

Forgiveness Workbook

A Step by Step Guide

by Eileen Barker

www.ThePathofForgiveness.com

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The Forgiveness Workbook

2nd Edition

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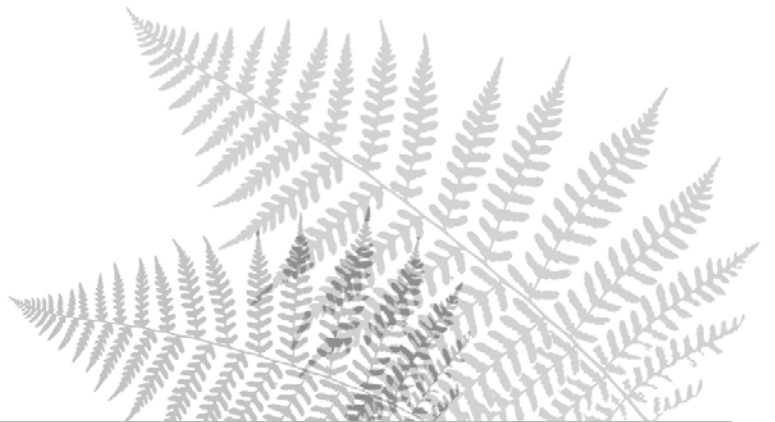
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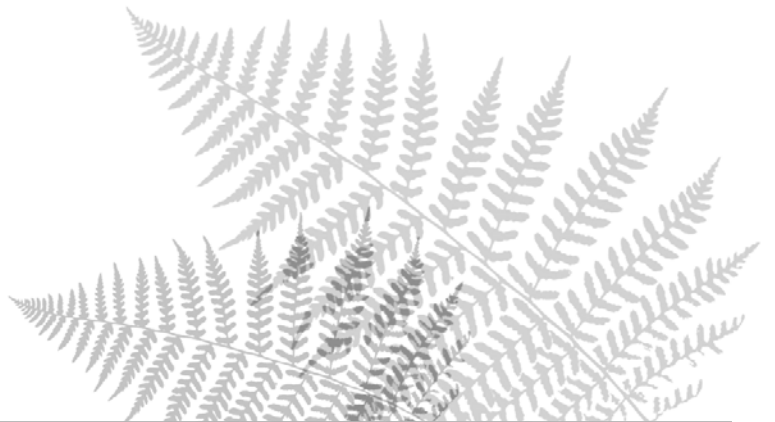


If you let go a little, you will have a little happiness.

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

If you let go completely, you will be free.

Ajahn Chan



Acknowledgments

- ∞ Dr. Fred Luskin, Founder of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, greatly contributed to my understanding of forgiveness and the fact that forgiveness is a learnable skill. His excellent book, *Forgive for Good*, illuminates how grievances are formed and how they can be released, and the process contained in this workbook borrows heavily from it. Fred's passion for forgiveness continues to inspire me. learningtoforgive.com.

- ∞ Kenneth Cloke has been an invaluable teacher, friend and mentor. Reading *Mediating Dangerously* and meeting Ken was a turning point, enabling me to see clearly that conflict can only be fully resolved if there is forgiveness. Ken's observation that "every conflict teaches us what we most need to learn" pointed me to fact that conflict it is a transformational opportunity. KennethCloke.com

- ∞ The late Robert W. Plath, founder of the Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance and International Forgiveness Day was tireless in his devotion to promoting forgiveness worldwide. Through him, I met incredible "heroes of forgiveness," people who forgave despite horrendously painful and difficult experiences. Some of their stories are shared in this workbook. ForgivenessDay.org

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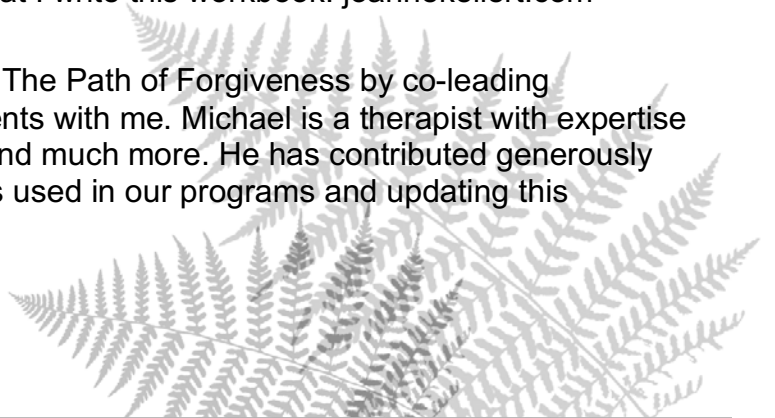


