

# Forgiveness and emotional freedom



*Is your emotional distress being  
maintained by non-forgiveness?*



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help tool for you from the Emotional Freedom Service*

Do you feel stuck, sad, or angry? Maybe not forgiving someone is the problem? When you don't forgive, you have a repeating voice inside you that's always angry and blaming. This voice stops you from being happy, and you may feel stuck in your misery or rage. You may be unable to feel normal and free. If this is you, you need to forgive the other person.



But forgiving isn't always easy. It is normal to be hurt and upset when somebody has betrayed you, or made you feel small, or abused you. And sometimes you may feel that the upset, your distress, prevents you from forgiving. The truth, however, is that forgiving will help to heal your distress.

You may think that your hurt is the responsibility of whoever abused or hurt you. That is just wrong thinking. Your hurt and your emotional distress are *your* responsibility. This does not mean your "fault"! It's your job to notice it, and to heal it. It's nobody else's job.

You may need somebody's help to face and release your emotional distress. When someone truly listens to you, you may find that your pain is healed. Or you may be strong enough to help yourself to heal. If you have been very angry for a long time, your body seems to store the anger inside it, and this must be released – it's poison. Releasing your an-

ger will make it much easier to forgive.

Sometimes, the person you really need to forgive may be yourself. Think about this. Here is something you can think about: Which do you feel you should do first—forgiving the other person, or forgiving yourself?

But as soon as you feel courageous enough to forgive, you can and should forgive. Non-forgiveness is a trap and an obstacle that blocks the healing, freedom, and joy of yourself, and others around you. It also cuts you off from others and makes you a bitter person. So please do not wait until you are perfectly healed before doing the work of forgiving.

When you are hurt, you may experience a kind of instinct that makes you want to hurt the person who hurt you. Notice this if you have it. Work on getting yourself healed; guide yourself to release any tendency for revenge. The more you heal, the less urge there will be for revenge. Revenge simply does not go with healing and forgiveness. Scientific research shows that people who take revenge are less happy than those who do not.





## What forgiveness is not...

Some people think forgiveness means forgetting. That's not true.

Some people think that forgiveness means giving up your legal rights, or your fight for alimony, or your efforts to make sure, through the courts, that others are not harmed by the person who

hurt you. That's not true. You can forgive in your heart and still stand up for your rights. But you must be very careful if you do those things, lest you start acting out of anger. Acting out of anger does not help you at all; it's harmful to you.

Some people think that forgiveness means that you become like a door-mat that people wipe their feet on. That's not true, either. Forgiveness gives you dignity and strength and self-respect. With this dignity, strength, and self-respect you will not want to put up with other people's bad behaviour towards you.

Some people think that forgiveness means pretending that the hurtful actions by somebody else were not so bad after all. That's not true. It's not useful to pretend any such thing. If the hurtful actions were serious, they remain serious. Or even criminal, or sick, or evil. But people have managed to



forgive others, even those who had killed all their family.

Some people think that forgiving means saying, "I forgive him" or "I forgive you," while your heart is still full of resentment. True forgiveness is forgiveness from the heart, and not just from the head.

Okay, so those are all the things that forgiveness is *not*. So, what *is* it?

Is forgiveness the same as being friends again? Well, in many situations, that would be a great thing to aim at, if it is possible and if it safe to do so. But forgiveness should come before that, if possible. You will be able to think much more calmly and realistically about such matters after you have forgiven. Both yourself and others.



voice.

Secondly, forgiveness is what you do, after that decision, whenever the angry blaming feeling-and-voice is felt again. How do you deal with that?

Firstly, let us look at the decision itself. If you continue to regard the angry, blaming feeling-and-voice as being you, yourself, then it will continue making you smaller, driving you into a small dark corner, making you poorer and more lonely and bitter. That's not really who you are, is it? That feeling-and-voice is just something that you *have*. In fact, it's an instinct, the same as animals have. It's an instinct that arises when somebody puts you at risk, or hurts you, or makes you feel small, or shows disrespect, or removes your freedom. That's just an instinct – it's not really who you are.

The angry blaming feeling-and-voice is there, it's unpleasant, it's yours, but it's not who you are! You are something wonderful and beautiful that is difficult to put into words. So, part of forgiving is to decide that you will remember this fact: the *angry blaming feeling-and-voice is not who I am, and I refuse to think that it is*. Such a decision will affect your whole life. For the better.

