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FORGIVENESS (OF OTHERS)





STEP 1

FORGIVENESS

It's time to embark on the first step.

I want to congratulate you on beginning this journey of self-discovery to achieving whatever it is that you really want from your life. You may not yet know clearly what it is that you really do want. If not, it will become clear as your journey proceeds.

The desire to change, grow and develop is the natural condition of all human beings. When you are free of worry and anxiety, you will naturally move towards things, people and events that will support your development. It is only when your experience is negative that you stop growing and gravitate to people and events that do not serve you well.

You may stop on your life path because of your fear, anxiety, loss of confidence or inner belief in your self. You may have developed the negative belief that you do not deserve to be successful and happy. Rest assured that you do deserve all the best life can offer you.

Society, culture and education have a powerful tendency to smother your natural creativity and to stop you from doing what you need to fulfil yourself, in favour of complying with whatever is seen as the norms of 'us' and 'ours' in your family, group, society, or culture.

"You can spend your whole life trying to be what you think is expected of you, but you'll never be free."

Chris Rea

The decision to grow and develop is rarely taken lightly. The route that your life has taken to bring you to this point where change has become a possibility may not have been comfortable. In general, there are two main routes that bring people to the point where you are right now; these are either pain or awareness. The drive to grow and change comes from within and is emotional ('e'- motion). Emotion is the energy, or motion, that comes from within, as in 'e'- xit or 'e'- merge.

The route of pain is normally taken by those who have run out of choices; the pain, be it physical, emotional or mental, has become so great that the only choice left is to change and make life different. If the emotional energy that has brought you to this point is pain, then you will know that your life and perhaps your relationships have not served you well and that you have not managed to achieve what it is that you want in life.

It may be your experience that life, circumstances, fate or other people have been unfair or unkind to you. You may be holding hatred, anger or frustration about events with people that have happened in the distant past, yet they are still affecting you in the present.

If your route is one of awareness, this is often taken by those of you who have been actively seeking change and development. You will have an understanding that you do deserve fulfilment but perhaps do not yet understand how to obtain it. Maybe you are just starting

out on your own path after a life of serving others. Perhaps you have experienced things that have caused you to wake up to your situation and realise that change is the natural course of action for you.

Often a mother, when the last child leaves home or goes to school, will feel that it is now her time in life, her turn to grow and develop and fulfil her own needs. Perhaps for the first time in her life, she finds that no-one wants anything and no-one needs anything. While for some, this situation may be scary and anxiety-provoking, for others, it is the time to get on and enjoy life.

Whatever the route you took that got you to this point, it is good you are here. Get all that you can from this book and use the things that you learn to enjoy your life to the full and to be happy.

FOCUS MEDITATION

A focused mind is a powerful tool in helping you to achieve your goal and will help you develop mindfulness in your 'now', to enable you to become an effective thinker. For most of us, our mind is busy, full of worries, concerns or random thoughts that take up our time. Visit our website and download the free morning and evening meditation mp3s. Follow the instructions and get used to using them each day as part of your work.

TASK

In a moment, put this book down. Get out your journal, sit quietly and listen to your mind working. Make a note of the current thoughts running through your mind. Do not rush this process! This is your first opportunity to truly live in the present and be at one with yourself and your thoughts. Enjoy it!

» What are the current themes in your life?

- » What are your worries and fears?
- » What are your hopes and expectations?
- » What is it that angers or frustrates you?
- » What is it that brings you happiness and joy?

What is it on your list that you give most of your attention to?

Remember this principle in all that you think, feel and do:

WHAT YOU FEED GROWS AND WHAT YOU STARVE DIES

This is a universal truth.

Very few people live in the present, most are either ruminating on, and reliving past, unresolved events, this is called depression; or projecting forward into a future that has not yet, and may never happen, but they are living it in the present as though it had, this is called anxiety.

Being in the 'now' is a skill that we all need to learn.

Whether it is eating, walking, making love, or attending to this programme, you will get the most out of your life if you are mindful, focused in the present, and not allowing the past or future to sabotage your efforts.

"Be here now."
Baba Rama Dass

In his book, 'Remember Be Here Now', Baba explains very clearly how the only time that we can act is now, in the present. What 'was' is in the past and what 'will be' is the future that has yet to come. However, there was a time when the past was the now, just as there will come a point when the future is now. The only time we can affect

anything is now, in the present. If you want to change your life, then you need to make the decision to do so NOW.

If you are full of doubts, or thoughts that you will change next week or next year then you will never change because your image of change will always be in the future, never in the present.

IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE, THE ONLY TIME YOU CAN DO SO IS NOW!

“It is not the strongest of the species who survive, not the most intelligent, but those who are most adaptive to change.”

Charles Darwin

Many clients will tell me that they will change in the future, or when they are ready, not now, not in the present. They will say that they are ‘not quite yet ready’. ‘I’ll stop smoking after Christmas’, but they didn’t make that deadline because then there was New Year; in life we find reasons to do things, or we find reasons not to do things.

MAKING EXCUSES

This is justification and rationalisation. Both are excuses, one true and one false, yet both excuses.

RATIONALISATION

To rationalise something is to give a logical explanation that explains what and why something did or didn’t happen. Rationalisations are based in what we see as the truth. Equally so, we can create a rational plan that will enable us to carry out the action in the future. As such,



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rationalisations are cognitive, conceptual and logical.

