

mind ~ HEALING

Set yourself free

FORGIVING YOURSELF IS THE BEST THING THAT YOU
CAN DO FOR YOUR PEACE OF MIND

by **Monica Fernandes**



Photo : Mary :
Model: Jayna Tida

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was YOU.”

– ANONYMOUS

It has been said that while God forgives us and we forgive others, we find it nigh impossible to forgive ourselves. We carry a heavy burden of self-condemnation like a millstone around our necks.

Arun’s parents were keen that he did an MBA degree after graduation. Arun foolishly listened to a friend who said, “What’s the use of studying more, year? You’ll only become a nerd and the butt of jokes. Take up a job at a call centre and earn some hard cash instead of being on a dole from your parents.” Arun found to his dismay that he was getting stuck in a rut. Instead of exploring the possibilities of doing a part-time MBA, he started chastising himself. He was problem-focused – not solution-focused.

Again, we go on a guilt trip when our actions affect the lives of our near and dear ones. I once read about a doctor who was proceeding to his clinic in his car when he saw a crowd milling around an accident. Instead of investigating and trying to help the victim, he just drove on. He found out too late that the victim was his son whose life he could have saved had he stopped to help. The doctor’s apathy had proven frightfully expensive indeed.

What happens when we go into self-condemnation mode? Our inability to forgive ourselves firmly shuts out self-confidence. We find ourselves sinking in a quagmire of regrets. We are our own worst enemies. We blame extraneous circumstances and others but the truth lies within us.

We indulge in self-flagellation which causes various psychosomatic illnesses.

Then, again, we magnify our misdeeds till they assume mammoth proportions. Putting ourselves down in our own mind and when we talk to others becomes habit forming.

Poor Jaya agonises even over a minor goof up. We sometimes tend to be overdressed for a function because we have insufficient inputs about whether the function is formal or informal. A positive person thinks, “Yes, so I am sticking out like a sore thumb because I have worn a formal saree when everyone is in jeans. So what? Big deal. I’ll just forget about it and enjoy myself instead.” But not our friend Jaya. She thinks, “Everyone is looking at me and thinking what a joker I am.” This is not so because the others are busy enjoying themselves.

Another drawback with self-condemnation is that it hampers our relationship with others. Since we live in a society, we need to interact with others for our very survival. We cannot give or receive love. This is a vicious circle that leads to feelings of being inferior. We need to pray for grace to get out of this debilitating thought process.

What are the root causes of the guilt complex and how can we surmount this obstacle?

Change our subconscious thoughts: We all have a hidden remote control inside us – our subconscious. It accepts whatever happens to us – the way we are treated, spoken to, and positive and negative incidents in our lives – without reasoning. But the good thing is that we can change our subconscious thoughts if we have the will to do so.

We need to introspect. “How was I treated when I was young? What negative feedback did I get from the significant other people in my life, whether intentional or unintentional, in the past and at present?” The significant others in our lives would include parents, siblings, near relatives, teachers, peer group, spouses, in-laws and bosses.

Sneha’s parents unwittingly compared her negatively with her sibling Rohan, who was praised as being brilliant. As a result, Sneha felt she was letting down her parents because she could not match up with this Einstein,

despite her best efforts. A close friend pointed out this to her and helped her to replace her guilt with repeated positive affirmations. Rome was not built in a day and nor can our negative, guilt ridden feelings be erased from our subconscious in a jiffy. What we need is dogged persistence.

Sometimes actions by others in their recent past could also affect people adversely. This is so in the case of emotionally and physically battered women.

Israel Zangwill puts it very succinctly when he says, “The Past: Our cradle, not our prison; there is danger as well as appeal in its glamour. The past is for inspiration, not imitation, for continuation, not repetition.”

Conversely, if we set our minds on mental self-flagellation, we cannot move an inch forward, no matter how much others may try to change our thinking.

Snehal was duped by a confidence trickster into parting with Rs. 17 lakhs. This money was left to her by her parents. She refused to let go of the guilt because, as she put it, “It was their hard-earned money.”

Remember, no one on this earth is perfect. There is too much emphasis on perfection in society today. But the fact is that society is made up of people, each of whom is less than perfect. Just imagine. Billions of people on earth, past and present, and no Perfect 10 with the exception of God.

Are we not being unreasonable in expecting perfection from ourselves? Sometimes people deliberately try to bring us down. Perhaps they are jealous and have their own insecurities.

Psychologists say that the correct approach is to learn from our mistakes so that they do not recur. Mistakes are stepping stones to self-development, not heavy stones to weigh us down.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

Making amends: In his touching

book, *The Kite Runner*, Dr Khaled Hosseini narrates how Amir betrays his childhood friend Hassan but he finds a way to make amends.

It is pertinent to mention that self-forgiveness is easier when we are forgiven by the person we have wronged. Julia was having an affair with her boss. Whenever her husband Jerry phoned, she would tell the telephone operator, “Tell the old fool I’m busy.” To cut a long story short, the boss soon tired of Julia. Her husband came to know of her affair but “the old fool” accepted her with open arms and got the children to forgive her too. They are now a happy, united family.

Watch out for signs of self-critical thinking habits and replace them with positive realistic non-critical thinking habits.

My constant fear is that I will not be able to cope with the work. I build up these thoughts, “There is this to do, and that to do. How will I ever manage?” I have to constantly tell myself that there is a difference between must-do and not so important jobs. Besides, I could delegate some of the jobs.

Some try to hide their lack of confidence with a veneer of boastfulness. They project themselves as having achieved more than they have actually done. For instance, there is this elderly lady who did not have the good fortune of being educated beyond the fifth standard due to monetary reasons. She would boast that she was a graduate. She had achieved a lot during her lifetime through sheer hard work but all this was eclipsed in her own mind by her inferiority complex.

I conclude in the words of Alden Nowlan, “The day the child realises that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.” ☺

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