

Forgiveness Workbook

A Step by Step Guide

by Eileen Barker



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For information contact:

Eileen Barker, 175 N. Redwood Drive, Suite 295, San Rafael, CA 94903.
www.barker-mediation.com

Cover artwork by Terry Barker
Graphicon Design
www.graphicondesign.com

Inside design by Vicki Kaufman
Blue Heron Design Studio
www.blueherondesignstudio.com



Dedicated to

*John Bern Ford,
for leading me to the path of forgiveness,
and
my son, Matthew Ryan Barker,
for reminding me when I need to forgive.*

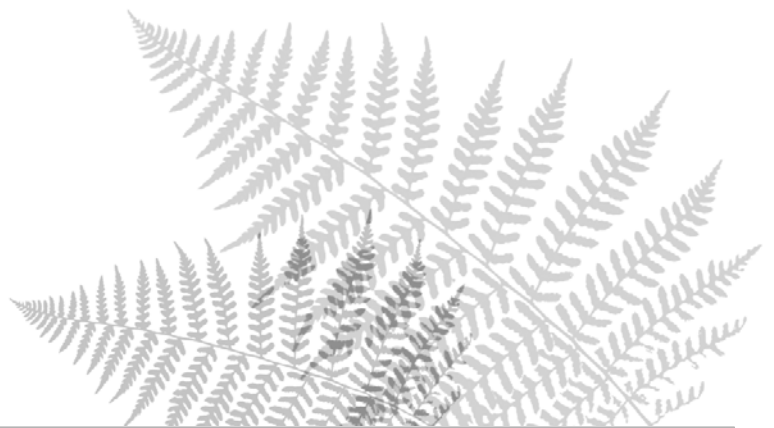


If you let go a little, you will have a little happiness.

If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of happiness.

If you let go completely, you will be free.

Ajahn Chan



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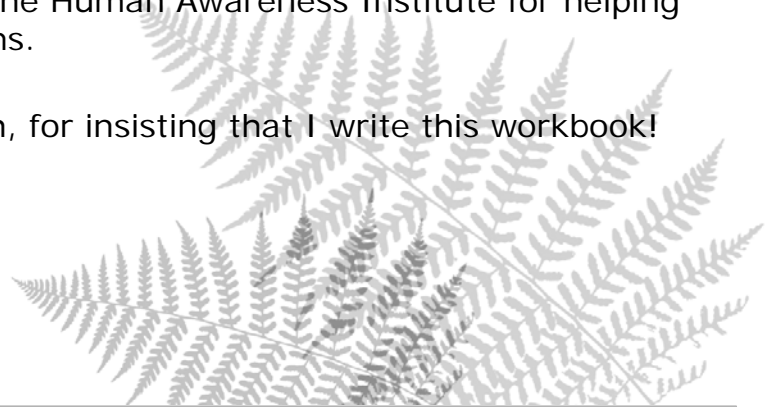


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Introduction

My introduction to forgiveness came unexpectedly during a visit to Washington D.C. in 2005. Looking for something to read in the guest room where I was staying, I came across the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, entitled *Long Walk to Freedom*. I started reading it one evening, and found that I simply could not put the book down. In it, Mandela tells the riveting story of his life and of the ending of apartheid in South Africa. Through his eyes, I came to understand more fully the horrors of apartheid, a system of institutionalized racism and white domination. When Mandela became President of South Africa, he was urged by many to convene criminal tribunals to hold apartheid leaders accountable and gain retribution for the atrocities committed under the apartheid government. Mandela understood that retribution would only perpetuate the cycle of hatred and violence between the races, which South Africa could ill afford. Instead, Mandela courageously established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a vehicle to promote truth telling, forgiveness and healing.

Realizing the enormity of Mandela's choice was a life changing moment for me. It led me to closely study the incredible life and teachings of Mohandas Ghandi, one of Mandela's role models. It also led me to Archbishop Desmond Tutu's wonderful book *No Future Without Forgiveness* which further reveals the crimes committed in the name of apartheid and the miraculous examples of forgiveness which emerged from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. One that I find incredibly inspiring is the story of the Biehl family.

Amy Biehl was a Fulbright scholar from California who had been involved in an anti-apartheid student campaign at Stanford University. She was living in South Africa in 1993, working to help disadvantaged youths in the Gugulethu township. One day, while riding to the township, four young men stoned the car. When Amy got out of the car, she was stoned and stabbed to death. In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu writes:

She who was so committed to justice was ironically killed by people whose cause she had espoused . . . Her family was obviously shattered. Yet instead of being embittered and seeking revenge, quite remarkably they did not oppose the amnesty applications of those who had killed their child so brutally. Mr. Peter and Mrs. Linda Biehl attended the amnesty application hearing and said that they supported the entire process of reconciliation and amnesty. They embraced the families of the murderers of their child.

But what is more remarkable is that they have established the Amy Biehl Foundation with the objective of uplifting the youth in the very township where their daughter was killed, helping residents who could very well have been involved in Amy's murder. The Biehls return to South Africa regularly to oversee the operations of the foundation and they frequently pass the spot where their child met her gruesome death.

As profound as the Biehl story is, what I find most amazing is this: Two of the young men who killed Amy Biehl later went on to work for the foundation established by her parents, helping other troubled youth in their township. They came to adopt Amy's life mission as their own.

These stories and many more like it have inspired me to learn about forgiveness, practice forgiveness in my own life, and teach it to others. They speak to the greater possibilities that exist in life, if we are willing to open ourselves to them.

Against this backdrop, I often reflect on the sorts of conflicts that I have encountered over the past 30 years as a lawyer and mediator: conflicts between large and small businesses, corporations, partners, neighbors, employers and employees, doctors and patients, lawyers and clients, coworkers, spouses, and family members. I have observed how consuming and debilitating conflict is for most people. I have watched clients go through years of litigation, only to win a victory that seemed quite hollow compared to the time, money and energy spent in achieving it. This has led me to embrace mediation which I believe uniquely offers people the opportunity for healing and true resolution of conflict. Yet, even in mediation, I have seen many people settle their legal dispute, only to continue mistrusting and hating those on the other side.

Above all, I have seen how our legal system and popular culture glorify adversity and encourage blame and retribution. Rarely do we consider the price we are paying for those attitudes, or the greater possibilities offered from truth, healing and forgiveness. Eventually, I hope that we will find a place in our culture and legal system for embracing forgiveness. It is only through forgiveness that healing and wholeness can occur.