JUSTIFICATION

Justification is when we seek to underpin decisions and actions that we know were bad, or wrong, that we now need to put a gloss on. Some justifications can be downright lies that we use to cover up misdeeds. Justifications tend to be emotional responses that have no rational basis and are often easily proved wrong. We might justify to our self why we failed to complete the task, or do what we agreed that we would do. Often this is because it is easier not to act and change, but simply to stay as we are.

However much we justify or rationalise our way out of it, we cannot get beyond the fact that all decisions to act can only be enacted in the present, in the now.

Any excuses that we make will simply support the unsupportable. In the end, when we learn to take full responsibility for who we are, what we have done, what we are doing, where we are going, and what we are about to do, only then can we create what we want from life.

THERE IS NO COINCIDENCE

As you work through this process, you will become aware of how the rules and laws of the universe are active all around you and within you. They are forever working as you seek the answer to your inner question of what it is that you need and desire, and the 'how' that will enable you to obtain it. Your subconscious mind will present you with ideas and inspirations.

These may be in the form of dreams (day or night). They may come from listening to what another person is saying, either in person in front of you, or on the media. Often answers come as a flash. It might

happen in the shower, in the car or at a party. An idea can suddenly pop into your awareness. It is the seed of an idea that, if you feed it, will grow into a large tree. You may get the whole package in one hit, as ideas, solutions and plans fall into your conscious mind from your higher self.

Whatever, and however, this inspiration comes, never discount it. Examine it, use it and deal with it. Those people who we see as geniuses, scientists, artists, leaders, great leaders and so on, act upon their hunches, visions, imaginings and inspired insights. Yet we all have insights, every single one of us. It is just that most of us discount them and they slip away into the trash can in our head and are lost forever.

I keep a journal/notebook with me at all times, because I know that inspiration can evaporate just as quickly as it comes and I really do not want to lose a good idea. The shortness of inspirational memory is a bit like the rapid eye movement, or REM, dream sleep. We can wake with a dream vivid in our perception yet it takes only a few short moments for it to be lost. What was so bright and clear just a few minutes later is gone. The production of dream states, visualisation and creative imagery use similar parts of our neurological system whether we are awake or asleep. These ideas can be just like mist that cannot be grabbed and is so easily lost.

Importantly, these inspired thoughts require of us that we act and act now, before we lose both the vision and the impetus. Throughout this process you will be asking yourself questions and seeking answers that will take you towards your goals. Often the answers to your questions will be given to you when your mind is still; when this happens, act, do it in the present, do it now, don't wait.

Being able to listen to and trust your intuition can be a powerful tool to have in your armoury. It is what is called EQ or emotional

intelligence. Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher, said of a great sage that he gave him the silence in which he was able to hear the answer to his own problem. In the silence of meditation and relaxation, your inner voice becomes your own counsellor. If you listen to the inner voice, you will grow, learn, and develop quickly.

Just so that we are clear about what we are doing in this book, I just want to take a few minutes to run through my aims.

Firstly, we must approach our work from the point of view that life is both meaningful and purposeful. That includes your life, my life, and all who live on this planet. However, we often do not understand our purpose in life, or we lose track of our reason to 'be', and get lost in everyday experiences, problems, hurts and hatreds, loves and lusts. For some, life becomes a mere act of daily survival, or is the thing that passes us by while we busily complete other meaningless tasks.

Secondly, believe that we all have the right and capacity to be happy, and that we can, in a very real sense, have all that we desire once we understand the processes and laws that rule our existence. We often become stuck in a negative life through our fear of change and of the unknown.

Our language is littered with well-known phrases designed to keep us from developing and growing...

**BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW.
YOU'VE MADE YOUR BED, YOU'D BETTER LIE
IN IT.
A LEOPARD CAN'T CHANGE ITS SPOTS.
YOU CAN'T TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW
TRICKS.**

We can all change, at any age, at any time, in any situation, if we have the will to do so. Fear and doubt keep us from daring our self to be happy.

“Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.”

Susan Jeffers

Thirdly, this is an interactive universe. Things only happen in response to other things. For there to be a response, there must be a stimulus; to get a reaction there must first be an action. Many people believe that the world, and the things that they want, will simply fall in their lap. They believe that if they follow the philosophy of ‘The Secret’ all that they want will be theirs. Yet thought is not enough, nor is feeling. This is a physical universe that requires physical action. You can create the world that you want, but only if you act. Wishful thinking will never do the job.

- » If you do nothing, the effect will be nothing
- » If you do something, there will be a response to your action
- » In responding to the response, you will learn and grow
- » Through learning and growing, you will achieve your goals

Your relationship with life is such that you are acting now and creating responses. Every thought, feeling or action will have both an effect and a consequence. The consequence of positive thoughts, feelings and actions is a positive life and positive life experience. The consequence of negative thoughts, feelings and actions is a negative life and negative life experience.

Our aim for you is that through this work, you will harness your thoughts, feelings and actions through self-development and planned action to get all that you desire. The following best sums this up:

- » To rid you of unwanted, negative, past thoughts and feelings that

- hold you back and create depressive feelings
- » To stop you projecting into a fearful future, creating anxiety and worry about things that may never happen
 - » To understand the purpose and meaning in your life; your aims, goals and objectives
 - » To know how to live in your present and discover your ‘now’
 - » To develop the skills to enable you to achieve what you really want
 - » To understand and use the law of deliberate creation

So let us get on with our task and let us start with letting go of the past.

