

FIND FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

This chapter on forgiveness is from Phil Bolsta's book,
*Through God's Eyes:
Finding Peace and Purpose in a Troubled World*

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FIND FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone has need to be forgiven.

George Herbert

Forgiveness is a great purifier. It matters not how long you have hated or how deep the hurt runs. A room can be dark for ten seconds or ten years; the moment that light floods the room, the darkness disappears as though it had never been.

One moment of true forgiveness can erase years of guilt, pain, or fear.

Alan Cohen

REFRAME, RELEASE, REWRITE

“Forgiveness” is a loaded word that may anger those who have endured great wrongs. Anyone with a trace of empathy can appreciate how difficult it must be to forgive the unforgivable.

When a deep injury is done us, we never recover until we forgive.

Alan Paton

Substituting the word “release” for “forgiveness” short-circuits the emotional charge and reframes the act as a blessing that you bestow on yourself rather than one bestowed on your antagonist.

Forgiveness is an act of self-love.

Wayne Dyer

Many balk at forgiveness, associating it with weakness, with losing, with giving in and giving up.

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

Mahatma Gandhi

True forgiveness is the noblest of acts, requiring great wisdom, spiritual strength, and an intuitive understanding of the human condition.

To heal the wounded memory is as natural to the human spirit as it is for the cells of the human body to heal themselves.

Lewis B. Smedes

Forgiveness is not an intellectual decision. It is an act of the heart, reflecting the infinite love and compassion of your spirit.

Forgiveness defies your mind. You have to break through your mind to forgive. Without forgiveness, a genuine healing cannot happen.

Caroline Myss

The moment you forgive, you reinvent yourself. Your psyche is flooded with light, forever dispelling the darkness that had emotionally crippled you.

*Someone may have stolen your dream when it was young and fresh and you were innocent. If someone has damaged the innocence of your dreams, Anger is natural.
Grief is appropriate.
Healing is mandatory.
Restoration is possible.*

Jane Rubietta

Instead of identifying yourself by past injuries and injustices, you are free to rewrite the story of who you are and who you wish to be.

Forgiveness is a rebirth of hope, a reorganization of thought, and a reconstruction of dreams. Once forgiving begins, dreams can be rebuilt. When forgiving is complete, meaning has been extracted from the worst of experiences and used to create a new set of moral rules and a new interpretation of life's events.

Beverly Flanigan

Writing a new story is more difficult if the person you are forgiving remains in your life and continues to act in ways that require forgiveness. A thoughtless relative is one thing, an abusive spouse is quite another. Forgiveness does not equal tolerance. If your antagonist treats your forgiveness as a welcome mat for further abuse, your new story must be written from a safe distance.

You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean. If a few drops are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.

Mahatma Gandhi

SELFISH AND SELFLESS

Forgiveness is ultimately a selfish act, requiring you to free your imprisoned spirit and reclaim your dignity, power, and sense of self-worth.

When we forgive, we set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner we set free is us.

Lewis B. Smedes

If you do not forgive, you are bound to the person who injured you as surely as if you were handcuffed together.

As long as you don't forgive, who and whatever it is will occupy rent-free space in your mind.

Isabelle Holland

Forgiveness is ultimately a selfless act, requiring you to look through God's eyes and not your own.

I pardon him, as God shall pardon me.

William Shakespeare

Then, instead of judging others, you will be adding much-needed loving energy to collective consciousness.

Forgiveness is holiness; by forgiveness the universe

is held together.

Paramahansa Yogananda

In this light, forgiving the imperfections of others contributes to the perfection of your own path as well as to God's ultimate plan for the world.

When we forgive we ride the crest of love's cosmic wave; we walk in stride with God.

Lewis B. Smedes

THE PRICE OF RESENTMENT

There is no middle ground for forgiveness. Resentment and forgiveness cannot coexist. You must choose one or the other.

