

2.9 Forgiveness

Free yourself from the burden of anger and resentment.

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The quote that opens this chapter sums up the value of forgiveness: “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm our hostility.”

The implication here is that forgiveness is something we do not do for those who have wronged us but for ourselves. When we forgive others, we free ourselves from the weight of resentment and anger. Refusing to forgive others maintains those painful emotions, stoking the fires of bitterness.

This is especially true in ongoing relationships. It’s one thing to forgive a hurt in a long-dormant connection and move on. It’s another to forgive someone you see regularly. In this case, an inability to forgive can prevent the relationship from attaining its true potential, affecting future behavior on both sides.

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- The ability to let go of emotional charges that burden you brings relief and inner peace.
- Anger blocks the flow of energy, which can eventually come back to haunt you. Releasing it frees you from this cycle.

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- Forgiving people without protecting yourself can open you up to further harm.
- Sometimes, the price of forgiving a painful wound can be too high.

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In the first book of his renowned Conversations with God series (see Tool 6.10), Neale Donald Walsch discusses forgiveness and how to go about it at length. He describes a road to forgiveness that embraces the worldview that we’re all one—we’re all the same. We are all parts of God, trying to meet our needs, and we all have triggers and histories of trauma, which can prompt us to behave in inappropriate ways. This may sound like a cliché, but when we tap into this idea of forgiveness, we can focus our energy on realizing that people are caught up in their own lives and trying to meet their own universal needs (see Tool 2.1: Nonviolent Communication). Having a little empathy can go a long way!

Forgiving others requires us to value them as human beings and acknowledge that they are damaged and hurt in some way. The idea that to know someone is to love them points to this path of forgiveness. When we truly understand others, we see that people behave meanly when they themselves are hurting. Functional people do not intentionally engage in dysfunctional behavior.

Accessing forgiveness is not easy, but one method is to reflect on the reasons for another’s poor behavior. If someone hurts you, try thinking about why they might be acting out—which needs of theirs are not being met. If you’re able to understand what is lacking in their lives, you may be able

to feel compassion for their pain and, from there, forgive them.

Importantly, however, this doesn't mean allowing them to continue hurting you. Forgiveness and enabling are quite different. It's admirable to strive to forgive others, but where necessary, it's important to maintain personal boundaries and protect yourself from continuing harm. Forgiveness and boundaries can exist simultaneously, and it's up to you to maintain the balance of the two.

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1. Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue by Neale Donald Walsch (Hodder and Stouton, 1977)
 2. "Free Yourself from Blame & Resentment":
https://insighttimer.com/meditation-courses/course_free-yourself-from-blame-and-resentment
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