

Four Steps To **FORGIVENESS**

A powerful way
to freedom,
happiness
and success.

William Fergus Martin

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For more information:

Forgiveness-is-power.com

About the Author

William Fergus Martin is an author, speaker and workshop leader who helps people empower themselves. He is Scottish and is married to a Japanese lady.

He has traveled extensively and his writing is influenced by an appreciation of the common challenges which people face everywhere in the world.

William is happy to write bespoke articles, give talks and offer workshops, especially on the topic of Forgiveness. He enjoys using his previous experience of writing and in training, gained in the computer field, to help people learn to forgive. Contact him through his publisher: Findhorn Press, findhornpress.com

Other works:

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Praise for Forgiveness is Power:

"William Martin has created an enlightening User's Guide for forgiveness. Thoroughly researched. Hugely insightful. Very practical. I recommend it wholeheartedly."
Robert Holden, author of Shift Happens! and Loveability

"A deep gold mine full of rich and relevant information."
William Bloom, Author of The Endorphin Effect

"William Martin has written a powerful guide book on learning how to forgive, not just our brothers and sisters, but also ourselves."
Jon Mundy, Ph.D. author of Living A Course in Miracles.

Why Forgive?

Forgiveness sets you free.

You benefit immensely when you choose to forgive and so does everyone around you. Whether you need to forgive others, or need to forgive yourself, doing so sets you free from the past and enables you to fulfill your true potential. Forgiveness allows you to break free from limiting beliefs and attitudes. It frees up your mental and emotional energies so that you can apply them to creating a better life.

Forgiveness helps you achieve even your most practical and immediate goals. Perhaps you want a better job, to earn more money, have better relationships, or live in a nicer place. Forgiveness helps you achieve all of these. If you have not forgiven then a part of your inner life energy is trapped in resentment, anger, pain, or suffering of some kind. This trapped life energy will limit you. It is like trying to ride a bicycle with the brakes partly on all the time. It slows you down, frustrates you and makes it difficult to move forward.

The choices you make and the things that you believe are possible will all be influenced by the ways you have not forgiven. As you learn to forgive the energy which was going into unhappy thoughts and feelings gets liberated and can flow into creating the life you want rather than limiting you, or creating more suffering.

If you do not want to learn to forgive to benefit yourself; then learn to forgive so you can benefit others. As you learn to forgive you benefit everyone you are in contact with. Your thinking will be clearer and more positive than before. You will have a lot more to give and you will more readily enjoy sharing what you have. You will naturally and easily become kinder, more generous and more caring of others - without having to struggle to achieve this. You will have a happier and more positive attitude to the people in your life and they will respond more positively to you in return.

Is a forgiving person easier to be around than an unforgiving one? Yes, of course they are. A forgiving person is always much easier to be around than an unforgiving one. The quality of your life depends on the quality of your relationships. Every aspect of your life will change for the better as you learn to forgive; whether in your family, your work life or your social life. Learning to forgive will improve all your relationships, because your attitude will improve. As your relationships improve, then all aspects of your life will also improve.

If you want to move up to the next level of financial abundance and success, Forgiveness will help you achieve it. For example, if you want more money in your life you need to make sure that you do not resent people who have more money than you. People with more money than you are the ones best placed to help you have more money too. If, as some people do, you resent "people with money" then they will not be able to help you, because you are not open to them while you are busy resenting them. Likewise, if you have a positive attitude to people who are more successful than you (you smile at them rather than glower at them) they will see you as approachable and will more likely want to work with you, or socialise with you.

If you want a better job, and to earn more money, then having a positive attitude towards the place you work, towards your boss, towards colleagues and towards clients or customers, helps immensely. People who have a positive, helpful attitude stand out in any situation. You can never succeed in an organisation which you do not want to succeed, because you will not give of your best. If you do not give of your best, by doing the best job you can, then you will not receive the best that can come to

you. Forgiveness will help you have the kind of attitude which will make you very successful at your job.

Learning to forgive yourself is vitally important too. Hurting yourself, by refusing to forgive yourself, hurts others also. If you do not forgive yourself then you will punish yourself by denying yourself the good things in life. The more you deny yourself the less you have to give. The less you have to give the less you can benefit those around you. When you stop limiting what you receive then you stop limiting what you can give. Everyone benefits when you forgive yourself as you then allow more good into your life, and have a lot more to share.

When you forgive; you become a better husband or wife, you become a better student or teacher, you become a better employer or employee and you become a better parent or child. When you forgive you are more open to success in whatever ways are meaningful to you. As you learn to forgive, what seemed impossible not only becomes possible, but can even become easily achievable.

If you are a religious, or spiritually minded, person then learning practical ways to forgive will enhance and deepen your experience of your religion or spiritual practice. It will help free you from guilt about not being as "good" as you feel you should be, because it will help you become the type of person you would like to be. Practising forgiveness strengthens the goodness within you so that it becomes more active in your life. You will naturally feel less inclined to do the things you know you should not do, but have not been able to stop yourself doing. You will start to do more of the things you know you ought to do, but have not been able to get yourself to do.

Learning to forgive can only help you; it cannot hurt you.

Forgiveness is immensely practical and helpful. There is nothing vague, or impractical about it. Forgiveness sets you free. As you learn to forgive many problems (possibly even health problems) will gradually disappear. It will be as if you can view your life from above and can see the easiest way to get to where you want to be. Life will open up in front of you. New opportunities will emerge as if from nowhere. Happy coincidences will occur where you meet just the right person at just the right time. Ideas or answers will come to you just as you need them. A friend may make a comment, or you flip open a book or a magazine, or you may overhear a conversation which gives you just what you were looking for. Why is this so? It is because by practising forgiveness you become more open to the goodness of life, so that goodness is more able to find its way to you.

