

Conscious Being

Reading Eight: The Power of Forgiveness

From Chapter 3 of Conscious Being

Self-Forgiveness

Self-forgiveness is reclaiming our innocence. It means living beyond our ideas about how we thought we “should” have done things differently. We let go of the belief that we “should” have known what we didn’t know then. We let go of the story that we “should” have been something we were not then, or that we “should” have acted in a way that we were not capable of at that time. Forgiveness—whether of ourselves or of another—is a choice. It might take time to finally arrive at the place where we recognize our true innocence. It might take time to recognize the innocence of others, no matter what their apparent injustice. This quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu says it well: “To forgive is the highest form of self-interest. I need to forgive so that my anger and resentment and lust for revenge don’t corrode my own being.”

We are 100 percent accountable for our lives. But if our life does not look the way we think we want it to, it can be easy to fall into the trap of making ourselves “wrong.” Self-criticism is not the same as self-responsibility or self-accountability. Self-criticism is never helpful. We understand that our lives are a reflection of our own consciousness and that our thoughts and feelings create our daily experiences. However, when something happens that we don’t want—an illness for example—this is not a reason to blame ourselves. Blaming ourselves for getting sick is what is sometimes referred to as

“metaphysical malpractice.” When we hear the voice of the inner critic, we can thank it for sharing (without judging it for judging) and decide not to take it seriously. After all, it is the voice of our limited ego, rather than the voice of our true essence. We can use these moments as an entry point to deepen our compassion for ourselves instead, by sending love and support in the form of constructive self-talk. Just as we would give support and encouragement to a small child who needed it in order to grow and develop.

Moving Beyond Limitation

In the 1960s, a rare white Bengal tiger arrived at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. The tiger, named Mohini, was a special gift to President Eisenhower and the people of America from the government of India. Mohini was placed in a temporary 12 x 12-foot cage, while the zoo discussed plans to build her a magnificent enclosure. The enclosure was to resemble her natural habitat, with lush forests, rolling hills, and everything a tiger could possibly need or want. During the construction period, Mohini paced around her cramped cage, in a figure-8 pattern, day after day. Unexpected delays in building the new habitat turned months into years, as the young tiger continued to pace around her small cage.

Finally, Mohini’s new, spacious enclosure was completed and a large crowd gathered to witness the big event. At long last, she would be able to experience her freedom. To the crowd’s great surprise, however, on entering her new home, Mohini headed straight to the far corner and started pacing around in the same figure-8 pattern, just as she had been forced to do for several years. Sadly, she spent the rest of her life in the small far

corner of her enclosure, moving in the same figure-8, 12 x 12 pattern, completely oblivious to the paradise surrounding her.

This story illustrates what happens when we allow our earlier programming to dictate the limits of our awareness and of our experience of life. My question to you is: What is your self-imposed, 12 x 12, figure-8 pattern? How are you living within the confines of an inherited belief system that still appears to be “real” for you? The truth is that you have the capacity to experience infinite freedom from within. You live in an infinitely abundant universe. It is only the limitations of your perception, and the stories you tell yourself, that keep you tightly contained in a life that might feel smaller than you would like it to be.

Expanding Consciousness

I learned a helpful image of expanding consciousness from my good friend and teacher Rev. Maureen Bass. Imagine lots of dots drawn on a piece of paper. If you draw a circle enclosing 8 dots or so, this circle represents a particular level of conscious awareness. If you expand the circle, and draw a larger one containing 12 dots, this represents a consciousness that has expanded. For example, your consciousness might have expanded after a spiritual study or a life experience that caused you to grow your awareness in a certain way. As you continue to grow spiritually, your consciousness continues to expand, and the circle continues to grow larger, enclosing more and more dots. And it continues, ad infinitum.

I invite you to take a look at the places where your understanding, your human consciousness, feels limited and restricted. Any limitation that you

are currently experiencing is not ultimately “real.” It’s only as real as the 12x12 limitation Mohini the tiger experienced when transferred to a larger enclosure. Mohini didn’t have the self-awareness to deconstruct her limited inner reality.

But as a human, you have the ability to take your self-imposed limitations and see them for what they are—illusions based on past experience. By living beyond them, your consciousness naturally expands to encompass a greater reality.

Awakening Happens Now

Waking up to who you truly are is something that can only possibly happen in this present moment. The mind thinks of awakening as a process and tells itself, “I’m not there yet.” It imagines what it will be like, at some future time, when it arrives. But that is affirming “I’m not awake now.” It is closing the door on the possibility of experiencing the truth of who and what you are, in this moment. In every moment, you have full access to your essential self, to the truth of who you are. You could say that this moment now is the most enlightened you’ll ever be. What do you choose to do with that? In other words, this is not a dress rehearsal. This moment holds all the potential you need to know the truth of who you are and what you are capable of experiencing in the outer realm.

Awakening or enlightenment is simply a recognition of the truth. There is nothing to figure out. It is being fully present, in this moment, in the body, as a spiritual experience. It is accepting the parts that feel glorious, happy, and connected and those parts that feel shut down, tight, or closed off. You

do not have to do anything with what you notice, but rather fully allow it and experience it just as it is, and recognize that there is an ultimate reality much greater than your mind can comprehend.

The Value of Spiritual Community

One of the greatest gifts of being part of a spiritual community is the support system of people who know and believe in the truth of who and what they really are, at the level of essence. A group of people who are committed to seeing us beyond our self-imposed limitations is of tremendous value. Spiritual friends and community remind us, when we seemingly forget, of our wholeness and spiritual perfection. When we are caught up in the illusion of our self-limiting stories and forget our true identity—as love, light, and truth—we can be reminded, by those who know us as love, light, and truth. This is the highest purpose of community.

There are those who seek out spiritual community in the hope that others will fix them or do their personal work for them. But we are the only ones who can do our own inner work. Nobody outside of us can fix us, no matter how much they might want to (And remember, we are not broken). But they can support us as we take steps on our inner journey, and reflect back to us the progress we are making.

In authentic and intentional spiritual communities, we offer full support to those seeking to know the truth of who and what they are. Our intention is to provide a forum for like-minded people from diverse backgrounds to come together. We celebrate each other and see the truth of who we are; perfect aspects of the divine. Our commitment is to see ourselves and each other as inherently whole and perfect. If at times we lose touch with our

wholeness, and find ourselves acting from our old conditioning, that is OK. Community members can hold a mirror up to us, inviting us to look within. They can encourage us to inquire whether there is a piece of our metaphoric 12 X 12 cage that is causing us to move in a habitual figure-8 pattern. We might discover an unresolved hurt from the past. We might find a deeply ingrained belief that keeps us focused on 10 dots when there are 10 billion. A loving, supportive community can help us see through our inner illusions and help to set us free.

The deepest surrender we will ever make is to know we are one with spirit. Ultimate freedom comes from experiencing ourselves as we truly are—a perfect expression of the one.