



The Cancer Recovery Pyramid: Spiritual Resource #1

Make Forgiveness a Habit

Do you want to free all your energy to heal? Forgive! Let go! Release!

Forgiveness is wellness work that brings with it huge rewards. Forgiveness links newfound awareness of the healing dynamics of intimate relationships with our awakened understanding of our emotional style. The promised benefit of this linkage is the peace and serenity we need for healing.

This is a big promise. Forgiveness can deliver.

Forgiveness, when it becomes a way of thinking and living, is the single most powerful psycho-spiritual key to well-being. Forgiveness is a trusted technique by which our thoughts and perceptions are changed, transforming the harmful effects of toxic emotions to the healing reality of compassion, even love. Forgiveness allows us to switch our focus from fear to love; it helps us change what can be changed and allows us to make peace with the rest. This is a profound dimension of healing.

Opportunities to learn and practice forgiveness are everywhere. The teachers of forgiveness come disguised as people, most often individuals who antagonize us, the ones whom we can't stand to be around.

We effectively teach ourselves the lessons of forgiveness when we hold ourselves accountable to be self-forgiving. Let's be honest; we hold much resentment against ourselves; we don't let go easily. In the quiet moments we judge ourselves harshly, "I'm so stupid. I'm fat. I'm ugly." The list is without end.

Now, like never before, this is the moment to release that self-condemnation. The only way is through self-forgiveness.

Let go. Many cancer patients carrying self-concepts of unworthiness. This is a false and deadly belief. Yes, we may have done something undesirable, but that is our behavior and does not equate with being an unworthy person. Release those feelings of unworthiness.

There's more. Our perceptions of others can also create a battleground of emotional turmoil. It is so easy to judge others. Judgmental behavior tears at the fabric of relationships and kindles the fires of resentment. Cancer is, among other things, an opportunity to learn and practice the difference between acceptance and approval, to transcend judgment.

All of us have imperfect natures. All of us exhibit behaviors that don't match our potential. Forgiveness is the answer. Forgiveness allows us to accept imperfection without having to judge it. Not everything in life meets your expectations. But we can find peace through acceptance. Forgiving ourselves and others is at the heart of practicing acceptance.



Make Forgiveness a Habit continued

Make the practice of forgiveness a habit.

Forgiveness is experienced on two levels. The first is the most obvious. There is an event: Someone is wronged or we perceive an attack. That behavior needs to be forgiven. When we can say, “I forgive myself for _____,” or “I forgive _____ (another) for _____,” then we have embarked upon the forgiveness journey.

The second level of forgiveness changes our perception of what happened. Yes, an event occurred. But the real problem starts when we begin to judge what happened, when we label ourselves or the other person as bad, hurtful, mean, stupid or with some other less-than-kind attribute. We perceived the event as unfavorable; the event didn't meet our approval. We judge, even condemn, the people involved.

The alternative? Acceptance. Accept ourselves. Accept others. Accept that events happen. Accept that life is often far from our glittering ideals. Forgive and accept. This is a far better way to live.

Marilyn's Story

Marilyn, in the middle of a battle with ovarian cancer, felt terribly ill at ease when her mother and father visited. Marilyn and her mother would make noble efforts to get along with each other, but they seldom fully succeeded. Old patterns of attack and defense were constantly cropping up between them. Child care, cooking, homemaking, religion — the particulars didn't seem to matter. Her mother wanted a more conservative daughter. Marilyn wanted a more enlightened mother.

“It was driving me crazy,” said Marilyn. “During her last visit, I was ready to throw her out. But then it occurred to me, God isn't looking at my mother and thinking, ‘Mildred is such a bitch.’ How could I pretend to want to get along with my mother if I was so consumed by my judgment of her errors? I had to practice acceptance and get off my fixation with approval.”

“So I said to myself, ‘I'll try this for an afternoon. I'll focus on acceptance and give up approval.’ From that moment, the situation and the relationship started to shift. As I was more accepting of her, she became more accepting of me. We're a long way from best buddies,” concedes Marilyn, “but there is a growing bond between us.”

The amazing payoff of forgiveness is that so many people do get well after extending forgiveness! Lives are certainly made better; many are made longer.

When do we need to forgive? *Always.* Don't drag the memories of past hurts and mistakes into your present moments. Nothing from the past is important enough to allow it to pollute our present. Forgive. Let go of judgment. Become a shining example of compassion. You deserve it. You'll change your life — forever!

Choose one hurt or mistake and forgive everyone concerned with it. Say out loud, “(Name), I totally and completely forgive you.” Mean it. Now feel the warmth of forgiveness. It's called freedom — and wellness! Choose to forgive one person each day.