"I can forgive, but I cannot forget," is only another way of saying, "I will not forgive." A forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note, torn in two and burned up, so that it never can be shown against the man.

Henry Ward Beecher

Grudgingly attempting forgiveness while refusing to relinquish your resentment fools no one. Your insincerity will carry more weight than your words or actions.

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

Indira Gandhi

Resentment exacts a steep cost. Investing your emotional energy in angrily clinging to past events saps your life force, ages you, and weakens your immune system.

Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Malachy McCourt

Unresolved anger has a corrosive effect on your body. It elevates your blood pressure and increases the likelihood of heart attacks and strokes.

You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger.

Buddha

You cannot know real peace without forgiveness. Until you release your resentments, the external world will always remain a threat.

When you make peace with yourself, you make peace with the world.

Maha Ghosananda

The price of resentment is unending suffering. The priceless gift of forgiveness is lasting peace.

*Forgiveness is the economy of the heart. . . .
Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits.*

Hannah Moore

Hold on to grudges and grievances and you restrict your life. You will never know the joy and freedom of a soul unburdened by pain.

When you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere.

Unknown

Refusing to forgive your antagonist compromises all your other relationships. Some part of you will always hold back, limiting your capacity to be emotionally available.

When we judge, we are pushing people away; we are creating a wall, a barrier. When we forgive we are destroying barriers; we come closer to others.

Jean Vanier

You may argue that your resentment is justified—indeed, that you are *entitled* to it. Defiantly, you wrap your anger around your heart, unwittingly blocking out the sunlight of Divine love and mercy.

We attach our feelings to the moment when we were hurt, endowing it with immortality. And we let it assault us every time it comes to mind. It travels with us, sleeps with us, hovers over us while we make love, and

broods over us while we die. Our hate does not even have the decency to die when those we hate die—for it is a parasite sucking our blood, not theirs. There is only one remedy for it.

Lewis B. Smedes

You may think that you are protecting yourself by refusing to forgive. The opposite is true: Your every hostile thought boomerangs back, causing incalculable damage to mind, body, and spirit.

To carry a grudge is like being stung to death by one bee.

William H. Walton

Then again, refusing to release your resentment *is* a form of protection. Choosing resentment over recovery protects you from the discomfort of facing and working through your emotional trauma.

I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain.

James Baldwin

Unchecked, your righteous anger takes root and stealthily expands, blotting out all the beauty and wonder of life, and insidiously choking off avenues of peace and love like a cancerous tumor.

The man who opts for revenge should dig two graves.

Chinese proverb

You cannot carry resentment without it permeating your consciousness and influencing the way you think, speak, and act. You become contaminated with rage. You wonder why your life seems stuck, why you cannot attune yourself to the Divine current, why you focus so much of your attention on those you scorn rather than on those you love.

Don't ruin the present with the ruined past.

Ellen Gilchrist

By living like this, by mentally returning to the scene of the crime over and over again, you enable your antagonist to wreak ever more havoc with your life and psyche. Like a marionette, you allow someone else to pull your strings, even from the grave.

When we hate our enemies, we are giving them power over us: power over our sleep, our appetites, our blood pressure, our health, and our happiness. Our enemies would dance with joy if only they knew how they were worrying us, lacerating us, and getting even with us! Our hate is not hurting them at all, but our hate is turning our own days and nights into a hellish turmoil.

Dale Carnegie

Brand your attacker as unforgivable and you become an accomplice to the crime. By passionately defending your hatred and anger, you are snatching the knife from your attacker's hand and plunging it deeper into your own heart.

It's not only injustice that causes problems; often our vengeful response to injustice creates even greater and more enduring problems.

Robert Enright

Yet you continue to cling desperately to your antagonist, fearful that if he breaks free of your grasp he will go unpunished, and *that* you cannot permit.

Anger is always fear, and fear is always fear of loss.