Indeed, one of the most powerful choices we can make is to forgive those we perceive to have injured or wronged us in some way. At its essence, forgiveness is a decision to let go of the past, including our feelings about injury and harm that occurred in the past. It doesn't mean we condone what happened. It means we've decided to move on from it. Forgiveness is choosing to reclaim your life and your energy, so you can live fully and freely in the present moment.

Life is challenging. We encounter a wide array of difficult experiences in our lives: dishonesty, disappointment, heartbreak, betrayal, job loss, humiliation, financial loss, illness, disability, abuse, violence, war, death . . . the list is endless. The pain and suffering are real.

The suffering of life can be enormous, and the pain almost unbearable. As we encounter loss, we often develop strategies and defense mechanisms which enable us to avoid feeling the pain. One of them is to move, often automatically, into a position of blame. We attempt to displace our pain onto the other person by saying (or thinking) "It's your fault that this has happened" or "I am right, and you are wrong." We want to hold the other person accountable. In the face of hardship, blame seems to provide psychological relief, and our entire culture not only endorses blame, but in many ways encourages and rewards it.

The problem is, blame doesn't work. It is a dead end. It may provide temporary satisfaction, but it doesn't alleviate the problem. The underlying pain remains, and is actually prolonged. As we attempt to shift pain onto the other person, we reinforce our own. We continue to focus on the painful experience and on the past. We feel angry and hurt. We feel powerless and victimized. We

believe we have the right to be angry, seek revenge, and/or feel sorry for ourselves. Over time, we perpetuate our own suffering, but we don't know what else to do.

Forgiveness breaks the cycle. It enables us to let go of our grievances, and the pain associated with past events. Forgiveness can release us from a life time of pain and liberate us from continuing to carry the burdens of the past. Forgiveness restores us to peace, freeing us to move forward in our life.

The idea of forgiveness is not new. Most of us learned about forgiveness as children, and depending on our upbringing, received countless messages from parents and religious teachers about the importance of forgiving others. Yet, experience shows that it is difficult to forgive, even if this is something we want, and often the truth is we often don't want to forgive, or don't know how.

Our inability to forgive costs us dearly. As we focus on ways that we believe we have been harmed by others, we remain locked a prison that is created of our own making, constructed with negative thoughts and emotions from the past. As we continue to experience blame and resentment, we suffer emotionally and physically. We miss the opportunity of being free and fully alive in the present.

When I started teaching about forgiveness, I noticed that the same sorts of reservations and questions about forgiveness would inevitably crop up: *"If I forgive, wouldn't it mean that I approve of what the other person did? After what was done to me, I'm entitled to feel angry and resentful. Why should I forgive?"* These questions and beliefs can be summarized in four central questions, which will be addressed in Part One of this workbook:

1. What does it mean to forgive?
2. Why should I forgive?
3. Isn't what happened to me unforgivable?
4. How can I learn to forgive?

In the end, what most people really want to know is: "Can *I* do this? Can this be applied to *my* situation?" The short answer is "Yes." *Anyone can learn to forgive. At any time. In any situation.*

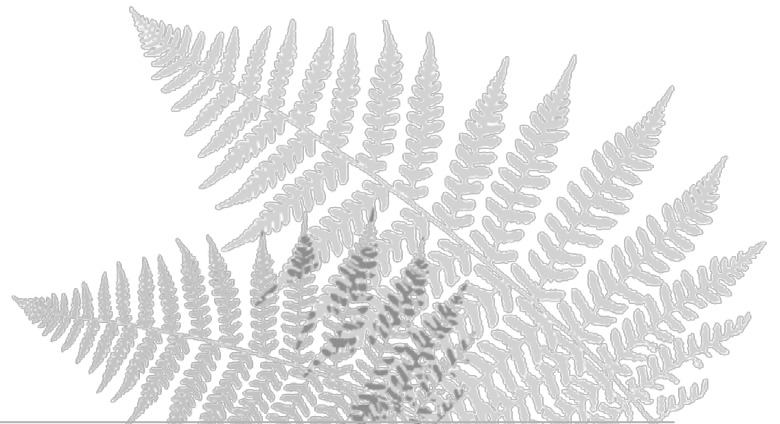
Which brings us to: "*Where do I begin?*" Part Two of this workbook provides the how. It is designed as a self-guided step by step process that will enable the reader to work through any situation or conflict in which there is a desire to forgive.

PART ONE

Understanding Forgiveness

Without forgiveness there is no future.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu



CHAPTER 1

An Overview: Three Levels of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude.
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discussion of forgiveness takes place on many different levels, but mostly focuses on forgiveness of others. However, there are in fact three distinct levels of forgiveness:

Level One – Forgiveness of Others

The first level is forgiveness of others. Often when we speak of forgiveness, it is assumed that we mean forgiveness of another person. This level seems to be the one on which most people focus.

“The Sunflowers” by Simon Wiesenthal is a poignant book about forgiveness of another person. Wiesenthal was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp and, after the war, he became a prosecutor of war crimes. The book is about something extraordinary that happened to Wiesenthal when he was in the camp. One day, as part of his work duty, he was taken to a nearby village and brought to the hospital room of a Nazi officer. He was told by a nurse that the Nazi officer was on his deathbed and had asked to talk to a Jewish person before he died. Wiesenthal was brought to the bedside to fulfill this request, and the Nazi officer proceeded to make a confession that went on for several hours during which he confessed to the many horrific things he had done to Jews during the war. At the end of this confession, the Nazi officer asked Simon Wiesenthal for his

forgiveness. Wiesenthal was dumbfounded. Eventually, he got up and left the room without saying anything.

Thirty years later, Wiesenthal wrote about this experience and he posed a simple question to thirty theologians from around the world, including the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He asked each of them: “What would you have done?” “The Sunflower” is a fascinating compilation of the essays written by these theologians. The perspectives shared are extremely thoughtful, heartfelt, well written, and all over the map. Interestingly, one writer noted that the Christian writers tended to be in favor of forgiveness, based on the clear teachings of Christ, whereas the Jewish respondents were equally adamant that it was not appropriate to forgive in this situation. This underscores that how we feel about forgiveness is largely based on what we have been taught and our belief system.

Interestingly, all of the essays focused solely on whether one person should or could forgive another. None explored the question of self-forgiveness. Yet, what struck me was that even if Wiesenthal had forgiven him, the Nazi officer would still have been left with his own substantial shame and remorse. The deepest layers of suffering stem from self-judgment about the ways we have fallen short.

