

This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

65 – Forgiveness as an essential practice

Fearlessness – laying our ghosts to rest

“There are those who do not realise that one day we all must die. But those who do realise this settle their quarrels.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha)

“How do we love our enemies? First, we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

The rock of fearlessness

In this Training stage of our journey, we have learned to build and steady our raft through the three great trainings of Gotama’s Middle Way Programme. Ethics forms the sound timber of the vessel: the planks, bindings, and careful craftsmanship that keep it from leaking or breaking apart (Chapters 59–61). Collectedness steadies the raft on the water: the balanced deck, the trimmed sail, and the quiet hand on the oar that help it move without being thrown about by every wave (Chapters 62–64). Wisdom is the compass and clear seeing that shows us how to read the currents, avoid hidden rocks, and keep the far shore in view (Chapters 57–58).

With these three in place, our raft begins to run true. And yet, even a well-built raft can struggle to cross the ocean if its cargo hold is filled with the heavy ballast of the past. This burden appears as resentment, guilt, and the haunting memory of old wounds. To travel onward, we must learn what to carry, what to repair, and what to release into the sea.

Our wisdom, mental stability, and ethical outlook reveal what remains. When the mind is no longer scattered, we can feel what we have been carrying. To lighten the vessel for the final crossing, we engage the practice of Forgiveness. In the context of the RAFT to Freedom Programme, forgiveness is not a separate, gritty duty. It is the natural outcome of cultivating the four Heart Practices (Appropriate Responses) that hold our raft together.

If we truly cultivate friendliness (Chapter 06), we cannot continue to cling to hatred. If we truly cultivate compassion (Chapter 26), we begin to understand the suffering of those who hurt us. If we truly cultivate appreciative joy (Chapter 35), envy and bitterness loosen their grip. If we truly cultivate equanimity (Chapter 52), we learn to meet what cannot now be altered without adding further struggle.

When these qualities are steady within us, forgiveness is not something we force ourselves to perform. It becomes a natural expression of maturity. It is the wisdom of non-ill-will – the refusal to keep feeding hostility in the heart. It is the lightening of the cargo so the crossing can continue.

Self reflections

1. If I was reaching the end of my life, which resentment or regret would weigh most heavily on my heart, and what would it take to begin laying it down now?
2. Where might my difficulty in forgiving reveal a blockage in my friendliness or compassion, and what does that tell me about the state of my heart?
3. Can I trace a clear line between a specific childhood wound and my present patterns of craving, avoidance, or reactivity, and what changes when I see that connection?
4. When I reflect on my past, do I feel the crushing identity of ‘I am a failure,’ or the clarifying energy of ‘I did harm and want to do better,’ and how does each perspective shape my next step?
5. Can I distinguish clearly between releasing ill-will toward someone and re-inviting them into my life, and what does that distinction protect?
6. What boundary would reduce the risk of further harm while remaining rooted in steadiness rather than anger?
7. When I look at the younger version of myself who acted from confusion or pain, can I recognise the conditions they were under and offer forgiveness

for not yet understanding?

Journaling prompts

1. The unsent letter: If it feels manageable, begin with a smaller hurt, disappointment, or unresolved tension rather than the experience that feels most overwhelming. Write a private unsent letter that names what happened and how it affected you. You might include what you wish had been understood, acknowledged, or done differently.
 2. The 'That was then, this is now' list: If it feels manageable, choose a past action, choice, or moment that you still judge yourself for. Write down a few words about it. Underneath, write: *'That was then. This is now. It is part of my story, but it is not who I am today, or who I will be tomorrow.'* You might then add: What have I learned, changed, or begun to understand since then?
 3. Navigation note: Write a brief note on the next wise step regarding a difficult relationship. Is it a boundary? A repair? A pause? Write one step only.
 4. The 'As best I am able' log: Identify a person you are *not* ready to forgive. Write: *'I am not ready to forgive [Name] yet, and I can still practise self-care and boundaries today.'* How does that feel?
 5. Arriving more lightly: Imagine reaching the Safe Shore no longer weighed down by resentment or ill will. What might it feel like in your body, heart, and mind to have more space, ease, and freedom?
 6. A sentence of release: If it feels right, write the phrases: *'I forgive myself for the mistakes of the past – I forgive myself for not understanding'*. Pause after writing it once or twice. Notice gently what, if anything, arises in your body, heart, or mind. There is no need to make yourself feel forgiveness; simply allow the words to be there.
 7. Guilt transformation: List three things you feel guilty about. Rewrite them as 'Remorse Statements' – focusing on the action and the repair, rather than your worth as a person.
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Remember to remember

Forgiveness is the act of laying our ghosts to rest. Resilient Equanimity (Chapter 52) reminds us that we cannot rewrite the past, but we can change our relationship to it. The nervous system may still echo with old memories, but we are not required to keep reliving them. We can meet what happened with steadiness rather than reactivity. We can allow the story to soften without denying its reality. Forgiveness is not erasing history; it is loosening the grip of yesterday on today. It is how the heart aligns with Skilful Perspective – recognising impermanence, causation, and the possibility of change.

Forgiveness is often gradual and partial – another crossing made in stages. It may begin with a modest truth: ‘Not today. I am not ready.’ That honesty is not failure; it is wisdom. We practise first with the smaller hurts, allowing the capacity to grow safely over time. As Friendliness, Compassion, and Appreciative Joy are cultivated, resentment loses its fuel. The heart becomes less organised around injury and more organised around care. This is how we travel lightly. And most importantly, remember this: much of what shaped us was not our fault. We are responsible for what we choose now – but we are not to blame for the conditions we were given.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.” ~ Mark Twain

“Without forgiveness, the grudge you’re holding is actually holding you.” ~ Oprah Winfrey

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