## What forgiveness is...

Forgiveness is *firstly* a decision that you make. It's a courageous decision in your own mind that will feel as if a heavy weight has dropped from your shoulders. *Secondly*, forgiveness is what you do when that angry, blaming, feeling-and-voice comes up again inside you.

Forgiving means firstly making a *decision* that when you notice that angry blaming feeling-and-voice inside you, you will not hold it close to your heart and cherish it as you used to do before. It is a decision that you will *remember* that the angry, blaming feeling-and-voice inside you *is not you* but rather it is something that you have or feel. So you decide to refuse to "be" that





## A decision, and then mindfulness...

After that decision, half the work is done! But then you must also do well something else that is very important. This is that when the angry, blaming feeling-and-voice comes again, you will look at it as if from a step or two away from it; not getting stuck in it but still facing it mindfully, sincerely, and with attention. It's not so much thought that's important here. What is important is attention.

Notice attentively where in your body you feel that *feeling*: is it in your fast-beating heart, or in a tight spot in your chest, in certain tight muscles? Notice which are the feelings or emotions that you are feeling in your body besides the anger. Is there misery, hatred, fear, resentment, a sense of being put down, a sense that you have been treated as worthless, or a sense of injustice? Also notice the *thoughts* that come up in your head at the same time. Be careful, we are not saying that you should hide that feeling-and-voice from yourself. Whenever it comes, you notice it sincerely, then say, *This is not who I am, and I refuse to think that it is who I am.*

Try to do that on every single occasion that the angry, blaming feeling-and-voice appears inside you, so that your attentiveness to that particular feeling and thought will become a habit. You learn to catch it, with your attention, as soon as it arises. This is very important.



## Storm warning...

Depending on your personality, and on your hurt and trauma, there may be a storm ahead as you give permission to your own deep hurts to come to consciousness as part of the release process. Weather the storm with self-respect and self-compassion in your own way. If you have absorbed a poor self-image from the other person's abusive behaviour, notice those thoughts while standing, as it were, in a place of self-respect.

If there is such a storm you may need to be alone. Or you may need to be with a trusted person, for support and safety. Understand your own emotional needs. Your body may need to shake and move your limbs to release its tension. You may need to cry, or scream. You may need to meditate. Or pray. Your vulnerable hurts can be healed with love. Starting with your own love is a good way to start.

So, in forgiving, the two things are: firstly, the decision, and secondly, the mindful watching of the feelings and thoughts whenever the angry, blaming feeling-and-voice comes up again.

If you do these two things properly, then that feeling-and-voice will certainly start quickly to reduce. Also, the memories of the past events begin to have less emotional charge stuck to them. Or even no emotional charge at all, except maybe some sadness and some caution from lessons learnt. Difficult lessons make us grow and become mature.



## Make it easier...

To make it easier to forgive, think about why you're angry, and write down the reasons. Maybe you feel that someone treated you unfairly or made you feel bad about yourself. You can try doing things like breathing slowly or talking kindly to yourself, to make the angry feelings less strong. Learn to relax all the muscles of your body. You will probably need to transmit love and kindness and compassion into yourself – try doing that with each inward breath, for a few quiet minutes. You may need help from a suitable friend or from an advisor or counsellor or therapist.

Depending on your spiritual path, if you have one, you may feel more whole if you pray for the person who hurt you. That will certainly help you in your internal healing. You may also want to seek comfort in divine power through prayer or meditation.

And if we do have spiritual sensitivity, the really valuable state of mind comes when we eventually realise that we are each other, in a great oneness, and we therefore start to live with great unconditional compassion to everyone. Including ourselves and those who hurt us.

When you forgive, it will certainly help you feel better. Scientific research shows that forgiving can make you less sad, less stressed, and healthier. It can give you a feeling of freedom and joy that you may not ever have known before.

So, if you want to feel better, if you want to do the right thing, try to forgive. It might be hard sometimes, but it's worth it.



*We can tell you, or email you, about some simple and effective methods that you can use to make forgiveness easier to do, such as writing a letter to the one who hurt you and then destroying the letter! Ask us to send you the Love-Circulation Method for releasing your emotional distress. You may need help with facing and releasing your sadness, hurt, anger, or rage. If you do, we can help you free of charge and confidentially, even online. This is for motivated persons without mental illness. Main languages: English, Maltese. Working languages: French, Italian. Emotional Freedom Service [efs@antidemalta.org](mailto:efs@antidemalta.org) of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation, a registered non-profit NGO [www.antidemalta.org](http://www.antidemalta.org) . V5 4/2023*

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