

If anyone thinks forgiveness is for wimps, they haven't tried it. It takes daily, diligent discipline.

Jaeger, 1998

RESOLVING RESENTMENT BY MEDITATING Chapter 8

Miller's Meditation

These meditative processes are suggested as an aid to bringing about a forgiving heart.

The first is from *A Little Book of Forgiveness* by D. Patrick Miller (1998) who suggests:

1. **Select a bitter sorrow, a serious grievance against someone, or a punishing charge against yourself, and review it in complete detail.**

Based upon the Gassin & Enright and Alcoholics Anonymous models, I think the more thoroughly this is done, the more effective the process would be.

2. **Hold in your mind the image of whatever is to be forgiven – yourself, another person, a past event – and say, “I release you from the grip of my sadness, disapproval, or condemnation.” Concentrate quietly on the intention.**

As with all affirmations, this is unlikely to feel real when it is done.

Some people have no success with this because they feel way too artificial to get through it; others swear by it.

For me, I find it more useful to find an affirmation that has enough of my own truth in it that I can connect to what I'm saying. That might look more like, "I want to be willing to release you from the grip . . . " or even, "I don't want to be willing, but I need to become willing to release you from the grip . . . "

3. Imagine for a while what your life will be like without the sorrow or grievance that has been haunting you.

I think this is an awfully important step in the process, and is one that isn't precisely taken into account by the other processes, though AA's suggestion for meditating on the Prayer of St. Francis is close. It is one of the benefits of meditation. I like it for myself because it helps make me aware that I'm refusing to forgive.

It has the added benefit of helping me shape my longing and remind my heart of the freedom that awaits me if I'll just continue working through the process of trying to create a forgiving heart.

4. Make amends with someone who has hurt you, tell a friend about your self-forgiveness, or otherwise link your inner work to your relationships.

This is a helpful instruction. It certainly matches the amends process in Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 Step program. And one thing that intrigues me is the suggestion that you tell a friend when your forgiveness process is

about yourself because it helps link the work you're doing inside to the world outside.

- 5. Ask for God's help to overcome fear or resistance at any step. If you do not believe in God, ask for help from all nature, humanity, and the mysteries of your own mind. These are the channels through which aid is sent – and aid is always sent.**

And that is my experience, too. Aid is always sent. Not without effort on my part. I have to be willing to want it, and that's a tough decision sometimes. "Even for good and normal people, forgiveness injures narcissism – it hurts" (Vitz & Mango, 1997).

- 6. Have patience. Forgiveness induces healing which follows its own order and timing. Whether you think you have accomplished anything thus far is less important than the fact that you have attempted a radical act calling forth change beyond your imagining. Go about your daily business, but stay alert to unexpected shifts in your thinking, feelings, and relationships.**

The religious would call this, "have faith." For the less than noble, of which I'm one, this requires loving support.

- 7. Repeat steps 1 through 6 as often as necessary, for life.**

Like the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, this meditation program is suggesting forgiveness as a principle for living.

There are no guarantees. From the viewpoint of fear none are strong enough. From the viewpoint of love none are necessary.

Emmanuel

Harada's Breathing Meditation

This next was something I happened upon by accident and later found described in a wonderful book by Pema Chödrön called *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times*.

To my delight, in reading her book, I learned this technique is a form of *Tonglen*, an ancient Buddhist discipline.

I suggest this as an aid in addition to one of the first two methods (AA's or Gassin & Enright's) It is especially helpful in helping with Gassin & Enright's 16th step, accepting and absorbing the pain of your injury.

There are four stages:

Stage 1: Just for you.

- 1. Close your eyes and rest comfortably, either sitting or lying down.**
- 2. Bring to mind and body the injury done to you.**

A little homework before you start this is obviously beneficial because the clearer you are about how you *feel* about this, the more effective the next steps will be.

- 3. On your next breath in, breathe in fully the pain of what was done to you.**

One thing that is critical to the success of this process is breathing in concert with the specified awarenesses. The deep breath in makes it almost impossible to contemplate the injury without feeling the pain of it. It's not unusual to cry in this process, especially if it is the first time you've allowed yourself to breathe while thinking about what has happened to you.

4. On your next breath out, breathe out relief and compassion for yourself.

This exhale is very important because it is instructional. It helps your body begin to understand letting go. The more you can let go of the tension in your body as you exhale, the more effect you will get from this exercise, because it uses not just your cognition and your feelings, but your physiology to help you rehearse the process of letting go.

Stage 2: For you and those like you

- 1. Again, close your eyes and rest comfortably, either sitting or lying down.**
- 2. Bring to mind and body the injury done to you, *and* recognize the existence of others in the world, with whom you may or may not be acquainted, who have had the exact same kind of thing done to them, who have had your kind of pain. Think of yourself in unity with them.**

Notice again the inclusion of mind *and* body. Bring this to your feeling self, not just your cognitive processes. But this time, you are uniting

consciously, cognitively, spiritually – and who knows, maybe even physically on an energy level – with others who have hurt like you have. This helps bring us out of isolation. It helps bring us into a way of seeing the world that, though it doesn't minimize our hurts, helps us recognize them as a part of the cycle of life.