As you learn to forgive, abilities which have been dormant within you will emerge, and you will discover yourself to be a much stronger and more capable person than you previously imagined. Parts of yourself which could not thrive in the frigid soil of unforgiveness will start to grow. You will begin to let go of struggling and striving. You will find more of an easy flow and life will be a lot more pleasant and a lot more enjoyable. If this all sounds like exaggeration, then let that be for now. Simply practice the Four Steps to Forgiveness that you will find within these pages and you will be very glad that you did.

Four Steps to Forgiveness

A powerful way to change your life for the better.

The Four Steps to Forgiveness offers you a quick and easy way to start forgiving. It can lead to deep and profound changes in your life. Its power is in its simplicity, so just start using it and you will see for yourself.

These Four Steps can be used for any kind of issue big, or small. However, it is best to start with relatively small issues until you get the idea. In fact it is best not to try and forgive someone who could potentially cause you further hurt until you have some experience and understanding of the whole forgiveness process (see Tough Forgiveness and Reconciliation). Think of a small issue you want to forgive and try the steps below.

Using The Four Steps to Forgiveness

It is best to do the Four Steps in writing till you get some experience.

Step 1: State who you need to forgive and for what.

Step 2: Acknowledge how you currently feel about the situation. It is best if these are your honest feelings, not the nice, polite things you think you should feel. You need to work from how you really feel. Then you express your willingness to at least be open to the possibility of letting go of those feelings.

Step 3: State the benefits you will get from forgiving. This will mainly be the opposite of what you are currently feeling. Sadness will become happiness, anger will become peace, heaviness becomes a feeling of lightness and so on. If you are not sure about the benefits just choose a few general good feelings which you would like to have for now (happier, more at ease, more confident etc). It helps if you can imagine how much better you will feel when you have forgiven.

Step 4: Commit yourself to forgiving. This is simply stating who you intend to forgive and then acknowledging the benefits which come from forgiving.

Usually, you will end up with Four Steps which looks something like this:-

Example 1:

Imagine your friend John has started avoiding you and you do not know why.

1. I am willing to forgive John for avoiding me.
2. I now choose to release my feelings of sadness, anger and fear. (You can choose to do additional emotional release later if you need to).
3. I acknowledge that forgiving John benefits me as I will feel happier, healthier and more peaceful.
4. I commit myself to forgiving John and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Example 2:

In this example someone's girlfriend, Janet, ended their relationship.

1. I want to forgive Janet for leaving me.
2. I now choose to release my feelings of regret, abandonment and fear.

3. I acknowledge that forgiving Janet benefits me as I will feel clearer, happier, and more able to create better relationships in the future.
4. I commit myself to forgiving Janet and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Example 3:

In this example someone was fired from their job.

1. I want to forgive my boss for firing me.
2. I now choose to release my feelings of anger, sadness, unfairness and disappointment.
3. I acknowledge that forgiving my boss benefits me as I will feel positive, happy, and more able to find a better job in the future.
4. I commit myself to forgiving my boss and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

To help guide you through the steps there is a Four Steps to Forgiveness Worksheet in the next chapter.

Four Steps to Forgiveness Worksheet

This worksheet can help you work your way through the four steps.

1. Who and What

Think about the person you need to forgive and why you need to forgive them and enter the details below:

I want to forgive _____ for _____.

This creates a sentence about who you need to forgive and what you need to forgive them for.

Examples:

I want to forgive Tatiana for stealing my boyfriend.

I want to forgive John for hitting me when I was a child.

I want to forgive my father for not loving me enough.

2. Acknowledge and Begin to Release Possible Blocks

Write a sentence about any feelings which may be in the way of you forgiving this situation, such as anger, pain, fear, envy, wanting vengeance and so on.

I now choose to release my feelings of _____

Examples:

I now choose to release my feelings of anger and fear.

I now choose to release my feelings of hatred, bitterness and resentment.

I now let go of my feelings of sadness, pain, and misery.

3. Benefits

List the reasons why you want to forgive and then create a sentence out of these. What benefits would you get from forgiving? How would you feel, how would your attitude be better? How would your behaviour be different? This helps to strengthen your desire and motivation to forgive.

Make a sentence with a list of benefits you will obtain from forgiving. Do this by completing the sentence below with a list of the feelings which you expect to have once you have forgiven. Preferably state positive feelings rather than lack of negative feelings ("more peaceful" rather than "less fearful").

I acknowledge that forgiving this situation will benefit me as I will feel _____

Examples:

I acknowledge that forgiving my mother benefits me as I will feel happier, healthier and more peaceful.

I see that forgiving John benefits me as I will feel free, loving and able to get on with my life.

4. Commitment

Create a sentence to affirm and confirm your intention to forgive. In this step you declare your intention to forgive the person and affirm your choice to live life from a wiser and higher perspective.

I commit myself to forgiving _____ [person] and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Example: I commit to forgiving Janet and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Build Your Forgiveness Declaration

You now build a Forgiveness Declaration by combining the sentences you created above.

Example 1:

I want to forgive Janet.

I now choose to release my feelings of bitterness and resentment.

I acknowledge that forgiveness benefits me as I will feel happier, healthier and more peaceful.

I commit myself to forgiving Janet and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

Example 2:

I want to forgive my father for not loving me enough.

I now choose to release my feelings of anger, disappointment and resentment.

I acknowledge that forgiveness benefits me as I will feel free, loving and more alive.

I commit myself to forgiving my father and I accept the ways in which this allows me to be happier and more loving towards others.

Practise

Choose how long you will work with the Four Steps (7 days, 21 days, etc) and at what times(s) of the day you will use it. Do it at least three times in each session, write out the steps, if possible, or say them either out loud or quietly in your mind in each session.

