

Integration Five

FORGIVENESS EXERCISE

“If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.”

- Richard Rohr

Forgiveness is broadly defined as “a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.”¹ It is also at the heart of the teachings of the great world religions. While this can be an extremely difficult process for people, it is a necessary step towards healing, health, and human wholeness.

Your Integration this week is to practice forgiveness. This exercise has two parts:

1. *Receiving forgiveness for yourself* for something you have done to yourself or others and any guilt or shame that you have caused
2. *Offering forgiveness to others* who have hurt you or caused you pain in the past

We are adapting Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s Fourfold Path of Forgiveness as a map for this process.² If possible, we encourage you to expand the practice by having conversations with those you are asking for forgiveness from, and those whom you are offering forgiveness. Remember that you will get out of this process what you put into it.

Examples

Start by reflecting and writing about each stage of the process. Do this process twice: once for receiving your own forgiveness, and once to offer forgiveness to others.

1. **Telling your story:** Start with the truth. Write down what you did or what happened to you as if you are watching or narrating a movie.
2. **Naming the hurt:** Recognize and name the hurt, the emotions you have caused or experienced.
3. **Seeking forgiveness:**
 - *Receiving forgiveness:* Accept the common humanity of the person whom you hurt, and ask for forgiveness.
 - *Offering forgiveness:* Accept the common humanity of the person who hurt you, and forgive them.
4. **Renewing or releasing the relationship:**
 - *Receiving forgiveness:* Offer to repair and renew the relationship on a new footing.
 - *Offering forgiveness:* Choose whether to renew the relationship on a new footing, or if the trauma is too significant, to release it and move on.

¹ Language drawn from [UC Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center](#).

² Please see pages 334-336 in [The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World](#) for more details, or [this review](#) for an overview.



Examples (continued)

If you are able, try to have a conversation with the people you are asking forgiveness from and those you are forgiving. Use your written reflection as a guide or script.

For additional examples and methods of practicing forgiveness, check out the following:

- Example [video from the *The Science of Happiness*](#)
- Jack Kornfield's Buddhist practice ([handout](#) and [video](#))
- These TED Talks and collections:
 - [The Real Risk of Forgiveness—And Why It's Worth It | Sarah Montana | TEDxLincolnSquare](#)
 - [What comes after tragedy? Forgiveness | Azim Khamisa and Ples Felix](#)
 - [How \(and why\) to forgive](#)
 - [TED Radio Hour: Forgiveness](#)

“He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Forgiveness Tips

- **The Sacrament of Reconciliation:** The Catholic tradition has a powerful ritual to help in the process of forgiveness. We invite you to consider the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is available at your local parish.
- **Additional Research and Methods:** For more information and ways to practice forgiveness, see any of the options listed at the [Greater Good Science Center](#).
- **The Big Picture:** Remember that this is a process - we do not expect you to magically jettison all of your resentments and pain in a day, a week, or even this semester. But we hope that we can help you jumpstart your own journey towards freedom.

“Forgiving is not forgetting; it’s actually remembering--remembering and not using your right to hit back. It’s a second chance for a new beginning.”

- Desmond Tutu



“Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”

Matthew 18:21-22

Scientific Foundations

- **Mental Health:** Forgiveness has been shown to improve mental health by increasing happiness and decreasing levels of anxiety and depression.
- **Physical Health:** Forgiveness can improve our physical health by releasing the grudges that cause stress and its resultant negative effects.
- **Relational Health:** Forgiveness improves our relationships with others by stopping the negative spirals of negativity, increasing our levels of social connection and kindness, and by giving people alternative ways to resolve conflicts.³
- **Acknowledging Responsibility:** Research shows that the most effective apologies have multiple components, of which the most important are an acknowledgement of responsibility and an offer of repair.⁴
- **Guilt vs. Shame:** The [distinction that Brené Brown makes between guilt and shame](#) can be a crucial one for people processing forgiveness:
 - Guilt can be a helpful corrective to living up to your values.
 - Shame is “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.”
 - Shame is a destructive form of labelling and identity that should be avoided.

“There is no failure the Lord’s love cannot reverse, no humiliation He cannot exchange for blessing, no anger He cannot dissolve, no routine He cannot transfigure.”

- *The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, [Constitution 8: The Cross, Our Hope, 118](#)*

³ Research summarized in “[Forgiveness Definition: Why Practice Forgiveness?](#)”, *Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley*.

⁴ Lewicki, Roy J., et al, “[An Exploration of the Structure of Effective Apologies](#)”, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2016, pp. 177–196., doi:10.1111/ncmr.12073.