At the level of forgiving others, there is another type of forgiveness that is very important. This is forgiveness for *impersonal acts*, acts that are not attributable to any one individual, but that nevertheless can have a profound impact on our lives. This could include forgiveness of mankind for destroying the health of the environment, forgiveness of God for allowing so much suffering to occur, forgiveness of “the system” or the government for being inefficient and corrupt, and forgiveness of society for being

unwise and unfair. There are many ways in which the collective conduct of these types of entities has a huge impact on our lives and can leave us feeling powerless. In the face of this, forgiveness is a very important and powerful way to reclaim our power and find peace.

Level Two – Self-Forgiveness

For closure to occur, there has to be both forgiveness of the other person and forgiveness of oneself. Even in situations in which we perceive ourselves to be the victim, eventually we must forgive ourselves for any way in which we have contributed to our suffering, or the suffering of another.

Because we usually start out feeling victimized by another person, it may be difficult to see how or why we would need to forgive ourselves. However, as we move past our anger and blame, there is often a realization that we too had a part in creating the situation. At the very least, we created our story about the situation, and kept replaying it in our minds, which caused us to suffer. It may well have caused others to suffer as well. Ken Cloke takes this a step further, making the point that the true source of every conflict is within our own minds:

Most conflicts are triggered by external experiences and information regarding them is conveyed to us by sensory inputs that have been gathered from our environment. Our conflicts therefore seem to us to take place externally, yet everything we understand about the meaning of what happened, and all of our responses to the actions of other are initiated and coordinated internally by our brains.

Once we make the leap of understanding that it is the meaning we attach to events that have caused our pain and suffering, rather than the external events themselves, the need for self-forgiveness becomes apparent. The realization that we have created the very problem for which we were accusing another can be humbling to say the least, and liberating, because now we have the power to end it.

Jaimee Karroll, designated a Hero of Forgiveness by the Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance, forgave the men who kidnapped her as a child and sexually abused and tortured her. She came to the realization that she also needed to forgive herself:

I had no idea how my life would be reshaped when I was finally able to consider the possibility of trying to forgive myself. I began to realize that I would have to look at how my rage and despair had resulted in hurt to those who loved me the most: my husband, family members and friends. From there, it was not difficult to recognize that if I was going to forgive myself for hurting others, then I ought to consider forgiving those who had hurt me. Forgiveness was not achieved in a single moment, but has unfolded over two decades.

Thus, although Karroll was clearly a victim of a terrible crime, she bravely came to see that she herself had also caused suffering. More importantly, she realized that while she could do nothing to undo past events, she alone could stop the suffering that she was perpetuating. This became the basis of her self-forgiveness.

Without self-forgiveness, we continue to inflict emotional pain on ourselves and those around us. We may harbor harsh judgments against our self. In the early stages, if we are focused on blaming the other person, these self judgments, may be subtle or even unconscious. However, they will eventually surface, and take their toll, eroding one's sense of well-being. The only release is through self-forgiveness.

Level Three – There Is Nothing To Forgive

The third level of forgiveness is the most controversial. It is the realization that, at the deepest level of understanding, there is nothing to forgive. It asks us to consider the possibility that at some level everything is exactly as it is intended to be, even though we may not like or understand it. It challenges us to let go of our notions of right and wrong, and the belief that we know how life is supposed to be, and how people should or should not behave. It challenges us to humbly admit that we do not know the meaning of life or the bigger picture of what is occurring in any given situation. If we can shift our perspective to see that life is occurring exactly as it is meant to occur, then there is nothing to forgive.

Along these lines, teacher and author Byron Katie says our suffering is caused by our unexamined judgments and, specifically, the belief that someone has done something ‘wrong.’ She urges us to move beyond our preconceptions, rather than accept them automatically as true, and in so doing embrace the freedom of not knowing:

Until you can see that there is nothing to forgive, you haven't really forgiven. No one has ever hurt anyone. No one has ever done anything terrible. There's nothing terrible except your uninvestigated thoughts about what happened. So whenever you suffer, inquire. Look at the thoughts you're thinking, and set yourself free. Be a child. Start from the mind that knows nothing. Take your ignorance all the way to freedom.

Similarly, in *Power v. Force*, author David Hawkins notes: “All pain and suffering arise solely from the ego.” Hawkins cautions that our egoic thoughts are not trustworthy. Nevertheless, we are easily beguiled by them. Hawkins beckons us to a

level of self-awareness that can perceive the egoic thoughts without being pulled along in their wake: “The great tragedy of human life has always been that the psyche is so easily deceived.”

As we develop the ability to unhook ourselves from our ego, it becomes possible to embrace a profound acceptance of life as it unfolds. A wonderful example of this is Julie Chimes, who was also honored as a “Hero of Forgiveness” by the Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance. One day, a woman visiting Julie’s home suddenly took a carving knife from Chime’s kitchen and began a frenzied attack, stabbing Julie and leaving her close to death. Chimes later reported that in the moment when she was been attacked, a part of her was witnessing all that was occurring and had compassion for the woman attacking her:

I am neither christened nor religious but Christ’s words about “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” is the closest way to describe how I felt. As I blamed no one, there was nothing to forgive, but there was still a lot for me to learn and understand. . . . I now know when there is understanding there can be compassion. When compassion arises there can be forgiveness. Where there is forgiveness there is peace.

It is possible even in the midst of great trauma to accept what is, realize that no one is to blame, and see there is nothing to forgive. This requires us to transcend our personal plight. It requires us to identify with a part of our self that is bigger than our ego, our fear, and our pain. If we are able to achieve this, the rewards are profound. As we accept life, as it is, we are free to flow with the current, rather than against it. Inevitably, we find life’s greatest treasures in the midst of what may have at first appeared to be a tragic situation.

CHAPTER 2

What it Means to Forgive

Forgiveness means letting go of the hope of ever having a better past.
Course in Miracles

In the context of the first level of forgiveness, the forgiving of another person, people often get stuck in misunderstandings about what it means to forgive. It is important to clarify what forgiveness is, and what it is not.

Forgiveness is a decision not to pursue resentment or revenge. It means letting go of our claim of wrongdoing, the desire to blame, and the need to be right. It means letting go of the past and seeing oneself as a victim. Forgiveness means *creating a new story about what occurred which is both peaceful and self-empowering*. Correctly understood, forgiveness means putting your attention back on yourself rather than on the other person, and reclaiming a sense of inner peace and love.

One of the greatest myths about forgiveness is that it is done for the benefit of the other person. Forgiveness is not for the other person's benefit. It is for your own benefit. To understand this fully, you must realize how much you hurt yourself by not forgiving. Then, you can appreciate that forgiveness is one of the most divinely selfish actions a person can ever take.