As you repeat the steps you may notice that your feelings will change (ie, in Step 2 anger changes to frustration and so on). If this happens, just change your wording to match your actual feelings in the moment as best you can. You may find that after going through all the steps a few times that your feelings about wanting to forgive will be much stronger. This is a good sign especially if it is because you are beginning to see all the benefits which will come to you (and those close to you) as you learn to forgive.

After a while you may not feel that it is necessary to do all four steps and you can then just use the Forgiveness Declaration from Step Four till you feel complete.

As part of freeing yourself of old feelings, you may need to do other kinds of emotional release such as talking things over with a friend or even seeing a therapist. As you work with this, you may find unexpected feelings and long forgotten memories arise. Just let them pass or find support if you need it.

If you believe in a higher spiritual power it is only natural you want that to be part of your Forgiveness process. Simply add a sentence at the end such as, "I ask God's help in forgiving and in becoming free", or "I invite and accept God's grace in helping me to forgive."

Using Step One

The key to Step One is to simply acknowledge that you want to forgive someone and acknowledge what you want to forgive them for. This helps you break out of any kind of denial of what happened and into a frame of mind of accepting it and from there begin to do something about it.

It is important to not try and be nice or polite in this step. You need to accept your real feelings about the event in order to make real changes. If you feel that someone "stole my girlfriend" then that is the phrase to use – at least in the beginning. However, avoid overly dramatic interpretations of the results of the event, such as "they completely ruined my life forever".

A little bit of drama is fine in the beginning, but try to stick close to the facts without too much of it. Later, after working through the steps a few times, you will likely find that your feelings will change and the wording you want to use will change too. This is a natural part of the process.

In order to forgive someone else you may feel they ought to apologize to you first. Or you may feel afraid to forgive someone as you are worried that they will hurt you again if you have anything to do with them. If so, then have a look at Tough Forgiveness which includes a separate and distinct reconciliation process. If you are willing to go along with the idea of Tough Forgiveness then go ahead and forgive them by doing the Four Steps in the meantime. Otherwise, pick an easier issue for now.

If working on forgiving yourself then please see [How to Forgive Yourself](#).

Using Step Two

Step Two is about acknowledging the ways in which the pain you felt from the event still shows up in your thoughts, feelings and actions. As in Step One, it is very important to write your real feelings as the more you accept your real feelings the more easily you will have real change.

If you are not sure what you feel, it can help to make a rough guess and change it as you work your way through the steps a few times.

You can also include physical sensations to describe your feeling, such as; "I release these feelings of prickly, cold numbness". This is especially useful if you are not aware of specific emotions around the issue, but are aware of physical sensations, then you can just use the physical sensations instead. If you later become aware of emotions you then start to include them too.

If your feelings are vague, just describe them as best you can at this time; "I release this sort of hopeless feeling". "I release this unclear, sort of sticky, cold unhappy feeling". Even vague feelings can lead to wonderful breakthroughs, so don't let the vagueness of your feelings hold you back if that is what you currently feel about an issue.

If you feel really stuck in this step then you could just try and work on an easier issue for now and come back to this one later. Otherwise you might need support from a trusted friend, or a counselor in order to work through the issue. Another option, if you still want to go ahead even though you feel stuck, is to skip lightly over this step and focus more on the other steps and see if this helps get your feelings moving again.

Using Step Three

In Step Three you focus on the benefits you will get from releasing unhappy feelings about the event. Imagine how you will feel and behave when you are free of those old painful feelings. Think about how much better and how much lighter you will feel and the difference it will make to your life. Think of the ways you will spread this good feeling to those around you.

In this step you may start to realize how beneficial Forgiveness is, because it means you are letting go of pain and choosing happier attitudes and actions instead. If this happens then you are really beginning to understand why Forgiveness is such a wonderful thing to do. If this realization dawns on you, then that is a very good sign as it will help motivate you to forgive.

Usually the benefits to forgiving are the opposite of the painful feelings. It is better to express these benefits in their positive form; "happy" rather than "not so sad", "peaceful" rather than "not angry". If not sure of the specific benefits you get from forgiving, then you can use generally good things you would like in your life right now – even if you are not sure they are relevant such as; "peace, happiness, success, or abundance".

If you used physical sensations to describe what you want to release then you can just use their physical opposite to describe the benefits in this step. a "cold and numb" sensations could become "warmth and aliveness", "tight, unable to breath" becomes "free and breathing easily", etc..

Benefits can also include things which are very practical stated in whatever form appeals to you; "be more confident", "get a better job", or "create a new happy relationship". The more you would like to have a benefit the more you will help to motivate yourself to forgive.

Using Step Four

In Step Four you formally and specifically state your intention to forgive.

You may not be sure that you really want to forgive. You may even have lots of doubts, but just try it and see. Forgiveness is one of these things where even a little bit of willingness to try, to being open to exploring the possibilities - even if very tentatively - can bring big results.

At first it is best to be fairly general about the effects of forgiving, "and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings", or "I accept the healing and well being which forgiveness brings".

Later you can include some of the benefits which you came up with in Step Three and include these as part of Step Four. For example, say you are forgiving a work related issue and you realize that clearing the issue will help you get a better job. You can use phrases like, "I accept the peace which forgiveness brings and the benefits of a happier working relationships and a better job", or "I accept the benefits of being happier at my current work and of being more able to find and even better job".

However, if this type of benefit feels too materialistic to you, or somehow offends your sense of values, then leave out the practical benefits.

Sometimes it can be useful to linger on a particular step, especially if you feel a sense of freedom or aliveness as you work on that step. Lingering on Step Four and repeating it more than the others can work well, at any time.