A wise man once said to me:

“You are not ready to live until you are ready to die.”

He was a wise old sage who had the habit of dropping gems like this on me when I was least expecting it. Whenever he did so, he had a twinkle in his eye. I gradually began to realise that he was doing this at times when I was caught off guard, and I learned to listen to him and address him and his ideas honestly. I learned to stop processing his ideas with my intellect and come up with a clever answer. I became lost in this question. I was young and the idea of death seemed a million miles away, I asked him to explain what he meant by this.

He said that each of us, through the process of life, acted and did things, and that to each of these actions, there was a reaction. This is the fundamental basis of the law of karma, or, as Isaac Newton put it, ‘to every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

In life, we are each the sum total of our experiences and, most importantly, our responses to our experiences. The important point is that we each realise that we are responsible for our experiences.

WHAT DO YOU HOLD ON TO?

My teacher asked me to think about my life. Right from the moment of my birth, I thought about all of the people that I had known. I described many of them to him. He asked me to consider the effect that I had on them. This was quite difficult in two ways. Firstly, it was hard for me to put myself in other people's shoes and attempt to imagine what their experience of me might be. Secondly, it is difficult to admit that my behaviour to other people has not always been that good.

WHAT DO OTHER PEOPLE HOLD ON TO?

Had their experience of me been a help or a hindrance to them? Then he asked me to consider the effect that they had each had on me. Who was it in my life that had been helpful to me, who had hindered me, who had given me love and who had hated me or treated me with disdain?

'What is it', he asked, 'that remains for you unfinished business?'
'When you lie awake at night, in the early hours of the morning going back over your life, who is it that is in your mind? And are the memories of goodness or badness?'

LET GO OF THE PAST

He explained that it was impossible for any of us to really live in the present, to be in our 'now', while there remains powerful influences holding us bound to the past. For most of us, there is unfinished business that may come in the form of hurt, loss, grief, bereavement, anger, anxiety, regret and so on. In some cases, we are locked into our past by love. All connected to the past, that might be positive or negative, that keep us from attending to, and living in, our present.

WE CAN ONLY DEAL WITH THE PAST WHEN WE FACE IT

In his book, 'Five Wishes', Gay Hendricks describes a similar moment when he was invited to let go of the past. For him, this involved contacting people and saying things to them that should have been said, in some cases, a very long time ago. In some cases, there were things that should have been done and were not. There are several stages to letting go of the past, but it begins here...

FORGIVE THOSE THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US

The most powerful feelings that keep you connected to your past that stop you moving forward are negative: anger, frustration, hurt and hatred. Some people find these emotions difficult to acknowledge and prefer words like frustration rather than anger, and bad feeling rather than hatred, and so on, and that is ok. The words that we use to describe these emotions are unimportant but the emotions are. They are like a strong elastic umbilicus that holds all the bad feelings in place. It is this emotional connection that we need to sever.

TASK

How about you now do what I did with my teacher? Sit down somewhere quiet with your journal. Think of all the people that have done bad things to you. Right from the moment you were first able to experience. Back as far as you can go. For many people, this will be around when they were two to three years old. Think of all the people that have had a negative effect on you. They may not even have realised it. Some people, either deliberately or through ignorance or mistake, have done things to you that have hurt, damaged, or altered your life. To cut these negative ties and to begin to live in the present,

we need to let these feelings go and that means **forgiveness**.

WHO DO YOU NEED TO FORGIVE?

In my own case, as I started to make a list of all those people that I had unfinished business with, I began to realise that some of these people were now dead, and the things that I needed to say or do to or with them were now impossible. My teacher explained to me the process that he was describing was only for me, not for others, it was not for their benefit. The process of my letting go was important for me, not for them.

While you might be lying awake in bed, when you should be sleeping, going over and over your negative feelings about someone who has done you wrong, it will have no effect on them at all. They might be lying on a beach drinking a cocktail and having a wonderful time. The only person your negative feelings affect and damage is you.

It is important to realise that forgiving and letting go can never justify other people's wrongdoing. When people do wrong things to you, the act of forgiveness will never make their behaviour right or ok. However, it will allow you to live in your present with the chance to find peace, happiness and self-fulfillment.

One of the biggest ties to my past was the negative feelings that I had about my father, but he was dead. 'So, write a letter. Write down exactly what you feel, say all that you need to say. Let it go,' said my teacher. I looked amazed. 'I doubt if you were to write letters to everyone you can think of, that you would be able to send any of them. This is about you not about them.' I was unsure, but I trusted him, and so I started there and then.

First, I made a list of all the people, as far back as I could remember, that I needed to forgive. It took many days and the list took up several

pages. When I had finished, I showed it to my teacher. The people on this list were those that I blamed for the damage, failures and hurts in my life. Some seemed really silly. There was one who had stolen my sweets when I was in pre-school, yet emotionally it was an issue that was still stuck inside me.

Up to that moment, I had blamed everyone on my list for the negative effect they had on my life. It was their fault that my life has been so bad, that I had been so unhappy, that everything had gone wrong. I used them as the reason for every bad experience in my life. In the darker moments of my life, having reviewed events and relationships, I had been feeling a lot of negative energy towards these people.

