

**Four Steps
to
Forgiveness**

**A way to
happiness,
freedom
and success.**

WILLIAM FERGUS MARTIN

Four Steps to Forgiveness

A powerful way to happiness, freedom and success.

William Fergus Martin

About this Book

This book *Four Step to Forgiveness* is offered free of charge on behalf of The Global Forgiveness Initiative, which is a non-profit registered in the UK (Charity Number: SC045990). It is available by free download in over 25 languages via their popular website, globalforgivenessinitiative.com, which gets millions of visitors each year.

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Why Forgive?

Forgiveness sets you free.

When we understand the benefits which we gain from doing something, it is easier to get ourselves motivated to actually do it. It will help you to feel motivated to learn how to forgive, and to keep forgiving, if you understand the benefits that Forgiveness brings you.

Some of the benefits that Forgiveness brings are very practical, whereas others could be considered “spiritual” benefits in the form of being morally “correct” and “proper”. Sometimes people are challenged by the idea of doing forgiveness for practical reasons, rather than for “spiritual”, or moral, reasons. It is good to know about the practical benefits of Forgiveness, because it is better to forgive to gain practical and materialistic benefits than to not forgive at all. Whatever causes a person to start on the path of Forgiveness is ultimately for the good, even if their motives are only practical and materialistic in the beginning.

You benefit immensely when you choose to forgive and so does everyone around you. Whether you need to forgive others, or need to forgive yourself, doing so sets you free from the past and enables you to fulfill your true potential. Forgiveness allows you to break free from limiting beliefs and attitudes. It frees up your mental and emotional energies so that you can apply them to creating a better life, and so that you have more to offer.

Forgiveness helps you achieve even your most practical and immediate goals. Perhaps you want a better job, to earn more money, have better relationships, or live in a nicer place. Forgiveness helps you achieve all of these. If you have not forgiven, then a part of your inner life energy is trapped in resentment, anger, pain, or suffering of some kind. This trapped life energy will limit you. It is like trying to ride a bicycle with the brakes partly on all the time. It slows you down, frustrates you and makes it difficult to move forward.

The choices you make and the things that you believe are possible will all be influenced by the ways you have not forgiven. As you learn to forgive, the energy which was going into unhappy thoughts and feelings gets liberated and can flow into creating the life you want, rather than limiting you or creating more suffering.

If you do not want to learn to forgive to benefit yourself; then learn to forgive so you can benefit others. As you learn to forgive, you benefit everyone you are in contact with. Your thinking will be clearer and more positive than before. You will have a lot more to give, and you will more readily enjoy sharing what you have. You will naturally and easily become kinder, more generous and more caring of others, without having to struggle to achieve this. You will have a happier and more positive attitude to the people in your life, and they will respond more positively to you in return.

Is a forgiving person more pleasant to spend time with than an unforgiving one? Yes, of course they are. A forgiving person is always much more pleasant to be around than an unforgiving one. The quality of your life depends on the quality of your relationships. Every aspect of your life will change for the better as you learn to forgive; whether in your family, your work life, or your social life. Learning to forgive will improve all your relationships, because your attitude will improve. As your relationships improve, then all aspects of your life will also improve.

If you want to move up to the next level of financial abundance and success, Forgiveness will help you achieve it. For example, if you want more money in your life, you need to make sure that you do not resent people who have more money than you. People with more money than you are the ones best placed to help you have more money too. If, as some people do, you resent "people with money," then they will not be able to help you because you are not open to them while you are busy resenting them. Likewise, if you have a positive attitude to people who are more successful than you (you smile at them rather than scowl at them), they will see you as approachable and will more likely want to work with you, or socialize with you.

If you want a better job, and to earn more money, then having a positive attitude towards the place you work, towards your boss, towards colleagues and towards clients or customers, helps immensely. People who have a positive, helpful attitude stand out in any situation. You can never succeed in an organization that you do not want to succeed, because you will not give of your best. If you do not give of your best by doing the best job you can, then you will not receive the best that can come to you. Forgiveness will help you have the kind of attitude which will make you very successful at your job.

Learning to forgive yourself is vitally important too. Hurting yourself, by refusing to forgive yourself, hurts others also. If you do not forgive yourself, then you will punish yourself by denying yourself the good things in life. The more you deny yourself the less you have to give. The less you have to give, the less you can benefit those around you. When you stop limiting what you receive, then you stop limiting what you can give. Everyone benefits when you forgive yourself as you then allow more good things into your life, and have a lot more to share.

When you forgive, you become a better husband or wife; you become a better student or teacher; you become a better employer or employee, and you become a better parent or child. When you forgive, you are more open to success in whatever ways are meaningful to you. As you learn to forgive, what seemed impossible, not only becomes possible, but can even become easily achievable.

If you are a religious or spiritually minded person, then learning practical ways to forgive will enhance and deepen your experience of your religion, or your spiritual practice. It will help to free you from guilt about not being as "good" as you feel you should be, because it will help you become the type of forgiving person you would like to be. Practicing Forgiveness strengthens the goodness within you so that it becomes more active in your life. You will naturally feel less inclined to do the things you know you should not do, but have not been able to stop yourself from doing. You will start to do more of the things you know you ought to do, but have not been able to get yourself to do.

Learning to forgive can only help you; it cannot hurt you.

Forgiveness is immensely practical and helpful. There is nothing vague, or impractical about it. Forgiveness sets you free. As you learn to forgive, many problems (possibly even health problems) will gradually disappear. It will be as if you can view your life from above and can see the easiest way to get to where you want to be. Life will open up in front of you. New opportunities will emerge as if from nowhere. Happy coincidences will occur where you meet just the right person at just the right time. Ideas or answers will come to you just as you need them. A friend may make a comment, or you flip open a book or a magazine; or you may overhear a conversation that gives you just what you were looking for. Why is this so? It is because by practicing Forgiveness, you become more open to the goodness of life, so that goodness is more able to find its way to you.

As you learn to forgive, abilities that have been dormant within you will emerge, and you will discover yourself to be a much stronger and more capable person than you previously imagined. Parts of yourself, which could not thrive in the frigid and frozen soil of unforgiveness, will start to grow. You will begin to let go of struggling and striving. You will find more of an easy flow, and life will be a lot more pleasant and a lot more enjoyable. If this all sounds like exaggeration, then let that be for now. Simply practice the *Four Steps to Forgiveness* that you will find within these pages, and you will be very glad that you did.

Four Steps to Forgiveness

A powerful way to change your life for the better

The Four Steps to Forgiveness offer you a quick and easy way to start forgiving. It can lead to deep and profound changes in your life. Its power is in its simplicity; so, just start using it and you will see for yourself.

These Four Steps can be used for any kind of issue, whether big or small. However, it is best to start with relatively small issues until you get the idea. In fact, it is best not to try and forgive someone who could potentially cause you further hurt until you have some experience and understanding of the whole forgiveness process (see Tough Forgiveness and Reconciliation). Think of a small issue you want to forgive and try the steps below.

The Four Steps to Forgiveness

It is best to do *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* in writing till you get some experience. You can use the worksheet in the next chapter to guide you through the process.

Step 1: Write down who you need to forgive and for what.

Step 2: Write a list of your current unhappy feelings about the situation. It is best if these are your honest feelings, not the nice, polite things you think you 'should' feel. You need to move forward from how you really feel, because that is where you are. You cannot move forward from where you would like to be; you can only move forward from where you are.

Step 3: Write a list of the benefits you will get from forgiving this situation. These will often be the opposite of what you are currently feeling. Sadness will become happiness, anger will become peace, heaviness becomes a feeling of lightness, and so on. If you are not sure about the benefits, just choose a few general good feelings that you would like, in order to get yourself started (“peace”, “freedom”, “more at ease”, “more confident”, etc.). It might help you to see the benefits, if you imagine how much better you will feel when you have forgiven.

Step 4: Forgiveness Affirmation. Pick of a few of the benefits you wrote in Step 3, which most appeal to you just now, and write a Forgiveness Affirmation including them. This is simply stating who you intend to forgive and then acknowledging the benefits which come from forgiving them. Then you say this sentence (in the silence of your mind) slowly, at least three times and then return to Step 1, and go around again. Keep going round until you feel relieved.

I forgive _____ [who] and I accept the _____ [benefits from Step 3] that Forgiveness brings.

Example

Imagine are forgiving someone called, “John” and the two benefits that most appeal to you from what you wrote in Step 3 are “peace” and “freedom”.

In Step 4, you would write, “I forgive John and I accept the peace and freedom which Forgiveness brings.

You say this sentence in the silence of your mind slowly, at least three times, and then return to Step 1. Then go around the steps again, making any changes that seem right, till you feel complete. The following sections and chapters will give you more information on how to use the *The Four Steps*

to *Forgiveness*.

How to Use the Four Steps to Forgiveness

A key element of *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* is that you keep going round the steps and changing what you wrote before, if necessary, as you go around. Doing the steps is a process and we often need to change what is written at each step to complete the process and forgive the person.

For example: Imagine you are forgiving a woman called Jane for something.

Doing Step 1:

At first you would write “I forgive Jane for...” and you would write what you want to forgive her for. However, as you later go around the steps again, you may feel that you really need to forgive Jane for something else, or you may want to add things you need to forgive her for.

What you write in Step 1 may change and grow as you explore forgiving Jane through *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* by repeatedly going round the steps. If you want to stay with what you wrote the first time you went through Step 1, or any other step, that is fine too.

Doing Step 2:

First you write a list of unhappy feelings that immediately come to mind about what Jane did. Try and find at least two or three unhappy feelings. You might write; “resentful”, “angry” and so on. Later, as you go round the steps and you come back to Step 2 a few times, you might find yourself uncovering deeper feelings about what Jane did. You might add, “raging”, “vengeful” and so on.

As you come back to this step, perhaps you notice stronger feelings that you had not noticed before, or it could be that your feelings become lighter as you come around again. You may discover that it helps to include bodily sensations in your list such as “numbness”, “aching”, or “pins and needles” and the like.

If you want to stay with what you wrote the first time around, that is fine too. You can also score out things you wrote if you feel they are not relevant this time around.

Doing Step 3:

First time around, you would write a list of benefits that you can see yourself as receiving by forgiving Jane. Some of these things will be the opposite of the unhappy feelings you wrote in Step 2. Try and come up with at least two or three benefits. You might write, “peace”, “freedom” and so on. As you repeat the steps, and return to Step 3, you may become aware of other benefits that you could have; some of these may be the opposite of any additional unhappy feelings that you added to Step 2.

You may come to realize that there are benefits that really matter to you more than others. These may not be the benefits that you feel you “should” want, but the ones you really want. The benefits you really want may be much more practical and down to earth (“better friendships,” “promotion,” “a better job,” and “more income”) or they may be the more “spiritual” benefits (“peace”, “inner freedom”, and “contentment”).

Doing Step 4:

First time around, you use two of the benefits you wrote in Step 3 as the basis of your Forgiveness Affirmation. For example, you might write something like, “I forgive Jane and I accept the peace and freedom which Forgiveness brings.” If your list of benefits changes, you can change the Forgiveness Affirmation you write in Step 4 to reflect that.

As you come back to this step on additional loops through the steps, you can change the list of

benefits you focus on. If you are not getting a sense of clarity or movement, and you reach a point where you feel stuck, you can try all the benefits. Either include them one at a time (by writing an affirmation for each benefit), or do them as a single complete list. You can say the Forgiveness Affirmation to yourself many times with different benefits included either singly or in different mixes, and then focus more strongly on the ones which feel right to you. You can also use the Forgiveness Affirmation on its own for a few days, and then return to doing *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* till you feel complete.

To help guide you through the steps, *The Four Steps to Forgiveness Worksheet* is in the next chapter.

Four Steps to Forgiveness Worksheet

This worksheet can help you work your way through the four steps.

1. Who and What

Think about the person you need to forgive and why you need to forgive them and enter the details below:

I want to forgive _____ for _____.

This creates a sentence about who you need to forgive and what you need to forgive them for.

Examples:

I want to forgive Tatiana for stealing my boyfriend.

I want to forgive John for hitting me when I was a child.

I want to forgive my father for not loving me enough.

2. Unhappy Feelings

Write a list of any unhappy feelings you currently have about this situation, such as anger, pain, fear, envy, wanting vengeance, and so on.

Right now I feel (angry, vengeful; I feel like I want to punch them on the nose, etc)

3. Benefits:

List the benefits you would get from forgiving them. How would you feel if you were clear of it? How would your attitude be better? How would your behavior be different? Examples: happier, peaceful, free, relaxed, more energetic, able to create better relationships. Preferably, state positive feelings rather than lack of negative feelings (“more peaceful” rather than “less fearful”).

4. Forgiveness Affirmation: Now create a sentence to affirm your intention to forgive. First pick a few of the benefits from Step 3, which feel the most important to you at this moment. Then create a sentence using those benefits.

I forgive _____ [name] and I accept the _____ [benefits] which forgiveness brings.

Say for example you are working on forgiving someone called John and from Step 3 you picked the benefits of ‘peace’ and ‘freedom’ as being most appealing. You would write:

“I forgive John and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.”

Slowly say this sentence inwardly, in your mind at least 3 times and notice if you begin to feel any different.

Repeat:

Now return to Step 1 and go through the Four Steps a few times for the same topic and see how your feelings change. You may find that the “want” to forgive has got stronger in Step 1, or that

your feelings change or become stronger in Step 2 or Step 3. At some point you will feel better and eventually you will feel that your work on this situation is complete. As you practice forgiveness, it gets easier until it becomes automatic.

Example: I commit to forgiving John and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Using Step One

The key to Step One is to simply acknowledge that you want to forgive someone and to also acknowledge what you want to forgive them for. This helps you break out of any kind of denial of what happened, and put you into a frame of mind of accepting your feelings about the situation, so that you are then able to move forward.

You might not be sure that you do actually want to forgive them. If that is the case, think of it like you are trying on a coat or a jacket in a clothes shop. You are looking at the questions, "Do I really want this or not?" So you try it on to see if you like it. You need to try it, so that you can decide whether, or not, this is for you.