3. On your next breath in, breathe in the pain of your injury and their injuries.

This can be a little scary upon first glance. Breathe in *their* pain along with mine? Somehow it is not. I don't know why. Maybe it is because we really are incapable of bringing to consciousness more pain than we can bear, or more pain than is ours. But maybe it is because when we recognize ourselves as part of a whole, we bear our pain diversely as well.

The point here is not to martyr ourselves. It is to make ourselves aware of what is, and what has been and how our lives and our beings are affected by our interaction with the other.

4. On your next breath out, breathe out love and relief and compassion for you and for the whole world that has hurt the way you hurt.

This is where the biggest payoff is in this stage. Most of us love others more freely and more compassionately than we do ourselves. Somehow, though it is changing with time, someone else's love for me has always mattered more than my own love for me.

So, here is where you get to hitch a ride on your love for others. They hitch a ride on the breath in, and you hitch a ride on the breath out. You get to include yourself in your care and compassion and affection for them. And it sticks!

Stage 3: For you and the injurer

- 1. Again, close your eyes and rest comfortably, either sitting or lying down.**
- 2. Bring to mind and body the injury done to you, and try to remember any instance in your life where you have acted like that or in the spirit of that toward another.**

If the crime done to you was violent or deeply, deeply hurtful in any way, the best you are going to be able to come up with is any instance where you ever felt completely rageful and wanted to hurt someone else. In fact, if the crime done to you was violent in anyway, you are probably completely capable of coming up with an equal amount of violent feeling. No, you didn't kill anybody, or molest anybody or whatever violent action you are trying to forgive. But in spirit, you know what it is like to want to.

The trick here is to hold yourself in that balance of feeling everything that goes with that hideous state of being. It's usually a pretty disgusting feeling.

I have struggled for years and years with one guy who consistently brow beats me with his opinions. Unfortunately, I've resolved it for much of that time by condoning, excusing, pardoning and pretending it wasn't happening.

This part of the meditation was *so* instructive for me, because as I internalized the attitudes and feelings of the brow beater, I was left dumb struck by how miserable that person is, and I *truly* felt compassion for him.

As Gassin & Enright suggest in their 12th unit, I instantly reframed him emotionally. This, more than anything else I had ever done, helped me toward developing a forgiving heart toward him, *and* toward taking different actions when his behavior began anew.

3. On your next breath in, breathe in the recollection of your experience and your awareness of the how that behavior came to be.

It may seem that I've thrown in something that I didn't discuss, by suggesting that you will also breathe in your awareness of how that behavior came to be.

But the experience of others is the same as mine. Perhaps this glimpse of understanding comes with the willingness to take the other into consideration. Perhaps it comes from simply opening our hearts to the life of another. But it seems to come. I don't find this pleasant. I do find it healing.

- 4. On your next breath out, breathe out love and relief and compassion for yourself.**

Here, you are exercising self-forgiveness. This is an important part of building acceptance of another, because rarely do we forgive in another what we do not at least conceptually forgive in ourselves. So, this act helps us build acceptance for ourselves, for others and for the condition of the world.

Stage 4: For you and the injurer

- 1. As before, close your eyes and rest comfortably, either sitting or lying down.**
- 2. Bring to mind and body the injury done to you, and bring again to memory any instance you can recall in your life where you have acted like that or in the spirit of that toward another.**
- 3. On your next breath in, breathe in the recollection of your experience and your awareness of the how that behavior came to be *and* your awareness of your injurer and all the others in the world who have acted in kind.**

This is very tricky. Like the stunt masters say, "Don't try this at home!" I will say, if you have been severely violated, get company for this one. It could be very hurtful for a person with poor boundaries to accidentally misidentify herself with her injurer.

Ultimately, the spiritual message of all self examination is to allow us to identify with each other. But there are times when that identification can become extreme.

A prime example is the identification with one's captor that takes place in a hostage situation, or worse, the identification that takes place in children with perpetrators of violence and sexual abuse. That's not the kind of identification we are looking for.

We want to achieve an identification in the spirit of our humanity, of the recognition of similarities in our motivations and basic characters.

The goal here is to be well grounded in the spirit of forgiving, and in the spirit of forward movement, because this step brings about deep feelings of remorse.

True remorse is critical to change. And it is a topic deserving of many chapters of its own. Remorse is best understood within an ontological (for this purpose hear metaphysical or existential) context. It is through this context that we are able to see its most *depthful* purpose.

Remorse is the experience through which guilt and regret enlighten us about the nature of ourselves and informs us with meaning about our future actions.

