

HOW TO DO FORGIVENESS MEDITATION

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, staying as still as possible. Take two or three deep breaths, and then just breathe naturally. Bring into awareness the particular person toward whom you feel resentment. Feel for a moment what arises with even the thought of forgiveness. How much longer do you wish to keep your heart closed to this person, and consequently *to life as a whole*? If you had just a few days to live, would you want to continue feeling resentful and bitter? Now remember the situation that sparked your resentment. Feel whatever arises. Don't try to do anything - just experience the feeling in your body. Experience how much you don't want to forgive this person. Experience the degree of unwillingness to even bring this person into your meditation. Bring a non-judgemental awareness to the sensations of resistance. How does it feel, in your body, to push this person away? Allowing the resistance to just be, let the container of awareness widen around it. Now bring to awareness sensory phenomena from outside the body: hear the sounds, feel the air temperature. Feel how the texture of the resistance changes as a sense of spaciousness surrounds it. Begin breathing into the heart area. Feel the texture of the heart. Now try to bring awareness of this person closer to you being. Breathing into the heart-space, bring their presence, via the in-breath, into the heart. On the out-breath, just breathe out - not trying to do anything special. Without self-judgment, experience all of the arising emotions. Is there anger, resentment, bitterness? Is there fear or grief? Asking: "what *is* this?" Notice whatever arises, and then experience it in the body. When you get lost in thoughts, memories or justifications, come back via the breath into the heart-space, to the sensations in your body. How does it actually feel? Asking: "What *is* this?" - feel it. Stay with the awareness of your bodily emotional reactions. Stay with them as long as it takes to be able to reside in them, painful as they may be, without having to push them away. Stay here. Breathe. Hear the sounds outside. Hear the sounds in the room. Feel the air around you. Breathe. Reside here. Return to your visualisation of the person you wish to forgive. Draw their presence, via the in-breath, even deeper into the heart-space. As you feel the in-breath, say their name. Then say these words:

I forgive you. I forgive you for whatever you may have done, whether intentional or unintentional, from which I experienced pain. I forgive you, because I know that what you did came from your own pain.

(Adapted from a piece by Ezra Beyda in a collection called "The Best Buddhist Writing 2004")

FORGIVENESS THROUGH MEDITATION

In this particular practice of forgiveness we shall work to *see through* our own emotional reactions. We practice noticing what stands in the way of our forgiveness. One way to be forgiving entails experiencing our own pain and then making a solid attempt to experience the pain of the person to be forgiven.

This method of forgiveness has three parts. The first stage is simply acknowledging how unwilling we are to forgive the other. We let ourselves experience the degree to which *we prefer to hold onto our resentment and bitterness, even when we see how it closes us to living a genuinely happy life.* By bringing non-judgemental “fact-finding” awareness to how we resist forgiveness, we can see clearly – not in order to feel guilty, which would result if we were living from the premise that we **shouldn't** be resentful – but *to enable us to experience resistance for what it is.* We can experience in our body how our unwillingness to forgive *feels.* We can see our self-centred judgements as *thoughts and beliefs* rather than objective truths. According to this method of forgiveness, it's hard to move to the second stage of forgiveness until we've entered into and experienced – in both our bodies and our minds – the depth of our unwillingness to forgive.

The second stage is bringing awareness to the emotional reactivity toward the person we resent. As we visualise this person we notice what emotional reactions arise. We ask ourselves: “What *is* this?” Is it anger, bitterness, fear, jealousy, grief, hurt, etc? Whatever arises we just experience it within our body. We stay with the awareness of our physical/emotional reactions as long as it takes to reside in them. This means *relaxing* into them, as painful as they are. At some point we no longer need to push them away.

The third stage of this forgiveness practice is to say words of forgiveness. It's important to realise that we are separating the act from the actor, and that saying these words has nothing to do with condoning the actions of another. It's about forgiving the person, not what they did. It means seeing that the action came from the other person's own pain, their early (usually mistaken) decisions and choices. Only after we've experienced how our own emotional reactivity stands in the way of real forgiveness can we truly understand that the other was just mechanically acting out of beliefs and conditioning. We can then say the words:

I forgive you. I forgive you for whatever you may have done from which I experienced pain. I forgive you because I know that what you did came from your own pain.