It is important not to try to be overly "nice" or "polite" in this step. You need to accept your real feelings about the event in order to make real changes. If you feel that someone "stole my girlfriend," then that is the phrase to use – at least in the beginning. However, avoid overly dramatic interpretations of the results of the event, such as "They completely ruined my life forever."

A little bit of drama is fine in the beginning, but try to stick close to the facts without too much of it. Later, after working through the steps a few times, you may find that your feelings about what you need to forgive them for will change and the wording you want to use may change too. This is a natural part of the process.

In order to forgive someone else, you may feel they ought to apologize to you first. Or, you may feel afraid to forgive someone as you are worried that they will hurt you again (if you have anything to do with them). If so, then read the chapters on *Tough Forgiveness* and *False Forgiveness*, which will help you to understand that reconciliation is a different, yet closely related, process to forgiveness. To put it briefly, you can forgive without needing to have anything more to do with the person. However, it is better to do forgiveness work first before deciding about a possible reconciliation. This will help to prevent your attitude to a possible reconciliation from being tainted by vengeance or feelings of entanglement.

If you are working on forgiving yourself, then please see the chapter: *How to Forgive Yourself*.

Using Step Two

Step Two is about acknowledging the ways in which the pain you felt from the event still shows up in your thoughts, feelings and actions. As in Step One, it is very important to write your real feelings as the more you accept your real feelings, the more easily you will have real change.

If you are not sure what you feel, it can help to make a rough guess and change it as you work your way through the steps a few times.

You can also include physical sensations to describe your feeling, such as; "cold," "numb," "aching," and "prickly." This is especially useful if you are not aware of specific emotions around the issue, but are aware of physical sensations; then you can just use the physical sensations instead. If you later, as you repeat the steps, become aware of emotions or stronger emotions, you then start to include them too.

If your feelings are vague, just describe them as best you can at this time; "sort of hopeless feeling," "cold, unhappy feeling", or "vague, uncomfortable feeling". Even vague feelings can lead to wonderful breakthroughs, so don't let any vagueness of your feelings hold you back.

If you feel really stuck in this step, then it would be better to try and work on an easier issue for now and come back to this issue later. Otherwise, you might need support from a trusted friend or a counselor, in order to reveal your feelings and to be able to work on forgiving the issue. Another option, if you still want to go ahead even though you feel stuck, is to skip lightly over this step, and focus more on the other steps to see if this helps get your feelings moving again.

Using Step Three

In Step Three you focus on the benefits you will get from releasing unhappy feelings about the situation or event. Imagine how you will feel and behave when you are free of the painful feelings you have around it. Think about how much better and how much lighter you will feel, and the difference it will make to your life. Think of the ways you will spread this good feeling to those around you.

Usually, the benefits to forgiving are the opposite of the painful feelings. It is better to express these benefits in their positive form; "happy" rather than "not so sad", "peaceful" rather than "not angry". If not sure of the specific benefits you get from forgiving, then you can use generally good things you would like in your life right now, even if you are not sure they are relevant; examples are "peace", "happiness", "success", or "abundance". Forgiveness brings many benefits along those lines even if we are focused on other benefits.

If you used physical sensations to describe what you want to release; then, you can just use their physical opposite to describe the benefits in this step. A "cold and numb" sensations could become "warmth and aliveness;" "tight, and unable to breath" becomes "free and breathing easily", etc..

Benefits can also include things which are very practical and stated in whatever form that appeals to you; "be more confident", "get a better job", or "create a new happy relationship". The more you would like to have the benefits you list, the more you will help to motivate yourself to forgive.

As you work on this step you may start to have realizations about Forgiveness and its benefits. Insights and ideas may start to dawn on you. You might even feel as if a light has turned on in your mind, or a fog is starting to dissipate and you can see your life more clearly. If this realization dawns on you, and it may take a while to happen, then that is a very good sign, as it will help even more to motivate you to forgive.

Using Step Four

In Step Four, you formally and specifically state your intention to forgive.

As mentioned in the chapter, *Using Step One*, you may not be sure that you really want to forgive. You may even have lots of doubts, but just try it and see. Even a little bit of willingness to explore Forgiveness (even if very tentatively) can bring big results.

A key to this step is to have benefits that you wrote in Step Three, which really appeal to you. In this way, the Forgiveness Affirmation will have more meaning for you and will work far better.

If you were struggling with being able to come up with benefits which hold real meaning for you when you did Step Three, then you can try out very general ones as part of the Forgiveness Affirmation in this step. Examples: "...I accept the peace and freedom, which forgiveness brings," "...I accept the healing and wellbeing, which forgiveness brings", and the like.

Once you have been round the steps a few times, it is very good to explore variations that come to your mind to see how well these work for you. You might even include a mix of general benefits with very specific ones. For example, say you are forgiving a work related issue and you realize that clearing the issue will help you get a better job. You can use a phrase like, "...I accept the peace, and better job with more income, which forgiveness brings."

However, if this type of benefit feels too materialistic to you, or somehow offends your sense of values, then leave out the practical benefits.

Sometimes it can be useful to linger on a particular step, especially if you feel a sense of freedom or aliveness as you work on that step. Lingering on Step Four and repeating it more than the others can work well, at any time.

It also works well to turn Step Four into a verbal affirmation which you speak out loudly or silently in your mind, in a number of times for a few days. Imagining how you will think, feel and act once you have completed this forgiveness process makes this even more powerful.

Forgiveness Vortex

As you work through the four steps, you will find that the feeling builds up. When you return to Step One after doing the other steps, you may well find that your feeling, "I want to forgive...", will have grown and become stronger. You will be clearer about what you currently feel in Step Two, or you will be clearer about the benefits in Step Three. Each time you go through the four steps it is like you are building a vortex of forgiveness.

You can even think of it like one of those modern vacuum cleaners, which uses a vortex to clean carpets; only in this case, by repeatedly going through *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*, you are creating a vortex to clean out old patterns of pain and unhappiness. The more often you go through the steps the more powerful the effect.

Also, when you have used the *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* a few times, the effect will be stronger even if you are working on a completely new topic. As you experience the benefits of forgiving one thing, you will want to forgive more things. Your feeling of "I want to forgive..." will be stronger even for things not related to your previous forgiveness processes. In this way, Forgiveness will become easy and natural for you.

Anxiety, Panic and Depression

How Forgiveness Protects You from Other People's Behavior.

Anxiety, panic and depression can be very debilitating. They drain our energy and make it more difficult to get on with life and do the things we need to do. When severe, anxiety and depression can seriously cripple a person's ability to lead a meaningful life.

Yet, there is a way out of these debilitating conditions. Forgiveness can help us to be free of anxiety and depression, as well as reduce the tendency to panic. At the very least, Forgiveness can make it much easier for us to manage these issues.

How Forgiveness Helps

When we look at the causes of anxiety and depression, our thinking processes are often part of the problem. Anxiety becomes habitual when we spend too much time having worrying and frightening thoughts. Your body then gets into very alert and vigilant state. This means your body is being flooded with the types of hormones that make it even more likely that we will think anxious thoughts. By putting your nervous system on "alert," you tell your nervous system to look for those things which might go wrong (or are going wrong), and to not look for things that are going right. Your perspective becomes one-sided and distorted towards the negative, and often without you even realizing it.

Likewise, thoughts of doom and gloom such as feeling stuck in a situation with no way out or no hope for a better future, can also become habitual. Such thoughts cause your body to be flooded with the types of hormones that make you feel sluggish; lacking in energy or enthusiasm, and even more likely to have despairing and unhappy thoughts.

By giving us a way to change or interrupt our habitual thought patterns, Forgiveness allows us to make radical positive changes. It helps us to cope with the things that we find worrying or fearful, and it also helps us to find hope and new possibilities in situations where we feel stuck. Yet, Forgiveness can take us further than this; much further.

Practicing Forgiveness

Forgiveness can produce deep and powerful changes in our attitudes, beliefs, and thinking habits. It can set us free from the past, so that we can face life with confidence, and we can go forward to create a better future. Forgiveness helps us break through the thought patterns that create fear, anxiety, depression and panic.

Practicing Forgiveness helps nourish our nervous system with positive, life enhancing feelings. These positive feelings and the associated hormones make it easier to see and enjoy the good things in life. This in turn makes it easier to become even more forgiving. Forgiveness also makes it easier to feel like reaching out to other people, and reaching out to others is known to be one of the best ways to reduce stress and anxiety, and to help people move out of isolation and depression.

A Life without Anxiety, Depression and Panic

What often feeds a sense of anxiety, is a feeling of being overwhelmed and not able to handle life. What this boils down to is really a feeling of not being able to handle other people. It is often the things that other people "might" do or say, which make us anxious.

Likewise, depression often comes from how we respond to other people's behavior. Perhaps

someone has been rude to us, or said something unkind; or someone we depend on does not seem to like us or approve of us. If we do not know how to manage our feelings about such events, then these can build up till we feel hopeless, and depression sets in.

Therefore, both anxiety and depression are often triggered by how well we cope with the demands, expectations and hopes of other people. However, there is more to it than that. The real issue is not what other people say or do, or what they want or expect from us; the real issue is what we say to ourselves about it. In other words, how we interpret the situation will determine how we feel about it.

Forgiveness Protects Us from Other People's Behavior

What we need is something that can sit between us and other people, or situations, which cause us to feel anxious or depressed. This is what Forgiveness does. Forgiveness helps to protect us from the affect of other people's behavior, by helping us become more detached from the effects of their behavior.

We might feel anxious because we do not know how to handle someone behavior towards us. We might feel worried that they will say something harsh or rude to us. However, as we learn Forgiveness, we see that we have a way to handle them. We can forgive them, and equally important, we can forgive ourselves. Through Forgiveness, we have a way of handling or coping with any situation.

We might feel depressed because we do not see a way out of a very difficult situation. As we learn to forgive, we find that we do have a way out. By looking to how we can forgive the people around us and forgive ourselves for getting into unhappy situations, our whole perspective begins to change. New possibilities, which we were blind to before, become really obvious and accessible as we learn to forgive.

Forgiveness Helps us to be Free of Fear

By learning how to forgive, we begin to discover that we have an inner freedom that we perhaps didn't even know was there. It is that inner freedom which enables us to find happiness even in difficult situations. It is like we rise above circumstances and find an inner strength, and new abilities to handle situations, and to handle other people and their behavior.

Through Forgiveness, we start to lose a lot of our fear of other people and our fear of life. We begin to become kinder to ourselves and kinder to those around us. Does this cause them to behave differently towards us? Very often it does, but we have the inner strength and inner freedom, such that we do not need to rely on that. Our inner freedom liberates us from being a victim of circumstances and enables us to shape the ways in which we are affected by the people and events in our life.

Forgiveness is quick and easy to learn (see the chapter: The Four Steps to Forgiveness). Begin today to put aside anxiety, fear, worry, depression and panic attacks. Breathe free, and learn to live your life to the full.

Guilt and Shame

Guilt makes us feel we did something bad; shame makes us feel that we are bad.

In order to forgive ourselves, it helps to understand the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt and shame are often mentioned together as if they are the same, or very similar. However, they are really very different things.

Guilt arises when we have done something which goes against our sense of right. Shame arises when we feel that there is something wrong with us. Guilt is a feeling about what we do, or what we have done; shame is a feeling about who we are. When we feel guilty we think, "I have done something bad"; when we feel shame we think "I am bad".

It is important to understand the difference between guilt and shame, because to fully forgive ourselves, we need to deal with both our sense of guilt and our sense of shame. Some events might trigger both these feelings in us, but what it takes to resolve guilt is different from what it takes to resolve shame.

We let go of guilt simply by letting go of the desire to punish ourselves, and by letting go of self condemnation and any form of wanting to harm or hurt ourselves. We can help ourselves do this by making amends for what we did, apologizing, or using The Four Steps to Forgiveness, and so on. This may help us heal some of our shame as well as our guilt, but resolving shame often needs to include using another approach as well.

To let go of shame, we need to become reconciled with ourselves (see Reconciliation chapter). Shame is healed by having a better ongoing relationship with ourselves, particularly with any parts of ourselves which we judge as weak, or defective, in some way. We need to create a happy and healthy relationship with ourselves to banish unhealthy forms of shame. This means being willing to become aware of, and release, the "voices" within us, which denigrate, or put us down in any way. It means releasing negative, overly critical and judgmental "self talk". It also means changing how we relate to people around us, who are not good for us, and putting a distance from them if we can. This includes spending more time with those who are good to us and good for us. In addition, letting go of shame means learning to stop being suspicious of people who genuinely like us and assuming that there is something wrong with them. Letting go of shame has a lot to do with becoming a good, kind and caring friend to ourselves.

We may have internalized a parent, teacher, or relative, who was overly critical or harsh to us in our formative years. If so, we have the voice of that critic running in our heads. It could be pushed so deeply within us that we are hardly aware of it, but the feelings and moods it creates will still come up. We do not need to fight with that overly-critical, and shame-inducing voice. We do not need to hide from it or be troubled by what it says. We do not need to give it power by reacting to it. Any time our inner critic offers us something which is not helpful or constructive, we can just tell ourselves, "This is just a thought, that is all it is." In time, it will run out of steam if we do not react by resisting it, or by giving in and believing what it says.

A sense of shame can be what actually pushes us into doing things which we later feel bad about. A sense of shame can fuel addictions, bad habits, social withdrawal or overly aggressive behavior. A sense of shame, if left unchallenged, is self-perpetuating. When we feel bad about ourselves, we feel weakened and more easily tempted to keep doing things which keep us feeling bad about ourselves. Therefore a sense of shame can feed guilt and more shame.

A sense of shame tends to make us quick to blame others and to be unforgiving of their mistakes. Therefore a feeling of shame can be spread amongst people, as each shamed person tries to deflect shame from themselves by making other people feel ashamed. When the leader of a group of people (a family, an organization, a religion, or whatever) has a strong sense of shame, this can easily

spread to all the people in that group, and create an underlying toxic atmosphere of blame and condemnation.

