



Forgiveness as a Spiritual Practice

By Renée Siegel

Many persons are confused as to what forgiveness is and how it works. In addition, we must be aware of who it is that we intend to forgive. As humans, we all make mistakes. There is a critic that is lurking in each of us. This critic can be quick to call attention to these mistakes.

Sometimes the critic is even relentless in their desire to hold onto the attention paid to these mistakes. I believe that this critic must be acknowledged in order for the process of forgiveness to begin. In acknowledging our inner critic, we actually initiate the process of forgiveness. We have taken action to pay attention to the part of each of us that casts judgment and plays the role of a parentalizing Deity. Although each of us would probably deny that we see ourselves as omnipotent, when we judge, we do in fact play the role of God.

To forgive is traditionally defined as to excuse for a fault, to renounce anger or resentment against oneself or another, to absolve one from paying a debt or to refrain from imposing punishment on an offender. I offer an additional definition that is not to be found in the dictionary:

- to allow ourselves or others the correction of a mistake.

To move from abstinence into recovery, forgiveness is an essential process. The guilt for our behaviors, the resentment and disappointment we have towards ourselves and others and the shame that keeps us looking for ways to avoid loving ourselves either paralyzes us from moving forward or entices a relapse.

The need to forgive arises when we hold onto anger, resentments, hurt, disappointment, blame and other typically uncomfortable feelings towards ourselves or others. Most likely these are perceived injustices to us and ruminating about the events and feelings keeps us in bondage. This interferes with our peace and serenity.

Often we entertain the false belief that forgiveness is dependent upon another person granting us pardon or excusing our behaviors or actions. This is where the core concept of self forgiveness becomes important. Self-forgiveness is not dependent



upon another's pardon. We let ourselves off of the hook for a "misperception" and can begin to heal.

When we have forgiven ourselves, we experience a sense of liberation and freedom from this bondage. The perceived injustice, resentment, disappointment, hurt or sadness dissipates. As the act of forgiveness grows, a spiritual healing emerges in the form of peace, contentment and or serenity.

Forgiveness requires taking some sort of action. There are various ways to take action in the process of forgiving. The following are ways you can take action to initiate or assist the process of forgiveness: share the perceived injustice with your perceived perpetrator, journal, speak with a loving trusted friend/sponsor, religious/spiritual advisor or counselor, pray, meditate or complete various steps in the fellowship. All of these methods are assisted by: quieting yourself to allow for being in a receptive mode and asking the Higher Power of your own understanding for assistance in the process.

In summary, forgiveness often begins with the need to forgive oneself. As we begin to be kinder and gentler with ourselves, it becomes easier to forgive others. It is not necessary for others to forgive us in order for us to forgive ourselves. There are various ways to initiate practices of forgiveness, but the act of self-forgiveness is essential to move forward in recovery.