THE HATRED IS THE PUS THAT COMES FROM THE SPLINTER THAT PENETRATES YOUR HEART

Some of the people on my list brought up waves of anger in me that I did not realise that I was feeling. Things that I had assumed I had dealt with were there again and I realised that these things had not been dealt with, they had simply been put into a cupboard in my head and I had just carried on with my life. Then came the hard bit: forgiveness.

The most powerful bond between our self and others is emotion. The emotional elastic that ties us to other people, even when they are dead, may remain even after they have gone. The power of the elastic may be based in the most positive drive of love or the most negative of hate. To let go of hatred, of either the living or the dead, involves forgiving those that have wronged us and that is not always easy.

DAVID'S STORY

I once had a male client, I'll call him David, who had been treated badly by a female colleague, who I will call Angela. She had constructed a case against him, lied about him, and even falsified evidence. This had led to disciplinary action against him for gross misconduct that could have led to his dismissal. After months of suspension and several disciplinary hearings, followed by an appeal, the case was dismissed and David was proven innocent.

Most important to David was that Angela had lied and got away with it and no action was taken against her. David felt that he had been punished for something that he had not done. He was, understandably, aggrieved by this and, in all senses of the word, he was experiencing very real and deep hatred for Angela.

Over several sessions of psychotherapy, we went through his experience and worked on its resonance with past events that had occurred in his life before David had met Angela. David did some powerful work on resolving his past unresolved experiences, but the sticking point always came back to how he felt about Angela and his inability to let his feeling about her and the situation go.

There came a point in the therapy when I had to get him to face up to the idea that the only way he would be able to move on from this was to let go of these negative emotions. To do this, he would have to forgive Angela for the wrong she had done him. David greeted this idea with rage. He called me several things that had four letters (none of them were 'Sean') and he stormed out of our session.

In the next session, he was calmer and apologised for his previous outburst. He then explained that he had thought about my suggestion of forgiveness, and had considered it very seriously. However, although he did acknowledge that he understood what I was suggesting and

that he accepted I was probably right, he had decided that if he were to forgive Angela, it would in some way be like telling her that what she had done was alright and ok. He felt that he simply could not do that.

‘If I forgive her, it will be as though she has got away with it scot free. Where is the fairness in that?’

This is a common problem for people facing the idea of forgiveness for the first time.

We can never absolve another person for what they have done to us, or to anyone else. That is their issue. I explained again to him that it would be him letting go of his hurt. That forgiveness meant ‘foregoing’ any revenge and retribution. That Angela’s stuff was Angela’s stuff, and that she would have to deal with her stuff in her time. David’s job was to deal with his stuff not Angela’s, and David’s stuff was the anger that he was holding that would only ever damage him and never her.

We talked at some length and David decided that he ‘would not’ let it go, not that he ‘could not’ let it go, he simply ‘would’ not. In full awareness of the consequences of his action, he decided to hold his hurt and hatred towards the person and nurse it like it was a baby and not let it go. He accepted he could now damage his own health, harden his arteries, and that he would potentially live a life of misery.

Like many people, David was prepared to cut his nose off to spite his face and suffer the consequences. Many of us become stuck just like David. We are often full of unresolved emotions, hurts, losses and grievances.

I have worked with hundreds of people that maintain bitterness and feuds that have been on-going for generations, for years, and in the process, these people and families have become bitter and twisted and

generally have a horrible experience of life. But if you believe that 'life is a bitch and then you die', then that will be the life that you choose to live.

There are examples all over the world of people who would rather hate than love. For those who hold the ideas of pain and hatred, it makes more sense to them than those of care and love. The Mafia in Italy and America has maintained family feuds for many generations. The Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland have lived with revenge and feud for over two hundred years. When President Tito died in Yugoslavia the country returned to the factions that existed before he united the country. The results was ethnic cleansing and mass murder, war and genocide. The Palestine/Israel wars; the list goes on and on.

Conflict, in any situation, will always continue until the protagonists have had enough, and decide to let it go and create peace, resolution or compromise. It does not matter whether it is a couple, a country, nation or a faction, the same rule will always apply. In short, when we carry on doing the same things in the same way, all that we get are the same results: same old, same old.

None of this is new. The awareness and understanding of the need to let go and to move on have been around throughout evolution. Most mammals signal once the conflict is over. The defeated stag in the rut walks away. The defeated dog rolls onto its back in submission. In most species, there is a cut off point.

Our commonality with chimpanzees would suggest that we both do not know when enough is enough and we are willing to carry on to the point of death and murder. Then, in some cases, we carry on after death and develop the long-lived feud with the relatives and then the relatives of the relatives and their friends and family as well. We are skilled and practiced and we are now good at it.

The important thing to realise is that the only person hurt by holding negativity is the holder. So it is that all the great philosophies, religions, sciences and psychologies say the same thing, in one form or another: forgive those that trespass against you.

Forgiveness is probably one of the most misunderstood of all the laws of the universe. I say 'law' deliberately. We can understand that there are physical laws that form the basis of physical science: the laws of motion, gravity and so on. Some people would acknowledge the less obvious spiritual laws such as Karma, the law of cause and effect. However, it is the laws of psychology that enable us to live in the present and keep us from reliving the past or projecting into the future.