Richard Bach

Ah, but here is the ironic twist. While you are maintaining a death grip on your resentment, thereby inflicting untold damage on your physical and emotional well-being, your adversary is oblivious to your wrath.

The one who throws the stone forgets; the one who is hit remembers forever.

Angolan proverb

REVENGE AND REMORSE

Acting on resentment by pursuing revenge is akin to dropping a huge boulder in the middle of your spiritual path. It blocks out the sun and halts all progress.

People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes.

Abigail Van Buren

By striking back at those who have harmed you, you harm yourself. Your obsession with getting even rips open your original wounds and inflames them further with the venom of vengeance.

Revenge . . . is like a rolling stone, which, when a man hath forced up a hill, will return upon him with a greater violence, and break those bones whose sinews gave it motion.

Rev. Jeremy Taylor

No matter how justified you feel your actions are, meting out your own brand of vigilante justice lowers your consciousness, attracts toxic consequences, and paves the way for future regrets.

How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it.

Marcus Aurelius

Worst of all, there will be a stain in your memory that will not wash out no matter how desperately you scour it with remorse.

If the other person injures you, you may forget the injury; but if you injure him you will always remember.

Kahlil Gibran

Look through God's eyes and you understand that Divine justice may not require your assistance. Ultimately, the perpetrator will be held karmically responsible for his or her actions. Of course, if the action was criminal or if you are in a position to prevent others from being victimized, follow your guidance accordingly.

If a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he repent and confess, forgive him. . . . But if he be shameless and persisteth

*in his wrong-doing, even so forgive him from the heart,
and leave to God the avenging.*

Gad, the ninth son of Jacob

Refuse to forgive someone who has wronged you, and you cannot expect to be forgiven by someone whom you have wronged. We all must learn to forgive, just as we all must need to be forgiven.

*The gift of being forgiven and love's power to forgive
are like yin and yang. Each needs the other to exist.
To receive the gift without using the power is absurd;
it is like exhaling without inhaling or like walking without
moving your legs.*

Lewis B. Smedes

ADVERSARIES OR ALLIES

How do you begin the process of forgiveness, of release? It may help to view your adversary in a new light: not as a powerful monster, but as a flawed, insecure human being in need of love and compassion. In other words, much like yourself.

*If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously
committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to
separate them from the rest of us and destroy them.
But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the
heart of every human being. And who is willing to
destroy a piece of his own heart?*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

In fact, you may be your own antagonist. Resentment is the inability to forgive others; guilt is the inability to forgive yourself.

Every guilty person is his own hangman.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

If you are wracked with guilt and remorse, it may help to view your former self as a separate person, as someone who no longer resembles you, a person whose sense of integrity had not yet fully formed and who did not have the knowledge and wisdom you now possess.

*The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect,
he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them,
he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he
becomes wise.*

Alden Nowlan

Reframing your transgression by recognizing the limitations of the person you used to be may give you the distance you need to apply these principles, heal your emotional scars, and find some measure of peace.

*I do not want the peace which passeth understanding.
I want the understanding which bringeth peace.*

Helen Keller

Looking through God's eyes, you realize that adversarial relationships are an illusion, and that every difficult encounter has been divinely orchestrated.

*No one at one with himself can even conceive of
conflict.*

A Course in Miracles

Before incarnating, you agreed to participate in situations on earth that would help you learn pivotal lessons, achieve your life's purpose, and advance your spiritual growth.

*We choose our joys and our sorrows long before we
experience them.*

Kahlil Gibran

In light of these sacred contracts, every quarrel, every betrayal, every hostility becomes a gift, an occasion to grow and evolve.

*Forgiveness is born of increased awareness. The more
you can see, the easier it is to forgive.*

Deepak Chopra

Remember too, that virtually everyone, no matter how horribly misguided they may be, believes that the way they conduct their life is the right way, the best way, and wholly consistent with the way the world works.

Pardon him . . . he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

George Bernard Shaw

Therefore, do not take every transgression so personally; the way someone treats you says far less about you than it does about them.