Shame Loop

We will not allow ourselves to have what we feel we do not deserve no matter how ridiculous or unwarranted that feeling of not deserving. Yet, unfulfilled wants do not go away. They just go underground and come out as addictions and compulsions. Our addictive and compulsive behavior then makes us feel ashamed and undeserving. This is a Shame Loop, where we get stuck in a loop of feeling shame, and that shame causing us to do things that then cause us to feel more shame. Our attempts to hide from our sense of shame, and feeling unworthy, can arise as a compulsion which causes us to do the more of the very things which cause us to feel ashamed of ourselves. This can grow into us feeling that we are secretly a very bad person and that no one would have anything to do with us if they really knew us.

Forgiving others also helps us break out of the Shame loop. When we forgive others, we begin to reconcile with ourselves and heal the inner splits between the different parts of ourselves. We become more able to connect and express the higher and wiser parts of ourselves in our daily life, and this leads us to a happier attitude, wiser decisions, and more fulfilling life.

When we learn to release our shame through forgiveness, the compulsions it creates will also dissipate, and we break out of the Shame Loop and become free.

Pride and Shame

Guilt is only useful when it causes us to change our behavior, and to make amends.

Feelings of shame are not just personal. We can also pick up feelings of shame from our nation, our family, or our even just being in the vicinity of an event.

Before looking at National Shame, let's first look at National Pride. I was born in, and live in a naturally beautiful country (Scotland). One day, an American visitor said to me, "You live in such a lovely country. It is just beautiful!" I felt some pride stirring inside me for a few seconds, but then I thought about it. "Wait a minute! I had absolutely nothing to do with the beauty of this country. I did not create the mountains he was so admiring; or the rivers and landscape he so enjoyed. I don't think I could even create a small hillock even if I dedicated my whole life to it. Anyway, it is not as if there are even any training courses available on how to create mountains, valleys and rivers. Why am I having a feeling of pride?"

On the other side, my sense of national shame can be triggered when our national football team loses in the soccer World Cup, which unfortunately is what happens every time they enter. I usually cringe with embarrassment watching my national football team lose fairly early on in the tournament. Yet this embarrassment is irrational, as I am not responsible for their failure. It is a form of shame by association.

I read somewhere that the highly successful English soccer club, Manchester United, have more supporters outside of the UK than they actually have in the UK. Many of these "fans" are people who have never been to the UK, and are not likely to ever come to the UK. They have no natural connection with Manchester United football club. Yet, they celebrate when Manchester United does well and are unhappy when they don't.

This is a frivolous example (unless you are a serious football fan), but points to a much deeper issue. Our pride and shame can be triggered by situations over which we have absolutely no control; or, we can deliberately pick things, which otherwise, we have absolutely no connection with, to use as a source of pride. That is most likely why some from other countries are wisely choosing to support the Manchester United football team (who are a notable success), rather than the Scottish Football team (which are not so well noted for success). Pride and shame can be quirky and arbitrary, yet they are primary driving forces which shape our behavior in deep and profound ways. They shape events on the personal level, as well as collectively through nations operating via the world stage.

Guilt and shame are by no means always bad. When they work in healthy ways they put reasonable limits on our behavior and help us fit into the social norms of our time. Guilt is only useful when it causes us to make amends for some wrong we have done and encourages us to change our behavior. Guilt is not useful if it just gets us into a long-term knot of self-judgement, and self-blame that does not result in any positive change. Shame is only useful when it causes us to question our attitudes and beliefs and to look for ways to become a better person, such as by developing personal qualities that we lack. Shame might drive us into developing more sensitivity to the feelings of others if we lack that, or more boldness in taking our ideas to fruition if that is what we lack.

It is a matter of learning how to manage these primal feelings of guilt and shame in ways which are constructive. It is not a matter of blindly giving in to them, avoiding them (by keeping busy), or trying to fight against them. We do not want to be bound by feelings from the past which are not leading to constructive attitudes or useful action. We can manage guilt and shame by forgiving ourselves, so that we shape how we respond to these primal feelings, rather than just being at the mercy of them.

Remorse

The best remorse is a life well lived.

It goes against the natural goodness of life to hold on to the past. The best way to make amends for any wrong we have done is to live well now. To paraphrase an old saying about vengeance, "The best remorse is a life well lived.". If there are ways to make amends for something we did, then that would naturally be part of living well.

An honest heart-felt apology can often work wonders and help to repair any damage we have done. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone has things they have said or done which they regret. It can take a lot of courage to face those we have hurt and admit that we were wrong and confess how sorry we feel. Yet, doing so can help us make sure that we do not make the same mistake again. The bond of empathy we form with the other person when we apologize, makes it less likely that we would hurt them again.

We can express remorse by making restitution; correcting unkind things we said about someone by speaking well of them from now on; returning money stolen; behaving more honestly and openly with everyone (to balance damage we have done), and so on.

If we cannot make restitution to the person we harmed, we could look at doing something to benefit someone in their group. For example, if we were hurtful to someone because of their race, we could make amends by doing something to help another person of that race. We could make amends by making an anonymous donation to a suitable charity. With a little bit of thought and imagination, we can find an alternative way to make amends if we can't make amends directly to the person we harmed.

If we have done something very bad, such as deliberately killed or seriously injured another person, it is obviously more difficult to make amends. However, no one is ever without hope. Forgiveness, along with the peace and healing it brings, is ultimately achievable by everyone. In extreme cases, it is better to first start making amends for small wrongs we have committed and then later, we will know better what to do about the larger ones.

Never decide that you need to be punished and therefore start to punish yourself. Punishing yourself does not help those you have harmed. It just adds one foolishness on top of another. You cannot correct a mistake by punishing yourself. You can only correct a mistake by doing good deeds. Likewise, you cannot help others by harming yourself. You can only help others by doing good things to them.

Living well does not include letting other people unfairly hold our mistakes against us. If we have done all that can reasonably be expected to make amends, then we are correct in wanting to leave the past behind us. If people continue to blame us beyond reasonable limits, then that could be about them and not about us. They may be acting out their own issues, and we need to question their motives even if they continue to play the victim. The Aggressive Victim likes to play on the guilt and shame of others as an attempt to justify their own belligerent behavior and as a smokescreen to hide their own dubious motives.

Guilt or shame can be used by others to manipulate us or control our behavior. Such manipulations usually come from those who claim the moral high ground. Yet such claims are an unhealthy means of influence at best. Genuine moral leaders will guide us in taking positive action to compensate for mistakes; and not use such mistakes as an excuse to impose their own agenda.

Even otherwise very confident and competent people can inwardly collapse in the face of a Shame Attack. It might come from a member of the family, "I remember you wet the bed as a child," or from our life partner, "Remember when you forgot our anniversary!", or come out of an

attack on the past actions of our country, "Remember what you people did in the war!" The answer to all of these is simply an attitude of, "I have moved on from there, what others do is up to them." As an additional defense, we always have the right to doubt the morality of any position someone is maintaining with such low tactics.

If we berate and condemn ourselves for something wrong which we have done, or that our country has done, who does this serve? Who benefits from this? How is the world a better place by us condemning ourselves? It can be useful as a temporary measure to stop ourselves doing further harm, but it is not useful beyond that. Berating ourselves for too long is just more of the same kind of overly self-centered focus that got us into trouble in the first place. Most of our errors come out of being too caught up in ourselves and not being aware enough of the wants and needs of other people. Self-punishment and self-blame are just other ways of being self-centered. Far better to use our time and energy in ways that will help and serve the needs of others, rather than spending it uselessly on some form of self-loathing, self-blame or self-harm.

Does God Forgive Me?

If you are judging or condemning yourself, then you also need to forgive yourself.

If you are a religious person you might wonder where God fits into this approach to Forgiveness. You might be thinking, "It is up to God to forgive me." If so, then consider this. Who is it that has blamed you, judged you, or condemned you? You certainly are, or you would not have a problem or an issue about what you did. *If you are judging or condemning yourself then you also need to forgive yourself.* You need to deal with the ways you blame yourself, judge yourself and condemn yourself.

Another thing to consider is this. How do you know that God has not already forgiven you? Do you know the mind of God? Probably not; so why ever assume you do, especially when it comes to something as important as Forgiveness?

Do you really think it is a good idea to decide how God will judge your actions and try to preempt that by punishing yourself in advance? We can be tempted to mete out self-punishment in subtle or roundabout ways. We can deny ourselves good things, or sabotage ourselves when we are about to succeed in an important situation. Yet, with this type of myopic and limited attitude, we assume we know the mind of God in regards to our affairs. Better to learn to forgive by practicing on ourselves, or others, and then we might have an inkling of how God is likely to see things. If you feel the need to pray for Forgiveness, then by all means do so.

Once there was a man who was a servant of a great Lord of a large country. One day, he was helping to prepare a feast to celebrate the return of his Lord from a visit far away. The servant was rushing when he bumped into a door and dropped a delicate and very valuable serving bowl which smashed into many pieces on the stone floor. The servant was so horrified that he ran away and hid himself from the wrath of his Lord. In his desperation he thought hard about how to assuage the punishment he felt sure was coming to him. He thought it would have to be something that would cause himself much pain, so he decided to cut off one of his hands. He did so and his yells of agony attracted other servants who found him, bound his wound, and took him to his Lord who had just returned.

When the Lord found out what had happened he said to this servant. "Foolish servant you have dealt me three blows when only one was by accident. You broke a most valuable serving bowl, but that is small matter. You took upon yourself the right to administer justice within my household when this right has not been earned by you. Furthermore, you decided to wound yourself, and gave no thought to how this would reduce your ability to serve me. These last two are by far the greater errors. Now you must live with knowing that you punished yourself far more severely than I would have. Owing to your wound you have crippled your ability to serve me and you have therefore crippled your ability to advance your station in life."

The story above illustrates how self-punishment, whether out of a misplaced sense of "loyalty to God," or simply out of guilt and shame, is completely misplaced. Usually, it serves no useful purpose and in fact cripples our ability to offer anything useful to the people and the life around us.

Self-punishment misdirects our energy and makes it less likely that we can find a useful and constructive form of making amends to those we have harmed. It adds one error on top of another. The way to live a worthy life is to become more aware of others and how we can live harmoniously with them and how we can serve a purpose larger than ourselves. Becoming even more self absorbed by immersing ourselves in unnecessary guilt and shame just takes us in the direction of living a selfish and self centered life. That is surely not a direction that any religion, worthy of the term, would endorse.

Whatever your religious beliefs, practicing *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*, can only enhance your

experience of your religion. It will help you to be awakened and express your natural spirituality, so that you will become more authentic in your expression of your spiritual values.

As you experience Forgiveness by practicing it, you will speak and take action less and less out of what others have told you is right, and more and more out of your own direct experience of spiritual truths. You will become more aware of the inner essence of your religion and less concerned with the outer layers which have built up over time. These outer layers (rituals and dogmas) can sometimes hide the inner essence of a religion and sometimes they can help reveal it. Practicing Forgiveness can help you tell the difference between the outer layers that reveal the highest and best within your religion, and those which obscure it.

You can, of course, adapt *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* to better fit the needs to your religion if necessary.

The Importance of Self Forgiveness

Self forgiveness is one of the most generous and unselfish things you can do.

Forgiveness has a beautiful price. The price of forgiving yourself is that it will be harder to stop yourself from forgiving others. The price of forgiving others is that it will be harder to stop yourself from forgiving yourself. *Forgiveness is giving the gift we think we cannot afford, only to find, as soon as we give it, that we have it in plenty.*

A drowning man cannot save another from drowning. Any person who has not forgiven themselves will find it harder to forgive anyone else. That is why so many find forgiveness difficult. They refuse to forgive themselves out of feeling unworthy of it. Feeling unworthy makes them incapable of forgiving others too. They feel that they have so little that they have nothing to give. The feeling of being unworthy makes them easy to offend and they tend to store up a sense of injustice or resentment. Forgiveness is a way out of this. We can then begin to fill the "empty" places within us and have more to give.

It is easy to see that being egotistical is to think too highly of oneself. However, it is not so easy to see that being egotistical can include thinking too lowly of oneself. The ego loves to separate itself by being "special" even if that means being specially bad. *Don't be arrogant; you are no worse than anybody else.*

Anything which blocks normal participation in life, and prevents you living life to the full by being overly self-concerned and self-absorbed, is egotistical. Too much focus on, "my mistakes", "my regrets", "what I did wrong", is just as out of balance being arrogant, or being too absorbed in smug self-promotion and self-satisfaction. If you realize that you have been doing this, no need to be hard on yourself. *The truth is never a stick with which to beat yourself.*

Self forgiveness not only helps you. It contributes to healthier friendships, healthier families, healthier workplaces, healthier communities, healthier governments and ultimately to a healthier world. It is a step towards a world in which more and more people do and say the right thing and can act, out of a sense of good and rightness, rather than the manipulation and compulsiveness which comes out of unacknowledged guilt and shame.

Self forgiveness allows you to put your energy into doing good; either to make amends to those you have hurt, or to give of your best to life. Energy that was going into useless attacks on yourself can then go into constructive action rather than self destructive behavior.

Self forgiveness is one of the most generous and unselfish things you can do. It frees you of tendencies towards being self-centered and self-obsessed and makes it easier for you to have a positive role in your life. Self forgiveness helps prevent you from being the type of person who is an emotional or psychological burden on those around them. It enables you to recognize and meet your needs in healthy ways. It enables you to participate in relationships in ways which contribute positively and constructively to the lives of others. It helps you bring your best to both your social life and your work life. Self forgiveness enables you to be someone who knows what is good and right (perhaps having learned the hard way what is not good and right) and is able to take a stand in creating that in your life and in the world.

Self forgiveness empowers you to become your best and to share your best in ways that fulfill you and help to empower and delight others.

How to Forgive Yourself

Consider the good you can do, rather than the bad you cannot undo.

In order to forgive yourself you may need to think of a suitable way to make amends to the other person. Making amends can be a very good thing to do, but watch out for self-punishment disguised as remorse. Making amends, or even thinking about making amends, should normally bring you a feeling of relief. If it does not, then it might be that some form self-harm or self-punishment in disguise. Making amends may cost you, but it should not harm you.