These are the laws that rule your creativity, intuition, thinking, emotional energy, perception, action and your results. These are the laws that take you from being a victim of experience, and other people's actions, to becoming a creative problem solver. Understanding this is the magical moment when you, as an individual, pick up the pen and begin to write the script of your life, as you really want it to be.

But, there is work to do. The book, 'The Secret', can leave you with the impression that there is little work to do, that with a little positive thinking, a bit of visualisation, and waking up happy, the world will suddenly change. Money will suddenly appear in your bank account and the perfect people and opportunities will come knocking on your door. Well, sorry, but it doesn't work like that.

It is true that once you understand and use laws, things around you do begin to change, but from word one you have to act, you have to 'do' things. You need to create an action as a stimulus to allow the universe to respond. Most commonly, you are required to change and to grow as a person. That is what this book is about.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PARADIGM

A paradigm is a collective set of ideas, attitudes and experiences. Your paradigm is the sum total of all that you have learned and experienced since the moment of your birth. The story goes something like this.

For nine months, you were in the womb. Everything is on tap. You were warm, safe and protected. We now know that in the last three months in the womb you were in a REM state, rapid eye movement, which is the dream state. Dreams are the part of your mind that is active, mainly in sleep, when you are able to process and resolve your daily experience. In the REM state, you encode, recall and process information into and out of long-term memory.

It is assumed that in the womb, you used REM to encode the basic information that allowed you to survive after birth. These are the unconscious functions of breathing, swallowing, etc. From the moment of your birth onwards, everything that you now know has been learned. You were a blank slate, white board, a new creation ready to be programmed through what you have learned about yourself and the world around you.

You have learned, and continue to learn through what you hear, what you see, what you smell, what you taste and what you feel. These five senses connect us to the world and it is through these that we learn. In the Eastern traditions the senses of intuition and imagination would be added to the five Western senses.

The nature of your birth, whether you were wanted, if your mother was well or ill, go to create what in psychology is known as 'attachment', a theory researched by John Bowlby. We know that the nature of your birth will have a direct effect on the rest of your life, and all of your relationships, unless you intervene with either new experience or organised psychotherapy.

Your paradigm is the result of what you have experienced, but more importantly, it is formed by how you have responded to all that you have experienced. A child that is born into a situation where they were wanted and were nurtured so that they felt security and safety will have a completely different paradigm to a child who was born into a situation where they were not wanted, where they felt unsafe and insecure.

In most cases, the first people that you learn from is your mother as the primary care-giver and then your father as the secondary care-giver. You then learn from your siblings, extended family, friends, your teachers, religious leaders, the media, fashion, culture, nationality and so on.

Now that means that you, here and now, as you read these words, are the sum total of all that you have experienced and learned, and, as we said, most importantly, by how you have responded to all that you have experienced in your life. As you progress through this book, you will be required to question and reprogramme your paradigm to enable you to make a paradigm shift.

MAKING THE PARADIGM SHIFT

Included in your current paradigm will be shared beliefs, those things shared with your family, community and culture. They will include such fundamental beliefs as ‘a leopard can’t change its spots’ or ‘better the devil you know’ or ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’, the list is endless. Each of these beliefs tells you that change is, at least, improbable, if not impossible. You are told that life is fixed, that growth is impossible. Often, the attitude is that you should simply shut up and put up with your lot.

Well, we are here to tell you that it is all nonsense, that you can change and that you can become and be whatever it is that you really, really,

want to be. All you need to do is to really want to change and to understand the rules that unlock the secret to your success. Remember that this is a process, it is an organic growth, and if you feed the parts of you that serve you well, they will grow to your advantage. If at the same time, you starve those bits of you that do not serve you well, they will wither and die.

WHAT YOU FEED GROWS AND WHAT YOU STARVE DIES

The first step to creating your paradigm shift is letting go. Holding any negativity is powerful, emotional elastic that holds you back in the past. The key to letting go is forgiveness.

Unless you let go, you will never move on in your life, you will remain stuck in the negative past. Forgiveness and love run together, though it may take some time to achieve this.

Remember, there is an understanding in this that the person damaged by your hatred is you, not them. While you are lying awake at three in the morning, going over hatred and murdering the object of your hatred in your imagination, you are only murdering yourself.

*“When we hate another person, it is as though we have taken poison
ourselves in the belief that it will damage them. It does not. It only
damages us.”*

So if you are ready to complete Step One, letting go, you will now need to start with forgiveness. So who do you need to forgive?

TASK

In the following exercise, you will need to take your list of all those that you need to forgive. Sit quietly, review your list, go back as far as you can to your earliest memory and then allow your mind to wander forward. As you travel through time, note down all those people that have done things against you, those that have hurt you in any way. Check it again; ensure they are all on there. Complete your list.

Now you know who is on your list, it is time to begin to let go.

At the outset of this exercise, I need you to realise that there will be many people you will not be able to communicate with directly. This may be because they are no longer here or because it would be inappropriate. Some, you will be able to communicate with directly. Consider each person; decide whether you would, or could, sort things out with a face-to-face communication, a telephone call, an email, letter or a text.

Note: if you ring someone out of the blue and announce, 'I am just ringing you to forgive you for being such a ...' etc, you may not get the positive response you had hoped for. In reality, there are very few people that you will be able to forgive directly because the other person may not be ready to discuss or deal with the issue. What is required is the letter that you never send.