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Even though the act that needs forgiving *involved* you, it often is not *about* you. You were simply an obstacle in the way or a convenient vehicle used in the self-absorbed pursuit of a self-centered desire.

How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours.

Wayne Dyer

NOTHING TO FORGIVE

Your sacred contracts offer a wealth of opportunities to transcend your human nature by expressing your Divine nature.

You know quite well, deep within you, that there is only a single magic, a single power, a single salvation, and a single happiness, and that is called loving. Well, then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not flee from it. Taste how sweet it is in its essence, give yourself to it, do not meet it with aversion. It is only your aversion that hurts, nothing else.

Hermann Hesse

If you accept that these pre-incarnation agreements exist and that we cross paths with those whom we are to learn from, then there is nothing to forgive.

Remember you come here having already understood

the necessity of struggling with yourself—only with yourself. Therefore thank everyone who gives you the opportunity.

Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff

You stop seeing yourself as a victim, and view every person in conflict with you as an instrument of God.

We do not and cannot know the agenda of each individual soul—but we can know that the agenda of each individual soul serves the agenda of every other soul.

Neale Donald Walsch

With this understanding, you learn to welcome conflict as an opportunity for self-reflection and honor it as a reminder of the Universal Intelligence that guides your way.

Another illusion is that external events have the power to hurt you, that other people have the power to hurt you. They don't. It's you who give this power to them.

Anthony de Mello

You realize that everyone you encounter, no matter how unlikely it seems to your earthbound sensibilities, is your teacher, your collaborator, your ally.

You know you have forgiven someone when he or she has harmless passage through your mind.

Rev. Karyl Huntley

On a soul level, you and your adversary have agreed to challenge and confront each other in ways that benefit you both.

*What is a good man but a bad man's teacher?
What is a bad man but a good man's job?
If you don't understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.*

Lao Tzu

Years from now when you have left this world, you shall meet again; only this time you will bow in gratitude for serving each other in that way.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

Rumi

Our challenge in the present moment is to resist responding with rage, resentment, and retaliation, and instead view conflict through God's eyes, with loving detachment.

*Never does the human soul appear so strong and
noble as when it forgoes revenge and dares to
forgive an injury.*

Edwin Hubbell Chapin

THE ASHES OF ATROCITY

It takes courage to forgive, to cast aside the insistent judgments of ego in favor of the infinite wisdom of Spirit.

*If you want to see the brave, look at those who can
forgive.*

Bhagavad Gita

Granted, that is all well and good for garden-variety dustups, but the concept is harder to swallow when applied to shockingly brutal individual acts and crimes against humanity.

*I believe in the sun—even when it does not shine;
I believe in love—even when it is not shown;
I believe in God—even when he does not speak.*

**Scatched into a basement
wall by a Holocaust victim**

Throughout history, people with malicious intent have exercised their free will to hurt others. God does not directly interfere because, by definition, free will would be rendered meaningless if it were interfered with.

God created the law of free will, and God created the

law of cause and effect. And he himself will not violate the law. We need to be thinking less in terms of what God did and more in terms of whether or not we are following those laws.

Marianne Williamson

Consequently, God's plan for each of us may weather continual course corrections, just as each move on a chess board reconfigures our universe of choices going forward. In extreme cases, our life's plan may be adapted, rewritten, or postponed. Even then, however, karmic forces are at work and angels hover near.

It can even come about that a created will cancels out, not perhaps the exertion, but the result of divine action; for in this sense, God himself has told us that God wishes things which do not happen because man does not wish them!

Joseph de Maistre

One way or another, in this life or another, our soul lessons will play out as planned. Fulfillment is certain; circumstances and timing are not.