If you have no access to the person (they are out of your life for whatever reason) and yet you want to make amends, then do it by proxy and be particularly kind, generous or helpful to someone of the same race, group or type of person; or even just someone at random.

Do you believe God has to forgive you before you can forgive yourself? (See the chapter: Does God Forgive Me?) If so, ask yourself how you know that it has not already happened. Then try and complete the Four Steps a few times, and see if you are any clearer.

In forgiving yourself, *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* are basically the same. However, we change Step Three by adding a section on how others will benefit from us forgiving ourselves.

Step 1. I want to forgive myself for:

Pick one specific thing.

Example: I want to forgive myself for saying hurtful things to my brother.

Step 2. Unhappy Feelings

Write a list of the feelings you have around the event. You need to acknowledge those feelings to release them to move forward.

Examples: “guilt,” “ashamed,” “fear of being punished,” etc.

Step 3A. Benefits to Self

List the benefits which will come to you as you become able to forgive yourself. The benefits can include being free of the feelings you listed in Step 2, and feeling their opposite. Benefits can also include being able to create better relationships, getting a better job, having more money, etc., depending on what is relevant to what it is you are forgiving yourself for.

Examples; “feel happier,” “be free,” “be more relaxed,” and so on.

Step 3B. Benefits to Others

As this is a self forgiveness process we add an extra step, Step 3B, to the usual four steps. In this step you focus on the ways others will benefit from you forgiving yourself.

Write a list of the ways in which forgiving yourself will help those nearest and dearest to you. Imagine you have forgiven yourself and you now feel better about yourself and your life. How will these feelings radiate out from you and benefit others?

Forgiving yourself can benefit others by helping you become a better parent, a more attentive friend, a better listener, a more forgiving person, and so on. You might become more interested in others and their wellbeing. You might feel more generous with your time and energy, and have more to give. Pick an example of a benefit to others which is likely to really matter to those around you.

Examples: “I will be happier and more pleasant to be around .” “I will become kinder and more loving. I will have more to give”.

Step 4. Forgiveness Affirmation

Now create a sentence to affirm and confirm your intention to forgive yourself. First pick two of the benefits which appeal to you the most from what you wrote in Step 3A. Then create a sentence using them. For example, if you had written the benefits of “peace” and “freedom” and these appealed to you the most from Step 3A at the moment. You would write:

“I forgive myself and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.”

In the silence of your mind, say your affirmation to forgive yourself slowly at least three times. Notice how it feels, then go back to go through all the steps again, making any changes you want, to what you wrote earlier. Keep going round the steps until you feel a sense of lightness and ease.

It is better to do the steps in writing at first. Start with small things, though you will find that with forgiveness, there are no small things. Even forgiving yourself for what seems a petty, minor thing that happened long ago can cause big changes. Go round all the steps at least a few times and you will see how your ability and capacity to forgive builds within you as you do so. Add things; change the words you use (if you want) as you go around. Linger over the steps where you feel movement happening within you.

Of course none of this excludes making amends or apologizing where this is feasible and would be helpful. If it is not possible to make amends; then live your life as best you can. *Consider the good you can do; rather than the bad you cannot undo.*

How to Forgive Yourself Worksheet

1. What do you want to forgive yourself for?

Think about what you want to forgive yourself for and enter the details below:

I want to forgive myself for _____.

Examples:

I want to forgive myself for hurting....

I want to forgive myself for not keeping that promise I made to...

2. Current Unhappy Feelings.

Write a list of any unhappy feelings which you have right now about the situation, such as: feeling shame or guilt, wanting to punish yourself, and so on. Examples: “regret”, “guilt”, “shame”, “fear”, “numb”, etc.

3A. Benefits to you: List the benefits you would get from forgiving yourself.

Write a list of how you will feel when you have forgiven yourself. Examples: “happier,” “peaceful”, “free”, “relieved”. Preferably, state positive feelings rather than lack of negative feelings. (“more peaceful,” rather than “less fearful”).

3B. Benefits to others: Lists the benefits others will get from you forgiving yourself. How will the people around you be positively affected by your new attitude? “I’ll be easier to be with”, “I will be more considerate of them”, etc.

4. Forgiveness Affirmation

Now create a sentence to affirm and confirm your intention to forgive yourself. First pick two of the benefits which appeal to you the most from what you wrote in Step 3A. Then create a sentence using them. If for example, you had written the benefits of “peace” and “freedom” and these appealed to you the most from Step 3A at the moment, you would write:

“I forgive myself and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.”

In the silence of your mind, say your affirmation to forgive yourself slowly at least three times. Notice how it feels, then go back to go through all the steps again making any changes you want to what you wrote earlier. Keep going round the steps until you feel a sense of lightness and ease.

False Forgiveness

Reconciling without doing any forgiveness work is False Forgiveness.

False Forgiveness is where we reconcile with someone, but we have not done any forgiveness work on the issues we have with them. Trying to push or bully yourself into forgiving too soon, or not using some type of deliberate forgiveness process (such as *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*) leads to False Forgiveness. We reconnect with the other person, as if we have forgiven them, but we have not really forgiven them. Unless we have done actual forgiveness work and experienced the release this brings, we are not likely to have genuinely forgiven.

False Forgiveness come out of not fully accepting how hurtful an experience was (avoiding painful feelings), rushing the forgiveness process, or even not having any kind of forgiveness process to work with, and assuming that we can just decide to “forgive” and then pretend that nothing bad happened.

False Forgiveness also tends to happen when people ignore their true feelings and decide to forgive as they think it is the "nice" thing to do, or they just don't know what else to do. It could be that they are exhausted from their unforgiving state of mind and, understandably, they want to let it go. Even though they know the other person is highly likely to do the same thing again, they feel they "should" forgive. They are not really forgiving; they are just reconciling without actually forgiving. They are likely to build up resentment and experience a lot of anxiety waiting for the next time the problem will happen again. They are using "forgiveness" as an excuse to tolerate bad behavior, so they do not get the sense of wellbeing that true forgiveness brings.

True forgiveness comes from doing specific forgiveness work on a specific issue. In this way, our attitude and beliefs change. Our perspective on life and our life situation changes so that we see it in a new way. We change as a person. We become freer from guilt, shame, and the issues that hook us into unhealthy relationships. We become freer from unhealthy patterns of thought and feeling that cause us to create unhealthy relationship from potentially healthy relationships.

True forgiveness gives a feeling of freedom and lightness, where we can see our way clearly and can make better decisions for our wellbeing. False forgiveness just keeps us entangled in the same situations with the same people. False Forgiveness comes from speaking or acting out of the belief that we do not deserve better, or cannot create something better; so we "put up" with things that are not good for us in the long term. True forgiveness frees us so we can create a happier life. True forgiveness connects us with our own value and worth as a person; False Forgiveness keeps us disconnected from our sense of being valuable and therefore too willing to tolerate unhappy and unhealthy situations.

In a co-dependent situation, where two people's patterns of addiction hook into each other, there is very little forgiveness present. It may look like one partner "forgives" the other on a regular basis; but really, it is False Forgiveness as they are reconciling without any real forgiveness taking place. If there was real forgiveness taking place, at least one of them would become free of their entanglement. That person would then negotiate for the kind of relationship they want and if that wasn't forthcoming, they would simply bless the other person and move on, to the extent that was practical.

The way to avoid False Forgiveness is to make sure you engage in an actual forgiveness process, so that you can re-evaluate your thoughts, feelings and beliefs about the person and the situation.

Reconciliation

Forgiveness is always unconditional, but reconciliation is sometimes conditional.

In the book *Forgiveness is Power*, Forgiveness is described as "Letting go of wanting to punish". If you look carefully at this wording, you will see that it does not say anything about reconciliation. Reconciliation has to do with what kind of relationship we want with the person we are working on forgiving. Reconciliation is a process of re-establishing our relationship with someone. Reconciliation is often part of Forgiveness, but it does not have to be. Reconciliation is really a distinct process, even though it often happens at the same time as Forgiveness.

Unpacking reconciliation from forgiveness can really help us to learn how to forgive as it brings clarity and very useful insights into the process. Understanding the differences between reconciliation and forgiveness, and how they fit together, helps us highlight any potential blocks we might have to forgiving, and allows it to happen more smoothly.

Forgiveness is always unconditional and always possible; reconciliation sometimes needs to be conditional and is not always possible.

Forgiveness is unconditional as it is always possible to let go of our desire to punish someone whether they are living or dead, whether they have apologized or not, and whether they are still on our life or long gone. Letting go of wanting to punish someone is solely up to us and can be done independently of the other person and their behavior. It is when we let go of the wanting to punish someone that we experience the benefits from forgiving them. We let go of holding onto hurtful (hurtful to both them and us) thoughts and feelings about them. Whether or not reconciling with them offers benefits to us is another matter.

Reconciliation sometimes needs to be conditional as we may be working on forgiving someone who is a persistent abuser, heavily addicted, a career criminal, or is in complete denial of their bad behavior. We most likely want to put clear and specific conditions on what kind of relationship we want to have with such a person (see the chapter *Tough Forgiveness*). We can forgive them, but we can still create clear boundaries around the ways we relate to them. Choosing to forgive someone can be made as a different and separate choice from choosing to reconcile with them.

In addition, reconciliation is not always possible. The person may be long dead and gone from our life, or just so hopelessly addicted that we cannot reach them. Reconciling with someone is not solely up to us; it depends a lot on the other person's behavior from now on.

This understanding that you can forgive someone and still decide to have nothing more to do with them (but watch out for hidden vengeance if you decide that), can actually make it easier to forgive them. We would naturally be wary of forgiving someone who is a nightmare for us to be around with, if we mistakenly assume that this means we had to get back into a relationship with them. Realizing we can negotiate a reconciliation in terms acceptable to us, or even decide not to do that part at all, frees us up to forgive as widely and as unconditionally as we like.

In forgiving problematic people, by all means use *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* and at some point decide what, if anything, you want to do about reconciliation. The decision about what you want to do in the way of reconciliation can be better left till you gain the fresh perspective, which comes from using the "Four Steps". That way you are more likely to avoid either refusing to reconcile with them out of a form of vengeance (punishing them by withdrawal and avoidance), or to get pulled into an unhealthy relationship because of being so enmeshed with the other person, who may well know just how to manipulate you.

Mainly, other people manipulate us through guilt, shame and fear. By doing forgiveness work on your issues with them, including self forgiveness, you help to free yourself from being manipulated

in those ways.

Self Forgiveness is a vitally important part of the forgiveness process even when we are forgiving other people. We may feel ashamed with what we let them away with, or how long we put up with their behavior. When this is the case, then forgiving ourselves is part of what will free us and allow us to move on with our lives.

You may find the ideas in the chapter on *Tough Forgiveness* a useful way of thinking about how to forgive in challenging situations.

Tough Forgiveness

Forgiveness gives us the freedom to stay, and the freedom to walk away.

The concept of *Tough Forgiveness* makes it easier to forgive in difficult and challenging circumstances. With Tough Forgiveness, we forgive (by doing forgiveness work such as using *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*), but we give ourselves permission not to have an ongoing relationship with the other person unless certain conditions are met. We might decide not to reconcile with them unless we see enough evidence of them being genuinely sorry, or of them being willing to change. We might want to put specific limits on their behavior, ask them to go to anger management, see a counselor together, or the like. As part of this, we would also need to be open to their preferences and suggestions as to how to heal the relationship.

With Tough Forgiveness, it is essential that we do forgiveness work on our issues with the person, so that our approach to negotiating with them around the reconciliation will be fair and reasonable. When we do forgiveness work, and therefore let go of wanting to punish them, we are in a far better position to see what a healthy reconciliation would look like, or if it's even possible.

We could all too easily be trying to punish them in roundabout ways, if we don't do forgiveness properly before attempting a reconciliation. We could come up with difficult or impossible terms, or we could deliver our terms in a belligerent or authoritarian way, knowing all too well that this will annoy them or provoke them.

You have probably come across the idea of Tough Love. Tough Forgiveness is a similar idea in that we need to hold firm to what we want in terms of having a healthy reconciliation, but we may need to negotiate with them so that it is fair and reasonable, and not just a one-sided list of demands. As mentioned in the chapter on Reconciliation, forgiveness is unconditional, but reconciliation is sometimes conditional.

With Tough Forgiveness, any reconciliation is conditional as it partly depends on how the other person behaves from now on. This is important, as people often confuse forgiveness with reconciliation and assume that they always go together. However, they are really two different things which only sometimes go together. With Tough Forgiveness, we unconditionally forgive them (ie we let go of wanting to punish them) but put conditions on the reconciliation. In other words, we put clear and specific boundaries around the process of reconciling with them. This helps minimize the chances that we will simply be hurt again (and again) in the same way, and by the same person.

Sometimes in a relationship, one person is being openly aggressive and the other is being passively aggressive (by expressing their aggression in covert ways). It can look like the passively aggressive person is the "victim" when there is much more to it than that. They were both engaged in ongoing hostilities, but they just expressed their hostility in different ways. If we took a passively aggressive role, this could easily come out again if we try and negotiate a reconciliation under the guise of Tough Forgiveness. It would really be a continuation of the same ongoing battle that the relationship had turned into, and nothing to do with forgiveness.

Therefore, we also need to be tough with ourselves if we attempt to use Tough Forgiveness. We need to be very honest with ourselves about our own motives and our own behavior, as well as the ways in which we deliberately did things to annoy, frustrate or anger the other person. Did we deliberately push them, knowing full well how they would react? Did we attack them, knowing that they were very likely to retaliate? Did we even knowingly trigger the very thing that we now need to forgive them for? Did we contribute to the escalation of the drama till it became something major?

Self Forgiveness is, therefore, also an important part of Tough Forgiveness. We may have been party to turning a relationship into a running battle, where we take turns of them hurting us and us hurting them. We may have got into the habit of hurting each other and then reconciling when the pain of being apart becomes greater than the pain of being together. We might have made the excuse that “I only hurt them because they hurt me,” but that attitude only perpetuates the problem and makes us an active participant in it. We therefore may need to forgive ourselves for the things we did as an attack on them, either overtly or covertly. This can include ways we shamed or blamed them. Additionally, we may also need to forgive ourselves for the things we put up with in the relationship, when we felt that things were not going to change for the better.

