



Article by **Mary Ann Wallace, MD, MA**

Forgiveness as Healing “Medicine”

It has been estimated that greater than 80 percent of all chronic pain has a strong emotional component. With recent data showing a clear correlation between hostility and heart disease, we can no longer ignore the evidence that the hurts, betrayals, and angers we hold close to our heart are, in fact, harming us.

What does forgiveness mean? Jack Kornfield puts it nicely when he says: “Forgiveness is letting go of past suffering and betrayal, a release of the burden of pain and hate that we carry. Forgiveness honors the heart’s greatest dignity. Whenever we are lost, it brings us back to the ground of love. With forgiveness we become unwilling to attack or wish harm to another. Whenever we forgive, in small ways at home, or in great ways between nations, we free ourselves from the past.”

How do we forgive? In small ways, at first. Staying present with ourselves in the midst of the sensation of hurt caused by another, we open the door to the possibility of not being alone. Often the difficulty in letting ourselves forgive stems from the belief that we will never be completely understood in our own innocence. We can only begin that process with ourselves. It may be that nobody else will ever fully know that which we have experienced. In fact, if we have truly forgiven, how could they know? To deny ourselves the gift of being completely present in kindness (rather than hatred) is to deny ourselves the possibility of freedom and deep health.

We also need to let our own peace of mind take precedence over our need to get even. When we are stuck in punishment mode needing someone to pay for hurting us, we are, in fact, stuck in pain mode. As Kornfield beautifully states: “We may still be suffering terribly from the past while those who betrayed us are on vacation. It is painful to hate. Without forgiveness, we continue to perpetuate the illusion that hate can heal our pain and the pain of others. In forgiveness we let go and find relief in our heart.”

When we embrace the fullness of ourselves, without justification or defenses, we can live our true potential.

This is living life to the fullest. Beyond the concepts of disease versus wellness, we begin to embark on a whole new adventure.

Reference:

Kornfield, Jack. *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace* (Bantam, 2002)

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