*When you mix free will you get certain deviants. . . .
You may believe that just because there is an absence of good, for example, that evil exists. This is not so.
In fact, things are far more intricate.*

Lena Lees

It is insensitive at best and cruel at worst to suggest to those who have suffered horrifically that there may be even a modicum of meaning associated with unspeakable crimes. And yet, even as we honor another's grief, it is an argument that must be considered, even if it remains unspoken.

The mark of your ignorance is the depth of your belief in injustice and tragedy. What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

Richard Bach

Clearly, any attempt to look through God's eyes has its limits; and any purpose behind incomprehensible suffering may remain beyond the capacity of human beings to grasp. But a purpose we cannot wrap our minds around is a purpose nonetheless.

*You've got to look hard for the sparks of divinity in
the ashes of atrocity.*

Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

FINALLY FREE

Paradoxically, to attain the enlightened perspective that forgiveness is unnecessary, it is necessary to practice forgiveness.

*Forgiveness is humanity's highest achievement
because it shows true enlightenment in action.*

Wayne Dyer

Every act of forgiveness expands your awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Divine Wisdom.

Be assured that if you knew all, you would pardon all.

Thomas à Kempis

You come to see that, while forgiveness cannot alter past events, it can alter your interpretation of them.

*You change the past when you change the way you
see it.*

Alan Cohen

You become more willing to forgive until, finally, you will yourself to a place beyond suffering, beyond forgiveness.

*Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does
enlarge the future.*

Paul Boese

In any context, Eva Kor's act of forgiveness is stunning. On January 27, 1995, in a public ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet troops, Kor declared her forgiveness toward the Nazis who murdered her parents and two older sisters.

Genuine forgiveness does not deny anger but faces it head-on.

Alice Miller

Standing by the ruins of a gas chamber at the infamous death camp, Kor also forgave Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who used her and her twin sister Miriam as guinea pigs for genetic experiments.

When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it.

Lewis B. Smedes

Kor's forgiveness allowed her to release the heartache and hatred she had carried for five decades. She said, "I read my document of forgiveness and signed it. I immediately felt the pain lift from my shoulders. Finally, I was no longer a prisoner of Auschwitz. I was finally free. So I say to everybody, 'Forgive your worst enemy. It will heal your soul and set you free.'"

Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

Buddha

Later that year, Kor opened the CANDLES Holocaust Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. (CANDLES is an acronym for *Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors*.) In 2003, the museum was burned to the ground by a fire that was deliberately set. Kor forgave the arsonist and rebuilt the museum. She said, "For most people there is a big obstacle to forgiveness because society expects revenge. Forgiveness is nothing more and nothing less than an act of self-healing, an act of self-empowerment. I call it a miracle medicine. It's free, it works, and it has no side effects."

Resentment, whether cold fury or smoldering rage, hardens your emotions . . . Tragically, you become one with anger; you are now its servant.

Phillip Moffitt

As Eva Kor learned, forgiveness does not mean that you condone what was done to you or that you absolve the perpetrator of responsibility for his or her actions.

Forgiveness does not equal forgetting. It is about healing the memory of the harm, not erasing it.

Ken Hart

How deserving your assailant is of your forgiveness is irrelevant. Forgiveness is a gift to yourself. It is an indispensable element in your enlightened self-care toolkit.

We must forgive those we feel have wronged us, not because they deserve to be forgiven, but because we love ourselves so much we don't want to keep paying for the injustice. Forgiveness is the only way to heal.

Don Miguel Ruiz

It is always within your power to forgive someone, even for things that one human being should never do to another.

There is nothing that in the end, cannot be forgiven, but there remains much that is inexcusable.

Vladimir Jankélévitch

Forgiveness allows you to recall your spirit back to present time, which energizes and heals you in profound ways, both physically and emotionally.

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

Abraham Lincoln

Eva Kor captured the true meaning of forgiveness when she said, "Forgiveness means to me that whatever was done to me is no longer causing me such pain that I cannot be the person I want to be."

A wise man will make haste to forgive, because he knows the true value of time, and will not suffer it to pass away in unnecessary pain.

