

Forgiveness

Dale Goldstein

“Love is forgiving. Love is for giving. Love is for giving.” Patricia Sun

Once many years ago when I was meditating, I saw how every place of tension in my body was a place where I was holding something. Ultimately, I was holding something against myself since it was a part of my body and mind that was being held. In this contemplative moment, I realized how every place of tension was a place of unforgiveness.

I recalled relationships, events and desires that were unresolved. When I consciously expressed the thought of forgiveness to myself, others and all in the circumstances of an event, a wave of relief, joy and freedom could be felt passing through my body.

From this self discovery, it became obvious to me that dis-ease was, at least on a psychological and spiritual level, all about forgiveness. Holding something against myself created tension and dis-ease. Although it started on a spiritual or psychological level dis-ease of spirit could transmigrate into my physical body and cause an outward illness. From this observation, I concluded that the healing of dis-ease, at least on the psychological and spiritual levels, could only come about through the act of forgiving – from releasing whatever I was holding in my body-mind that was creating the dis-ease.

The most dramatic example of forgiveness I’ve witnessed was with a woman who was dying of colon cancer. The cancer had progressed to the point where her colon closed up completely and she was unable to eat any solid food for the previous 10 days. She was in her last days of life and she was suffering greatly. The first time I came into her room, the woman lay on a sofa in obvious pain, fear, and confusion. I introduced myself to her and told her I was there to try to help her in any way I could. She acknowledged my presence and purpose and very quickly went into her feelings towards the three people in her life to whom she was harboring anger and resentment – her husband, her mother and her sister.

Each of these important people in her life had hurt her very badly and she had been holding each of them out of her heart for decades. As she retold the story, she forgave

them, one after the other. As the act of forgiveness was pronounced, there was a release of a holding deep in her abdomen. Her face brightened, body tension washed away and it was as if a life giving nourishment was now being received and distributed throughout her body.

After her act of forgiveness released the last of the three people, she experienced a great peace and was completely free of the pain she had been experiencing previously.

In my naiveté, I had hoped she would live, as sometimes a physical disease with psychological and/or spiritual causes can be healed when the underlying dis-ease is reconciled, but the cancer had progressed beyond the point of reversal. She did, however, die peacefully with love and forgiveness in her heart. This was a psychological and spiritual healing, although it was too late for there to be a physical healing.

What does it really mean to forgive?

Let's start with what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean excusing another person's hurtful behavior. People are absolutely responsible for the pain they cause others. And it doesn't mean having to make amends with the person you are forgiving.

The act of forgiveness is primarily for your own healing. If you want to let the person know that you are in the process of forgiving him or her, it could benefit them, of course, but that is not the primary purpose or necessary for forgiveness. What's more, in my experience, those being forgiven get the message in subtle ways that they may not even be aware of. We're all connected to each other, and our thoughts travel through the ether -- everything one does in thought and deed, affects everyone one is connected to. This aspect of life has been documented as applied to the distant healing affects of prayer.

Forgiveness also doesn't mean holding to some ideal of having to forgive everyone for everything always or forcing oneself to forgive someone before one is ready to.

Once, when facilitating a meditation retreat, I played my "Forgiveness Meditation" tape and did the meditation along with the retreat participants. There was someone in my life at the time who had hurt me more than anyone else had ever hurt me and I tried to forgive this person in the meditation but couldn't. I had this idea that I should be able to, especially since I was teaching forgiveness, but it just wasn't possible. Finally, I gave up trying to forgive this person and instead, forgave myself for not being able to forgive. Eventually, when the time was right for me, I was able to forgive this person.

Forgiving, in my mind, really means being willing to feel "The Pain." I call it "The Pain" instead of your pain or my pain because, in truth, it is a pain that is shared by all human



beings. It is just played out this way and that way in different places with different people.

When someone hurts me, they are giving me “The Pain,” which is too great for them to hold. If I resist it, it hurts and persists as anger and resentment. If I am willing to receive it, it hurts and then passes through me. This way, I don’t hold onto any resentment and there’s nothing and no one to forgive. And the person who gave me “The Pain” gets to see it right in front of his or her nose and has the opportunity (because of my willingness to feel it) to safely feel what was previously too much to feel and thereby to achieve some degree of healing for him or herself. “The Pain,” if shared in this way, becomes a catalyst for healing instead of hurting. When one becomes completely willing to feel ‘The Pain,’ forgiveness and healing automatically follow.

There are three aspects of forgiveness: First, we need to forgive others for the hurt they have inflicted upon us. Second, we need to allow ourselves to be forgiven by others for the hurt we have caused them. And, ultimately, we need to forgive ourselves for holding others and ourselves out of our heart because we’re unable to bear “The Pain.”

When we can forgive ourselves for being “perfectly imperfect,” acknowledging and taking full responsibility for “The Pain,” however it was given to us, however it was received by us, we can live our lives fully and freely.

My all-time favorite and most forgiving quote is attributed to Dogen Zenji, one of Japan’s two greatest Zen Masters: “My life has been one mistake after another.” Dogen is forgiving himself and acknowledging that when one is truly working on him or herself, that person’s awareness is continually opening to see greater and greater truths and, consequently, always seeing how limited his or her awareness was the moment before.

What would your life be like if you had forgiven everyone for everything?

© 2014 Dale Goldstein, All rights reserved