



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

A Path of Peace and Renewal
for Oneself and Others

Shantideva Center

September 9, 2023



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

The purpose of this one-day course is...

- To explore and understand the nature of forgiveness within the context of the Buddha's teachings
- To learn how to practice skillfully:
 - Forgiving ourselves
 - Asking forgiveness of others and apologizing
 - Forgiving those who have harmed us



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Agenda

- **The nature of forgiveness**
- The rationale for practicing forgiveness
- The practice:
 1. Generating forgiveness for yourself
 2. Asking forgiveness of others and apologizing
 3. Cultivating forgiveness for those who have hurt or harmed you
- Making forgiveness your life's practice



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- What is forgiveness?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the mental, emotional, and spiritual process of letting go of resentment, indignation, or anger against another person for a perceived offense, difference, or mistake. It can also mean ceasing to demand punishment or restitution for transgressions, real or imagined.

- New World Encyclopedia



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness means reclaiming peace of mind by letting go of anger toward someone who has done something that feels hurtful or disturbing. Learning to forgive doesn't mean forgetting what happened, it means making a new start.

- FPMT Ready Set Happy/The 16 Guidelines



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past.

- Jack Kornfield

Forgiveness does not change the past but it enlarges the future.

- Paul Boese, Writer



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When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts.

- Joanna North, Philosopher

From *Forgiveness is a Choice* by Robert D. Enright, PhD



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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- Why forgive?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Buddhist views on forgiveness stem from the general overriding project of seeking to alleviate suffering in ourselves and others.

- Terry Hyland, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Bolton and Lecturer in Philosophy at the Free University of Dublin



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

The practice of forgiveness is rooted in the Buddhist teachings on:

- 1) **The role of karma and interdependence**
- 2) **The faults of anger and hatred**
- 3) **The need for compassion**



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

1) The role of karma and interdependence

*Just like the guardians of the hell worlds
And the forest of razor-sharp leaves,
So is this suffering produced by my actions;
With whom therefore should I be angry?*

- Master Shantideva

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life , Verse 6.46



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

2) The faults of anger and hatred

*Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent
of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets
burned.*

- The Buddha [?]

*Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person
dies.*

- Augustine of Hippo



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2) The faults of anger and hatred

*Hence the enemy, anger,
Creates suffering such as these,
But whoever assiduously overcomes it
Finds happiness now and hereafter.*

- Master Shantideva

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life , Verse 6.6



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3) The need for compassion

*If when, under the influence of disturbing conceptions,
People will even kill their treasured selves,
How can they be expected not to cause harm
To the bodies of other living beings?*

- Master Shantideva

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life , Verse 6.37



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3) The need for compassion

When we think of a person who creates a lot of suffering in our own land, usually frustrations, anger, hatred come. So here it's very useful to make a distinction [between] the action and the actor. Although we totally oppose their action, their activities, we always can keep compassion - to not develop hatred towards the person, [and] on that basis, to develop forgiveness.

- His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama



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3) The need for compassion

Forgiveness will not be possible until compassion is born in your heart. Even if you want to forgive, you cannot forgive.

- Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh



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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Three levels of forgiveness practice

1. **Generating forgiveness for yourself**
2. Asking forgiveness of others and apologizing
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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- What is self-forgiveness?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Seeing faults clearly, taking responsibility for them with remorse and making amends, and then coming to peace about them: this is what I mean by forgiving yourself.

- Rick Hanson, Ph.D.



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- Why do I need to forgive myself?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Finding a way to extend forgiveness to ourselves is one of our most essential tasks. Just as others have been caught in suffering, so have we.

If we look honestly at our life, we can see the sorrows and pain that have led to our own wrongdoing. In this we can finally extend forgiveness to ourselves; we can hold the pain we have caused in compassion. Without such mercy, we will live our own life in exile.

