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Forgiving Another Person

Even in the closest of our relationships we can harbor unforgiveness. Taking some time to reflect on our relationship can help us identify and dislodge any unforgiveness that may be present. If pain and resentment are left unchecked in our relationship, and the healing power of forgiveness has not been made use of, resentment, bitterness or a loss of hope could develop.

We often carry around misperceptions of what forgiveness is and these misperceptions impede our ability to forgive or be forgiven. It is important to know what forgiveness is not.

- Forgiveness is not forgetting. We often will not forget a hurtful event, but we can still seek and grant forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is not having resolved all the painful feelings. Often the hurtful feelings will last. But we can still seek and grant forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is not absolving someone from the responsibility of what they have done. What they did was wrong; you are simply choosing to not let it negatively impact you (and your relationship) anymore.
- Forgiveness is not accepting being continually hurt. If you are in an abusive relationship or one in which you are regularly being hurt, then that pattern must change. You do not deserve to be hurt. This may require staying away from the offending person to protect yourself.
- Forgiveness does not mean the relationship is always back to where it was before. If the offense is minor, you might be able to go back to where you were. If the offense is serious, it may take time (even years) to rebuild trust in the relationship. Forgiveness is simply starting this healing process.

Exercise in Forgiving Someone Else (even if they are not present):

1. Write about a time or incident that you wish to forgive someone.
 - a. Write out all the thoughts and feelings associated with this event, the more detail the better.
 - b. How has this incident impacted your life? How much energy do you give to it? What was your involvement in the event? How has the event impacted your self-esteem and self-worth?
2. Think about ways that you can take ownership of your actions.
 - a. When thinking of your actions, do you hold onto resentment to keep the other person beneath you? Do you blame them for the feelings you feel?
 - b. How can you begin to take responsibility for your feelings and actions in the future?

3. Think of a variety of ways that you can seek forgiveness from the other party.
4. Forgive them in your heart and mind and if appropriate, plan how to forgive them personally.
 - a. If necessary, also think of ways to avoiding being hurt by this person or others in the future.
5. Repeat the exercise for as many people you wish to seek forgiveness.

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