It also works well to turn Step Four into a verbal affirmation which you speak out loud or silently in your mind a number of times. Imagining how you will think, feel and act once you have completed this forgiveness process makes this even more powerful.

Forgiveness Cyclone

As you work through the four steps you will find that the feeling builds. When you return to Step One after doing the other steps you will likely find that feeling of "want to forgive" will be stronger. You will be clearer about what you currently feel in Step Two, or you will be clearer about the benefits in Step Three. Each time you go through the four steps it is like you are building a vortex of forgiveness.

You can even think of it like one of those modern vacuum cleaners which uses a cyclone to clean carpets; only in this case, by repeatedly going through the Four Steps to Forgiveness, you are creating a cyclone to clean out old patterns of pain and unhappiness. The more often you go through the steps the more powerful the effect.

Also when you have used the Four Steps a few times the effect will be stronger even if you are working on a completely new topic. As you experience the benefits of forgiving one thing you will want to forgive more things. Your level of "want to forgive" will be stronger even for things not related to your previous forgiveness processes. In this way Forgiveness will become easy and natural for you.

Guilt and Shame

Guilt makes us feel we did something bad; shame makes us feel that we are bad.

In order to forgive ourselves it helps to understand the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt and shame are often mentioned together as if they are the same, or very similar. However, they are really very different things.

Guilt arises when we have done something which goes against our sense of right. Shame arises when we feel that there is something wrong with us. Guilt is a feeling about what we do or what we have done; shame is a feeling about who we are. When we feel guilty we think, "I have done something bad"; when we feel shame we think "I am bad".

It is important to understand the difference as to fully forgive ourselves we need to deal with both our sense of guilt and our sense of shame. Some events might trigger both these feelings in us, but what it takes to resolve guilt is different from what it takes to resolve shame.

We let go of guilt simply by letting go of the desire to punish ourselves, by letting go of self condemnation and any form of wanting to harm or hurt ourselves. We can help ourselves do this by making amends for what we did, apologizing, using the Four Steps to Forgiveness, and so on. This may help us heal some of our shame as well as our guilt, but resolving shame often needs to include using another approach as well.

To let go of shame we need to become reconciled with ourselves (see Reconciliation). Shame is healed by having a better ongoing relationship with ourselves, particularly with any parts of ourselves which we judge as weak or defective in some way. We need to create a happy and healthy relationship with ourselves to banish unhealthy forms of shame. This means being willing to become aware of, and release, the "voices" within us which denigrate, or put us down in any way. It also means changing how we relate to people around us who are not good for us and putting a distance from them if we can. It means spending more time with those who are good to us and good for us. It means learning to stop being suspicious of people who genuinely like us. Letting go of shame has a lot to do with becoming a good, kind and caring friend to ourselves.

Many of us internalize a parent, teacher, or relative, who was overly critical, or harsh, to us in our formative years. If so, we have the voice of that critic running in our heads. It could be pushed so deeply within us that we are hardly aware of it, but the feelings and moods it creates will still come up. We do not need to fight with that overly-critical, shame-inducing, voice. We do not need to hide from it, or be troubled by what it says. We do not need to give it power by reacting to it. Any time our inner critic offers us something which is not helpful, or constructive, we can just tell ourselves, "This is just a thought, that is all it is." In time it will run out of steam if we do not react by resisting it, or by giving in and believing what it says.

A sense of shame can be what actually pushes us into doing things which we later feel bad about. A sense of shame can fuel addictions, bad habits, withdrawal or overly aggressive behavior. A sense of shame, if left unchallenged, is self-perpetuating. When we feel bad about ourselves we feel weakened and more easily tempted to keep doing things which keep us feeling bad about ourselves. Therefore a sense of shame can feed guilt and more shame.

A sense of shame tends to make us quick to blame others and to be unforgiving of their mistakes. Therefore a feeling of shame can be spread amongst people as each shamed person tries to deflect

shame from themselves by making other people feel ashamed. When the leader of a group of people (a family, an organisation, a religion, or whatever) has a strong sense of shame this can easily spread to all the people in that group and create an underlying toxic atmosphere of blame and condemnation.

We will not allow ourselves to have what we feel we do not deserve no matter how ridiculous or unwarranted that feeling of not deserving. Yet, unfulfilled wants do not go away. They just go underground and come out as addictions and compulsions. Our addictive and compulsive behaviour then makes us feel undeserving. This is the Shame Loop; feeling a compulsion to do something which we feel we should not do, feeling ashamed of ourselves about that, our attempts to hide from our sense of shame (and the critical voices inside which condemn us) arises as a compulsion to do something which we feel we should not do, and so on.

Pride and Shame

Guilt is only useful when it causes us to change our behaviour and to make amends.

Feelings of shame are not just personal. We can also pick up feelings of shame from our nation, our family, or our even just being in the vicinity of an event.

Before looking at National Shame let's first look at National Pride. I was born in, and live in, a naturally beautiful country (Scotland). One day an American visitor said to me, "You live in such a lovely country. It is just beautiful!" I felt some pride stirring inside me for a few seconds, but then I thought about it. "Wait a minute! I had absolutely nothing to do with the beauty of this country. I did not create the mountains he was so admiring, or the rivers and landscape he so enjoyed. I don't think I could even create a small hillock even if I dedicated my whole life to it. Anyway, it is not as if there are even any training courses available on how to create mountains, valleys and rivers. Why am I having a feeling of pride?"

On the other side, my sense of national shame can be triggered when our national football team don't do well in the soccer World Cup – which unfortunately is what happens every time they enter. After watching a few games I usually have had enough cringing while watching them not doing all that well and I give up.