Fred Luskin, author of *Forgive for Good* and *Forgive for Love*, is one of the world's leading researchers and teachers on the subject of forgiveness, and the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, which conducts research on forgiveness methods.

Luskin provides the following distinctions (partial list):

What Forgiveness Is:

- Forgiveness is taking back your power.
- Forgiveness is taking responsibility for how you feel.
- Forgiveness is for you and not the offender.
- Forgiveness is about your healing and not about the people who hurt you.
- Forgiveness is a trainable skill.
- Forgiveness is becoming a hero instead of a victim.
- Forgiveness is a choice.

The last point is most significant: forgiveness is a choice. Every one of us has the power to forgive and can exercise that power as we alone see fit. Forgiveness does not depend on what anyone else does. It's something you do for your own benefit, not for anyone else. We can choose to forgive, or choose not to forgive, and we alone must choose the timing. It is essential that each person's choices be completely honored. As Holocaust survivor Viktor E. Frankl points out, no one can force another person to forgive, nor can anyone stop us from forgiving.

We who lived in the concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread . . . They may have been few in number but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from us but the last of human freedoms . . . the freedom to choose our spirit in any circumstance.

What deters many people from pursuing forgiveness is the mistaken idea that by forgiving, they will somehow be condoning or approving conduct which they perceive to be wrongful. According to Luskin:

What Forgiveness Is Not:

- Forgiveness is not condoning unkindness.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting that something painful happened.
- Forgiveness is not excusing poor behavior.
- Forgiveness does not have to be an otherworldly or religious experience.
- Forgiveness is not denying or minimizing your hurt.
- Forgiveness does not mean reconciling with the offender.
- Forgiveness does not mean you give up having feelings about what occurred.

What is most important is understanding that forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, excusing, or saying that hurtful conduct is okay. Also, it doesn't have to be linked to any particular religious belief or practice. Most important is that forgiveness not be seen as obligatory. Rather, it is a choice.

One further note: forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Reconciliation means forming a new relationship with the other person. Forgiveness is a necessary precursor to reconciliation: without forgiveness true reconciliation cannot occur. Yet, it is possible to forgive without reconciling. Remember, forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. You can forgive someone who has been dead for many years. You can forgive someone, yet chose to have no further contact with them.

CHAPTER 3

Why Should I Forgive?

Forgive all who offended you, not for them, but for yourself.

Harriet Nelson

In the face of stressful situations or relationships, we often seek to avoid the other person involved. Or we settle for an unspoken truce. The conflict is no longer openly expressed, but the tension remains. Family members stop talking to each other. Friends distance themselves. Co-workers avoid contact. The problem remains under the surface, waiting for the next opportunity to erupt. Even if the conflict does not reemerge openly, we pay a price for the unspoken tension.

Until we forgive, part of our attention is held in place by what we perceive to be the problem. Some amount of our life energy is expended on it. A portion of our life energy is taken up with the problem, and is therefore not available to us for other, more positive and creative endeavors.

The benefits of letting go of difficult experiences from the past seem apparent. Why then, can it be so hard to forgive? According to Luskin, the primary issue is one of habit and motivation: “The hesitancy to forgive is principally a question of motivation . . . and our tendency to continue reacting to hurt in ways that do not work.”

Our habits keep us stuck in certain patterns. Some people will develop negative thought patterns, obsessing about the other person and what occurred. Others will have habitual emotional response, which may include long periods of depression. Some will develop feelings of hopelessness about the situation, and perhaps life in general.

Holding onto grievances is also physically debilitating. The research of Luskin and others has demonstrated convincingly that conflict is hazardous to one's health:

- Even thinking about an unresolved conflict causes the body to release stress chemicals and respond in measurable, harmful ways.
- Simply recalling an event which triggers feelings of anger or resentment increases one's heart rate and blood pressure.
- People who are chronically angry are at higher risk for heart attacks and other cardiovascular disease, as well as immunological weakness.
- Conversely, learning to forgive can lower one's blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart disease, and strengthen the immune system.

If we pay attention to the body, we can begin to notice where we feel tension when we are in conflict. Some will experience tightening in the jaw or abdomen, others may feel jittery. Stress takes its toll on the body over time, raising the likelihood of a wide-range of diseases. Each of the following conditions has been attributed to the carrying of grudges and anger:

- Heart attacks
- Cardiovascular disease
- High blood pressure
- Decreased lung function
- Muscle tension
- Stress
- Depression
- Weight gain
- Cancer

The good news is that learning to forgive can ameliorate these conditions and has been linked to the following:

- Improved cardiovascular functioning
- Improved lung function
- Improved functioning of nervous system
- Improved functioning of immune system
- Increased ability to think clearly and creatively
- Lower blood pressure
- Lower heart rate
- Less muscle tension
- Increased hope, caring, trust, happiness, gratitude and faith

In sum, we pay dearly for stress and conflict. It is easy to lose sight of this when we are in the throes of anger, or feeling that we have been the victim of unfair conduct or circumstances. We can so easily justify carrying anger and resentment, vowing to never speak to the other person again. Remember, next time you are tempted to hold a grudge against another person, that forgiveness is vital to your own well-being.

Mediator Cate Griffith, astutely points out that our culture equates strength with anger, fighting and revenge, and condemns forgiveness and vulnerability as weak. Our culture lies to us about what is true, but our bodies do not lie. Revenge and lack of forgiveness cause dis-ease, while forgiveness promotes health and wholeness of body and spirit. In this context, to forgive is an act of courage, requiring a response of great loving kindness for ourselves, an act of heart. Indeed, the etymology of the word courage is from the Latin, *cor*, which means heart.

CHAPTER 4

Is It Possible to Forgive in *This* Situation?

*If it were not possible to free the heart from entanglement in greed,
hate, and fear, I would not teach you to do so.*

The Buddha

People often resist forgiveness on the grounds that what happened to them is too horrible to be forgiven. They don't know how to process their pain in a way that permits them to make sense of, or find meaning in, the situation. The pain is so great, that forgiveness seems impossible. The question inevitably arises: Are some things in fact unforgivable? Much ink has been poured on this controversial topic. Lusk writes persuasively that the answer is no, it is always possible to forgive, based on the fact that in any given situation there are people who have chosen to forgive:

The first [obstacle to forgiveness] is our tendency to confuse an unforgivable offense with an inability to forgive . . . Our major obstacle is not the offenses themselves but the lack of tools with which to work . We only imagine it is the nature of the offense that is unforgivable. However, if any of us look around we will find people who have forgiven the very same offense . . . No offense is unforgivable to everyone. If you look you can always find someone who has forgiven in a similar situation . . .

