

SPEAKER: This is a forgiveness meditation. We're practicing with mindfulness and kindness. And we're working with the process of forgiveness by bringing mindfulness and kindness to the blockages in our heart. To just where we're closed down, just where we're burdened.

Forgiveness can be so very hard to do, letting go of the pain caused by harmful actions committed by others, and by harmful actions that we ourselves have committed, or by things that we haven't done, but should have. How can we have the courage to forgive? First, we recognize that we don't want to go to our death carrying these burdens. When our time comes, we want to die with an open heart and mind filled with kindness, not with anger.

Forgiveness is a process. It can take years. It doesn't happen all at once, but we can take one step at a time. Each time we formally practice forgiveness, we take one such step.

Let's begin now sitting in a relaxed, but alert position on a chair, on a cushion, whatever works for you-- make sure it's comfortable-- a position you'll want to be able to hold for 10 or 15 minutes. Now, bringing your attention into your body, going into your body, noticing the sensations that are present there right now, noticing how your aliveness shows up at this moment.

This is not about the thoughts running in your mind, not about the commentary, but the sensations in your body. What sensations are present? Where are they located? Can you notice?

Maybe constriction in the belly or chest, maybe tightness in the jaws or shoulders, or pulsing, throbbing, or maybe relaxed, openness in the heart, whatever, please notice what's true for you right now? What is your truth? Not judging it, or trying to get rid of it, or change it, just noticing, getting in touch.

Now, allowing your attention to move into your heart, and imagine you are breathing through your heart naturally, gently, your own natural breath, envisioning it is moving in and out through your heart area.

Continuing to look into your heart, call to mind one person, someone who, at some point in your life, treated you unfairly, maybe recently. Maybe it was years ago.

It's a good idea to start small here. Don't start with the person who has caused you the most pain. Whomever you choose, hold the image of that person in your heart and mind, recalling and envisioning what they look like, the setting that you're envisioning them in, what they're wearing. Fill in with as many details as you can.

Now look into that person's eyes. Just look.

Going deep inside, recognize that that person acted the way they did because of the circumstances of their life, because the way their life shaped them. And out of that conditioning, they reacted in, perhaps, very confused ways, ways that caused you pain.

And knowing for sure that as you look, whatever they did, it was because they wanted, in their own way, to be happy. And their way may have been very confused. But their wish for happiness, that's for sure.

That's everybody's wish. We all want to be happy, and we have very different ways of understanding how to achieve it. Some of us have greater, and others of us have lesser clarity and wisdom.

And remember, please, forgiveness means bringing compassion, bringing a compassionate understanding to that person, the one who was confused. Forgiveness does not mean forgiving the hurtful actions. It does not mean hurtful actions were OK.

Now, looking into the person's eyes and opening your heart in compassion, say, I forgive you. And you might want to say their name. I forgive you.

Let those words resonate within or any other words of forgiveness that come naturally to you. And if, in fact, you find you just can't bring yourself to say, I forgive you, then maybe you can say, I understand something about the circumstances of your life, and I truly see your own pain and suffering, again, remembering this is not about forgiving or forgetting the actions that were so hurtful to you. It's about viewing this being with compassion.

As you speak forgiveness, if you feel emotion arising, just let it. Don't try to stop it. And if there are tears, then let tears flow. They're cleansing tears. Or if it's tightness, and anger, and resentment that arise, just notice that, and continue on with the forgiveness practice.

Or if there's no emotion at all, that's OK too. Just continuing-- just continuing the forgiveness practice, knowing that you're taking a step toward releasing the burdens in your heart.

Often, the place where our heart is most blocked is toward ourself when we can't forgive ourselves for the harmful things that we've done to others, over the harm caused by things we should have done but didn't. Or against all reason, we hold for unforgiveness toward ourself for things others have done to us, feeling that we're to blame, that we deserved it.

So now let us practice forgiveness toward ourselves, forgiveness toward this vulnerable being, you, this vulnerable being who's not perfect, like every other being on this planet, whether human or not human. You're not perfect. You never have been and never will be, and neither is anybody else.

Perfection just isn't in the cards for living beings. We all make mistakes out of confusion, ignorance, ill will, all kinds of reasons. You need to be able to forgive yourself, your mistakes. That doesn't mean to forget them are not to learn from your harmful actions. But it does mean bringing clear-sighted mindfulness, and kindness, and compassion to yourself as a being who wants to be happy, but has sometimes been confused.

So now identifying an area, just one, where you've treated someone else unfairly, perhaps with anger, abuse, envy, violence. Don't choose the biggest, most serious hurt you've ever done to another. Again, start small.

Recognizing the corrosive effect of your actions in your own heart, recognizing you were acting from your conditioning and from the situation you were in. And really truly and ultimately, you wanted to be happy, even then, and that you still want to be happy.

So in kindness, kindness to yourself, say words of forgiveness to yourself. I forgive you. Or maybe you want to say, I forgive me. Say your name, and repeat it. I forgive you.

Repeating the words, let them resonate in your heart, not just words, but really let them come from the inside, using seen any words that come naturally to you. And you may want to use an endearment as well, not only calling yourself by your own name, but an endearment. I forgive you, honey, or darling, or friend, our buddy, an endearment that feels fairly natural to you.

Now, continuing with our forgiveness meditation, continuing looking within, finding an area where you have treated yourself unfairly, where you've been harsh, unloving, judgmental. Maybe you've believed other people's criticism of you and have internalized that. Maybe you're using harsh language to yourself. Sometimes we can become our own biggest abuser.

So now turning your attention and your compassion to yourself for your own attitudes and actions towards yourself that were unforgiving, say words of forgiveness. I forgive you, or I forgive me, and using your name, using, too, an endearment, again, whatever endearment is fairly natural to you, even if you haven't done it before.

Perhaps, you'll want to call yourself dear heart, or friend, or buddy. I forgive you, darling or buddy. And call yourself by your name. And use, again, whatever words of forgiveness now. Come naturally.

If a motion arises during this offering, that's fine. Let it be what it is. And if you feel no emotion, that's fine too.

Forgiveness is a long-term process, sometimes a life long process. But each offering of forgiveness is a small step, a small chip in the hard armor around your heart. As you practice letting go of unforgiveness, you might want to consider what action or actions would be appropriate to make in order to make amends to the person you hurt, and that includes yourself.

There's no one best way to make amends. It's something you need to look into and decide for yourself what's the right thing to do, what's the best thing to do. No one can tell you, only your own honest heart.

Let's practice of forgiveness. This finally and first a way of blessing yourself. It is a self-blessing, a benediction, because you're taking a step, one after another, towards transforming yourself, towards bringing true joy into your life. So let us bless ourselves and in that way become a light of kindness, mindfulness, and forgiveness to others.