



**“Forgiveness”—
Breaking the Chain
of Hate**

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A grieving martial arts master climbs daily to the hilltop, searching the road below for the black belt student of ten years who has run off to squander half the family fortune. Finally, one day he sees a distant figure whose step makes him catch his breath. Tears beginning to swell, master runs down the road to meet the errant young student. Ragged and hungry, the student tries to deliver his well-rehearsed apology, but the master doesn't wait to hear a speech.

Tears spill down the older O' Sensei's cheeks as he sweeps his adopted son into arms that have ached with emptiness far too long.

But not every quarrel has such a happy ending. When the offender doesn't repent...when physical or emotional distance makes reconciliation impossible... when the injury runs deep and its effects still reverberate through your life...

Does old *anger* and *hatred* keep steaming through the surface, bringing you unhappiness and guilt with *them*? Do you find yourself saying, “I just can't forgive.”

It may be a parent, an in-law, a grown child, a boss, a spouse, or ex-spouse, teacher, fellow peer who has injured you deeply. As your wound festers, your injury haunts and hurts.

Working Your Way Through

Forgiving *is* possible. Not easily. Not quickly—perhaps. But you can free yourself from the memory that brings such bitter sorrow. And, in the process, heal your wound which has throbbed so long. Forgiving is not a moment of tear-streaked reunion. It is a *process*. A journey of your heart.

Remember—the first step toward forgiveness

Today, you will find a guide to your journey. One caution, though: Don't hurry yourself. There is no jet service to forgiveness. No rocket can hurtle you to the journey's end. Yet, with patience and perseverance, you can find the peace you seek.

Ageless wisdom tells us “forgive and forget.” How easily we forget small offenses. You know, the ones we don’t have to struggle to forgive. It’s the opposite story for major wounds. Only when we have forgiven can we begin to put painful memories behind us.

Can complete forgetting be dangerous, opening the way for a repeat performance? Communally we dare not forget the injustice of segregation or the horror of the Holocaust! **We know we must never let such events happen again.** Every personal experience yields important lessons. We all lost a precious lesson when we forget the experience. One example of this is the abused child/*student* who has never faced the wrong done him or her ends up marrying an abusive man/*teacher*. Remembering is clearly a painful task. Be gentle with yourself. If you must, take it in three small steps. If the old hatred gushes, 1) treat it as you would an unruly child. 2) Admit its presence but make it sit in a corner while you get this important work done. 3) Write down your recollections—so you can pick up where you left off (if you need to), then back off for a while. Now you can continue to fill in the details piece by piece.

You can’t forgive what you refuse to remember, any more than you can seek treatment for a disease whose symptoms you have yet to notice. **Begin your journey into memory *before* you were so harshly tinged.** Remember the time before your need to forgive existed. Retrieve what your life was like back then and remember what you were like, too. Were you trusting, certain of your own invulnerability?

Remember each person who hurt you. Reconstruct whatever relationship existed between you and that person before rage blurred your vision. If a stranger wounded you, try to imagine what that person was like earlier in life.

Once you have remembered the happier past, let yourself relive the injury in all its painful detail. Note exactly what happened. Feel how you felt inside. In your mind’s eye, see the injury evolve just as it did initially.

Understanding: walking in the other person’s moccasins

Now re-examine the outcome. Besides your obvious loss. Your shattered relationship. Your material setback. Take care listing the losses you may not have chosen before—the changes inside you. Did you lose some ability to trust? ... to be a happy, loving individual? **What part of yourself, separated by that past injury, would you like to regain?**

Once you have recalled the injury in all its dreadful detail, verbalize your gift of insight. Try to understand why things happened as they did.

Probe the personalities involved. Note the stresses at work on each individual—yourself included.

Perhaps, you may learn you, yourself contributed to these unfortunate course of events. Maybe you did not nourish the damaged relationship well enough. Possibly you refused to see where surroundings were surely going. Or you may feel that somehow you deserved what happened to you.

Don't trap yourself into assigning blame. Don't make excuses for yourself. And forgiving yourself as well is paramount.

Making excuses for the person who hurt you is not good either. (Excusing and forgiving are not the same thing. You may *excuse* the small child who spills the too-full glass of milk; you must *forgive* the grown child who turns against you.) Just try to the best of your ability to understand what was happening inside the offender.

Decide to Forgive

Right now you have a clearer picture of what happened and why. So let's face it. Do you really want to forgive?

Remember hearing the saying “nursing” a grudge? By using this word we imply tender concern and prudence. **Why is it something in the human heart (some call it original sin) loves dark feelings.** When ire and hatred take up long time residence, we grow used to having them around. Sadly, we even grow to love them.

Something in our heart demands fairness. Forgiving when sorrow or atonement is absent, when real harmonizing is perhaps impossible because of distance, death, or the other's unwillingness—that kind of forgiving rightfully outrages our sense of justice. Some things don't, in decent human terms, *deserve* forgiveness.

Forgiving is not something you do because you should, according to the standards of religious belief or human decency. **Forgiving is something you do for yourself.**

It is one way of becoming the person you were created to be—and fulfilling God's dream of you is the only way to true wholeness and happiness.

You need to forgive so that you can move forward with life. An unforgiven injury binds you to a time and place someone else has chosen. It holds you trapped in a past moment and in old feelings. ***Forgiveness is your ticket to total emotional freedom.***

Write down what difference forgiving will make in your life. Think of what you'll gain? And just what will you really lose?

Are you willing to lose the company of your dark feelings? Have you the courage to step out into the future without carrying the so-called *bad luggage* and *extra burdens*?

Let Go Tender Heart

The fact you *want* to do something, isn't the same as *doing* it. But it is a giant first step. Here on in, it's okay to give yourself time. Behind you lies arduous work. The rest is a matter of practice. Little by little, let go of the harsh feelings you have nursed for so long. You may miss them at first, but you'll learn they were in very unpleasant company after all.

In your struggle to forgive why not ask for divine help. The God of Judeo-Christian tradition has an ancient reputation for compassion and mercy. Try praying for your enemy. Don't just ask for a change in that person's heart of behavior. Really pray for such a prayer. In front of God who knows your mind and heart, spoken words are not even necessary. Just stand before God

with that person at your side, and let God's love wash over both of you until it penetrates your heart.

The actual moment of forgiveness probably won't come as a sudden rush of warm feelings. You may not even notice when it happens. But one day you may find yourself really wishing well to the person who hurt you. Or suddenly realize — you haven't thought of your old injury for weeks.

At this point, you'll know you have reached your journey's end. Indeed, **forgiving can take a long period of time, but in the end lies total exuberance and fresh freedom and new-found life.**

It is not my intention to offend anyone in this article. If I have offended you, be kind enough to forgive me.

Thank you in advance.

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