Therefore, while some conduct might be difficult to forgive, it cannot be said that anything is *per se* unforgivable. Rather, what is needed are the tools to forgive, such as are contained in *Forgive for Good*, this workbook, and others, and the motivation. For most people, motivation comes when the pain of continuing to carry a grievance becomes unbearable.

Holocaust survivor Eva Kor has been honored as a Hero of Forgiveness by the Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance. After a lifetime of seeing herself as a victim, Kor decided to forgive the Nazis and war criminal Josef Mengele who conducted inhuman medical experiments upon Eva and her twin sister and killed all of the other members of her family. Kor bravely realized that continuing to hate the Nazis was ruining her life:

At first I was adamant that I could never forgive Dr. Mengele but then I realized I had the power . . . the power to forgive. It was my right to use it. No one could take it away . . . It became a gift to myself as well, because I realized that I was NOT a hopeless, powerless victim. . . Forgiveness is really nothing more than an act of self-healing and self-empowerment. I call it a miracle medicine. It is free; it works and has no side effects.

There are countless examples around us of people who have forgiven under extremely difficult circumstances. If we allow it, they can inspire us to apply forgiveness in the face of whatever challenges we face in our lives.

CHAPTER 5

How Do I Learn to Forgive?

He who refuses to forgive breaks the bridge over which he too must cross.

Confucius

The primary reason people do not forgive is that they do not know how to forgive. They lack the tools. The good news is that forgiveness is a learnable skill, like learning to play a new sport or speak a new language. The skill comes by learning the basic steps, and then practicing them. At first it may require steps that are unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable. However, like all skills, ability comes with practice.

Forgiveness is best seen and used as a tool of daily living, not something to be saved for rare, once in a lifetime, occurrences. Daily life provides ample opportunity to practice forgiveness! Start with the small insults of daily living — inconsiderate drivers, poor restaurant service, and the like. Then graduate to working on minor offenses committed by family members and friends. Practice over time will strengthen your forgiveness muscles and fluency. When major loss occurs, you will still have to pull deep from within, but you will have the skills needed to meet the challenge.

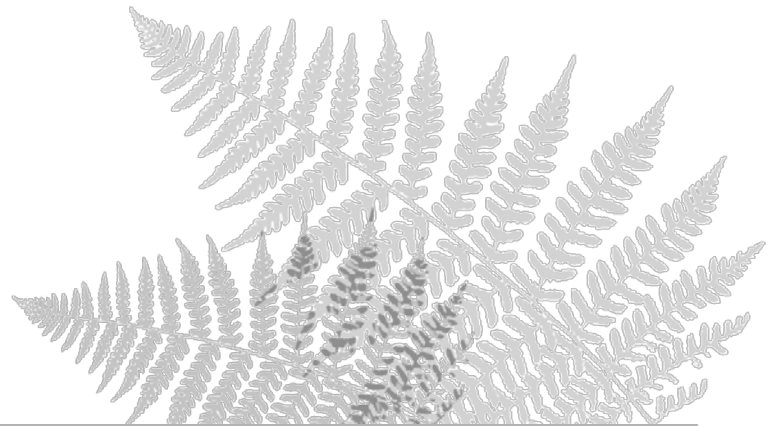
The process that follows in Part Two of this workbook provides a step by step process for releasing the past and restoring peace. It can be used in any situation in which forgiveness is desired.

PART TWO

The Forgiveness Process

*I have asked you to forgive and reconcile.
How can I ask that if I'm not ready to do so myself.*

Nelson Mandela



Step 1

Preparation

*The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.*
Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi

Before beginning the Forgiveness Process, the following steps are suggested:

1. Set aside plenty of time for the process. Don't rush yourself through it.
2. Create support for yourself. This could be a counselor or trusted friend with whom you can talk as you are going through the process.
3. Find a partner or create a small support group. Most ideal would be to arrange with one or more other people go through the forgiveness process together, meeting periodically to talk about your progress, questions, and challenges and give each other support.
4. Do the steps in order, especially the first time through.
5. Select the situation with which you wish to work. It might be a long-standing problem, a one-time traumatic event, a dispute you are currently involved in, or a situation from the past that continues to weigh upon you. The Forgiveness Inventory which follows is designed to help you identify potential areas of forgiveness in your life from which you can choose

Please note — The forgiveness process is not therapy. It can be used to complement, not replace, any counseling or other treatment you may be receiving. If you are receiving counseling or other treatment by any mental health or other professional, please consult with your therapist or other professional before beginning this process.

Step 1

Preparation

Forgiveness Inventory

Think about the various areas of your life. List all of the people you need to forgive, including yourself. Indicate what you need to forgive each person for. Use additional paper, as needed.

Family:

Friends:

Spouse or Partner:

Co-Workers:

Step 2

Describe Your Situation

*Holding a grudge is like drinking poison,
and expecting the other person to die.*

Anonymous

Describe your situation, including who is involved, what occurred and how you feel about it. Use as much paper as you need to write everything you feel is important about the situation. Don't hold back, and don't censor yourself. Be as truthful and complete as you can in expressing how you see the situation.

Step 2
Describe Your Situation

Step 3

Deconstruct Your Story

Because out of forgiveness comes love.
Tom Mingle

Grievance Stories

As we go through life and experience something difficult or offensive, we typically create a story about the events, a way of looking at the situation. In *Forgive for Good*, Luskin calls this a “grievance story.” According to Luskin, there are three universal elements in a grievance story:

1. We interpret an event in an overly personal way
2. We blame the other person for how we feel.
3. We create a story in which we are the victim.

The next step of the process gives you an opportunity to look at each of these elements in the context of your situation. Answer each of the three questions, and then on the following page, consider whether your story has become a ‘grievance story.’

Step 3

Deconstruct Your Story

Have You Created A Grievance Story?

The following questions, adapted from Luskin's work, can help to determine whether a story is a grievance story:

- Are you taking events that occurred personally?
- Does it sometimes feel like you are the only person who has had this experience?
- Do you find yourself thinking this experience occurred because of a shortcoming on your part?
- Do you blame the other person for how you feel?
- Have you told your story more than twice to the same person?
- Do you replay the events that happened more than two times a day?
- Do you find yourself speaking to the person who hurt you even when that person is not there?
- Is the person who hurt you the central character of your story?
- When you tell this story, does it remind you of other painful things?
- Does your story focus primarily on your pain and what you have lost?
- Is there a villain?
- Has your story stayed the same over time?
- Have you checked the details of your story for accuracy?
- Have you made a commitment to yourself not to tell the story again and then broken it?

