



Why is it so difficult to forgive ourselves and others?

Answered by Ven. Rita Riniker

I think that like everything in samsara, there are various reasons for this. First of all, we have high expectations

that everything should go well in our lives, and when it does not, our views as to why are wrong. Generally, if we do have a right view, it is just an intellectual understanding and is not applied properly. Everything is projected outside: There is a one hundred percent enemy there and it is all his fault. With this view, we become the innocent victim. Of course, it is difficult to live with that happily. The right view of the law of cause and effect takes care of that immediately.

Somehow, we have this arrogant idea that we should be able to protect ourselves from all harm from others as if we are superheroes and perfect. If we get hurt, our ego is not happy and we start to hate ourselves for not being perfect. That in turn makes us feel very important. Although it is not a happy feeling, we prefer to be an unhappy, important somebody than a relaxed, happy nobody. Feeling hurt is perfect food for the ego. It makes it really big, but also very vulnerable and weak. In that way, the target to be hurt again becomes even bigger. If we see the nature of samsara as *dukkha* and see ourselves as having no control unless we eliminate its causes, then it is easier to accept difficult situations. Instead of them being a problem, they become an opportunity to learn.

We also confuse forgiving and forgetting. We do not want to forgive. However, we would like to forget – as if the situation had never occurred – so that we can go back to normal. But how can you forget having been harmed? What we have to understand is that we do not need to forget in order to forgive. And that which has been forgiven is, in general, well remembered. Very often we do not want to forgive because we have never tasted the bliss of forgiveness. If we have learned how to forgive properly, then we can never be harmed again because our mind will remain peaceful in any situation. Many things are not excusable, but everything is forgivable.

If we look at what is preventing us to forgive, we could also find that there is some fear that one is condoning the action.

This, of course, is not the case. You can see an action as negative without continuing to hate the person.

First of all, we have to check if there is a willingness to forgive. That comes from understanding in a direct way that by not forgiving we just keep open a wound that could heal. Our mind constantly goes to the past and refuses to see that our future will be very troubled and bleak if we do not forgive. By forgiving, we cannot change the past, but, it definitely makes the future brighter.

Another reason why it is so difficult to forgive is that we think that keeping a grudge is giving us some kind of power over the aggressor. In a mistaken way, we feel more protected keeping that grudge. But not forgiving always brings out the worst in us, while, by forgiving, our positive sides will start to operate, bringing well-being now and in the future.

We think that in order to be able to forgive, the other has to clearly acknowledge that he has hurt us. We feel that he owes us something; we would like him to be unhappy about it as if that would help us to heal our own pain. Now, how can we really be happy when we see that somebody else is suffering? That is a very perverted kind of happiness.

To make forgiving easier, we can do a simple meditation. By remembering a situation where we have hurt somebody else, we feel in ourselves the deep wish to be forgiven. We feel the pain of being stuck with the memory of this negative act. It seems possible for the other to forgive us, and it does not even appear to be so difficult.

Then we turn the whole thing around and we look at somebody that has hurt us. We feel that it is justified not to forgive *that* person. We do not feel the other person's pain of not being forgiven. We do not see the wish and need for the other person to be forgiven. Forgiving seems very difficult and even impossible

So, the situation is the same, but with completely different views. By meditating like this again and again, we start to understand that forgiving is difficult, but never impossible. ☸

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