

## Stage Six: *Forgiveness*

*I forgive myself for any mistakes I have made. I forgive and release those who have harmed me.*

In order to lead a balanced and healthy life it is necessary to release feelings of resentment, anger, fear and pain. When, in the present, we hold on to those experiences that caused us pain in the past, we eventually begin to lead an imbalanced life because we are using/ investing some of our vital life energy in emotionally protecting ourselves from something that happened in our past. Therefore, you are now at another focal point in your growth and development with the Eight Stage Process. You are now at another point of *choice* -- to continue to hold on to the pain, anger and resentment which you carry, *or* to let go of those feelings and forgive what has been done to you. It is clearly a choice and a choice that can only come when you are ready!

Webster's definition of forgiveness:

1. to give up resentment against or the desire to punish; stop being angry with; pardon.
2. to give up all claim to punish or exact penalty for (an offense), overlook
3. to cancel or remit (a debt).

The intent of forgiveness comes across clearly in Webster's definition. It does not imply in any way that the behavior (the offense) is acceptable. Instead, it focuses on *your* giving up the resentment, the desire to punish, and the anger. This concept truly represents the beauty of and fundamental power behind forgiveness. It essentially cancels your involvement with the offense or mistake. Forgiveness is **NOT** about "changing your mind" about a particular experience or event, and it is *Not* about "forgetting." It is about gradually "letting go" of any fear, blame, anger, or any other intense emotion related to a person or experience. It is something that you are doing for yourself and not necessarily for anybody else.

### The Process of Forgiveness

Bear in mind that learning to forgive is a *Process* -- a very challenging process. It happens over time and it takes a great deal of effort. When harm is done to us, or when other people have hurt us, neglected us or abused us, it is a normal and healthy human response to feel intense confusion, anger and resentment. These emotional responses, and any corresponding behaviors (defense mechanisms), are designed to protect us and to keep us safe. In other words, these intense feelings serve a very positive purpose -- for a while.

Like any good defense mechanism, eventually they get old and start to cause us

more harm than good. This is exactly what happens to each and every one of us when we hold onto these feelings of anger and resentment too long. We begin to live our lives around or behind this pain and anger. By holding on to these resentments we prevent ourselves from fully living our lives the way we want to live them because we are too invested in protecting ourselves from any further pain.

There is a *right time* to begin to work on forgiveness. Only you can decide when you are ready to work on forgiving any particular person or experience. Many times it takes a good therapist or an Eight Stage Group to help us work through and decide when, what and whom to forgive. Please utilize these resources in your process. To work on forgiveness too soon leaves us feeling too vulnerable. To postpone the process too long leaves us feeling stuck and unable to move on in our lives. Do not try to forgive someone of something by ignoring your feelings. Identifying one's feelings and expectations in the given experience is an important part of allowing forgiveness to take place. Get through the feelings, and then allow yourself the freedom of forgiveness, of letting go. Several psychological signs to look for that might indicate that you're ready to work on forgiveness are:

1. feeling stuck in your own growth process.
2. feeling that your own anger or memories are holding you back.
3. feeling that you want to detach and let go of those who have hurt you.

Remember, too, that forgiveness is rarely a "one shot deal." Forgiveness is a very repetitive process that we keep practicing whenever thoughts, feelings, memories, or triggers reoccur. Once you have decided to work on forgiveness in a particular area, every time that thought, feeling, or person comes to mind you need to focus on letting go of it. If you do this diligently and consistently, the results will be truly amazing -- and freeing.

Suggested exercises:

1. Read the accompanying list of *What Forgiveness Is...And What It Isn't*.
2. Answer these questions:
  - a. Who has brought you harm?
  - b. How did they harm you?
  - c. Who or what still causes you stress and pain?
  - d. What are you angry about?
  - e. Whom do you need to forgive? (Whom do you need to let go of and their treatment of you?)
3. Read over Stage Six in the book. There are two forgiveness exercises demonstrated there. Select someone or something to work on and practice with the exercise demonstrated in the book.

Suggested readings:

Gawain, Shakti: *Living in the Light*.

# What Forgiveness Is...And What It Isn't

## What Forgiveness Is:

- To forgive means to "give up." You give up any negative emotion that you are holding on to.
- To forgive means to release.
- To forgive means to let go.
- To forgive means ultimately to move on.
- You allow a given trauma/ offense/ mistake to be over, so that it no longer has harmful effects on you.
- You give up any hold (power) that the offender may have on you (via your continued anger, resentment, or feelings of revenge).
- You process through the emotions that are keeping you connected to the particular person or event.
- You allow yourself to feel the emotions.
- You set clear boundaries between yourself and what someone else did. You are not someone else's behavior.
- You accept yourself and others as fallible human beings.
- You let go of past offenses to allow you to be present for the moment, rather than reacting to the past.
- Forgiveness makes you far more empowered because the other person has less effect on you.
- Forgiveness is a process.

## What forgiveness isn't

- To forgive someone else does not mean you have to appreciate or like that individual.
- To forgive does not condone the behavior or the person.
- To forgive does not mean that you forget. (However, with time, something you have forgiven often becomes less important to you.)
- You never have to be with anyone you do not enjoy or that you are afraid of. Forgiveness does not assume that you will spend time with that person.
- You are not giving the person permission to repeat the offense/behavior when you forgive him or her.
- To forgive does not say that the person is not to be punished or reprimanded for a harmful or illegal act.
- Forgiveness does not make you vulnerable to that person.
- You do not have to "forgive all" in order to forgive. Give up whatever you decide you have held on to for too long.