



Forgiveness & Your Life's Unfinished Business, by Stephen Levine

As awareness becomes yet subtler, able to discern even the muffled whispers of the mind, we are confronted with what a dying musician friend called "the Unfinished Symphony" - the dreams and longings that have played themselves out unabated just beneath the surface of our worldly persona - the unfilled, the uncompleted, the oft-resented inheritance of a life only partially lived. Many coming upon long unresolved issues and old holdings, find it difficult to simply let go. The holding around the unresolved, the unapproached has become so cramped close that it seems to take considerable effort to soften it back to its natural openness. But forgiveness acts almost as a kind of lubricant to allow the yet held to slip lightly away. Indeed, in theory it would be ideal to just let go of heavy states such as resentment or fear or guilt. But in practice we discover that the considerable momentum of our identification with such feelings is not so easily dispersed. Before we are fully able to just be mindful of such feelings, to just let them be without the least tendency to cling or condemn, it may well be necessary to deepen the practice of forgiveness - to actualize the potential for letting go that the open-handed acceptance of forgiveness offers upon meeting the gravel-fisted judgment of the often unkind mind. [] The practice of forgiveness opens the mind to the natural compassion of the heart. Practiced daily, it allows ancient clinging to dissolve. But in the beginning forgiveness may have something of an odd quality about it. One needs first to recognize that guilt arises uninvited. It is important to use forgiveness not as a means of squashing guilt, or even upleveling the unforgiveness of another, but as a means of dissolving obstructions. At first one may feel they did nothing wrong, so why ask for or send forgiveness. But emotions are not so rational; they have a life of their own. We ask for forgiveness and offer forgiveness not because of some imagined wrongdoing but because we no longer wish to carry the load of our resentments and guilts. To allow the mind to sink into the heart. To let go and get on with it. [] Forgiveness benefits oneself, not just another. Although we may open our hearts to another, it is a means of letting ourselves back into our own heart. Indeed, forgiveness may be felt across hundreds of miles and even acknowledged, but that is not the primary purpose [] In fact, to wait for such acknowledgment is an example of how we continue unfinished business. Forgiveness finishes business by letting go of the armoring which separates one heart from another. As one teacher said, "As long as there are two there is unfinished business. When the two become one, the heart whispers to itself in every direction." -- Stephen Levine