Remorse is a necessary and valuable psychological experience. It helps us take the events of the past to heart and permits us to be affected by them.

Thomas Moore (1988) says that “the word, ‘remorse,’ meaning, ‘to bite back’ has echoes of the medieval phrase, ‘agenbite of inwit,’ suggesting that remorse is an attack of conscience, “an inner voice that returns to be heard and attended. He goes on to advise us:

Remorse is an important function of the soul. Among other things, it is a way of digesting past events and turning them into meaningful experience. Remorse is a working on life, an alchemy that transforms raw facts of biography into the stuff of the soul. Remorse gives outer behavior interiority.

. . . the soul grows wise through initiation. Initiation is far deeper and more challenging than learning. In learning one doesn’t have to be so deeply affected as in initiation. It is the difference between reading about sperm and eggs, and having one’s first sexual encounter. In initiation, the soul is put to a test. It is affected, moved, stunned perhaps into a new dimension of being.

Initiation hurts.

Moore, 1988

Jean Houston (1987) in *Search for the Beloved* speaks of “transformation through sacred wounding,” Maybe all we’re saying through all of these processes is that is that whatever it is that you do, at the point at which you create “sacred wounding” you have an important spiritual,

physical, cognitive, and emotional change. Maybe the issue is in making sure that whatever route you choose, you create that! Houston says:

Disconnected from the myth, from the Larger Story, and from the sacred, we seek to “understand” our pain, or find relief from it as quickly and comfortably as possible. Or we resort to blame and seek to avenge the wrongs done to us. Thus we turn our backs on the knocking at the door of our souls.

Houston, 1987

Sacred psychology, she tells us, offers an alternative; not always a comfortable one, or even always a “safe” one, but a very powerful one.

Sacred psychology invites you to allow your wounds to stay open; to take off the Band-Aids and cover-ups; to allow the engagement of the Great Story; to link the local self to universal patterns; and to sacrifice the old story to which you were bonded so that the new story may become manifest through you.

Houston, 1987

So, to conclude what has been elaborated on in Chapter 9 on the value and implications of remorse, I'll just quote Stern (1988) who pointed out that remorse draws our guilt and regret into a sense of purpose. At the very peak of that sense of purpose is the ability to take the enlightenment from the experience and use it to gain a deeper understanding of life and a corresponding deeper equanimity with what is, as it is.

- 4. On your next breath out, breathe out love and relief and compassion for yourself, for your injurer and for the entire world that suffers from fearful behaviors.**

One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.

Joseph Campbell

Harada's Energy Meditation

I tried something quite by accident – because I'm always experimenting on myself – and had a great success. I don't entirely understand it, but am benefitting tremendously from the experience of it. Again, it is an aid to a larger process, and not intended to be a process in and of itself.

I was having a heck of a time forgiving my mother. I'd been writing, and sharing and praying and meditating and doing everything I could think of, and it wasn't coming. I had shared my experiences and gotten very beneficial spontaneous responses. I wasn't getting much relief.

One day, I'd been thinking a lot about survival of consciousness. And I was wondering if my mother was "out there." And if she was "out there" was she . . . I don't know . . . close by.

And I wondered, if she was close by, did she magically heal all her misunderstandings in death, or did she carry them with her beyond this life.

And then I wondered, even if she did carry her misunderstandings with her beyond this life, and if her energy were still “out there,” could I pull her energy into me?

So, I tried. I closed my eyes and imagined myself drawing my mother’s energy into my body. And I want to tell you, I felt the most hideous combination of ugly, resentful feelings I can ever remember feeling.

I was *so* miserable, I could barely make myself do it, but I breathed it in as deeply as I could. And I breathed out love and compassion for her, and it didn’t change a thing! It was *awful!*

And so, caught up in what I half believe is just my weirdness, I decided to forgive *for* her. And that’s when the relief came. That is when I finally felt forgiveness for my mother. It was when I felt forgiveness *for her, on her behalf.*

Why? How could that be? I don’t really know. Maybe by my mental machinations I managed to surface the aspects of my mother that I had internalized as an infant and as a very young child.

Maybe by bringing those to the surface and then forgiving through them, I was able to gain the relief that had prior to that been out of my grasp.

Maybe, on the other hand, consciousness survives in the state it was in when it leaves our bodies, and maybe (this *is* a lot of maybes) her energy was available to me for that purpose. Maybe that's what praying for the departed souls was about when I used to go to church. I always kept myself very separate from those souls when they talked about them in church. I kept my heart and my mind and my spirit completely sequestered.

But not on this occasion. On this occasion, I allowed myself to believe I was healing my mother's resentment, and so I did. And when I did, I was gifted with the forgiving heart that I've wanted for so long.

Who knows why or how or by what mechanism? I don't even care! Because the beautiful feeling of relief, of tenderness and compassion I'm able to feel for her now is one of the finest, most exquisite spiritual experiences of my life.

