

Forgiveness Meditation

The act of forgiveness is one of the great gifts of spiritual life. It enables us and the world to be released from the sorrow of the past. Forgiveness is an act of the heart, a movement to let go of the resentment and outrage that we have carried for too long. It eases the burden of pain in our heart. To forgive does not mean we condone the misdeeds of another or ever allow them again. It acknowledges that no matter how much we may have suffered, we will not put another human being out of our heart. We have all been harmed, just as we have all, at times, harmed ourselves and others.

For most people, forgiveness is a process. The work of forgiveness goes through many stages, during which you may feel grief, rage, sorrow, fear and confusion. In the end, when you let yourself feel the pain you carry, forgiveness comes as a relief, as a release for your heart. You will see that forgiveness is fundamentally for your own sake, a way to let go of the pain of the past.

To practice forgiveness meditation, let yourself sit comfortably, allowing your eyes to close and your breath to be natural and easy. Let your body and mind relax. Breathing gently into the area of your heart, let yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions that you have carried because you have not forgiven – not forgiven yourself, not forgiven others. Let yourself feel the pain of keeping your heart closed. Then, breathing softly, begin asking and extending forgiveness, reciting the following words, letting the images and feelings that come up grow deeper as you repeat them.

FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS: *There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of my pain, fear, anger and confusion.* Let yourself remember and visualize the ways you have hurt others. See and feel the pain you have caused out of your own fear and confusion. Feel your own sorrow and regret. Sense that finally you can release this burden and ask forgiveness. Picture each memory that still burdens your heart. And then to each person in your mind repeat: *I ask for your forgiveness, I ask for your forgiveness.*

FORGIVENESS FOR YOURSELF: *There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself. I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times through thought, word or deed, knowingly or unknowingly.* Feel your own precious body and life. Let yourself see the ways you have hurt or harmed yourself. Picture them, remember them. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this and sense that you can release these burdens. Extend forgiveness for each of them, one by one. Repeat to yourself: *For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain and confusion, I now extend a full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself, I forgive myself.*

FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HURT OR HARMED YOU: *There are many ways I have been harmed by others, abused or abandoned, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed.* Let yourself picture and remember these many ways. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past and sense that you can release this burden of pain by extending forgiveness when your heart is ready. Now say to yourself: *I now remember the many ways others have hurt or harmed me, wounded me, out of fear, pain, confusion, and anger. I have carried this pain in my heart too long. To the extent that I am ready, I offer them forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.*

Let yourself gently repeat these three directions for forgiveness until you feel a release in your heart. For some great pains you may not feel a release but only the burden and the anguish or anger you have held. Touch this softly. Be forgiving of yourself for not being ready to let go and move on. Forgiveness cannot be forced; it cannot be artificial. Simply continue the practice and let the words and images work gradually in their own way. In time you can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your life, letting go of the past and opening your heart to each new moment with a wise loving kindness.

- From Buddha's Little Instruction Book by Jack Kornfield

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