We may also need to forgive ourselves for ways we might have used the other person to hurt ourselves, just as some people do self-harm by deliberately harming their own body. Perhaps, some with this tendency play out their self-disgust and self-loathing by triggering other people to harm them. They deliberately say things, and behave in ways, that trigger a person who tends to react violently. In this way, their compulsion to self-harm is played out on their behalf by the other person. With this “self-harm by proxy,” it does not look like they are the ones doing it, when all the time they are really doing it to themselves.

There is an ennobling quality to forgiveness that lifts our mind to a higher level and allows us to step free. As part of this ennobling experience, we face ourselves, and face the reality of our lives with honesty and integrity. In order to be truly free, we need to drop any harmful games we have been playing that distort our relationships with ourselves and other people. However, there is no way to fake this, we have to do it for real or it will just not work.

With Tough Forgiveness, you might choose to forgive and:

- + Create clear agreements about specific issues so that you are willing to go ahead (so that you can feel safe and respected).
- + Specify the types of behavior which you do not find acceptable and which will cause you to end or pause the reconciliation process.
- + Limit the types of contact you have with the other person, till specific conditions are met.
- + Want agreement to do something to increase mutual understanding, such as going to a counselor together.
- + Express your preferences respectfully to the other person, so that this is not part of the power struggle that has been playing out in the relationships thus far.

The core of Tough Forgiveness is mutual respect. Tough forgiveness means ensuring that the other person knows and respects how you feel and that you know and respect how they feel. If this kind of mutual respect is not present, and the other person does not want to help establish it, then there is no real ground for reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not just a decision; it is a process. As part of Tough Forgiveness, we may want to make sure that they really understand how we felt about whatever they did. However, Tough Forgiveness does not mean we get to put everything we are unhappy about onto someone else. There is a big difference between, "This is how I feel... AND it is all YOUR fault;" and simply saying, "This is how I feel..." (without attaching blame). The first is loaded with blame and judgement. The second is more of a mutually respectful expression of honest feelings.

We may also decide that reconciliation is just not possible. If someone is not intending to change, we can be sure that they won't! Change takes effort and does not happen without commitment. No matter how much we may want them to, without a commitment to change, they will not change.

Mutual respect includes you showing respect for yourself, as well as you showing respect to the other person. To respect yourself includes being honest with yourself about how you really feel. You never want to hide from yourself how you really feel, because if it becomes a habit, it can too easily lead to *False Forgiveness*.

If you are not ready to forgive someone, or not ready to reconcile with them, then you need to forgive yourself and accept that as being how you feel right now. In this way, you can at least be reconciled with yourself. You may need time to recover, to renew yourself, and to restore your faith in life and in other human beings, before you will be ready to forgive some of the bigger issues. Give yourself the time you need. Once you have more practice with both forgiving and reconciliation, you will be more able to forgive, and perhaps even reconcile with the more challenging ones.

Happiness and Success Through Forgiveness

Our ability to be happy and successful is greatly increased when we practice Forgiveness. This is because the ability to forgive has a powerful effect on our attitude to ourselves, to other people, and to life generally. An improvement in our attitude is noticed by others as they will see it or sense it from our body language, tone of voice, or general demeanor. They will then respond more positively to us, and will be more willing to help us achieve our goals.

If you are feeling angry and resentful towards someone, then it is obviously very difficult to feel happy while those feelings are going on. Similarly, it is also very difficult to feel happy if you are feeling guilt and shame because of a mistake you made, or some 'bad' thing that you did. If you feel full of self-judgement, self blame and self-condemnation, it is not going to be possible for you to move towards being happy and successful till you deal with the underlying causes of those feelings. Telling yourself that you "should" feel happy in such circumstances is only going to be counterproductive and make you feel even worse about yourself.

Practicing Forgiveness in order to forgive other people and to forgive yourself, helps you let go of feelings of anger, bitterness and resentment towards other people; as well as let go of any self-judgement and self-condemnation that could also be blocking your happiness.

Forgiving Others and Happiness

When you forgive others, it makes you happier because:

- You let go of the pain of the past and stop maintaining bitter, resentful and angry feelings, which are clouding your life.
- You free yourself to either stay within that situation without feeling bitter and resentful, or to walk away from the situation without feeling shame or guilt. If you decide not to stay in that situation, you don't leave out of vengeance, but out of a clarity that the situation is not working for you, and it is no longer contributing to your happiness.
- You are able to grow in wisdom from what you gained from the person or situation. Your mind is not cluttered by unhappy feelings, so you can see the ways you have learned and have grown, which contributes to your sense of happiness and wellbeing.
- You realize that you are freer within yourself and are much less likely to create a similar situation, as you have allowed yourself to grow from what you have experienced, rather than being diminished by it.
- As you learn to judge other people less harshly and feel more kindly towards them, you will judge yourself less harshly and become more kindly towards yourself too.
- If you resent other people because they have more than you, you will block them from being able to help you, as they will notice that you don't like them. As you let those resentful feelings go, you will be better able to create healthier personal and business relationships with people who can mentor you and assist you in your goals.

Forgiving Yourself and Happiness

Much of our happiness comes from the experience of sharing good things with others. Forgiving yourself enables you to let go of any negative attitudes you have towards yourself. This makes you feel like creating more opportunities to enjoy sharing happy experiences.

When you forgive yourself, you let more good come into your life, and this gives you more good things to share. Forgiving yourself is one of the most generous and unselfish things you can do because of all the benefits it brings to those who associate with you. Self Forgiveness allows you to be a more giving person.

When you forgive yourself it makes you happier because:

- You have less guilt, shame, self-judgement and self-blame; and a lot more space in your life for pleasanter thoughts and feelings.
- You will then notice that other people find you more pleasant and enjoyable to be with, and that you find them more pleasant and enjoyable too.
- You will allow more good things into your life because you will feel that you deserve them. You will allow more money, love, success, prosperity, or whatever, because you are no longer keeping them away.
- Letting more good things into your life means you have more good things to share; so you have the happy pleasure of sharing those good things with those you care about.
- It becomes easier to forgive other people because you are learning to judge yourself less harshly and more kindly; so you are able to judge other people less harshly and more kindly too.

How to Forgive

As you can see from the above, Forgiveness offers you ways in which you can become happier and more successful in your life. However, you need to apply yourself and make Forgiveness a part of your life on a regular basis for a while.

When you try *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*, from the chapter earlier, you will likely find that Forgiveness is much easier than you thought it would be, and that you will start to feel the benefits almost right away. Please go ahead and give yourself and those you care about, a happier and more successful version of yourself.

Addictions and Compulsions

Forgiveness sets you free from addictions and compulsions.

One of the things that can help us overcome addictions and compulsions is to become able to face the pains of the past and to let them go. You might not realize that pain from your past can cause you to have addictions in the present, but it can. Also, you might not realize that you can let go of the pain from your past, so that it is not affecting you now. You can then let go of the addictive behavior that was being caused by the pain from the past.

The pain of the past may include; anger, resentment, bitterness, hate, or shame from being treated badly by other people. It can include memories of actual physical, or emotional pain, and the traumatic effects this can have on a person's thinking and behavior.

This type of suffering can make us feel that there is something missing and something not right about our life; or that there is something fundamentally wrong with us. We may feel a gap, a type of emptiness or numbness inside ourselves. Or, we may be troubled by nightmares and painful feelings that do not seem to go away. This can make us feel very lonely even when we are surrounded by people.

In an attempt to escape from our pain, we might seek relief in some kind of excitement, or some kind of activity that will detract from the painful, unhappy feelings inside us. This can cause us to gamble, or to become addicted to alcohol or drugs; or we choose less severe addictions like compulsive TV watching or computer games. Such things only numb the pain for a short time and afterwards we may feel even worse. We then not only feel bad because of what has happened in our past, we also feel bad because of the hurtful things we are doing to ourselves and to those closest to us in the present.

We might be gambling away money that our family really needs. We might be hurting our body from eating too much, or too little. We might get angry and say or do hurtful things to people who try and get us to change our ways. We might feel that even our closest friends do not understand us. Yet, it is really us who do not understand; we do not truly understand ourselves and our own needs.

The biggest need we have is to learn how to forgive. We need to let go of the past, so we can truly live in the present. We need to forgive those who hurt us in the past, so that we can let go of our old pain. When we let go of that old pain, we can be free to live a good life. We also need to forgive ourselves for the ways we have hurt others. We need to forgive and move on.

As we learn to forgive others, we will find that the pain we feel from what other people did to us will begin to ease, and finally, we will be able to let it go. In letting go of those old pains, we become much more able to let go of the addictions that they were causing. As we learn to forgive ourselves, we may also want to find ways to make amends to those we have hurt.

When you forgive, you win. You win the life you were always meant to live. You will be free of the people and the situations that hurt you. How would you live your life if those painful situations had never occurred? Would you be happier, freer, and more able to enjoy life? Of course you would be happier! By learning to forgive, freedom, happiness, and more, can be yours. You will feel like a winner every time you forgive, and it will not cost you any money to experience it. Eventually, the false promises of the casinos, the bars, the gambling dens and their lies, will no longer attract you.

When you forgive you are free. You are free of the past and can live in the present moment. You can then begin to find joy in just being alive. It is the joy that children often have and that adults, too often, sadly lack. You can gain that joy as you learn to forgive.

Perhaps you live in worry and fear and cannot find peace. By learning to forgive you will realize that the source of peace is within yourself. As you let go of the past, you will begin to discover the

natural state of peace and ease within yourself. You will find peace through forgiveness.

Perhaps you are judging yourself harshly. You may have been attacking yourself with thoughts and feelings of self-blame and self-criticism, because of your addictive behavior. Yet, this has not helped much, if it has not freed you from that behavior. Why not try another way? Try Forgiveness.

Learning to forgive will take a bit of work. You will need to look honestly at yourself and your feelings. This will not always be easy, but it is much easier than the pain and suffering caused by leading a life that is governed by addictions.

Remember: Learning to forgive cannot hurt you; it can only help you.

Practice forgiving every day, and begin to leave behind your addictions and live the wonderful life you were meant to live.

Loneliness and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is your friend in healing loneliness.

At first it might seem there is not much connection between loneliness and Forgiveness, but if we look deeper we will find that Forgiveness can help us a lot in overcoming loneliness. There is an old saying: "If you want a friend, be a friend." However, the challenge with this saying is that many people don't like themselves and don't really believe that they are worthy of friends and of friendship. Some are wary of other people and have a "keep away" attitude which has been in place for so long that they may not be aware of it. Others have an unforgiving attitude and this makes people feel uncomfortable around them. If we make people feel like they are being criticized, or judged, even if we don't voice these opinions, they will not want to spend much time with us.

Maybe we don't really care for the idea of friendship and are only concerned with finding "The One," that one special person who we will love, and who will love us. However, what we fail to see is that someone who is not able to create friendships does not have the qualities necessary to create a good relationship with "The One," even if we found them. In fact, we may not be able to see or recognize "The One," even if they were right in front of us.

If we are having trouble creating friendships, we may well be stuck with an unforgiving state of mind and all the cynical, judgmental and overly critical attitudes that comes with it. Such a person may convince themselves that they will be able to completely love their "Angel" when they find them. However, every person has their faults and failings, and an unforgiving mind will soon find reasons to have judgments about them. Their potential "Angel," or "The One," may be well aware of their own faults and failings and will feel that someone with an unforgiving attitude will judge them, blame them, and may even reject them, sooner or later.

An unforgiving mind is one trained, through habit, to be judgmental, cynical and overly critical of others. Such a mind lacks the ability to love and is imprisoned by a sense of loneliness and isolation. It is also imprisoned by the fear that its habit of judgment and criticism will turn on itself. They fear that if they don't direct their unforgiving mind's attention outwards, then it will turn on them and they will then feel the pain of guilt, shame, self-judgement, self-blame and perhaps even acute self-loathing.

However, there is a way out of this prison of an unforgiving mind and the loneliness it creates. It is simply the practice of Forgiveness, including forgiving yourself for the ways which you have abandoned yourself and your own needs.

Feelings of loneliness are generated by the parts of you, which have been abandoned. But, it may well be you who has abandoned them. You may have taken on, or internalized ideas from other people about whom, or what you should be in your life. If so, this can cause you to push away parts of yourself, which don't fit with what those others have told you about how you "should" be. Those parts of yourself, which you have rejected have feelings, and those feelings of being rejected and abandoned, surface and influence your mood and perspective on life.

What are the parts of yourself that you have not befriended, or have rejected? How do those parts of you feel about that? They are communicating with you through how you feel. If they feel isolated, you will feel isolated. If you reject parts of yourself, you will feel the rejection, as those parts are still connected to you. When you are not distracted and you have time on your own, you will have those feelings even more intensely. But, it is not because you are on your own that you are having those feelings; being on your own is what gives you the chance to notice them.

Forgiveness is what allows you to re-accept those parts of yourself and heal the sense of rejection and the feelings of isolation. As you learn to create a healthier relationship with yourself, this in turn, helps you to become more able to create healthier relationships with other people. Of course,

creating healthy relationships with others helps to reduce loneliness and isolation.

It may be that you feel that you are not understood by others, “Nobody understands me.” Perhaps you don't particularly like other people, or perhaps you don't really trust them. You may have become fearful or wary of others because of previous bad experiences. This is unfortunate, but it does not have to be this way. There are indeed bad people in the world; yet, there are many good people too.

We sometimes hide from our lonely feelings by trying to distract ourselves by becoming addicted to work, alcohol, watching TV, computer games, or drugs. Ultimately, this just makes us feel worse about ourselves and even more lonely. What we most need to do is to begin to face the pain and unhappiness that we have been avoiding, and begin to look at what will make us feel better and less alone. If you need professional help with this, then you could see about getting it.

You can start by looking at the attitudes, thoughts and feelings within you which cause you to become lonely and isolated. You can look to how you can begin to remove the blocks within you which prevent friendship.