I read somewhere that the highly successful English soccer club Manchester United have more supporters in countries outside of the UK than they actually have in the UK. Many of these "fans" are people who have never been to the UK, and likely never will come to the UK. They have no natural connection with Manchester United football club. Yet, they celebrate when Manchester United do well and are unhappy when they don't.

This is a frivolous example (unless you are a serious football fan), but points to a much deeper issue. Our pride and shame can be triggered by situations over which we have absolutely no control. Or we can deliberately pick things – which otherwise we have absolutely no connection with – to use as a source of pride. That is most likely why those guys from other countries are wisely choosing to support the Manchester United football team (who are a notable success) rather than the Scottish Football team (which are not so well noted for success). Pride and shame can be quirky and arbitrary yet they are primary driving forces which shape our behaviour in deep and profound ways. They shape events on the personal level as well collectively through nations operating via the world stage.

Guilt and shame are by no means always bad. When they work in healthy ways they put reasonable limits on our behaviour and help us fit into the social norms of our time. Guilt is only useful when it causes us to make amends for some wrong we have done and encourages us to change our behaviour. Guilt is not useful if it just gets us into a long-term knot of self-obsessed self-blame which does not result in any positive change. Shame is only useful when it causes us to question our attitudes and beliefs and to look for ways to become a better person, such as by developing personal qualities that we lack. Shame might drive us into developing more sensitivity to the feelings of others if we lack that, or more boldness in taking our ideas to fruition if that is what we lack.

It is a matter of learning how to manage these primal feelings of guilt and shame in ways which are constructive. It is not a matter of blindly giving in to them, avoiding them (by keeping busy) or trying to fight against them. We do not want to be bound by feelings from the past which are not leading to constructive attitudes or useful action. We can manage guilt and shame, by practicing forgiving ourselves so that we shape how we respond to these primal feelings rather than just being at the

mercy of them.

Remorse

The best remorse is a life well lived.

It goes against the natural goodness of life to hold onto the past. The best way to make amends for any wrong we have done is to live well now. To paraphrase an old saying about vengeance, "The best remorse is a life well lived". If there are ways to make amends for something we did then that would naturally be part of living well.

An honest heart-felt apology can often work wonders and help to repair any damage we have done. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone has things they have said or done which they regret. It can take a lot of courage to face those we have hurt and admit that we were wrong and confess how sorry we feel. Yet, doing so can help us make sure that we do not make the same mistake again. The bond of empathy we form with the other person when we apologise makes it less likely that we would hurt them again.

We can express remorse by making restitution; correcting unkind things we said about someone by speaking well of them from now on, returning money stolen, behaving more honestly and openly with everyone to balance damage we have done, and so on.

If we cannot make restitution to the person we harmed, we could look at doing something to benefit someone in their group. For example, if we were hurtful to someone because of their race we could make amends by doing something to help another person of that race. We could make amends by making an anonymous donation to a suitable charity. With a little bit of thought and imagination we will find a way to make amends even if the person we harmed is not available for us to make amends to directly.

If we have done something very bad, such as deliberately killed, or seriously injured, another person, it is obviously more difficult to make amends. However, no one is ever without hope. Forgiveness, along with the peace and healing it brings, is ultimately achievable by everyone. In extreme cases, it is better to first start making amends for small wrongs we have committed and then later we will know better what to do about the larger ones.

Never decide that you need to be punished and therefore start to punish yourself. Punishing yourself does not help those you have harmed. It just adds one foolishness on top of another. You cannot correct a mistake by punishing yourself. You can only correct a mistake by doing good. Nor can you help others by harming yourself. You can only help others by doing well by them.

Living well does not include letting other people hold our mistakes against us, if we have done all that can reasonably be expected in the way of making amends. If people continue to blame us beyond reasonable limits then that is about them and not about us. They are acting out their own issues and we need to question their motives even if they play the victim. The Aggressive Victim likes to play on the guilt and shame of others as an attempt to justify their own belligerent behaviour and as a smokescreen to hide their dubious motives.

Guilt or shame can be used by others to manipulate us or control our behaviour. Such manipulations usually come from those who claim the moral high ground. Yet such claims are an unhealthy means of influence at best. Genuine moral leaders will guide us in taking positive action to compensate for mistakes; and not use such mistakes as an excuse to impose their own agenda.

Even otherwise very confident and competent people can inwardly collapse in the face of a Shame

Attack. It might come from a member of the family "I remember you would wet the bed as a child", or from our life partner, "Remember when you forgot our anniversary!", or come out of an attack on the past actions of our country, "Remember what you people did in the war!". The answer to all of these is simply an attitude of, "I have moved on from there, what others do is up to them." As an additional defence, we always have the right to doubt the morality of any position someone is maintaining with such low tactics.

If we berate and condemn ourselves for something wrong which we have done, or that our country has done, who does this serve? Who benefits from this? How is the world a better place by us condemning ourselves? It can be useful as a temporary measure to stop ourselves doing further harm, but it is not useful beyond that. Berating ourselves for too long is just more of the same kind of overly self-centered focus which got us into trouble in the first place. Most of our errors come out of being too caught up in ourselves and not being aware enough of the wants and needs of other people. Self punishment is just more of the same self-centredness. Far better to use our time and energy in ways which will help and serve the needs of others rather than spending it uselessly on some form of self-loathing, self-blame or self-harm.

Does God Forgive Me?

Self forgiveness is one of the most unselfish things you can do.

If you are a religious person you might wonder where God fits into this. You might be thinking, "It is up to God to forgive me." The thing to consider is, who is it that has condemned you? You certainly have, or you would not need to forgive yourself. You need to deal with the ways you blame yourself and take things from there. Do you really think it is a good idea to decide how God will judge your actions and try to preempt that by punishing yourself in advance? If so, then consider whether it is wise to assume you know the mind of God. Better to learn to forgive by practicing on yourself, or others, and you might then have a clearer idea of how God is likely to see things. If you feel the need to pray for forgiveness then by all means do so.