The important thing is to process your thoughts and feelings from your head and your heart, and record them on the paper in front of you. When you have finished your letters, we have ways of getting rid of them, but we will worry about that later.

The reality is that you do send the letter really. It is just that you are sending it in the emotional world, not in the physical world. I will explain as we go along. Remember that even if the person has died,

you can still write a letter, because the object of the exercise is you letting go, and that brings me to the next point.

What happens if the person you want to communicate with does not want to communicate with you?

When I undertook this exercise, there were several people who I attempted to contact who would not talk to me, which left me with dilemmas about how I could resolve my issue. Well, just as when someone has died, you can still write a letter that you may never send. Remember, this is you letting go and completing things for you. It may be that the person has a totally negative response to your communication, but that is not the point. If someone reacts then that is their issue, not yours. Your job at this time is about letting your stuff go, about getting it right for you, not them.

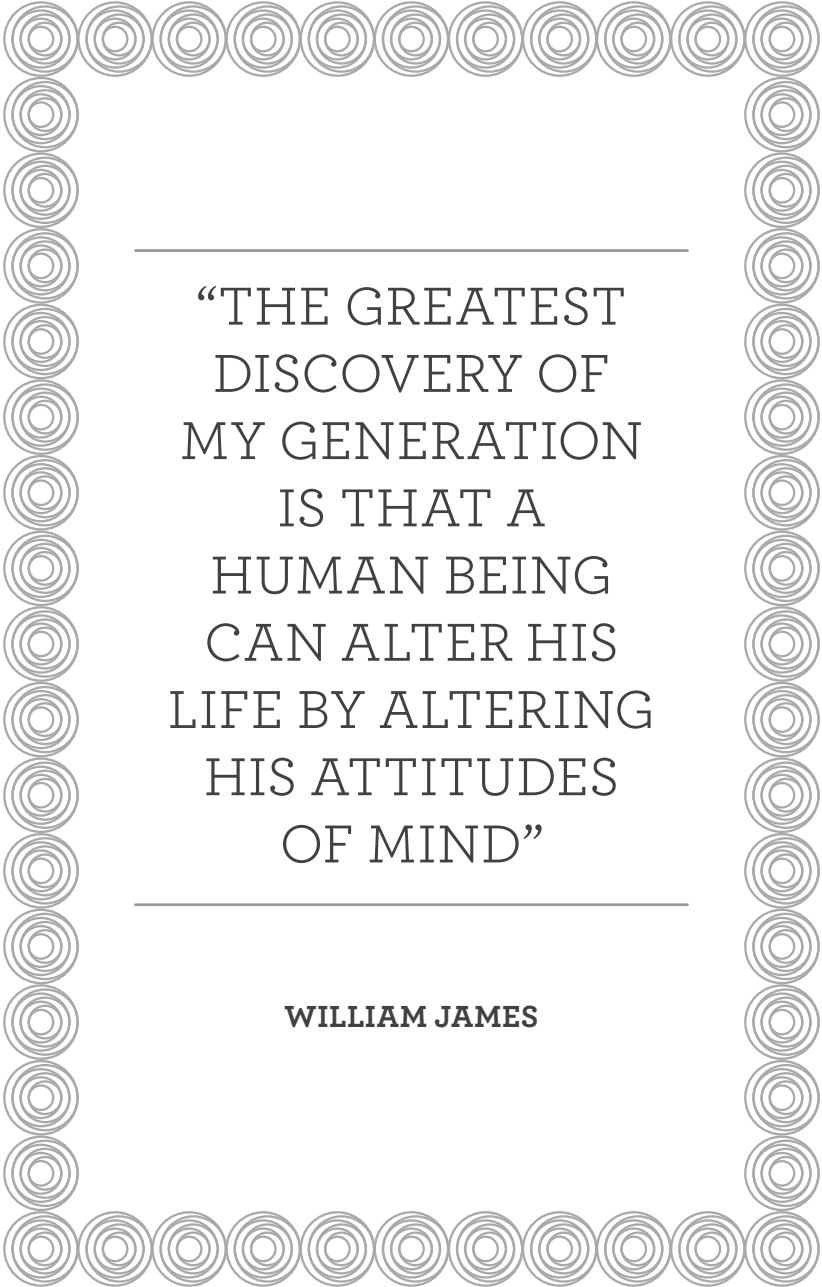
WRITING LETTERS TO THE ABSENT OR DEAD

This is a reproduction of the letter that I wrote to my dead father when I was doing the completing exercise.

Dear Father,

I say father because you were never my Dad. I do not think that you had the capacity to be a Dad. I want to tell you how unhappy I was as a child and how bad you made me feel for many years. I lived my childhood in total fear of you; there were many times when your mere presence would make me feel sick, and sometimes be sick. I never felt that you supported me or even cared about me.

When you continually told me that I was an idiot, I let you take away my confidence and ensured my repeated failures. The worst thing that you ever did to me was to beat me. You made me feel totally humiliated, vulnerable and helpless, and that made me



“THE GREATEST
DISCOVERY OF
MY GENERATION
IS THAT A
HUMAN BEING
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OF MIND”

WILLIAM JAMES

perfect material to be bullied by other people at school and even by my sisters and eventual partners.