Are there ways you take petty vengeance on people? In other words, are you ignoring or avoiding people who don't do what you want them to do? Are you quick to punish people by withdrawing from them? Do you hide your hurts behind anger? Do you hide your anger behind your hurts? This builds a wall which separates you from being able to connect with other people in meaningful ways. An overly critical attitude often plays a part in creating depression, loneliness and isolation. Learning to think kindly of others helps to attract people to you.

Are you filled with self-judgement, self-criticism or self-pity? Do you have thoughts like, “I am not good at making friends”, “I don't belong here”, “I am a fake”, “Nobody likes me” and so on? Perhaps it is time to heal the cause of such thoughts by looking at ways you need to forgive yourself. Perhaps there are things you have done, which you need to let go of and move on.

Painful thoughts create painful feelings; so, that is why learning to forgive is so important to overcoming loneliness. Loneliness is partly an attack on yourself. It is largely due to the thoughts you think when you are alone that you suffer. What could be “happy alone time” turns into loneliness because of negative thoughts. Write down your thought stream (the stream of thoughts going through your mind) and you will see. It is also this negative thought stream that gets in the way of your making friends. This makes it self-perpetuating till you acknowledge and change your thought stream.

A wonderful skill to learn is to really take time to listen to people. There are few people in the world who really learn to listen to others. If you learn this skill you will do very well. Ask people questions about what they say to you, to show you heard them. Don't rush in to comment or give an opinion. Don't try to impress anyone; instead, be impressed by them and let them know of anything they say or do that impresses you. Make it about them; not about you. Appreciate other people, and tell them about it. No need to be fake unless you need to fake it till you make it.

Give others plenty of space to talk. Make eye contact. Friendship starts there, especially if combined with a smile. Extend friendship, even in a small way, wherever it is safe to do so - at the checkout, waiting in a queue or whatever. Let it become a habit, without getting pushy about it.

A good way to begin to create friendships can be a mutual support group of some kind. However, be careful about becoming part of a shared victim experience for too long. It is not good to define yourself too much as a victim, “I am a such-and-such survivor.” That may be true in some ways, but there is much more to you than that and Forgiveness can help you to discover more good things about yourself.

Shared victim-hood is not friendship. Mutual support obviously has its place, but it is not the job of your friends to be unpaid therapists. Don't squash budding friendships with heaviness or a compulsive need to “share your pain”. Friendship is supposed to be enjoyable and not a chore, a

duty, or a trade (“I’ve listened to your misery, now you must listen to mine”).

Get into the habit of doing fun things on your own and then start to invite others along. Friendship takes time to develop and some people need to spend a bit more time to cultivate friendship. Don’t confuse Pacing Signals (“slow down”) with Stop Signals. If the other person becomes unavailable, let them. Wait a bit, send a friendly and short “Hope you are okay” and move on if you don’t get much response. Always cultivate more than one friendship at a time as you don’t know which ones will grow and what they will grow into.

From the above you will be able to see that there is indeed a way that Forgiveness can help you out of feelings of loneliness. *Loneliness is often the result of an unforgiving mind. If you want friends, be forgiving.* You can turn your life around by practicing Forgiveness; preferably, at least once per day. You can begin to build lasting connections with others even if it looks like it is not possible under your current circumstances. Make Forgiveness your friend and you put an end to loneliness; at the very least you will make loneliness manageable and far less painful.

Positive Thinking and The Law of Attraction

Forgiveness helps you to be more positive by releasing the pains of the past.

Anyone who studies the importance of positive thinking comes to realize that the more positive our thoughts, the more positive our life will be. Forgiveness can help you immensely in being able to think more positively as it helps heal the causes of negative thinking habits.

Some see this as the practical outworking of psychological principles: It is almost impossible for someone to allow into their life something they feel they don't deserve. They will find a way to sabotage themselves if they ever do attract that thing into their life. Others see it as a "Law of the Universe", and that we are all affected by the "Law of Attraction", or the "Law of Vibration". Many consider the effects of the Power of the Subconscious Mind and how a person's unconscious beliefs affect their life and their ability to achieve their goals.

Whether you see the effectiveness of Positive Thinking as being due to psychological principles, or being due to something magical or mystical, the practice of Forgiveness helps considerably. Amongst the varieties of approach to Positive Thinking, there is the underlying idea that our thoughts and feelings need to be more positive in order to create more positive experiences in our life. However, there is a problem...

The problem is that even if we realize the importance of being positive, that is often not enough to help us stay positive. We may be overcome with a dark mood or a sullen frame of thought. We may get caught up in anger and resentment. We may feel bitter about things that have happened to us in the past, or we may feel ashamed or guilty about things we have done. All these can put a damper on our efforts to think higher and better thoughts.

Perhaps we read something inspiring and uplifting and feel better for a while, but often for many of us, the change does not last and we struggle to keep ourselves feeling good about life.

However, it does not have to be this way. It just means that we have not got to the root cause of negative and unhappy attitudes to life and we need to deal with those causes and then we can be free of them. There is a way you can deal with those root causes and begin to make permanent and lasting changes to your general level of thought and feeling. Furthermore, you reap the benefits by more rapidly and more easily achieving your goals for a better life.

What usually affects our feelings in the moment are either things from the past, or things in the present that are being colored by our experiences from the past. Therefore, in order to be more able to think positively, and feel positive, we need to heal our relationship with the past. We need to let go all past events and experiences, which might be holding us down.

We need to forgive people who have hurt us, so that whatever they did is no longer affecting us in the present. We need to let go of our own mistakes and forgive ourselves for them, so that these do not affect how we feel about ourselves and the good we deserve in the present.

In this way, we change our inner climate so that more good can come into our life. Roses do not grow in the Arctic Winter, and if our internal climate is cold and dark by being overly affected by unhappy things from our past, then this is what makes our efforts to "be positive," a struggle.

We do not need to relive old painful situation to let them go. We just need to look at them, while staying in the present, and use *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* so that we can let them go. In this way we can extract any valuable experiential "nutrients" that the situation might offer us, and move on.

As you learn to forgive you will become increasingly free of the past. You will let go of anger and resentment of what others have done to you; and you will let go of any feelings that you are "not good enough", or somehow lacking and undeserving, which could be causing you to not allow

good things to flow into your life. You will then be free of the past and more able to keep your thoughts and feelings on the positive. You will then be free to create the life you really want.

Self Worth, Self Esteem and Self Confidence

Forgiveness boosts your Self Worth, Self Esteem and Self Confidence.

Learning Forgiveness is an excellent way to improve yourself and increase your Self Worth, Self Esteem and Self Confidence. There are very clear reasons as to why this is the case. If a person is caught up in feelings of anger and resentment about the past because of what others have done to them, or is caught in guilt and shame because of mistakes they have made, then their ability to feel good about themselves is greatly reduced. It is also harder for them to feel good about the relationships they have had and to feel good about life in general. This reduces their capacity to achieve their full potential because their thoughts and feelings are caught up in the past.

Being caught up in the past burdens the person and makes them feel more worried and fearful of the future than they would otherwise have been, as they fear that they might not be able to cope with what life brings. They are burdened by what they have already experienced, as they have not been able to process it in a way that lets them move on; so more experiences hold the potential threat of more things that will burden them. It is the lack of Forgiveness that is actually burdening them, and not the experiences themselves, because when they learn to let handle their past constructively through Forgiveness, they can let go of the burden. They can release the heavy weight they have been carrying and become lighter and freer.

You can learn to leave the past behind you and let go of old pain. You can stop being haunted by the past and move forward into a brighter future. As you learn to forgive, you are no longer a victim of the events of your life. You begin to gain skills in determining how events will affect you. You begin to become master of your thoughts and your own emotions and to take charge of your own inner life.

Sometimes people get caught in a vicious circle and, when encouraged to do things which will help them out if it, they say things like, "I can't change; this is how I am." They think they are being themselves, but what they don't realize is that they are actually not being themselves. The natural process of life is, change and grow. All life is change and growth. Stagnation is denial of life, and produces many ill effects in physical and psychological health. The real self of that person is orientated towards change and growth, and to deny that is to deny our real self. Is any person the same all their life such as a 3 year-old, an 18 year-old or 40 year-old, etc? Of course, not. Nobody can have good levels of Self Esteem and Self Confidence and deny their real self. When you allow yourself to become the best version of yourself, you not only benefit yourself, you also benefit all those around you.

Also, as you learn to forgive others you grow in confidence in your ability to handle the events and people in your life. When you forgive you win! You feel more and more a winner as you learn to forgive. This may or may not improve the outcome of events, though often it does; but it certainly helps you stop wasting time and energy on things you cannot change.

You can choose to let go of the past. You can let go of old pains and unhappiness, which are acting as a heavy weight holding down your Self Worth, Self Esteem and Self Confidence. You can flourish and your life can become the person you were meant to be. If this is what you want, learn to forgive so that you are free to become the best version of yourself.

How to Forgive Infidelity and Adultery

Forgiveness helps us turn a painful experience into a benefit.

Perhaps you are a man who has been betrayed by a wife or girlfriend. Perhaps you are a woman who has been betrayed by her husband or boyfriend. Being “cheated on” can be a very painful and sad experience.

We may feel that we have been tricked, lied to, or fooled in some way. It can come as a real shock to discover that someone we have trusted completely has tricked us and has lied to us. The shock of betrayal can feel similar to the shock of the death of someone close to us. We grieve not only for the loss of what we had; we also grieve for what could have been. It may seem like all our hopes and dreams have turned into disappointment, fear and despair.

However, there is no need to make the situation any worse than it has to be. There is no need to give way to the anger, bitterness and resentment that will arise. It would not be good for us to let such feelings shape how we see the future and how we see life. We can learn to heal the pain of infidelity and adultery in ways that leave us wiser and more resilient.

You can let go of much of the pain of the situation by being willing to forgive. When you forgive a person or situation, you can move on in your life more quickly and more easily. Forgiveness helps you to avoid becoming bitter and angry for too long.

It might surprise you to discover that when you experience betrayal from someone you care about, you may need to forgive yourself. You may be blaming yourself, with thoughts like; “What is wrong with me?” “I always pick the wrong person.” You might be telling yourself, “I was so stupid,” “I should have seen this coming”. You might be frightening yourself with thoughts like; “Nobody will want me now,” “I’ll be alone for the rest of my life.”

You might notice your thoughts swinging between things like: “He/she never really loved me.” “Why did they do this to me?” “It’s all my fault.” “It’s all their fault.” “I’ll never love another.”

Much of the pain of betrayal comes from that kind of thinking; not from the event itself. The pain comes from what we tell ourselves about it, and what it “means;” not from the actual facts of the situation. Forgiveness enables us to change what a situation means to us and therefore it enables us to change how we feel about it. Forgiveness enables you to break out of only attributing a negative, and therefore painful, meaning to such events in your life. There will still be difficulties and challenges which will come to you, but they will be a lot less painful, and possibly even enjoyable.

Of course, you will most likely feel many strong feelings against the other person too. However, if you can do some forgiveness work on yourself first, you will find it much easier to forgive them. In fact, lack of forgiveness of yourself can be a major block to moving on with your life. It may also act as a block to you forgiving them, which is also part of moving on with your life. If you are clinging to an idea like, “I will never forgive them,” then this will really hold you back and cause you a lot of unnecessary pain.

It helps to know that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. You can forgive someone, in order to let go of the pain of the situation, and still decide not to have anything more to do with the person. Forgiveness can include “Goodbye” (see the chapter *Tough Forgiveness*). However, this can be done without bitterness or resentment once you have done some forgiveness work using *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*.

You may decide that you do want to reconcile with the person. However, again, it is better to reconcile after doing some forgiveness work. This helps you change how you relate to the person in ways that help you to grow, and let go of old attitudes and beliefs that might not be serving you or

serving the relationship. Otherwise, nothing has really changed in the relationship. If at least one of you does not do some work on yourselves, then you are still the same people as you were before, and there is a strong chance the same thing might happen again.

Practice *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*, from the earlier chapter. Let go of the pain of betrayal, infidelity or adultery and see your way forward to a brighter future. You may eventually be able to look back on this experience as a gift and as something which benefited you. Many who practice Forgiveness have had the experience of something they thought was terrible or a curse, turn into being a major benefit or even a blessing. You can too.

Separation

Forgiveness can dissolve the pain of separation.

There are many things that can cause us to experience separation from a loved one. It can simply be caused by life circumstances, or by each person making different choices about their paths in life. Whatever the cause, separation can make us feel lonely and frustrated, and even angry or depressed.

If the separation is caused by infidelity, or adultery, then this adds the pain of betrayal to the pain of separation. (Please see earlier chapter on Infidelity and Adultery).

Separation, whatever its cause, can be a painful and lonely experience. Yet, there is a way out of this pain. We can still find happiness and fulfillment and it depends on our choices and not on other people's behavior. In fact, we can use the situation to elevate ourselves more and more above the effects of other people's behavior. Not only can we heal our current pain, we can also begin to heal the underlying causes of this type of pain.

If you explore the thoughts you are having when experiencing separation, they may range from thoughts which make you feel angry and resentful, to thoughts which make you feel rejected and abandoned. It could be that you are having thoughts, which make you want to rage against the "unfairness" of life.

What you need to realize is that these types of thoughts are what are causing your unhappiness and pain in this moment. Those thoughts are not the side-effects of your pain, they are the actual cause. Change those thoughts and the pain of separation will start to subside and may even go away completely. You may still miss the person, but not in such a painful way. You can then move into feeling happier and more contented with your situation. This can give you a new perspective, so that you may even find a solution to your situation, which had not occurred to you before.

Of course, there may well be practical things you need to take care of because of a separation by whatever cause. However, as you change your thoughts you will be able to handle the situation without the painful drama.

How to change those thoughts that are causing you pain? Forgiveness sets you free as it allows you to clear your mind of the types of thinking that cause you pain. Forgiveness, allows you to re-wire your way of thinking and feeling to one which brings you more peace and happiness. This peace and happiness is something that comes up from within you; it is independent of external circumstances. It gives you a sense of being filled with something good, which you want to share with others. This is a much better feeling than the feeling of being somehow empty and trying to get other people to fill that emptiness.