Once there was a man who was a servant of a great Lord of a large country. One day, he was helping prepare a feast to celebrate the return of his Lord from a visit far away. The servant was rushing when he bumped into a door and dropped a delicate and very valuable serving bowl which smashed into many pieces on the stone floor. The servant was so horrified that he ran away and hid himself from the wrath of his Lord. In his desperation he thought hard about what to do to assuage the punishment he felt sure was coming to him. He thought it would have to be something which would cause himself much pain, so he decided to cut off one of his fingers. He did so and his yells of agony attracted other servants who found him, bound his wound, and took him to his Lord who had just returned.

When the Lord found out what had happened he said to this servant. "Foolish servant you have dealt me three blows when only one was by accident. You broke a most valuable serving bowl it is true, but that is the least of it. You then took upon yourself the right to administer justice when this has not been earned by you. You decided to wound yourself, and gave no thought to how this would reduce your ability to serve me. These last two are by far the greater errors. Now you must live with knowing that you punished yourself far more severely than I would have and that owing to your wound you have crippled your ability to serve me and you have therefore crippled your ability to advance your station in life."

A drowning man cannot save another from drowning. Any person who has not forgiven themselves will have little idea, or ability to forgive anyone else. That is why so many find forgiveness difficult. They refuse to forgive themselves out of feeling unworthy of it. Feeling unworthy makes them incapable of forgiving others too as they feel that they have so little that they cannot give. The feeling of being unworthy makes them easy to offend and they tend to store up a sense of injustice or resentment. Forgiveness is a way out of this.

Forgiveness has a beautiful price. The price of forgiving yourself is that it will be harder to stop yourself forgiving others. The price of forgiving others is that it will be harder to stop yourself from forgiving yourself. Forgiveness is giving the gift we think we cannot afford only to find, as soon as we do it, that we have it in abundance.

It is easy to see that being egotistical is to think too highly of oneself. However, it is not so easy to see that being egotistical can include thinking too lowly of oneself. The ego loves to separate itself by being "special" even if that means being specially bad. Don't be arrogant, you are no worse than anybody else. Anything which blocks normal participation in life, prevents you living life to the full by being overly self-concerned and self-absorbed, is egotistical. A focus on, "my mistakes", "my

regrets", "what I did wrong", is just as out of balance as being too absorbed in smug self-promotion or self-satisfaction. If you realise that you have been doing this, no need to be hard on yourself. The truth is never a stick with which to beat yourself.

Self forgiveness not only helps you. It contributes to healthier friendships, healthier families, healthier workplaces, healthier communities, healthier governments and ultimately to a healthier world. It is a step towards a world in which more and more people do and say the right thing and can act out of a sense of good and rightness; rather than the manipulation and compulsiveness which comes out of unacknowledged guilt and shame.

Self forgiveness allows you to put your energy into doing good; either to make amends to those you have hurt, or in your life in general. Energy that was going into attacking yourself can then go into constructive action rather than self destructive behaviour.

Self forgiveness is one of the most unselfish things you can do. It frees you of tendencies towards self-centredness and self-obsession and makes it easier for you to have a positive role in your life. Self forgiveness helps prevent you being the type of person who is an emotional or psychological burden on those around them. It enables you to recognize and meet your needs in healthy ways. It enables you to participate in relationships in ways which contribute positively and constructively to the lives of others. It helps you bring your best to both your social life and your work life. Self forgiveness enables you to be someone who knows what is good and right (perhaps having learned the hard way what is not good and right) and is able to take a stand in creating that in your life and in the world.

How to Forgive Yourself

Consider the good you can do; rather than the bad you cannot undo.

In order to forgive yourself you may need to think of a suitable way to make amends to the other person. Making amends can be a very good thing to do, but watch out for self punishment disguised as remorse. Making amends, or even thinking about making amends, should normally bring you a feeling of relief. If it does not then it might be that some form self-harm, or self punishment in disguise. Making amends may cost you; but it should not harm you.

If you have no access to the person (they are out of your life for whatever reason) yet you want to make amends, then do it by proxy and be particularly, kind generous or helpful to someone of the same race, group or type of person – or even just someone at random.

Do you believe God has to forgive you before you can forgive yourself? If so, ask yourself how you know that has not already happened. Then try and complete the Four Steps a few times and see if you are any clearer. (See Does God Forgive Me?)

In forgiving yourself The Four Steps to Forgiveness are basically the same. However, we change Step Three by adding a section on how others will benefit from us forgiving ourselves.

Step 1. I want to forgive myself for:

Pick one specific thing.

Example: I want to forgive myself for getting angry and saying hurtful things to my brother.

Step 2. I want to release the feelings of:

List the feelings you have around the event. You need to acknowledge those feelings to release them to move forward.

Examples; fear of being punished, self-reproach, self-hate, guilt, shame, etc.

Step 3A. I acknowledge that forgiving this situation will benefit me as I will:

List benefits which will come to you as you become able to forgive yourself. The benefits can include being free of the feelings you listed in Step 2, and feeling their opposite. Benefits can also include being able to create better relationships, getting a better job, having more money, etc., depending on what is relevant to what it is you are forgiving yourself for.

Examples; feel happier, be free, be more relaxed and so on.

As this is a self forgiveness process we add an extra step, Step 3B, to the usual four steps. In this step we focus on the ways others will benefit from you forgiving yourself. Some benefits might be spin-offs from the benefits you receive from forgiving yourself; some might be benefits which come to other people as you become more alive and creative.