As an adult, I can look back and see that it was your own negative childhood that made you the way that you were. That may be the reason for your behaviour towards me, but it is not an excuse. There are no excuses for the way that you treated me and for the things that you did to me. You missed out on what would have been a good relationship with a son and I missed out on having a Dad.

It is now time for me to let go of my negative feelings towards you. What you did and why you did it is your stuff, not mine, and wherever you are now, it is yours to deal with. In that light, I now let go of all negative feelings towards you, I forgive you for your wrongdoings towards me and hope that you, in turn, find your own happiness.

*With love,
Sean*

MY RESPONSIBILITY

The important issue in this letter is the acknowledgment that the bad things that happened were not mine, they were his. He was an adult and I was a child in his care. Yet I did have responsibility for the way that I responded to what he did. This is my stuff. The fact that I became a victim of bullying by other people later in life is also mine to own; it was my response. Just as, later in life, I also decided to work on these issues, cease being a victim and sort myself out; that was my response as well.

Joe Vitale in ‘The Secret’ invites the reader/viewer, to accept that they are the result of the decisions and responses that they have made to

their experiences over the past few years. That can be a hard place to start, especially when you feel that you did not want your life as it is or has been, and feel that you are the victim of other people's actions or events outside of your control. Yet accepting your part in your experience puts you in a very powerful position. If you can accept your responsibility for your life as it is, then you have the power to make it the way that you want it to be. If, on the other hand, you are the victim of circumstances, then you are helpless and will never have the power to enact change.

The image of pulling the sword from the stone is of King Arthur taking his power to do what needed to be done; when you take responsibility, for your life, you are pulling your sword from your stone, and empowering yourself to enact your will in making your life the success that you want it to be.

STEP ONE ROUND-UP

You will cover a lot of ground in your homework for this step. It is really the foundation step, which sets the tone for our work throughout the programme. We designed this book to work on a weekly basis, but it may take you a little longer than that. If, for you, it is better to do a single step each month rather than one a week, work at your speed. The important thing is to keep going. This is an investment in your life and you need to make it count, so progress in a way that works well for you.

I hear people repeat negative affirmations such as 'no pain, no gain'; it does not have to be that way, though it can be if you believe that to be the case, and that is what you hold in your paradigm. Your work on yourself should not be painful, there may be times when it is a challenge, but if you are doing what is right for you, it will be a joy that will give you the feeling of achievement, the feeling of 'I did that' as you take the positive steps to sort out your life.

In the first step, you do not need to visit everyone, phone everyone, or do face-to-face, or voice-to-voice, communication. Often, a letter is enough and most times it will be the letter that you never send. There may be people that you feel it is right for you to communicate with directly, and if you can do this then that is good, but this exercise is about you, not them. It is about you letting go of your attachments, and assumes that you have reached a stage in your personal development where this is now possible for you to do so, even if it is challenging.

The person that you might wish to communicate with may not be at the same stage of development as you and may not be able to understand where you are coming from or what it is that you are doing. They may even feel offended by the things that you need to say or share. Remember that what we are seeking to do is to make things better and clear up the mess of the past, not make it worse. So ensure that your actions and communications are done in awareness and with sensitivity.

When you write your letters, it is the final paragraph that you need to work hardest on; it is the way that you let go. In my letter to my father, I wrote...

It is now time for me to let go of my negative feelings towards you. What you did and why you did it is your stuff, not mine, and wherever you are now, it is yours to deal with. In that light, I now let go of all negative feelings towards you, I forgive you for your wrongdoings towards me and hope that you, in turn, find your own happiness.

Forgiveness through love is the only real way to let go of negative associations. If you feel only hatred, anger or negativity, the power of that emotion will keep you tied to the past forever and you will never move on. You cannot ever be responsible for the actions of others.

I will never know why my father treated me the way that he did. From what I can understand, his own childhood was difficult and he was playing pass the parcel and repeating the negative behaviour he had experienced. I cannot affect that or change that. But I have choice, and my choice is to unpack the parcel now, so that I do not do the same thing and pass on this negative behaviour to the next generation.

Some people will say to me that they feel, in forgiving someone, they are condoning or excusing their behaviour. This is not the case. To forgive is to let go. In forgiving, you are saying to the person:

“I let go of any negative connection between us and, in so doing, I will no longer allow what happened between us to have any effect on my present or my future life. You must decide what it is that you need to do for you. I am now free.”

This is an article that I wrote for a blog and an NHS staff newsletter. It is a good way of explaining what it is that you need to do when starting your day in a spirit of positive expectation, with no connection to negative past.

THINKING ABOUT STRESS?

If you ask your friends and colleagues if they are stressed, the chances are that they will say ‘yes’. I hear people talking a lot about their stress in all sorts of jobs. I am told that these days, ‘we are all stressed’. What does that really mean?

Stress, from a technical point of view, is when the needs of the situation, that may be physical, emotional or mental, exceed the resources available to fulfil those needs. Often, what we refer to as ‘stress’ is more appropriately termed ‘pressure’. Modern psychology would suggest that we all need pressure to be able to function effectively.

The stress of doing nothing (under-load) is as great as the stress of being overworked (over-load). To be a couch potato and do nothing puts tremendous pressure on all of your body/mind systems and is one of the quickest routes to depression and cardiovascular disease. To be healthy, we need to be stretched, we need challenge and purpose, we need to feel the drive to get out of bed in the morning and enjoy the challenge of life.