You become less "needy" of others when you learn to forgive. You become less desperate for others to give you "something." You find, in fact, that you have more of a sense of wellbeing and wonder about life that you want to share. You become less interested in getting something from others and more interested in sharing with them the goodness that you are finding in life.

Your long distance calls or communications with those you feel separated from become lighter, more playful and happier. It will feel like there is less distance between you, and less of a barrier. You will feel more connected with them and more part of their life. Next thing you know, and perhaps much sooner than you expected, the need for the separation dissolves and you can be together again.

Therapy and Mental Health

When we do Forgiveness work, everything changes.

When we do Forgiveness work it is not just our perspective on the issue, which we are working on that changes; we may well find that our perspective on everything starts to change for the better.

One of the major benefits of Forgiveness is that it gives us a sense of being able to manage our internal state, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. It helps us change what we think and feel about events that have happened in our life. It enables us to rise above circumstances and to realize that things we were taking personally were not “about” us at all. When we realize this, we feel less hurt by unhappy events.

Through practicing forgiveness, we begin to see new ways to gather together our internal and external resources so that we can make the most of our life. We become like a wise and kindly parent to the less mature parts of ourselves, so that we can guide them in healthy directions and life enhancing ways of seeing things, instead of them feeling rebellious or abandoned.

Forgiveness can therefore have a very positive effect on our mental health. A psychotherapist was very surprised by the positive changes in her client. The psychotherapist discovered that this was due to her client having attended a “Four Steps to Forgiveness” workshop and then avidly practicing what she had learned. The therapist learned the method, and now uses it with clients, finding it very effective. The client herself says in surprise and delight, “Since I started practicing Forgiveness, everything changes for the better.”

Lack of forgiveness and lack of the ability to forgive, may well be an underlying cause of many mental health problems. Just like we cannot have a healthy physical body with undigested food blocking up the normal channels of digestion, we cannot have mental and emotional health if we are clogged up with “undigested” life experiences. Forgiveness enables us to process, or “digest”, our life experiences.

If we feel very bitter, resentful and angry about something which has happened to us, or excessively guilty and ashamed for something we have done, it is essential that we learn to move on and let go of the past. Forgiveness makes us free of the past. It frees us from living part of our life continuously in the past, or living out the effects of past mistakes or past pain.

When we have an experience in life, it is an opportunity to learn and to grow. It can be very difficult to find anything of value in some life situations, but that is all the more reason to try. For example, going through a divorce can be very painful. But, Forgiveness work can enable us to discover new resources of emotional strength and resiliency within ourselves. This not only helps us to cope with the divorce, it also helps us become a more resilient and happier person in the longer term.

If we insist on thinking of ourselves as the victim of circumstances, it will be difficult or even impossible for anyone to help us until we change our attitude. If we build our sense of self around feelings of being wounded, harmed and treated unfairly, then our self esteem will be low. It will then become more difficult to feel the sense of wellbeing, which makes life worth living.

You can learn to let go of the past. You can create a positive and empowered self image, which allows you to build your sense of self as a strong, capable and independent person. You can find a renewed sense of vigor and passion for life.

If you are suffering from mental health problems, please consider using *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* to help yourself. If you are seeing a therapist, it is best to consult with her/him first. If you are a therapist, you will most likely find *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* very easy to learn and of great benefit to your clients.

Is Vengeance Sweet?

The 'sweetness' of vengeance hides its poison.

People sometimes convince themselves that vengeance is “justified” and that vengeance is “sweet.” But you will never meet a person who is truly happy, and at peace with themselves, who is also vengeful. There can be a form of satisfaction in a vengeful act, but it is a sickly form of satisfaction and there is nothing healthy or life-enhancing about it.

Vengeful people live in fear and anxiety. They may adopt a pose and a demeanor of confidence, but they do not tend to sleep well at night. They believe so much in vengeance that they cannot conceive of anyone else not believing in vengeance too. They are waiting and wondering when those they have harmed will come and do vengeance on them, or whether those they have punished will find a way to punish them. They become anxious about how to protect their fragile ego from real or imagined ‘harm’ from others.

Have you noticed what fragile egos many ‘tough guys’ have? Strange that the ‘tougher’ they are supposed to be, the more easily that even the mildest insult can trouble them and put them into a rage. They are not in charge of their own life, because they feel they must react to what others say and do. Their “power” is illusionary. When a person's actions are too much determined by what others say and do, then others have the power, and not them. Ironically, the vengeful person becomes a constant victim of other people, because they feel that they “must” react. They may well be an angry victim (and vengeful victim) but they are still a victim.

The price of a vengeful and unforgiving mind is to have to forego any deep and lasting happiness, and to forego any deep and lasting friendships. Think about it. What is it like to live with, or be a 'friend' to a vengeful person? Is it possible to be truly friends with a resentful and vengeful person in any kind of honest way? It is very unlikely that we can really trust and feel comfortable around a vengeful person. We never know when they will turn against us for any mistake we make, or any real or imagined slight against them. Vengeful people have no real friends; they only have hostages. Instead of friends, they have fear-filled, angry and resentful companions, and they congregate together in their own miniature version of hell. Their only “friends” are people they “buy,” or coerce, in one way or another.

We don't need to cling to vengeful thoughts with the idea that this is the only way justice can be done. The desire for justice and the desire for vengeance are very different things. The desire for justice needs to include the greater good of society; the desire for vengeance often works against the greater good of society, because the vengeful person becomes blind to the greater good. Forgiving someone does not mean that we cannot seek justice through the proper legal channels, or that we need to have anything more to do with that person. We have the right to keep ourselves out of harm's way if they are very likely to try and harm us again.

The toxic feelings of anger, rage, hatred, resentment and bitterness, which the vengeful person feels often causes them more real harm than anything anyone else has done to them. Such toxic feelings stress the body and mind and can create long-term physical or mental health problems, as well as making the person very unhappy, and not much fun to be around. Vengeful feelings are like a form of instant karma where the person wishing harm on another person is meanwhile causing harm to themselves through the toxic feelings and associated stress hormones coursing through their body. It's like they are drinking a daily dose of poison and expecting to be healthy. *Taking vengeance is like taking antifreeze, both are 'sweet' and both are deadly poisons.*

Forgiveness is a genuine form of empowerment; it is not like the fake empowerment of vengeance. There are stark choices to be made between being a happy person and being a vengeful person. Forgiveness allows us to manage how the actions of others affect us and releases us from being a victim. It frees us from the past, and allows us to live up to our best potential. Forgiveness

allows us to pursue success in our own terms and not the terms of others. Forgiveness enables us to let go of vengeance and its hypnotizing effects, which makes us obsessed about things that do not really matter. Through Forgiveness, we find things that vengeance can never truly offer; freedom, happiness and contentment. And, we also find that no one can really take these away from us.

Gaslighting and Forgiveness

“Forgiveness can include ‘Goodbye’.” – *Forgiveness is Power*

Originally, “gaslighting” referred to a situation where someone is manipulating the physical environment in order to convince another person that they are going insane (such as moving their keys many times and then denying it). However, recently the term is being applied much more widely, and includes attempts to manipulate perceptions of others, whether in the personal, social or political spheres.

This plethora of ways of gaslighting that is now being defined is very useful, but it can confuse the issue of, “What is gaslighting?”. In a recent list offered by one author along the lines of, “Signs that you are being Gaslighted,” the supposed “signs” the author listed could also be experienced by anyone who had really low self-esteem. It might have nothing to do with someone gaslighting them. Low self-esteem may cause them to be partners in crime; except that the “crime” is against themselves. A propensity for self-doubt could cause someone to indulge in what we could call “self-gaslighting,” which leaves them vulnerable to the real thing.

For our purposes here, the focus is on Forgiveness and how to relate to people we feel may be gaslighting us in some way. To this end, we could regard gaslighting as: when a person deliberately targets an individual with false information with the intent to cause them to question their own memory, perceptions, or judgements. The underlying motive is usually to make the other more tractable and easier to manipulate.

The term “Gaslighting” emerged from the movie *Gas Light* (and from a play) from the 1930’s and 1940’s. We can better understand the term gaslighting if we know a bit more about how people related to actual gas light, when it was in common use for lighting the home.

As a young child, I visited a relative with a very old house that still had some gas lights in use. Actual physical gas lights can make things look strange and other-worldly, with odd flickering shadows (the term “spooky” comes to mind). Also, there was a sense of not being able to trust gas lights in the home. There was a risk of being poisoned by gas (from lack of ventilation, or if a light got blown out accidentally and filled the room with gas) and there was also the risk of an explosion. Although, when it was introduced, people appreciated gas lighting in comparison to oil lamps and candles, there was sometimes a sense of wariness, doubt, uncertainty and even fear about their use.

The movie, *Gas Light* tapped into a cultural experience of people's uncertainty around gas lights and whether they could be trusted, which was common at that time, and used this as a metaphor to portray the deliberate and devious manipulation of one person by another. The cultural background of people's wariness of gas lighting added to the suspense of the story.

There are stark similarities between how people experienced gas lights and the experience of being gaslighted by someone. Such a person probably brings a welcome “light”, or brightness into your life. However, their particular light may make things look a bit strange, and you might feel some wariness or doubt about whether you are really safe with them. There may be risks attached; the risk of being poisoned by their toxic emotions, and the possibility of emotional “explosions.” All very similar to how people experienced the use of gas for lighting.

The *Gas Light* movie took this a step further and made the light itself part of a story of deliberate manipulation (the villain in the movie would turn the lights up and down and deny having done so). This is what gave us this very useful term “gaslighting” and the idea that if someone confidently and boldly speaks a lie, and does so often enough, we tend to doubt ourselves and believe what they say. We may have assumed that no seemingly decent person would boldly present a lie as the truth, if we are incapable of so doing. However, this does not allow for the fact that they may well have convinced themselves that a convenient lie is the truth (by repeating it to themselves often enough), hence their being able to speak with conviction. It can also be that they have no moral compunction

against lying. We might find that inconceivable, but it is unfortunately part of the character of some people.

How can we find a healthy way to relate to someone who is gaslighting us, or who we suspect might be gaslighting us? Specifically, how do we bring in Forgiveness without having to keep ourselves in a situation that could potentially harm us?

It is important to understand that Forgiveness is not the same thing as Reconciliation. Reconciliation is about whether we want to have an ongoing relationship with someone and what that will look like. We can be in process of forgiving someone and still decide to keep a distance from them for a while. In fact, we can forgive someone and decide to not see them again. However, such a decision would not come out a feeling of wanting vengeance or wanting to punish someone, but simply out of the need to protect ourselves from further harm.

Forgiveness can be very helpful with issues like gaslighting. But “Tough Forgiveness” is probably more suited to a gaslighting situation. Tough Forgiveness is where we do some Forgiveness work and afterwards look at what we want to do about the relationship. The Forgiveness work helps us gain clarity, and allows us to see whether we want to reconcile and whether we need to negotiate some aspects of the reconciliation. In other words, Tough Forgiveness allows us to create breathing space to do some Forgiveness work and then to decide what we want to do about the relationship. “Forgiveness can include ‘Goodbye’.” – *Forgiveness is Power*

However, it is essential to do some actual Forgiveness work as part of the process (such as Four Steps to Forgiveness), otherwise we could drift into “False Forgiveness.” False Forgiveness is what happens when we confuse reconciliation with Forgiveness. It is when we reconcile without having done any Forgiveness practice to clear ourselves of the attitudes and beliefs that got us into the situation.

False Forgiveness is all too common, and is often described as “forgiveness,” but nothing has really changed in the situation when we reconcile without doing some Forgiveness work. The participants in the drama will still be acting out the same or very similar roles, and will get very similar results as before.

When we do forgiveness work, it changes us in deeply healthy ways. We not only give up our resentments and the like, towards the person we are forgiving. We start to heal and transform the patterns of thoughts and feelings that cause us to become embroiled in unhappy relationships. Through working with forgiveness, we resolve things at the level of causes and build our self-esteem. *Forgiveness sets you free!*

With Tough Forgiveness, we can even decide to negotiate about what mutually acceptable terms would be appropriate for reconciliation. However, unless preceded by in-depth forgiveness work, our attempts at reconciliation could turn into a disguised form of vengeance, or we could find ourselves still enmeshed in an unhealthy relationship.

Forgiveness is very helpful in unravelling the patterns that cause us to get hooked into unhealthy relationships. It helps free us from being manipulated by guilt and shame, which are very often the favorite tools of those who want to try and gaslight us. Forgiveness also helps us build our self-esteem and our sense of purpose and direction in life, so that we have a stronger inner compass to keep us on track and not get diverted by manipulative people.

However, forgiveness takes time and we may need time away from someone we feel may be gaslighting us, in order to do the in-depth forgiveness work necessary to regain our perspective. Tough Forgiveness gives us a bit of distance from the other person so that we can make healthier choices about a particular relationship.

Are They Gaslighting Me?

It can be difficult to know for sure whether or not someone is gaslighting you. However, you don't need to know for sure. You just need to know that you want some distance in the relationship to sort out your feelings. Even if taking distance in the relationship is not an option, you can still do some Forgiveness work to get clear up old wounds from the past, and get a clearer perspective on your life. This will give you fresh insights and awareness on your current relationships, or lack of current relationships.

One clue that someone could be gaslighting you, is if they are never wrong; and they always try and turn it around so that you are always the one who is “wrong.” They take the attitude that they are never at fault; it’s always you. This could be gaslighting on their part, or they may just hate to be seen as wrong. An attempt to try and put the blame on you when they caused a problem could be low self esteem on their part. They may feel such and intense level of shame when they make a mistake that it is very painful, and they don't want to have to face it.

It could also be that they are being deliberately manipulative and controlling. This can also be due to them avoiding something within themselves, rather than a much more serious, deliberate and malignant attempt to manipulate you.

Trying to decide about another person's motives can be difficult and often impossible. However, it is not necessary to do so. A healthy person has no need to gaslight another person. Nor does a healthy person need to stay in a relationship where they feel like they are being gaslighted or simply uncomfortable too often and for too long. We do not need to get caught up in why other people do what they do. We just need to do our Forgiveness work, and that will bring us the clarity and certainty (and Self Esteem) we need to outgrow our current life situation, and grow into a better one.

