



Forgiveness

Thoughts and Practices for forgiveness an Introduction

A Personal Journey

Why is forgiveness important? Because it cleanses us of resentment; it frees us from the past.

Without forgiveness, we are bound to the other through our anger, bitterness and resentment. We are never free.

Is forgiveness the same as pardoning?

No, it's not about excusing or exonerating from blame. It doesn't mean that bad behaviour is no longer bad. It's not about saying that "it's all right", it's saying, "this no longer hurts me now". Forgiveness is about the present, and not about the past.

My own journey with forgiveness starts with my mother. My mother was an unhappy woman, bitter after her divorces, she was landed with two small children (one of whom was learning disabled), having never wanted to have children in the first place. She took her anger and frustration out on me, both physically and emotionally. I was scared of her, and I don't remember her ever saying she loved me, either as a child or as an adult.

Our relationship didn't improve as I got older. Even having my own children didn't ease matters between us, and at one point it became so poisonous that we didn't speak to each other for 12 years. When we reconnected, she was still cold and hurtful.

Towards the end of her life, a change happened - not from her, but from me. I was working on compassion as part of my Sufi path, with *Ya Rachman - Ya Rahim* as my daily practice. By this time, she was bed bound, although still completely mentally strong, and being cared for at home. I was visiting her several times a week. During one visit, I suddenly became aware that I was enjoying being with her! I realized that everything that had happened during my childhood didn't matter anymore! It didn't change the fact that I had been abused, but it was no longer part of my present, no longer part of my self-definition, my narrative. I was no longer "someone who had an abusive childhood"; I was free. And what had happened was that through understanding compassion I had been able to let go of the past. It didn't make her behavior to me ok; no, her behaviour had been terrible. But that was then, and this is now, and I could see her and be with her without the past encroaching. This change, this forgiveness, enabled me to really enjoyed seeing her for the remainder of her life - even though she still never told me she loved me!



After she died (which was in January 2020), I felt at peace with myself and with her, but my understanding grew after she passed when I was able to examine more closely what I had learned from having had the mother I had.

What did I learn? So much! But an example is that, whilst many children who grow up in similar circumstances take the pain into themselves and become “victims”, I felt outraged by the injustice of it and was filled with a fierce righteous anger. It doesn’t take a psychologist to realise that this is probably what motivated me to become a human rights lawyer.

Nelson Mandela said: “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.” Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. I was in a prison of my own making for 60 years.

A Personal Journey

But forgiveness isn’t a single act. It’s a process - something we can revisit over and over again, going deeper into the process and learning more each time.

Martin Luther King said that “forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.”

“Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act.” It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. He said that forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again. Without this, no man can love his enemies.

And forgiveness doesn’t mean that there’s no longer a demand for justice. Although the search for justice is often driven by anger, it needn’t be - and Martin Luther King was a magnificent example of this: his movement was all the more powerful and stronger because it was founded on forgiveness.

The Interfaith Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation says, “Fostering and practising forgiveness has the power to transform memories and deep-seated responses to legacies of injustice, conflict and war. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their pasts and long ingrained mental and emotional conditions. Faith and spiritual traditions guide and inspire us to awaken the best of our human potential, by practising compassion, mercy, kindness, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to positively reshape our destinies.”

And our, Murshid, Pir Hazrat Inayat Khan said:

‘Forgiveness is a stream of love, which washes away all impurities wherever it flows. By keeping this spring of love, which is in the heart of man, running, man is able to forgive, however great the fault of his fellow man may seem. One who cannot forgive closes his heart.



The sign of spirituality is that there is nothing you cannot forgive, there is no fault you cannot forget. Do not think that he who has committed a fault yesterday must do the same today, for life is constantly teaching and it is possible in one moment a sinner may turn into a saint.

At times it is hard to forgive, as it is hard to take away the thorn that has gone deep into one's heart. But the pain that one feels in taking away the thorn deepest in the heart is preferable to keeping the thorn in the heart constantly. The greater pain of a moment is better than the mild pricking going on constantly. Ask him who forgives what relief there is in forgiveness. Words can never explain the feeling of the heart when one has cast out the bitter feeling from one's heart by forgiving and when love spreads all over within oneself, circulating like warm blood through one's whole being.'