Samuel Johnson

It took Eva Kor fifty years to forgive her tormentors. Grief and rage demand their due. Be patient; forgiveness cannot be forced. Listen to your heart and you will know when it is time to forgive.

I worry about fast forgivers. They tend to forgive quickly in order to avoid their pain. . . . And their instant forgiving only makes things worse. . . . People who have been wronged badly and wounded deeply should give themselves time and space before they forgive. . . . There is a right moment to forgive. We cannot predict it in advance; we can only get ourselves ready for it when it arrives.

Lewis B. Smedes

CHOOSING LOVE

Forgiveness is another word for love. It is about choosing to love when love seems like an impossible choice to make.

We cannot love unless we have accepted forgiveness, and the deeper our experience of forgiveness is, the greater is our love.

Paul Tillich

It is easy to love someone who is lovable, but you can never fully embody love and forgiveness until you learn to love the unlovable.

People need loving the most when they deserve it the least.

Mary C. Crowley

When you are treated poorly, when you are not respected, when you are ignored or mocked or scorned, recognize that such behavior speaks to the other person's character, not your own.

To be wronged or robbed is nothing unless you continue to remember it.

Confucius

Do not take such boorish behavior personally. As an ambassador of God's love, it is your great privilege to respond to insensitivity and mean-spiritedness with kindness.

Start learning to love God by loving those whom you cannot love.

Meher Baba

Your antagonist is playing the role that must be played if you both are to grow and evolve as planned.

I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to these teachers.

Kahlil Gibran

As you model graciousness and generosity of spirit, you inspire and change others who are fortunate enough to find themselves in your presence.

Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.

Mark Twain

You cannot release a hurt until you send love to the source of that hurt, as if you were a parent sending unconditional love to your child. How do you do that? Like this: "I send you love and light, from my heart to yours—to love you, to protect you, to guide you, to heal you, to cherish you, to comfort you. God bless you. You are beautiful and you are loved."

And I saw the river over which every soul must pass to reach the kingdom of heaven and the name of that river was suffering; and I saw a boat which carries souls across the river and the name of that boat was love.

Saint John of the Cross

If you are more visually oriented, ask God to guide your soul to meet the other person's soul on a bridge of light between your hearts. Visualize the two of you meeting halfway on that bridge and embracing in divine friendship.

If we really want to love, we must learn how to

forgive.

Mother Teresa

You break the hold that people have over you by bathing them in love and asking that these conflicts be resolved for the highest good of everyone involved.

Forgiveness finishes unfinished business.

Stephen Levine

Whether or not you witness any changes in these relationships, they have been forever altered.

When we are firmly established in nonviolence, all beings around us cease to feel hostility.

Patanjali

Forgiveness unsupported by love is only a word. If your love is not genuine, your forgiveness will be shallow and transient.

We pardon to the extent that we love.

François de La Rochefoucauld

It is not necessary to tell the people whom you are forgiving that you are forgiving them. The loving energy you broadcast through the Unified Field reaches people, changes them, makes them better.

Sincere forgiveness isn't colored with expectations that the other person apologize or change. Don't worry whether or not they finally understand you. Love them and release them. Life feeds back truth to people in its own way and time.

Sara Paddison

If sending love to someone who betrayed you or harmed you seems inconceivable, step aside and ask God to use you as a conduit.

Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one who inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness.

Marianne Williamson

By allowing the pure love of God to flow through you and into that person's heart, you are surrendering to a higher form of justice.

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.

Bryant H. McGill

You do not have to like the other person, you simply have to acknowledge that God loves him or her the way all of God's children are loved.

An overflowing love which seeks nothing in return, agape is the love of God operating in the human heart. At this level, we love men not because we like them, nor because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess some type of divine spark; we love every man because God loves him. At this level, we love the person who does an evil deed, although we hate the deed that he does.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Resolve to be an instrument of Divine love and mercy regardless of your personal feelings for those who have harmed you.

