

Buddhist Psychology

with Jack Kornfield, PhD

Module 5: Forgiveness: The Key to Escaping the Chains of the Past

Part 3: Undertaking the Practice of Forgiveness

Undertaking the Practice of Forgiveness

Dr. Kornfield: I'd like us to undertake the practice of forgiveness now for ten or fifteen minutes and be forgiving as you do it, because, as I said, it can bring up the opposite.

You can realize, "I hate that person. I'll never forgive them." You can feel numb, or you can feel like, "I'm a failure. I'll never be able to forgive." So, you want to forgive yourself for that. You want to forgive *all* of that.

Put your things down and let yourself sit in a way that's comfortable, gracious, and easy. Know that this is a training or a practice of the heart that you can undertake and cultivate over a succession of times.

Allow your eyes to close gently and come back to the reality of the present – of this body seated here on the earth, of the life breath that breathes through your body.

Rest in the breathing and let the body be calm and the mind quiet.

As you sit quietly now, there are three directions for the practice of forgiveness, and I'll lead it as a guided practice of reflection, which you can then repeat on your own.

“There are three directions for the practice of forgiveness, and I'll lead it as a guided practice of reflection.”

Here is the first direction: "There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others – betrayed them, abandoned them, caused them pain and suffering. I remember these now – the ways I have harmed others. I feel the sorrows I still carry."

Let yourself reflect on the ways that you've hurt and harmed others. Pick one or a number of events and feel the pain of this.

“Let yourself reflect on the ways that you've hurt and harmed others.”

"Here are the many ways that I've hurt and harmed others knowingly or unknowingly that I remember now – out of my confusion and pain, out of my own hurt and fear, out of my own anger and disappointment and ignorance.

In this moment, I ask your forgiveness for the ways I've acted out of my pain and confusion – please forgive me – please forgive me."

As you breathe gently in the heart, try to sense what it would be like to be forgiven for what you've done – that this is possible for you.

As you ask forgiveness of others, it now becomes apparent that you also have to forgive yourself.

So, this is the second direction of forgiveness: "Just as I have hurt or harmed others, so, too, I have harmed myself. Just as I have betrayed others or abandoned them, so, too, I have abandoned what I know best in myself. I've harmed myself in so many ways – I've betrayed myself and caused pain to myself."

Let yourself remember the ways that you've harmed yourself just as you've harmed others; let yourself remember the ways you've abandoned or betrayed yourself. As you can remember, feel the sorrows or pain that you carry.

"Let yourself remember the ways that you've harmed yourself just."

"In the ways that I have hurt or harmed myself as I may have hurt others – abandoned or betrayed myself, caused pain or suffering to myself knowingly or unknowingly – in this moment I offer myself forgiveness.

In the ways that I've hurt or harmed myself out of confusion and pain, out of anger and fear, out of my own hurt, anger and disappointment – in this moment, I hold myself and my life with mercy and tenderness. I offer myself forgiveness. Just as I ask forgiveness of others, so, too, I offer it to myself. I forgive myself. I release myself. I hold my life with mercy and tender compassion.

Let the sweet rain of forgiveness fill your body and your being. I forgive myself."

Now, this is the third direction: "Just as I have hurt or harmed others, so others have harmed me. There are so many ways that we have each been betrayed or abandoned, harmed or caused pain to by others, knowingly or unknowingly. I remember these now, too, and feel the sorrows I carry."

Let yourself remember the ways that you have been hurt or harmed by others. As you remember these, feel the pain you carry, the suffering of it – picture your hurt.

"Let yourself remember the ways that you have been hurt or harmed by others."

"In the ways that you have hurt or harmed me, knowingly and unknowingly, out of *your* pain and confusion, out of your hurt and anger and disappointment and ignorance, to the extent that I'm ready, I forgive you.

You can't paper it over. But to the extent that I'm ready, I release you. I will not carry hatred. I forgive you. I,

too, offer you forgiveness."

Feel how the offering of forgiveness frees your heart and allows you to move on with your life. "I offer you, too, forgiveness."

In these three ways of asking forgiveness, of extending it to yourself and offering it to others, you gradually liberate the heart and mind, and you free yourself to move on.