Step 3B. I acknowledge that forgiving myself for this will benefit others, because:

Forgiving yourself can benefit others by helping you become a better parent, a more attentive friend, a better listener, and more forgiving person and so on. You might be less self-absorbed and more interested in others. You might become less needy and have more to give. Pick an example of a benefit to others which is likely to really matter to those around you.

Examples; I will be more pleasant to be around (less grumpy, sour and depressed), I will become

kinder and more loving. I will have more to give.

Step 4. I commit to forgiving myself for _____ and I accept the peace and freedom which forgiveness brings.

As well as, or instead of, peace and freedom you can list specific benefits. You can also include benefits which others will receive too from the changes which happen within you as you learn to forgive yourself. Often the benefits you receive directly benefit others too. If you become a happier person, or a better employee, many others around you benefit from that. Being aware of the benefits to others, as we do these Forgiveness Steps, can help make it easier to forgive ourselves.

Examples:

1. I commit to forgiving myself for getting angry at my wife/husband , so that I am free to live up to my full potential and can become a more loving partner.
2. I commit to forgiving myself for losing my job, so that I can move on and find an even better job with more pay for the benefit of myself and my family.

It is better to do the steps in writing at first. Start with small things, though you will find that with forgiveness there are no small things. Even forgiving yourself for what seems a petty, minor thing which happened long ago can cause big changes. Go round all the steps at least a few times and you will see how the ability and capacity to forgive builds within you as you do so. Add things, change the words you use (if you want) as you go around. Linger over the steps where you feel movement happening within you.

Of course none of this excludes making amends or apologizing where this is feasible and would be helpful; as long as doing so is not going to cause the others involved more pain. If you give it some thought and feel into what is right you will soon get some ideas as to what to do. If it is not possible to make amends; then live your life as best you can. Consider the good you can do; rather than the bad you cannot undo.

False Forgiveness

True forgiveness gives a feeling of freedom and lightness; false forgiveness does not.

Trying to push or bully yourself into forgiving too soon, or not using some type of deliberate forgiveness process (such as the Four Steps to Forgiveness) leads to False Forgiveness. False Forgiveness is where some form of reconciliation happens, but no real forgiveness work has been done. We reconnect with the other person as if we have forgiven them, but we have not really forgiven them.

False Forgiveness come out of not fully accepting how hurtful an experience was (avoiding painful feelings), rushing the forgiveness process, or even not having any kind of forgiveness process and assuming that we can just decide to forgive and then pretend that nothing bad happened.

False Forgiveness also tends to happen when people ignore their true feelings and decide to forgive as they think it is the "nice" thing to do. Even though they know the other person is highly likely to do the same thing again they feel they "should" forgive. They are not really forgiving as they are just building up resentment and creating a lot of anxiety waiting for the next time it will happen. They are using "forgiveness" as an excuse to tolerate bad behaviour, so they do not get the sense of wellbeing that true forgiveness brings.

True forgiveness gives a feeling of freedom and lightness where we can see our way clearly and can make better decisions for our wellbeing. False forgiveness just keeps us entangled in the same situations with the same people. False Forgiveness comes from speaking or acting out of the belief that we do not deserve better or cannot create something better, so we "put up" with things which are not good for us in the long term. True forgiveness changes our perspective and frees us so we can create a happier life. True forgiveness connects us with our own value and worth as a person; False Forgiveness keeps us disconnected from our sense of being valuable.

In a co-dependent situation, where two people's patterns of addiction hook into each other, there is very little forgiveness present. It may look like one partner "forgives" the other on a regular basis, but really it is False Forgiveness as they are reconciling without any real forgiveness taking place. If there was real forgiveness taking place one person would become free of their entanglement. That person would then negotiate for the kind of relationship they want and if that wasn't forthcoming they would simply bless the other person and move on, to the extent that was practical.

The way to avoid False Forgiveness is to make sure you engage in a forgiveness process which lets you include your deeper feelings.

Reconciliation

Forgiveness is unconditional, but reconciliation is sometimes conditional.

In the book *Forgiveness is Power*, forgiveness is described as "Giving up the desire to punish". If you look carefully at this wording you will see that it does not say anything about reconciliation. Reconciliation has to do with what kind of relationship we want with the person we are working on forgiving. Reconciliation is a process of re-establishing our relationship with someone. Reconciliation is often part of forgiveness, but it does not have to be. Reconciliation is really a separate and distinct process.

Unpacking reconciliation from forgiveness can really help us to learn how to forgive as it brings clarity and very useful insights into the process. Understanding the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness, and how they fit together, is a great way to highlight any potential blocks we might have to forgiving and allows it to happen more smoothly.

Forgiveness is unconditional and always possible; reconciliation sometimes needs to be conditional and is not always possible.

Forgiveness is unconditional as it is always possible to let go of our desire to punish someone whether they are living or dead, whether they are still on our life or long gone. Letting go of wanting to punish someone is solely up to us and can be done independent of the other person.

Reconciliation sometimes needs to be conditional as we may be working on forgiving someone who is a persistent abuser, heavily addicted, a career criminal, or is in complete denial of their behaviour. We most likely want to put clear and specific conditions on what kind of relationship we want to have with such a person (see Tough Forgiveness). We can forgive them, but we can still create clear boundaries around the ways we relate to them. Choosing to forgive someone is a different and separate choice from choosing to reconcile with them.

In addition, reconciliation is not always possible. The person may be long dead, gone from our life, or just so hopelessly addicted that we cannot reach them. Reconciling with someone is not solely up to us; it depends a lot on the other person's behavior from now on.

