

## Is It Time to Forgive?

by Gail Brenner

□Forgiveness holds the possibility for expanding our capacity to love. There is only one reason to forgive. If we want to be free, if we want to live as the full and unlimited expression of ourselves, if we want our hearts to open, then we are being invited to put an end to all stories that keep us closed and contracted.

□Consider also these benefits of forgiveness: less stress, lower heart rate, lower blood pressure, improved sleep, greater psychological well being.

□What exactly is forgiveness? When we are in the state of unforgiving, we are holding on to a grudge. A grudge is a story of hurt and resentment that we believe to be true and repeat over and over in our thoughts. It lodges in our body and mind like a freeloading visitor who won't leave. It keeps our hearts clamped shut, depletes our energy, and hijacks our creativity. The story of the grudge involves blaming someone else for what happened, which turns us into a victim. And as a victim, we are powerless, bitter, and stuck. If you are clinging to an old painful story, check in right now to see if this is true in your own experience.

□When we make the choice to forgive, we let go of the power the grudge has over us. We are released, liberated, and free to return to our natural state of open-heartedness and clarity.

□Did you notice that I didn't mention the other person who wronged you? Forgiveness is not about the other - it is an inner letting go that finally allows us to be at peace. It is an acceptance of what happened along with a choice to stop dragging the unhappy past into the present. It is the experience of moving through blockages that keep us from being alive right now. It is for you way more than anyone else.

□Byron Katie says, "Things don't happen to you; they happen for you." When limiting stories are put to rest, we are able to see the lesson, the offering from them, that deeply enriches our life experience.

□Let's clear up two misconceptions about forgiveness.

□+ When you release your attention from your grievance story, you are not condoning the other's behavior. No question - people do nasty things, and what happens in life is not always fair. Forgiving is for you, for your inner peace. You cannot control what someone did in the past, but you can examine what you are doing right now. If you persist in focusing on the terrible things someone did to you, even though the actual behavior stopped long ago, you are still hurting yourself in your mind. If you accept that what happened happened, no matter what your opinion about it, you are well on your way to

freeing your heart.

☐+ You can be completely released without receiving an apology. An apology indicates that the other acknowledges and takes responsibility for his or her behavior. This may support your process, but it is not essential. The key to forgiveness is an inner letting go, which occurs only when your mind stops perpetuating a hurtful story. It is work you can do on your own. This is very good news, as it means you can forgive even if the other has died or is unable to converse with you about what happened.

☐Forgiveness is a process

☐+ Forgiveness happens in its own time. It is never too early, or too late, to let go. When the time is right for you, adopt an attitude of tough love: be tender and compassionate, but don't let yourself off the hook. Stay committed and on track, even if it's challenging, until you feel at peace.

☐+ First, identify your experience of the grudge. What are your thoughts...feelings...physical sensations? What is the texture of your experience? Close your eyes and see. Grudges often make you feel flat, dense, dark, and heavy. You are likely to have been thinking about the situation in exactly the same way for a very long time. You know the story by heart. Crack open to the possibility of discovering something new about it that has the potential to release you from suffering.

☐+ Experience the feelings directly. Without justifying them by repeating the story of what happened, simply welcome the sensations in love and acceptance. Let things be as they are, even if they are intense or fiery. Meeting the feelings directly will eventually help to soften them.

☐+ You might notice a part of you that shouts a resounding, "No!" to this process. Maybe you continue to blame someone, legitimize your right to feel the way you do, or avoid the whole thing altogether. These are all ways of keeping your grudge intact. Offer a loving, "Yes" to even these experiences by accepting the underlying pain that energizes them. Be so kind to these tender places in you.

☐+ Now consider the impact that holding on to this story has on you. How is it serving you? What aspects of your life have been affected? Imagine, just for a moment, that you were not putting your energy and attention into this story. How would you and your life be different? Realize that the past is over, but that you are keeping it alive in your mind and body. Who is most impacted by perpetuating this story?

☐+ Acknowledge the core belief that keeps the story running - it shouldn't have happened, it should have been different. Sustaining this belief abdicates your power to something you cannot control, which is what others think, say, or do. Give up blaming, and don't wait for history to change or for the offender to apologize. Cease living in, "If only that hadn't happened." You are putting off your own life. Things happen as they happen - let go of expectations of others, for your own sake. ---

☐+ Bring your attention inside, and ask yourself what you need, then be creative so that your need is fulfilled. If you need to express yourself to someone, do so in a letter you will never mail. Or ask a trusted friend to sit with you, imagining he or she is the person you desire to speak to. You can even use an empty chair. Say what needs to be said, then put it to rest. If you feel you need love, treat yourself like royalty, then pass it on to someone who needs it more than you. Do whatever it takes so that you can let go of the ball and

chain you are dragging around.

□In the course of writing this article, I discussed it with two friends who spontaneously applied the suggestions to their own grievance stories. Once they saw how much they were resisting letting go of the story and how it kept them trapped in victimhood and powerlessness, they made the choice to give it up...right before my eyes! They did it, I've done it, and so can you. Release yourself, and experience freedom beyond measure!

□What are you holding on to? What has your experience been with letting go? What challenges are you aware of?