Step 3

Deconstruct Your Story

Have You Created A Grievance Story?

Recognizing that one has formed a grievance story is a powerful step. If you concluded that you have formed a grievance story (most people do), do not feel discouraged. The good news is that once you become aware of our grievance story, you have the ability to change it. You can create a new story, which is the essence of forgiveness. Luskin points out that the elements of the grievance story provide the roadmap for one's work:

- 1 - Learn to view the events less personally.
- 2 - Take responsibility for your feelings.
- 3 - Change the story so that you no longer see yourself as a victim.

Each of these elements is incorporated into later steps of the Forgiveness Process.

Step 4

Consider the Impact

Hatred is an infectious disease.

Eva Kor

The next step is to consider the impact of your story. How does it shape and influence various aspects of your life experience? What is it costing you? It is important to take stock of how the situation impacts you on all levels -- mental, emotional, spiritual and physical.

Before writing, take a moment to close your eyes and think about your story and notice the impact it has on your physical body. Notice how you feel as you imagine the situation. Take note of any places where you feel tense or contracted. Start with your jaw and neck, scanning your entire body, including the chest and abdomen.

Step 5

Listen to Your Emotions

*Forgiveness is the decision to never put another
human being out of your heart.*

Jack Kornfield

Emotions are the glue that bind us to a situation. If you have strong feelings, they cannot be sidestepped. They need to be addressed. Often, the greatest understanding and shift can occur when one delves deeper into the emotional truth of his or her experience.

The first step for many people is developing awareness of their feelings. Tragically, many of us were taught that emotions are not okay, and that we should hide our true feelings. Or perhaps we were told that some feelings are okay, but not others. The opposite is true.

As I was growing up, I had very little understanding of emotions. I learned to hide, or at least try to hide, my emotions. Yet, over time, anger would inevitably erupt, or I would break down crying. Starting in 1989, I was fortunate to attend a series of workshops offered by the Human Awareness Institute, www.hai.org. There, for the first time I was encouraged to honestly express all feelings. I saw that this was not only safe, but extremely beneficial.

Emotions are part of our humanity, and vitally important to our well-being. They give us important feedback about what is happening in our life. It is essential that we learn to feel our feelings and stay connected to them. It's essential to realize the pain is a vital part of being alive, of being a human being.

Step 5

Listen to Your Emotions

In the *Presence Process*, author Michael Brown offers a powerful tool for working with pain and difficult emotions: the distinction between a messenger and a message. The messenger is the external situation or person who causes you to feel upset. The message is the feeling of being upset. Brown advises us to dismiss the messenger, and stay with the message. He offers this example: When the post office delivers my credit card bill, I may be unhappy. I am unhappy with the bill, not the person who delivered it. The bill is the message. The letter carrier is the messenger.

This distinction can be applied to any situation in which we are emotionally triggered. For instance, I may become upset if I have plans to meet a friend and the friend fails to show up. In this situation, my friend is the messenger. I need to dismiss the messenger, and look at the message. What is the reason I am offended? It might be that I feel dishonored. I might feel hurt or unimportant. Whatever it is, this is my message. While it might be tempting to focus on blaming my friend, it is far more beneficial to 'dismiss the messenger' and look for the emotional signature.

Accordingly to Brown, if we are willing to consider the emotional signature of the situation, we will find that it is part of a repeating pattern, and that the pattern inevitably started in our childhood, during the first seven years of our life. Regardless of the source, our task is this: to feel the feelings, and to heal the emotional wound. To do this, we must literally view ourself as a young child having the experience, holding the same compassion we would have for a young child, as we feel the feelings connected to the message.

Step 5

Listen to Your Emotions

As you go through the Forgiveness Process, if you are experiencing deep emotional issues and/or feeling stuck in an emotional pattern, begin to recognize your emotional patterns or habits. Realize that it is generally your story, i.e., your thoughts, that triggers your emotional reaction. Therefore, as you create a new story, your emotions will shift as well.

Often, the greatest healing comes when we can begin to see a challenging situation as a precious gift. Although we generally do not appreciate the benefits inherent in difficult situations, consider the following:

The Gift of an Enemy

In one way, having an enemy is very bad. It disturbs our mental peace and destroys some of our good things. But if we look at it from another angle, only an enemy gives us an opportunity to practice patience. No one else provides us with the opportunity for tolerance. Since we do not know the majority of the five billion human beings on this earth, therefore the majority of people do not give us an opportunity to show tolerance or patience either. Only those people whom we know and who create problems for us really provide us with a good opportunity to practice tolerance and patience.

Shantideva says that it is the very intention of harming us which makes the enemy very special. If the enemy had no intention of harming us, then we would not classify that person as an enemy, therefore our attitude would be completely different. It is his or her very intention of harming us which makes that person an enemy and because of that the enemy provides us with an opportunity to practice tolerance and patience. Therefore, an enemy is indeed a precious teacher. By thinking along these lines, you can eventually reduce the negative mental emotions, particularly hatred.

I consider hatred to be the ultimate enemy.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Step 5

Listen to Your Emotions

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being least possible and 10 being most possible), how much do you experience each of the following in connection with this situation?

Anger	_____	Anxiety	_____
Resentment	_____	Confusion	_____
Blame	_____	Disappointment	_____
Hurt	_____	Frustration	_____
Sadness	_____	Hopefulness	_____
Grief	_____	Peace	_____
Fear	_____	Gratitude	_____
Mistrust	_____	Growth	_____
Betrayal	_____	Learning	_____
Rage	_____	Compassion	_____

2. What emotion is triggered most intensely for you in this situation?

3. Distinguish between the messenger and the message. Who is the messenger?
What is the message?

Step 6

Shift Perspective: There is Nothing to Forgive

*Conflict is an external drama that reflects one's internal state.
Once the message is understood,
the external conflict is no longer needed.*

In *Radical Forgiveness*, Colin Tipping offers the view that our life is unfolding perfectly and that if we could see the big picture, we would recognize this and be grateful for each and every experience. Tipping illuminates the realization that the true path of forgiveness is understanding the gift of every life experience. From this perspective, forgiveness is a powerful shift in perspective, a realization that there is nothing to forgive because every situation has perfectly unfolded exactly as it was meant to unfold. By no longer seeing ourselves as victims, and by aligning ourselves with the perfection of life, we open ourselves to experience great love and joy. Tipping calls this “making room for the miracle!”

This view is often controversial, especially for people who have experienced great trauma or suffering. How can suffering be perfect, they wonder. Indeed, it may be hard, if not impossible, to understand because we cannot see the big picture. Nevertheless, it behooves us to explore conflict and difficult situations for whatever healing and personal growth the situation may offer.