You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

Lewis B. Smedes

Granted, no matter how much you long for the peace and release that forgiveness brings, the words "I forgive you" can stick in your throat, even if you intend to only say them silently.

Wisdom is harder to do than it is to know.

Yula Moses

Think of God as the supreme love of your life, and your love and compassion for others will flow more naturally and effortlessly.

*Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look
which becomes a habit.*

Peter Ustinov

In time, this intention of love and forgiveness will take up lasting residence in your mind and heart.

*Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent
attitude.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In this state of awareness, resentment against your adversaries drops off your radar. Indeed, you no longer *have* adversaries. You see that everyone who crosses your path does so to deliver a message divinely crafted just for you.

*Whoever approaches Me walking, I will come to him
running; and he who meets Me with sins equivalent to
the whole world, I will greet him with forgiveness equal
to it.*

Mishkat al-Masabih

FIND FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS LIVING THE LESSON

From the beginning, my mom and my wife were at odds with each other, and neither had any qualms about offering her opinion. I often felt caught in the middle. The conflict finally reached critical mass after I had a particularly bitter argument with my mom. I smugly wrote her a letter telling her she would no longer be in my life, and felt completely justified in sending it. What a clueless, self-righteous dolt I was! My dad told me later that my mom cried when she read the letter and had trouble sleeping for days afterward.

It didn't take long for my mom and me to start talking again, but something important was missing. She had doted on me from the day I was born and we had always had a wonderful, loving relationship. But there was now a distance between us. I even stopped telling her I loved her because I couldn't pretend that the purity of our relationship had been restored.

I don't remember how long the rift between us lasted. It may have been months, but it seemed like years. Over time, it gradually dissipated until one day there was no longer any resentment or bruised feelings. We both had awakened to the understanding that love is what matters most. We also understood that we both had acted very foolishly.

My mom traces her wake-up call to the day a friend of hers explained the tradition of Yom Kippur, a day of atonement in Judaism that follows a ten-day period of reflection, repentance, and reconciliation. Realizing that her constant criticism was poisoning our relationship, my mom decided she would stop judging us and allow us to live our lives as we saw fit. The moment she committed to that decision, she felt an enormous burden lift. More importantly, her heart was at peace.

Writing that letter to my mom is perhaps the greatest regret of my life. Now that my daughter is grown, I can't begin to imagine the excruciating heartache I would feel if I received such a letter from her. If anything could destroy me, that would be it. I recently told my mom that I still felt anguish about putting her through such torment. She waved off my concern with a loving smile. We were both wrong, she said, but none of that mattered anymore.

I can no longer remember what feeling angry at my mom felt like. The power of unconditional love vaporizes any and all non-loving feelings as if they had never

existed. I can attest that pure, loving forgiveness washes away every last trace of hurt.

My mom and I aren't the only ones who experienced the healing balm of forgiveness. My now ex-wife feels nothing but love and affection for my mom. We've been divorced for more than sixteen years but we all still get together for the holidays when we can and consider ourselves one big happy family. Indeed, that is exactly what we are.

FIND FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Who have I not forgiven and cannot imagine ever forgiving?
- How is forgiving both selfish and selfless?
- How does holding on to past hurts and resentments affect my mental, emotional, and physical well-being?
- How does refusing to forgive prevent me from fully living in the present moment?
- How do my anger and resentment allow the person who harmed me to continue to exercise power over my life?
- Why are acts or even thoughts of revenge harmful to me?
- How can learning to forgive myself affect how I show up in the world?
- How is my antagonist a collaborator in my spiritual development?
- How would viewing a conflict through God's eyes instead of my own affect the way I react to it?
- If I believe that everything happens for a reason, why do I believe or disbelieve that there are exceptions to that rule?
- Why does forgiveness have far more to do with me than the person I am forgiving?
- How does love release the hold my antagonist has on me?