

A FORGIVENESS MEDITATION

© 1991 Stephen Levine

[To be read slowly to a friend or silently to oneself.]

Begin to reflect for a moment on what the work “forgiveness” might mean. What is forgiveness? What might it be to bring forgiveness into one’s life, into one’s mind?

Begin by slowly bringing into your mind, into your heart, the image of someone for whom you have some resentment. Gently allow a picture, a feeling, a sense of them to gather there. Gently now invite them into your heart just for this moment.

Notice whatever fear or anger may arise to limit or deny their entrance and soften gently all about it. No force. Just an experiment in truth which invites this person in.

And silently in your heart say to this person, “I forgive you.”

Open to a sense of their presence and say, “I forgive you for whatever pain you may have caused me in the past, intentionally or unintentionally, through your words, your thoughts, your actions. However you may have caused me pain in the past, I forgive you.”

Feel for even a moment the spaciousness relating to that person with the possibility of forgiveness.

Let go of those walls, those curtains of resentment, so that your heart may be free. So that your life may be lighter.

“I forgive you for whatever you may have done that caused me pain, intentionally or unintentionally, through your actions, through your words, even through your thoughts, through whatever you did. Through whatever you didn’t do. However the pain came to me through you, I forgive you. I forgive you.”

It is so painful to put someone out of your heart. Let go of that pain. Let them be touched for this moment at least with the warmth of your forgiveness.

“I forgive you, I forgive you.”

Allow that person to just be there in the stillness, in the warmth and patience of the heart. Let them be forgiven. Let the distance between you dissolve in mercy and compassion.

Let it be so.

Now, having finished so much business, dissolved in forgiveness,

allow that being to go on their way. Not pushing or pulling them from the heart, but simply letting them be on their own way, touched by a blessing and the possibility of your forgiveness.

And now gently, giving yourself whatever time is necessary, allow the other person to dissolve as you invite another in.

Now gently bring into your mind, into your heart, the image, the sense, of someone who has resentment for you. Someone whose heart is closed to you.

Notice whatever limits their entrance and soften all about that hardness. Let it float.

Mercifully invite them into your heart and say to them, "I ask your forgiveness."

"I ask your forgiveness."

"I ask to be let back into your heart. That you forgive me for whatever I may have done in the past that caused you pain, intentionally or unintentionally, through my words, my actions, even through my thoughts."

"However I may have hurt or injured you, whatever confusion, whatever fear of mind caused you pain, I ask your forgiveness."

And allow yourself to be touched by their forgiveness. Allow yourself to be forgiven. Allow yourself back into their heart.

Have mercy on you. Have mercy on them. Allow them to forgive you.

Feel their forgiveness touch you. Receive it. Draw it into your heart.

"I ask your forgiveness for however I may have caused you pain in the past. Through my anger, through my lust, through my fear, my ignorance, my blindness, my doubt, my confusion. However I may have caused you pain, I ask that you let me back into your heart. I ask your forgiveness."

Let it be. Allow yourself to be forgiven.

If the mind attempts to block forgiveness with merciless indictments, recriminations, judgments, just see the nature of the unkind mind. See how merciless we are with ourselves. And let this unkind mind be touched by the warmth and patience of forgiveness.

Let your heart touch this other heart so that it may receive forgiveness. So that it may feel whole again.

Let it be.

And now gently bid that person adieu and with a blessing let them be on their way, having even for a millisecond shared the one heart beyond the confusion of seemingly separate minds.

And now gently turn to yourself in your own heart and say, “I forgive you,” to you.

It is so painful to put ourselves out of our hearts.

Say, “I forgive you,” to yourself.

Calling out to yourself in your heart, using your own first name, say “I forgive you,” to you.

If the mind interposes with hard thoughts, such as that it is self indulgent to forgive oneself, if it judges, if it touches you with anger and unkindness, just feel that hardness and let it soften at the edge. Let it be touched by forgiveness.

Allow yourself back into your heart. Allow you to be forgiven by you.

Let the world back into your heart. Allow yourself to be forgiven.

Let that forgiveness fill your whole body.

Feel the warmth and care that wishes your own well-being. Seeing yourself as if you were your only child, let yourself be bathed by this mercy and kindness. Let yourself be loved. See your forgiveness forever awaiting your return to your heart.

How unkind we are to ourselves. How little mercy. Let it go. Allow you to embrace yourself with forgiveness. Know that in this moment you are wholly and completely forgiven. Now it is up to you just to allow it in. See yourself in the infinitely compassionate eyes of the Buddha, in the sacred heart of Jesus, in the warm embrace of the Goddess.

Let yourself be loved. Let yourself be love.

And now begin to share this miracle of forgiveness, of mercy and awareness. Let it extend out to all the people around you.

Let all be touched by the power of forgiveness. All those beings who also have known such pain. Who have so often put themselves and others out of their hearts. Who have so often felt isolated, so lost.

Touch them with your forgiveness, with your mercy and loving kindness, that they too may be healed just as you wish to be.

Feel the heart we all share filled with forgiveness so that we all might be whole.

Let the mercy keep radiating outward until it encompasses the whole planet. The whole planet floating in your heart, I mercy, in loving kindness, in care.

May all sentient beings be freed of their suffering, of their anger, of their confusion, of their fear, of their doubt.

May all beings know the joy of their true nature.

May all beings be free from suffering.

Whole world floating in the heart. All beings freed of their suffering. All beings' hearts open, minds clear. All beings at peace.

May all beings at every level of reality, on every plane of existence, may they all be freed of their suffering. May they all be at peace.

May we heal the world, touching it again and again with forgiveness. May we heal our hearts and the hearts of those we love by merging in forgiveness, by merging in peace.