The following story, as told by Ram Dass, illustrates this point:

The Story of the Man Whose Horse Escaped

Once upon a time, there was a man who lived in a small European village. He had a wife and seven children. His only asset of any value was a cart. One day, he swapped his cart for a horse. "Oh how stupid!" all the other villagers said. "Why get a horse if you have no cart for the horse to pull? What a stupid thing."

"Hmm," said the man softly, "You never know."

The next day, the man woke up and looked out of his bedroom window. Disaster! The horse had escaped from his stable. Now the man had nothing and a hungry family to feed. "Oh how stupid!" all the villagers said. "We told you that you shouldn't have swapped that cart for a horse. Look at the disaster which has happened as a result!"

"Hmm," said the man sadly, "You never know."

A week later, the man was sitting at the kitchen table in despair, wondering what he was going to do. He didn't have any money left. He rested his head on the kitchen table...then he heard a noise. Parrupety, parrupety, parrupety... That noise sounded like the hooves of a horse. He looked out of the kitchen window and saw not only his own horse, but nine other horses with his horse. The horse had been lonely and had gone and found his brothers and sisters so that they could come to live with him.

Suddenly, with ten horses, the man was the richest man in the village. "Oh, how amazing!" all the villagers said. "It seems like getting that horse was a great idea after all! How lucky you are!" "Hmm," said the man pensively, "You never know."

A few weeks later, the man's eldest son, who was 15 years old, was out riding the horse. The horse shied and threw the son onto the ground. The son's ankle was badly broken. He would not be able to walk for months. "Oh how terrible!" all the villagers said. "We told you from the very beginning that the horse was a bad idea, and look what's happened now!" "Hmm," said the man calmly, "You never know."

Shortly afterwards, the local ruler declared war on the next country. All the young men of the village were rounded up and conscripted, except for the man's son, because he was still unable to walk on his broken ankle. "Oh, how lucky!" all the villagers said. "What a good thing that horse was! Now your son will be safe." "Hmm," said the man. "You never know."

Step 6

Shift Perspective: There is Nothing to Forgive

1. How might your personal conflict situation present a growth opportunity for you?
2. Do you see any repeating patterns in this situation and other events in your life?
3. What have you learned so far from this conflict?
4. Imagine that you have died and are now looking back on your life. How was this situation a perfect part of your life path? In what way was it exactly what needed to occur?
5. In what way can you see that there is nothing to forgive? Can you see the gift in the situation?

Step 7

Are You Ready to Forgive?

*Forgiveness requires that we let go of our need
to be pitied, our need to be right, and our need to feel
an intense connection with our tormentor through anger.*

Matt Kramer

Occasionally, forgiveness is experienced as a moment of grace in which a heavy burden is instantly lifted from us. However, for most people in most situations, forgiveness is a process that unfolds over time.

The issue of timing is important, and very individual. It is not helpful to push yourself towards forgiveness before you are ready. Notice if you feel you “should” forgive, but don’t really want to forgive. Notice if you feel you “should” be ready, but don’t really feel you are ready. Notice if you feel any resistance to the idea of forgiveness. If so, do not try to ignore or override it. I’ve never ever seen that work. The best thing you can do is honor your truth. Give yourself permission to be exactly where you are.

Step 7

Are You Ready to Forgive?

1. Are you ready to let go of your old story? Are you ready to forgive the other person? On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 being not ready at all, and 10 being completely ready), how ready are you?

2. Are you ready to let go of your old story about your self? Are you ready to forgive yourself? On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 being not ready at all, and 10 being completely ready), how ready are you?

3. If you see that you are not completely ready to forgive, describe any resistance you are feeling.

4. Is there anything you need in order to be ready to forgive?

Step 8

Look For Positive Intention

*Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds
on the heel that has crushed it.*

Mark Twain

One of the keys to forgiveness (of self and others) is to look at each person's positive intention. Luskin defines positive intent as the *strongest positive reason we had for being in the situation in the first place*. Luskin uses the example of a man setting out on a trip, to drive from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Along the way, he gets a flat tire. He could just sit by the side of the road and be angry at his circumstances. However, recalling his intent to go to Los Angeles, his better option would be to fix the tire and get back on the road.

The same is true in other situations. Let's say you've been in a difficult relationship for many years. You feel angry and blaming towards the other person. You are also angry with yourself for staying in the relationship so long. This relationship did not turn out the way you had hoped, yet your positive intention, the reason you were in the situation in the first place, was to have a loving relationship. You can sit on the side of the road and feel victimized by this relationship, or you can get back on the road by realigning with your positive intention of forming a good relationship, if need be with a new partner. This is an important step of self-forgiveness. Similarly, identifying the other person's positive intent, which here, was probably also to be in a loving relationship, is also an important part of making peace with the situation.

Step 9

Forgive Yourself

*Forgiveness requires the ability to forgive yourself
for the failure of your own false expectations.*

Kenneth Cloke

Forgiveness is not complete without self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is often the deepest level of forgiveness, and can be the most difficult.

While we are embroiled in a situation, perhaps feeling angry and blaming the other person for the problem, it may be difficult to see how or why we would need to forgive our self. The self-awareness necessary to see this, and therefore the ability to forgive oneself, may not occur until much later, well after we have forgiven the other person involved.

Eventually you may realize that you played a part in creating the situation and, at the very least, created your story about the situation which caused you to suffer. It may well have caused others to suffer as well.

Without self-forgiveness, you might create a new grievance story about yourself and how you created a terrible mess! Instead, it is important to revisit each of the steps of the forgiveness with yourself in mind, viewing yourself with compassion.

Realize that as you were going through the situation, you didn't have the perspective you now have. See yourself as an innocent child, naïve and unknowing. Remember, life is all about learning from our experiences.

As you release your self-judgment, you can begin to create a positive, affirming story about yourself and your role in the situation.

Step 9
Forgive Yourself

4. Can you see ways in which the external conflict is a reflection of an internal conflict?

5. What was your positive intention in this situation?

6. What have you learned from this situation so far?

7. Can you view yourself with compassion?

Step 10

Rewrite the Story

*Are you capable of forgiving and loving the people around you,
even if they have hurt you and let you down by not being perfect?*

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

The essence of forgiveness is creating a new story about what occurred. As Luskin points out, it is shifting from seeing yourself as a victim to seeing yourself as a hero. A victim is someone who is acted upon and feels helpless to respond or take control. A hero is someone who shows great courage and has overcome adversity.