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Preface

Forgiveness is an extraordinarily powerful healing force and it is always available. This workbook was first published in 2009 to provide a step-by-step guide for those wanting to forgive and wanting to learn how forgiveness works. It contains a comprehensive forgiveness process developed based on extensive research which was tested for several years in courses I taught at Sonoma State University and elsewhere. Once I saw the profound impact of this work, I wanted to make it as widely available as possible. Since then, I have continued to use this process in trainings, retreats and individual coaching. I've also started training other professionals including mediators, therapists, coaches, and lawyers on how to help their clients forgive.

As I continue to teach, I continue to learn. I've learned that each of us has the power to forgive – no matter what – and to achieve a level of healing, transformation and peace previously unimagined. I've discovered forgiveness is always possible, and can be of most help to those who are suffering most. If you do the work, it works. It's as simple as that. Because of the above, my passion for teaching forgiveness has grown exponentially.

This workbook focuses primarily on what I call “unilateral forgiveness.” This is forgiveness that is unconditional and internal. It is available to us at any time, regardless of whether the other person apologizes, shows remorse, or is deemed deserving. It is a process done, first and foremost, for one's own benefit, yet there is no doubt that one person's healing benefits everyone around them.

I was blessed in 2015 to be joined in this work by Michael Gelbart, LCSW, as a co-facilitator of forgiveness retreats and other forgiveness programs. Among the many contributions Michael has made to The Path of Forgiveness, is bringing emphasis to the

importance of “bilateral forgiveness.” This type of forgiveness is interpersonal and conditional, such as when forgiveness is given in exchange for an apology or when a process with the other person is needed to resolve grievances.

As this work continues to unfold and deepen, the impetus arose to update the workbook, the result of which is in your hands. While the framework presented in this workbook remains focused on “unilateral forgiveness,” we have added some materials relevant to “bilateral forgiveness” in the Appendix.

The soul-soothing balm of forgiveness, and the relational healing it allows, is medicine that is greatly needed. May all of us learn how to use the power of forgiveness to remember who we really are and bring more love, peace and compassion into the world.

Eileen Barker

April, 2016

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 Gandhi, one of Mandela's role models. It also led me to Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 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 incredibly inspiring story is that 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.

What a beautiful example of forgiveness in action! Not only that, the spirit of generosity exhibited by the Biehls gave rise to something else even more amazing. Two of the young men who killed Amy later went on to work for the Amy Biehl Foundation established by her parents – they came to adopt Amy's life mission as their own, helping other troubled youth in their township.

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. The stories of forgiveness 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 have we considered the price we are paying for those attitudes, or the greater possibilities offered from truth, healing and forgiveness. I hope we will soon 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 our life and your energy, so we can live fully and freely in the present moment, and not be dragged down by past memories and emotions.

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, terrorism, 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 shift, 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'm right, and you're 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 lifetime 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 in a prison created by 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 you to work through any situation or conflict in which there is a desire, willingness and decision to forgive.

About the Author

Eileen Barker is a highly regarded forgiveness teacher and leader in the movement to integrate emotional healing and forgiveness with conflict resolution, and the author of the *Forgiveness Workbook* and the *Forgiveness Meditation CD*. After practicing law for many years, Eileen became a professional mediator helping thousands of clients resolve business and family disputes. This work led her into a deep exploration of forgiveness as it relates to resolving conflict and making peace, both with others and oneself. After extensive research and study, she created the process contained in this workbook. Eileen founded The Path of Forgiveness in 2007 to provide education about forgiveness and teach people “how to forgive.” She leads forgiveness retreats, trainings and workshops internationally and provides forgiveness coaching to individuals and organizations. She offers Forgiveness Coaching Training for lawyers, mediators, therapists, coaches and others who want to help their clients forgive. In 2016, Eileen received the “Champion of Forgiveness Award” from the Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance alongside Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

For more information about forgiveness retreats and trainings, private coaching, and forgiveness tools, visit www.thepathofforgiveness.com

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THE COMPLETE FORGIVENESS WORKBOOK IS AVAILABLE AT

<http://www.thepathofforgiveness.com/tools/>