What happened when you awoke this morning? Something brought you into consciousness. It might have been an alarm clock, the radio, your partner, children or a pet; whatever it was, what was your first thought?

Did you wake, thinking, ‘Wow, another day in paradise, how lucky am I?’ or was your first thought, ‘Oh no, not again’. Sadly, most of us do the latter and it sets the tone for the day. We stagger from the bed with a miserable face and a miserable mind, so that when we look in the bathroom mirror, we think, ‘Oh, look at the state of me’, and we feel bad. Now, this is unlikely to create the happy person who feels good about life and free from stress.

THOUGHTS BECOME THINGS

Modern neuro-psychology tells us a lot about how the brain functions, and how we tend to predict our experience in advance by what we choose to pay attention to.

Have you ever bought a car? If you have, you will have experienced the process of attention and perception. Imagine that you are driving along the road, thinking about the sort of car you would like to buy: the make, the model and the colour. Maybe you have read adverts, and may even have visited the showroom; you might have touched it, sat in it, or taken it for a test drive. As you tune in and pay attention to the car that you really want, something strange happens to your

perception.

Out of nowhere, the car appears before you. You find that on your way to work, there is one driving towards you, or there is one stopped next to you at the traffic lights, or one parked up when you go shopping. The strange thing is that those cars have always been there; it is simply that you did not pay attention to them before now. As you pay attention, you change your perception. Once you buy the car that you want, you will continue to see the same cars around you for a while, but they will gradually fade into the background with all the other cars, as you cease to pay attention to them any more.

This ability of our mind for us to experience what we pay attention to is happening all the time; there are many examples. If, for instance, you are trying to get pregnant, you see pregnant women everywhere you look, or if you have recently come out of a failed relationship, everywhere you go people are in couples and they all seem to be so very happy.

Now, let us go back to this morning and you getting out of bed. If thoughts become things and what you pay attention to, you tend to see around you, what will you experience in life if you start the day feeling bad? You will experience more bad things. Equally so, if you start the day feeling good, you will experience more good things. This is not wishful thinking. This is not simply saying focus on the positive. This is how your mind works, always has done, always will do. People who see the cup as half-full expect it to be, and that is how they experience their life to be; those that see the cup as half-empty live a half-empty life. What you feed grows and what you starve dies.

I am not stupid and I am not naive; there is a lot of work to be done and the 'pressure' is on. There are targets to be met, patients to be cared for and budgets to be maintained. However, if we choose to look at life negatively, we can turn pressure into stress by feeding it, paying

attention to it and telling our self how stressful it all is. Thoughts become things; what we think about, we bring about. We may not be able to reduce the workload, but we can change our attitude to how we deal with it. We can choose to see stress as pressure and enjoy the challenges that life presents us with.

Developing a positive frame of mind starts first thing in the morning when you wake. So, tomorrow morning, when you become conscious, stop, and allow some positive thoughts to form in your mind, maybe things that make you feel good or things that you are grateful for. So that by the time your feet hit the ground, you have a smile on your face. When you get to the bathroom, look in the mirror and smile – amazingly, the face in the mirror will smile back and that will make you feel good too. Then look in your eyes and say to yourself, ‘Who loves ya?’ The first time you do it, it might feel like you are play-acting, but if you keep it up, you will change your attitude to yourself, the morning and your life.

Did you know that it takes between twenty-five and thirty days of persistent, consistent repetition to change an attitude?¹ If you consistently practise the above for one month, it will simply become a part of how you start your day. If you feel good about your day, you will pay attention to good things around you.

If you have persistent feelings of stress, negative thoughts, or you find yourself ruminating on angers, worries or hurts in the middle of the night when you should be asleep, get some help. Counselling will help you resolve any negative issues and your relaxation sessions will enable you to re-establish an effective sleep pattern.

So, if what you think about is what you bring about...

¹ *The Answer* by John Assaraf and Murray Smith. Published in 2009 by Atria Books

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING NOW?

In this step you are approaching the doorway of letting go. If you do not complete the tasks that follow you will not be able to step through the doorway. If you do not step through this doorway the subsequent steps will not be available to you.

So, in forgiveness, let go of the past and when you're ready go through the doorway to the next step.

A collection of various black geometric shapes, including circles, hexagons, and pentagons, scattered across the lower half of the page. Some shapes are solid, while others are hollow. The shapes vary in size and are arranged in a way that suggests movement or a path.

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CHAPTER 1 TASKS

Daily Tasks

EACH MORNING, GO TO THE BATHROOM
MIRROR AND SMILE TO YOURSELF

COMPOSE YOURSELF FOR THE DAY

ENJOY YOUR DAY AND TREAT EVERY INCIDENT AND EVENT WITH JOY AND APPRECIATION

At the end of your day, you will need to complete your reflective diary, reviewing your experience since you jumped from your bed

USE YOUR DIARY TO RECORD YOUR FEELINGS

Thoughts

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT THEMES IN YOUR LIFE?
WHAT ARE YOUR WORRIES AND FEARS?
WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS?
WHAT IS IT THAT ANGERS OR FRUSTRATES YOU?
WHAT IS IT THAT BRINGS YOU HAPPINESS AND JOY?

Compile a list of all the people that have done bad things to you throughout your life. Review your list, then write your letters of forgiveness. You may have one or one hundred to write. However long it takes, keep at it and complete your task.