Forgiveness is a hero's journey. It is a journey of moving from telling the story as a victim, to telling the story as a hero. As Luskin says, it means your story changes so that you, and not the situation, are in control.

The culminating step in the process is to rewrite your story. Retell the story such that you are not taking things personally, not blaming any one else for how you feel, and such that you are in no way a victim. Be sure to include:

- **Positive intentions.** Include the positive intention of each person involved.
- **Self-forgiveness.** Write a new story about your own choices, beliefs and actions. Do so with compassion, and with *no judgment*.
- **Gratitude.** Express any gratitude you now feel for the situation and those involved.

Step 10

Rewrite the Story

Use as much paper as you need. It may be necessary to work on the story over time, with multiple rewrites, to completely make the shift. It is well worth the time and effort. It can be extremely helpful to have outside help with this step. Because we are so familiar with our own story, it is often difficult for us to hear or see the ways we are still holding ourselves as victims. Ask someone who can be objective to hear your new story and give you honest feedback if they hear traces of victimhood, and any ideas they have for how the new story could be even more empowering.

Step 10
Rewrite the Story

Step 11

Integration

Forgiveness is the key to happiness.

Gerald Jampolsky

In order to hold your new story in place, it is necessary to integrate it into your mind, emotions, and body. The new story needs to be anchored with images and feelings.

You can do this by finding a quiet time each day to recall your new story, visualize it, and feel it. For maximum results, these are suggested ways to integrate the new story:

1. Reread your new story once a day. Each time you reread your new story, envision yourself in the story feeling peaceful and filled with love. Allow yourself to feel these feelings in your body. Continue this until you feel you have integrated the new story.
2. Listen to the Forgiveness Meditation CD. The Forgiveness Meditation CD is designed to guide you through an integration process, helping you to fully release the old story and to let go of any ways in which your energy has been blocked. It includes steps which will help you connect your new story on a bodily-felt level, which is essential for integration.

Step 12

Completion

Forgiveness cannot change the past but it can enlarge the future.

Gerald Jampolsky

While forgiveness is often an ongoing process that will occur in phases, it is valuable to mark stages of completion. If you have experienced a significant release or shift in your experience of a painful situation, it is important to acknowledge this, either as a point of total completion of the issue for you or, at the very least, a significant milestone along the way.

Completion can take many forms. You may feel complete from the foregoing process without the need to do anything more than the writing and integration. If not, consider what you would need to achieve closure. Is there anything you would like to say, hear or do?

Rituals play a powerful and important role in our lives, including in ending conflict and making change. As you complete your forgiveness process, consider using ritual to consecrate your experience. It might include one or more of the following rituals, or creating your own:

Fire Ritual

Create a tangible expression of your conflict on a piece of paper, such as a written description or a drawing. Affirm your intention to completely release the conflict, any one else involved, and yourself, from your life forever. When you are ready to completely release the conflict forever, set fire to the paper and allow it to burn completely.

Tree Ritual

*This ritual is from *The Four Fold Way* by Angeles Arrien. Arrien writes that many indigenous cultures refer to trees as “the medicine people of the plant kingdom.” They recognize that trees are important to the survival of all living creatures, and so regard them as having big medicine. Identify your wound – the story you always share about yourself that is tied to some traumatic event. Offer this wound to a special tree, and never speak of this wound again. Some indigenous cultures use this practice as a way of making a commitment to healing the wounded part of ourselves.*

Water Ritual

Another ancient ritual is to purify and cleanse oneself in water. This can be done in the ocean or other natural body of water. It can also be created with a ceremonial bath in your home, undertaken with intention of purification. You might include anything that enhances the intention for you, such as candles, sage or music.

Sweat Lodge

Rituals tied to the sweating process of the body are common to many ethnic cultures found in North and South America, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, and Africa. Native Americans used sweat lodges to create a place of purification, spiritual refuge and mental and physical healing, as well as a place to get answers and guidance by asking the Creator and Mother Earth for the needed wisdom and power. A similar ritual can be adapted using a sweat bath or sauna, undertaken with sacred intention.

Recommended Reading

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Recommended Websites

A Season for Nonviolence, www.agnt.org/snv02.htm

Association for Global New Thought, www.agnt.org

Beyond Intractability, www.beyondintractability.org

UK Forgiveness Project, www.theforgivenessproject.com

Hawaii Forgiveness Project, www.hawaiiiforgivenessproject.org

International Forgiveness Institute, www.forgiveness-institute.org

Luskin, Fred, www.learningtoforgive.com

Radical Forgiveness, www.radicalforgiveness.com

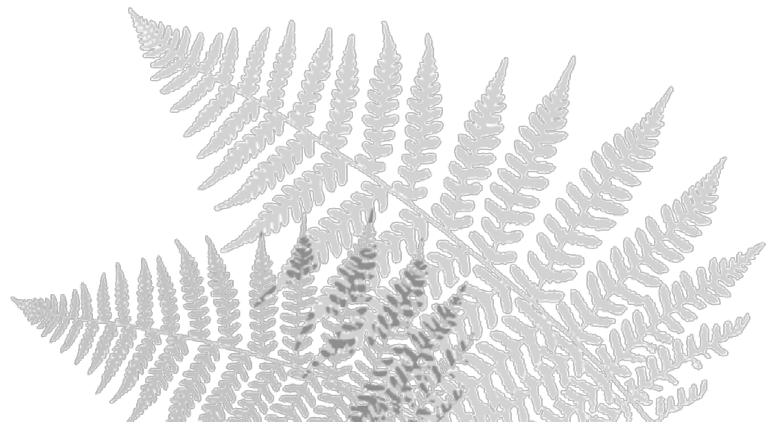
Restorative Justice, www.restorativejustice.org

Restorative Resources, www.restorativeresources.org

Sorry Works, www.sorryworks.net

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, www.vorp.com

Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance, www.forgivenessday.org



About the Author

Eileen Barker is a leader in the movement to integrate emotional healing and forgiveness in conflict resolution. She has led numerous trainings on forgiveness both for individuals and organizations and is the author of the *Forgiveness Workbook and Forgiveness Meditation CD*. Drawing on her background as a lawyer turned mediator, Eileen has helped thousands of people resolve disputes involving business, probate, family enterprises, employment, and divorce. She also teaches classes on mediation, conflict resolution and forgiveness at UC Berkeley School of Law, Sonoma State University, JFK University and elsewhere.

For further information about forgiveness trainings for individuals and organizations, private consultation and coaching, and forgiveness books and CDs, visit our website at www.thepathofforgiveness.com.