This understanding that you can forgive someone and still decide to have nothing more to do with them (but watch out for hidden vengeance if you decide that) can actually make it easier to forgive them. We would naturally be wary of forgiving someone who is a nightmare for us to be around if we mistakenly assume that means we had to get back into a relationship with them. Realizing we can negotiate a reconciliation in terms acceptable to us, or even decide not to do that part at all, frees us up to forgive as widely as we like.

In forgiving problematic people by all means use the Four Steps to Forgiveness and at some point decide what, if anything, you want to do about a reconciliation. The decision about what you want to do in the way of a reconciliation can also wait till you gain the fresh perspective which comes from using the Four Steps.

You may find the idea of Tough Forgiveness a useful way of thinking about how to forgive in challenging situations.

Tough Forgiveness

Tough Forgiveness means setting conditions on any future relationship.

The concept of Tough Forgiveness makes it easier to forgive in difficult and challenging circumstances. With Tough Forgiveness we forgive (and do forgiveness work such as using the Four Steps to Forgiveness), but we give ourselves permission to not have any relationship with the other person unless some conditions are met. We might decide to not reconcile with them unless we see enough evidence of them being genuinely sorry, or willing to change.

You have probably come across the idea of Tough Love. Tough Forgiveness is a similar idea. As mentioned in the page on Reconciliation forgiveness is unconditional, but reconciliation is sometimes conditional. Tough Forgiveness means that we set conditions on any future relationship.

With Tough Forgiveness any reconciliation is conditional as it partly depends on how the other person behaves from now on. This is important as people often confuse forgiveness with reconciliation and assume that they always go together. However, they are really two different things which only sometimes go together. With Tough Forgiveness, we unconditionally forgive them (ie we let go of wanting to punish them) but we put clear and specific boundaries around the process of reconciling with them. This helps minimize the chances that we will simply be hurt again (and again) in the same way by the same person.

Deciding to protect ourselves from harm is very different from deciding to avoid someone as a way of punishing them. It may look the same to the other person, but it is less likely to do so if we are open about what we are doing and why. With Tough Forgiveness we can forgive someone and still avoid them in order to protect ourselves.

There is an ennobling quality to forgiveness which lifts our mind to a higher level and allows us to step free.

As I like to say in the book; Forgiveness is Power:

Forgiveness gives us the freedom to stay and the freedom to walk away.

With Tough Forgiveness you might choose to forgive and:

- + Create clear agreements about specific issues so that you are willing to go ahead (so that you can feel safe and respected).
- + Specify the types of behaviour which you do not find acceptable and which will cause you to end or pause the reconciliation process.
- + Limit the types of contact you have with the other person, till specific conditions are met.
- + Want agreement to do something to increase mutual understanding such as going to a counselor together.

The core of Tough Forgiveness is mutual respect. Tough forgiveness means ensuring that the other person knows and respects how you feel and that you know and respect how they feel. If this kind of mutual respect is not present, and the other person does not want to help establish it, then there is no real relationship and no real grounds for reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not just a decision; it is a process. As part of Tough Forgiveness we may want to make sure that they really understand how we felt about whatever they did. However, Tough Forgiveness does not mean we get to put the blame for everything we are unhappy about onto someone else. There is a big difference between, "This is how I feel... and it is all your fault." and

simply saying, "This is how I feel..." The first is loaded with blame and judgement. The second is more of a mutually respectful expression of honest feelings.

We may also decide that reconciliation is just not possible. If someone is not intending to change we can be sure that they won't! Change takes effort and does not happen without commitment. No matter how much we may want them to, without a commitment to change they will not change.

Mutual respect includes you showing respect for yourself as well as you showing respect to the other person. To respect yourself includes being honest with yourself about how you really feel. You never want to hide from yourself how you really feel, because if it becomes a habit it can too easily lead to False Forgiveness.

If you are not ready to forgive someone, or not ready to reconcile with them, then you need to forgive yourself and accept that as being how you feel right now. In this way you can at least be reconciled with yourself. You may need time to recover, to renew yourself, and to restore your faith in life and other human beings before you will be ready to forgive some of the bigger issues in your life. Give yourself the time you need. Once you have more practice with both forgiving and reconciliation you will be more able to forgive, and perhaps even reconcile, with the more challenging ones.

Next Steps

To become a teacher of Forgiveness, just decide that is what you want you to do.

If you want to explore more deeply please discuss Forgiveness with others, either in person, or online via social networks. You will find it makes for an excellent topic of conversation which helps deepen and enrich your connections.

Simply mentioning to people that you are reading a book about Forgiveness can spark a wonderful conversation. Perhaps someone will tell you about something they would like to forgive, but do not know how. Just tell them the Four Four Steps to Forgiveness! By explaining those four simple steps to someone you could completely change their life.

Everyone who is learning to forgive is also a teacher of Forgiveness. The more you teach Forgiveness the more forgiving you will become; and the more you practise forgiveness the more you will teach it. You could make it your task (your secret task if you prefer) to let people know about Forgiveness, or even be a teacher of Forgiveness.

The only thing you need to do to become a teacher of Forgiveness is decide that is what you want to do. You do not need to be an "expert", get a certificate or anything like that. We are all teachers of Forgiveness, or its opposite, as we all teach each other by example. It is just a matter of becoming aware of this and deliberately deciding to teach Forgiveness rather than teaching the lack of it. You just need to start doing it and you will get better at it as you go along.

You are very welcome to quote from this book and to use it as teaching material. But please email me for permission if you want to copy more than 10% of this book. We would all like to leave the world at least a little bit better place than we found it. What better way to do that than spread the word about Forgiveness?

You might also be interested in my other book *Forgiveness is Power*, published by Findhorn Press, and available in many book stores. It is available in different languages so please go to my website and click on the flag of your country, or language, for more information: forgiveness-is-power.com