Low Self Esteem

Some of us go through a phase in life of having very low Self Esteem, and that can cause us to have a lot of self-doubt no matter how much others try to reassure us. This may be just a temporary phase, such as after a very challenging time, or it may be more of a long term issue. However, whatever the cause, we may meet someone who mirrors our self doubts back to us. This experience may feel, somehow, familiar, and even strangely “comfortable,” as it confirms our low opinion of ourselves. They are confirming our beliefs about ourselves and who we think we are. This can make it feel that we are “understood” in an odd way, as this person confirms our low value of ourselves. However, because they seem to be willing to be around us and “put up” with us, we can see them as offering us something of value. We might even “fall in love” with such a person.

If the relationship moves to another level and starts to help us build our self-esteem, then that can be a good thing. However, if the person is using our self-doubts to manipulate us and convince us that we could not live without them and that we would be helpless and hopeless without them, that is not good. This is especially true if the person expects us to put up with their bad behavior without them being willing to negotiate a compromise, as the price of staying around us. In other words, if they are not helping us to become a healthy independent person, and we are not contributing to them becoming the same, then it is probably not a healthy relationship to be in. A healthy relationship is created by two healthy individuals coming together; or at least by two individuals actively working on becoming healthier coming together. It does not come out of two damaged individuals constantly trying to fix each other (or by one individual constantly trying to fix the other).

When we feel vulnerable with low Self Esteem; that is the time when we are most susceptible to being manipulated through our vulnerabilities. Forgiveness helps us overcome low self esteem. Forgiveness reconnects us to the source of goodness and rightness within ourselves. When we focus our attention on forgiving someone; whether ourselves or someone else, we place ourselves under the influence of the highest and best within us. We find that we are not alone, and that there is a

source of wellbeing, happiness and success that is not external and not dependent on external things. Our Self Esteem starts to grow, as we grow that connection with the “goodness” within us, through practicing Forgiveness.

As we learn to forgive ourselves and learn to forgive others, we begin to elevate ourselves above the low-level pond-life type of perceptions that muddy our ability to see ourselves, to see others, and to see life more clearly. Through learning how to forgive, we begin to heal our inner wounds and regain our strength as self-determining individuals. Forgiveness is Power; the power to be your best self.

Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness

For when you need an alternative to *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*.

As the title of this book suggests, it is mostly focussed on *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*. This has proved itself to be wonderfully effective in many people's lives. However, there are times when *The Four Steps to Forgiveness* is not applicable. We may want to work on Forgiveness while doing some kind of physical exercise (such as out walking or running), or we might not have the time or inclination to focus in-depth on a specific issue. We might want a forgiveness method we can use at the start of the day before we are really awake; or something we can use just before going to sleep and our mind has partly switched off. It can also be that we find ourselves in a bad mood and don't know why; or we may feel overwhelmed and confused, and don't know where to start with Forgiveness.

It is very useful to have a Forgiveness method that acts like a "general tonic" to our sense of wellbeing. Something we can use like a pick-me-up for any situation and at any time of the day, even if we are not quite awake yet, or we're too tired to do *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*; or we just feel like trying something new. This is where *Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness*, comes in.

Use it for at least 5 minutes any time you want to boost how you feel. You can use it whether you notice that you are feeling unhappy about something (worry, frustration, anger, resentment, shame or guilt, etc), or you want to increase your current state of happiness to the next level.

Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness

Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness is done in cycles of four breaths. You do a forgiveness affirmation on each of the first three breaths, and you are silent (or even sigh if appropriate) on the fourth breath. Even if you are "saying" the affirmations in the silence of your mind, it is still good to follow the cycle of four breaths. If you use it while doing yoga, exercising, walking, or running, you simply fit *Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness* into whatever breathing rhythm is comfortable for you.

Notice your feelings without making any particular effort to try and make them change. Breathe a little bit deeper and a little bit more slowly and say the phrases in the silence of your mind for 5 minutes:

First out-breath: "I choose the Love that Forgiveness brings."

Second out-breath: "I choose the Peace that Forgiveness brings."

Third out-breath: "I choose the Freedom that Forgiveness brings."

Fourth out-breath: Silent (possibly with a sigh).

Keep going round, nice and slowly, till the 5 minutes is up.

After 5 minutes, notice how you feel. If it felt good and you have the time, feel free to do it some more, but don't let it become a strain. If it starts to feel like a strain, see if you can be more relaxed about it. There is no need to push it, or put much effort into it.

It helps to gently get into the feelings of "love", "peace" and "freedom," as you speak the relevant word.

Variations

After you have tried this a few times, and have got familiar with it, you may get the urge to use different words like "happiness," "joy," "contentment," and "lightness". By all means, follow this

urge so that you are varying the method to suit your needs in the moment. You might find yourself using the same word, such as “happiness,” for all of the first three out-breaths and that is fine too. If you lose your way, or become uncertain, just come back to the “standard version” above.

You can also shorten the sentences. Instead of using a phrase like “I choose the Love that forgiveness brings,” you can use, “I choose Love.” Or you can just say the actual quality for each breath. For example: “Love” for the first out-breath, “Peace” for the second, and so on.

However, I recommend that you keep the fourth out-breath silent as before, as this allows space for you to let go anything which gets in the way of you experiencing the qualities that you are focussing on.

Forgiving our Fate; Forgive Life

A life without difficulty would be like a gymnasium that did not challenge us - useless.

In the course of life, we experience many things that we would rather not experience. We experience getting old, illness (our own or someone close to us), the death of our parents, the fear of our own death, and many similar things. We may experience natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes or hurricanes. We experience a whole range of things that are beyond our control; from minor things like delayed flights, to major things like disease epidemics.

We may sometimes feel that life is unfair, or may wonder why life is so difficult at times.

Imagine you went to a new gymnasium for some exercise; but it was a very strange gymnasium. All the weights were very light; so light that you could lift any of them with only one finger! Then you tried an Exercise Bicycle. It was a powered bicycle, so you could make it go as quickly as you wanted without any effort at all. Then you tried the walking / treadmill machine and it had a special attachment that supported all your weight; so you hardly needed to move your legs in order to walk on it.

You would think that this was a useless gymnasium, because it did not challenge you at all. It would make you weaker, and not fitter and stronger like you wanted.

Life is like a Gymnasium

Life is like a gymnasium, except that the “muscles” we develop are aspects of our character. We developed qualities like compassion, kindness, boldness and courage in response to the challenges of life. In order to develop physical muscles, we need physical “resistance” to push against. In order to develop inner “muscles,” which are the qualities of our character, we need inner “resistance” to push against. Why is life difficult? A life without difficulty would be like a gymnasium that did not challenge us; it would be useless. There would be nothing for us to internally “push” against so that we develop our character.

If we tell the truth when it is difficult to do so, we develop an honest and truthful character. When we speak kindly to someone, even when we feel tired and grumpy, we strengthen our ability to be kind and develop kindness as part of our character. When we make an effort to forgive someone when it is difficult, because we feel angry and vengeful, then we strengthen our character with the capacity to forgive.

Even just the physical universe is a vast place. Who knows what other dimensions there are to it, and how vast it really is? The human species is evolving towards something. What that “something” is, we do not know. But those who understand the nature of life the most are also those who become the most happy and peaceful. The ancient sages tell us that life is essentially good, and that human beings are essentially good. They tell us that the purpose of the universe is a good purpose.

Human Goodness

We can see the evidence of human goodness by ourselves, even in people who have done very bad things. There have been very few people in human history that got a good feeling out of doing bad. People who do very bad things usually have to convince themselves that what they are doing is somehow good, before they are able to do it. Some of the most evil people in history would have disagreed (probably in a very nasty way) if someone called them “evil.” They were not trying to be evil. They made up some kind of “justification” no matter how tenuous for all the bad things they did. They convinced themselves that they only did bad things for a “good” reason. This is because

our natural human characteristic is to be orientated towards the good. Therefore human nature is, generally speaking, orientated towards the good.

Sometimes there is a human cause behind the things we suffer from. It could be someone is unkind to us, or treats us badly. Or it can be more general things, such as the hassles of security at airports, because of the threat of terrorists. It could be a more serious thing comes to us, like a car accident or something extreme and violent. The suffering in life, major or minor, comes to everyone sooner or later. Everyone experiences rejection, or a broken relationship, or a relative that will not speak to them, or someone they love who leaves or dies. A few years ago, a billionaire couple from Europe tragically lost two of their children in a terrorist bomb attack in Sri Lanka; so, even billions in money will not save us from inevitable challenges of life.

Yet, there are many problems, struggles and difficulties in life that we bring on ourselves, and are not caused by “fate.” We suffer if we become cynical and expect the worst to happen as we usually work hard to make our expectation come true. If we are cynical about life, then even if good things happen, we find fault with them. We suffer if we become negative in our attitude and see life as a “problem,” or a series of problems. We suffer if we refuse to forgive and let go of the past. Next time you find yourself resenting something from the past, notice the unhappiness that it is causing you in the moment, and ask yourself why you would want to cause yourself this suffering.

Working with the Inner Forces of Life

Do you find yourself in a difficult situation? Ask yourself what good qualities of character this situation can help you develop. Cultivate those qualities and see how quickly things will change. Is there someone in your life you find very difficult to handle? Ask yourself what qualities they express (possibly in a distorted or unskillful way) that you lack, and then cultivate those qualities. In these simple ways, you begin to cooperate with the inner, and hidden forces of life. You begin to work with the inner causes which shape your life, your fate, and your destiny, rather than fighting and struggling against them.

If you do this, your life will change in a very fundamental way. It will be like you had spent the whole of your life riding on a bicycle going uphill. Then suddenly you are coasting downhill at a nice enjoyable speed. Life becomes your friend; perhaps sometimes, a challenging friend, but still your friend.

Whatever happens in your life, use it to cultivate your character in good ways. When you do this, you may start to feel that there is some hidden force in life supporting you and helping you. Something is going ahead in front of you to clear the way for you. You might start to feel “lucky” or “fortunate,” and other people may wonder and comment about the changes that have come over you. You might start to feel more and more that you are exactly where you are supposed to be, and doing exactly what you are supposed to be doing.

Deliberately and actively cultivate you character, and you will become a friend to yourself and a friend of life. You and the process of life are now “on the same team.” You are working together and cooperating with each other. You will feel this to be true and it will make a huge difference in your life. You will be reconciled with life, reconciled with yourself, and more able to forgive other people and to forgive life itself.

Next Steps

Everyone who is learning to forgive is also a teacher of Forgiveness.

The more we learn about Forgiveness, the more we teach it (even if we don't say a word); the more we teach Forgiveness, the more we become it.

If you want to explore Forgiveness more deeply, please discuss it with others, either in person, or online via social networks. You will find it makes for an excellent topic of conversation, which helps deepen and enrich your connections.

It's important to realize that we all teach each other all the time. We all teach Forgiveness, or its opposite, by our example. Often we don't have to say anything in order to teach Forgiveness; it comes out in our attitude to other people, and our attitude to life. Making the choice to deliberately teach Forgiveness, even if we only want to do it in a very small way, is still a very good choice. The more we become forgiving, the more we teach Forgiveness by our example. The more we teach Forgiveness, the more we become it.

Simply mentioning to people that you are reading a book about Forgiveness can spark a wonderful conversation. Perhaps someone will tell you about something they would like to forgive, but do not know how. If so, just tell them about *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*! By explaining those four simple steps, or giving a copy of this free ebook or a download link to someone, you could completely change their life for the better. Everyone who is learning to forgive is also a teacher of Forgiveness.

The only thing you need to do to become a teacher of Forgiveness is to decide that is what you want to do. You do not need to be an "expert", get a certificate or anything like that. We are all teachers of Forgiveness or its opposite, as we all teach each other by example. It is just a matter of becoming aware of this and deliberately deciding to teach Forgiveness, rather than teaching the lack of it. You just need to start doing it and you will get better at it as you go along.

Start by using *The Four Steps to Forgiveness*, or *Love, Peace and Freedom: 5 Minutes to Forgiveness* on a regular basis by yourself. Then try it by sharing with a friend, and take it from there. When you have more confidence, perhaps you can try it with a group of friends.

We would all like to leave the world at least a little bit better place than we found it. What a better way to do that than spreading the word about Forgiveness?

You might also be interested in my other book, *Forgiveness is Power*, which goes more into depth on the topic of Forgiveness. It is available in various international versions, and is in many book stores. For more information see the next chapter: About the Author.

About the Author

“I hope you enjoyed your free copy of this book! Please help to spread forgiveness by giving copies of this free book to others via email and social networks. For more in-depth information about Forgiveness please check out my other book: *Forgiveness is Power*. It is available in various international editions (please see below)” - William Fergus Martin.

William Fergus Martin is from the UK, and he is an author, speaker and workshop leader, who helps people empower themselves. He is the founder of The Global forgiveness Initiative, whose website receives around 3 million visitors per year (<http://www.glofig.com>). William has traveled extensively and his writing is influenced by an appreciation of the common challenges that people face everywhere in the world.

William is willing to write bespoke articles, give talks and do workshops, especially on the topic of Forgiveness. Contact him through his publisher: <https://www.innertraditions.com/> or through his facebook link below.

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Other works: *Forgiveness is Power*, Published by Inner Traditions.
ISBN: 978-1-84409-628-2

Praise for *Forgiveness is Power*:

"William Martin has created an enlightening User's Guide for forgiveness. Thoroughly researched. Hugely insightful. Very practical. I recommend it wholeheartedly."

[Robert Holden, author of Shift Happens and Loveability.](#)

"A deep gold mine full of rich and relevant information."

William Bloom, Author of *The Endorphin Effect*

"William Martin has written a powerful guide book on learning how to forgive, not just our brothers and sisters, but also ourselves."

Jon Mundy, Ph.D. author of *Living a Course in Miracles*.

International Editions

Forgiveness is Power is also available as international editions: Indian Edition (ISBN: 9789325975170); in Traditional Chinese (ISBN: 9789863591184) and in Simplified Chinese (ISBN: 9787559606006).

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