- Jack Kornfield



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- How do I forgive myself?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Reflect on how you have not forgiven yourself fully for any of the three types of actions you have done that have harmed yourself and which have often also been harmful to others:
 - Physical actions
 - Speech
 - Thoughts



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Begin self-forgiveness with less significant things and work up to those that are heavier
- ❖ As you do this practice, appreciate your good qualities, especially your willingness to work with your own faults in this way



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Acknowledge what you have already done in this life to learn and grow from those experiences
- ❖ Observe whatever feeling of forgiveness that arises in your heart, as well as thoughts in your mind and sensations in your body



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Engage in the practice as best as you can. Even if it doesn't feel genuine at first, it will become more authentic over time.
- ❖ Conclude by reflecting on your own values and aspirations that you want to honor and uphold in the future and establish a strong intention to continue in that direction



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

We need to forgive ourselves for not living up to our ideals all the time, while at the same time striving to live up to our ideals. Ideals are something to reach for, something to look up to, not something to beat ourselves up with.

- Ratnagosha (FWBO teacher)



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

The Four Opponent Powers for Purification

1. Regret
2. Reliance
3. Remedy, which can include apology
4. Resolve



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Three levels of forgiveness practice

1. Generating forgiveness for yourself
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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- What is the nature of asking forgiveness of others and why is it necessary?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Our asking forgiveness from other beings is based not on shame or guilt or blame, but on our recognition of what has happened ... the ways in which ignorance or unawareness has worked in our lives that has led to our actions, our thoughts, or our words being the cause of someone else's unhappiness, sorrow, suffering.

- Gina Sharpe



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Asking forgiveness is an act of humility, generosity, and healing. Some level of regret will remain – and should – but shame and guilt will eventually disappear. Through structured meditation, we can train the heart/mind to let go, to meet past pains with understanding and acceptance.

- Noah Levine



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- How do I ask forgiveness of others?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Reflect on the ways that you feel you've not been forgiven fully for any of the three types of actions you have done that have harmed yourself and particularly which have also been harmful to others:
 - Physical actions
 - Speech
 - Thoughts



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ As with self-forgiveness, begin asking forgiveness with those things that are less significant, working up to heavier ones
- ❖ Thinking about those people who have been the object of your actions, truly value those relationships and acknowledge their experience of hurt or pain that you caused



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ As you do this practice, be aware of how difficult it is to accept your own mistakes and to feel worthy of being forgiven for them by those you've offended
- ❖ Observe whatever releasing of the burden of those actions that occurs – the feelings in your heart, the thoughts in your mind and any sensations in your body



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Engage in the practice as best as you can with whatever level of authenticity you have
- ❖ As before, conclude by reflecting on your own values and aspirations that you want to honor and uphold in the future, establishing a strong intention to continue in that vein



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- What is the role of apologizing in asking forgiveness of others?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- Apologizing, in which we admit having done something wrong and then approach the harmed party to ask for their forgiveness, might open the other to forgiveness and reconciliation
- As with forgiveness, unilateral apologizing which allows us to let go of feelings of guilt and shame is beneficial



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The benefits of apologizing

- Restores our own inner peace, which allows us to move on
- Opens up and expands our thought-action repertoire
- Overcomes disturbing thoughts and emotions
- Provides space for reconciliation
- As an act of kindness and compassion, offers the other the opportunity to forgive, thereby restoring their inner peace and allowing them to move on



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The challenges of apologizing

- Shame and guilt often prevent us from apologizing and moving on
- May require us to face our own shortcomings and wrongdoings
- Means facing the negative effects of the action on self and others and seeing the possibility for change
- Might involve self-forgiveness



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- How do I apologize to others?



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- Remember that apologizing is a process
- The key is a feeling of genuine regret and remorse
- It is important to try and understand our intention for apologizing



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Four components of an effective apology

(From Aaron Lazare's *On Apology*)

1. We express remorse, shame, or humility in recognizing how the victim suffered.
2. We acknowledge the specific offense and accept responsibility.
3. We show empathy and offer an explanation for why we did what we did.
4. We offer compensation or reparation.



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Three levels of forgiveness practice

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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- What is the nature of forgiveness for others who have harmed me?



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From *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace* by Jack Kornfield ...

REMEMBER THESE TRUTHS:



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

(1) FORGIVENESS IS NOT WEAK OR NAIVE.

Forgiveness requires courage and clarity; it is not naïve. Mistakenly people believe that to forgive is to simply “forgive and forget,” once and for all. That is not the wisdom of forgiveness.