Practices to begin to foster forgiveness

I'd like you to think of someone who you feel has wronged you, disrespected you, or upset you. If you can think of no-one, then maybe someone who you just don't like, or who irritates you. But for today's purpose, make it someone towards whom there is at least a little spark of openness - not someone who has wronged you so deeply that you feel you can never even begin to forgive. Because it's ok to feel that about some people, in some circumstances. Those people are for another, deeper process - at the right time, but only if a little seed of openness has already been planted. But start with someone for whom you may, just, maybe, be able to open your heart a little. Just a crack...

1. Opening the Heart

Focus on your breathing, being aware of the rhythm of the in and out breaths. After a while, breath into your kalb, the subtle centre in the left of your chest. Let your breath go in and out through your kalb. Now let your breath turn into light, into a greenish gold light, and breathe that gold light into your subtle centre, seeing the kalb get brighter with each inhalation, and letting the gold light emit from your kalb with each exhalation.

Now add the fikr, Fattah - the Opener - on your breath, on the inhale and exhale.

Relax back into your regular breath.

2. Connecting with the Other

Now, I'd like you to focus on the person you identified who you'll work with today. Close your eyes and really picture them, in as much detail as possible. You may feel distaste in doing this, but stick with it. See their face, the colour of their hair, their eyes, the way they hold their face. Do they frown? Set their jaw, keep it slack, smile, smirk? Set your own face in the manner of this person.



Now see how they use their body. Can you see them sitting? Walking? Sit like they do. Get up, and walk the way they do, holding your face like theirs. Try to be this person, without judgement, without caricature. What do you notice? Do you get any insights into the other person, why they use themselves this way? What can you understand from moving like them? Do you get an understanding of their mind and their heart?

Let us assume that we can learn from everything that happens to us, that every experience, even the bad ones, are a gift from the Divine to help us evolve. Think about this person and what happened. What can you learn from it? What is the gift in this learning? How can you evolve as a result?

3. Qassab Practice to Heal the Past

Breathe in L nostril, hold, exhale R nostril - 5x

As inhale, look over your life as a film observing the past.

Hold, knowing anything that needs healing can be healed; the past can be changed.

Exhale, see how the future can be different if the past is healed.

Breathe in R nostril, hold, exhale L nostril - 5x

As inhale, imagine a future which is lighter.

Hold, knowing the future can change the past.

Exhale, be with the past that is different.

Breathe in both nostrils, hold, exhale both nostrils - 5x

Inhale, acknowledging the present is what it is.

Hold, getting in touch with the Divine world.

Exhale, being in touch with the Lord of my being, the majesty in me, thinking:

“*Dhul Jalali wal'Ikram*” - (the source of generosity)

Say *Ya Dhal Jalali wal'Ikram* - 5x

4. Wazaif Practice

Ya Ghaffar - *Ya Ghafur* x 33

Ya Ghaffar (inexhaustible forgiveness, the All Forgiving); *Ya Ghafur* (deepest possible forgiveness, The One who completely forgives our faults and sins).

Ya Ghaffar: In the Qoran: Every creature is bound to have perfection and imperfection, or ugliness and beauty, so whoever overlooks the ugly and mentions only the beautiful is one who shares in this attribute. So know that we are all imperfect, we are all in need of forgiveness.

Fikr: Feel your heart opening to the power of divine forgiveness flowing through you, open yourself to be a channel of forgiveness, let the forgiveness enter you, cleanse you, and wipe your own slate clean. Let it fill you, and flow from you with each out breath, out towards all injustice, and out towards the world.



Fikr A Sirr: Let go of the words and sit in the silence of your mind, allowing the forgiveness in your heart to glow and surround you.

Prayer Nayaz

*'Beloved Lord, Almighty God!
Through the rays of the sun,
through the waves of the air,
through the All-perovading Life in space,
Purify and revivify me,
and I pray,
heal my body,
heart
and soul.'*

Hazrat Inayat Khan

Eve Munira Salomon