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

When you forgive me for harming you, you decide not to retaliate, to seek no revenge. You don't have to like me. You simply unburden yourself of the weight of resentment and cut the cycle of retribution that would otherwise keep us ensnared in an ugly samsaric wrestling match. This is a gift you can give us both, totally on your own, without my having to know or understand what you've done.

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

***(2) FORGIVENESS DOES NOT FORGET, NOR DOES IT
CONDONE THE PAST.***

Forgiveness sees wisely. It willingly acknowledges what is unjust, harmful, and wrong. It bravely recognizes the sufferings of the past, and understands the conditions that brought them about.



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

(2) FORGIVENESS DOES NOT FORGET, NOR DOES IT CONDONE THE PAST. (Continued)

There is a strength to forgiveness. When we forgive we can also say, “Never again will I allow these things to happen.” We may resolve to never again permit such harm to come to ourselves or another.



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Forgiving is not forgetting. It’s actually remembering – remembering and not using your right to hit back. It’s a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don’t want to repeat what happened.

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future.

- Lewis B. Smedes, Christian author, ethicist, and theologian



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

(3) FORGIVENESS DOES NOT HAPPEN QUICKLY.

For great injustice, coming to forgiveness may include a long process of grief, outrage, sadness, loss and pain. True forgiveness does not paper over what has happened in a superficial way. It is not a misguided effort to suppress or ignore our pain.



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(3) FORGIVENESS DOES NOT HAPPEN QUICKLY. (Continued)

It cannot be hurried. It is a deep process repeated over and over in our heart which honors the grief and betrayal, and in its own time ripens into the freedom to truly forgive.



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

(4) FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE HAVE TO CONTINUE TO RELATE TO THOSE WHO HAVE DONE US HARM.

In some cases the best practice may be to end our connection, to never speak to or be with a harmful person again. Sometimes in the process of forgiveness a person who hurt or betrayed us may wish to make amends, but even this does not require us to put ourselves in the way of further harm.



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(5) IN THE END, FORGIVENESS SIMPLY MEANS NEVER PUTTING ANOTHER PERSON OUT OF OUR HEART.



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

“He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me!” – in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred will never cease. “He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me!” – in those who do not harbor such thoughts, hatred will cease.

- The Buddha



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- Is forgiveness something you do for yourself, for others, or for both yourself and others?



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Consider the dialogue between two former prisoners of war:

- “Have you forgiven your captors yet?”
- “No, never!”
- “Well, then, they still have you in prison don’t they?”

We begin the work of forgiveness primarily for ourselves.

- Jack Kornfield



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.

- Catherine Ponder
Inspirational Writer and Unity Minister



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- How do I extend forgiveness to those who have harmed me?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Recall the particular harms that you have experienced by the physical actions, words, or even thoughts of others
- ❖ Once again, it's recommended to not start with those that are most difficult to forgive but rather to work up to them



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Remind yourself of your own imperfections and your desire to be forgiven, using that as the impetus to hold those who offended you in that same space of understanding and compassion
- ❖ Don't force it or take on more than you can handle; work with what you can forgive now, accepting what you can't forgive at this time



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Be mindful of whatever feelings arise in your heart, the thoughts in your mind and sensations in your body
- ❖ Should the practice awaken any hurt from the past, gently soften into that pain within a space of compassion and loving kindness for yourself and others



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- ❖ Engage in the practice as best as you can, recognizing that simply having the willingness to engage in forgiving others is where your practice begins



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- Is there any act that is unforgiveable?



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Consider the possibility, and I am only saying consider the possibility, that maybe nothing is unforgiveable. Maybe there is a way to find forgiveness even for what we believed for so long to be unforgiveable. Explore this mindfully.

- Allan Lokos



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The Healing Power of Forgiveness

- How do I sustain and grow this practice of forgiveness?



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is, love, compassion and forgiveness ... the important thing is that they should be part of our daily lives.

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama



The Healing Power of Forgiveness

I can't say it often enough: forgiveness is a process that continues throughout our life. We can't just say the phrases or do the meditation a couple of times and be done with it.

- Noah Levine



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So I encourage you to just continue to practice daily if this is a practice that feels right to you, ... to continue to know what it feels like to meet resistances, to meet the resentments, to meet the anger, to meet the feelings of vengeance with an open and compassionate heart ...

- Gina Sharpe



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THANK YOU!