

Volume 18 No. 47

Issue 4 Winter 2018



Tuxedo Park Magazine

Covering ROCKLAND, ORANGE, PUTNAM and BERGEN Counties

Showcasing Our Distinctive Regional History



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During this holiday season, when rituals and celebrations are plentiful, take the opportunity to look at past hurts with a new perspective.

In the book “Forgive For Good: A Proven Prescription For Health and Happiness” (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), Stanford University Professor Fred Luskin emphasizes a forgiveness methodology based on rigorous research that documents the effects of unresolved grievances (things that have caused you pain) on one’s emotional and physical health. As a result of my association with the Stanford Forgiveness Project, I have adapted this process in my practice to facilitate those seeking peace and wellness. Forgiveness is definitely even more relevant during the holiday season.

First of all, it must be understood that forgiveness is not minimizing a hurt you have suffered. This is a major

misconception. Forgiveness is first and foremost for oneself to be in the present and not allow past grievances or pain to take up unnecessary space in one’s head or heart. When a grievance is embedded and shows no resolution, the “fight or flight” part of our nervous system becomes over used. This part of our nervous system is great for reacting to threatening situations, but is injurious to our mental and physical health if called upon too often. When it is over used, especially, during the holiday seasons when the good and unfortunately the bad of family and friendship issues can become a major focus, we lose insight as to the meaning of the holiday season.

Importantly, unresolved pain provides the impetus for one to become “the victim.” However, we have a choice in the present to change our framework and mindfully focus on being grateful for the good in the world.

The first thing is to know what you feel so you can allow empathy for yourself. When you are out of balance from a past grievance it is the time to widen your lens and view what is the “wrong” that hurts you now. In this process, forgiveness is for you, and can result in a commitment to make peace with yourself and inevitably with others. It is not about minimizing your hurt: it is about changing your grievance story. Instead of dwelling on how, “he continually hurt my feelings five years ago,” you can, for example amend that to “I now assertively express myself when my feelings are hurt.”

This process is not for reconciling with the person or thing that upset you nor condoning their action. Instead, set a goal to let yourself go to a spiritual place that does not blame or hinder your well-being. It is a way to stop reliving your pain and unnecessarily dwelling on the negative. By

getting the right perspective on what is happening you will recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts, and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes or even ten years ago.

Uncomplicated pain for instance, is easy to handle, i.e. you missed your movie or the grocer was out of your favorite food. Complicated pain is when you cannot let go of a grievance, such as long standing anger toward an ex-spouse or boss. It only results in you making deposits into a bitter bank and becoming a millionaire in bitterness. Not a good holiday gift for yourself! The accompanying tale of woe to your pain only gets bigger and keeps you connected to negativity from the past. The reality is that life can say “no,” and it is a part of nature’s inevitable sufferings that we encounter every day.

We need to have a beginners mind to move forward and recognize the beauty that also surrounds us.

Again, this is not to condone the hurt but to realize that your grievance story may not be healthy for you and your loved ones. It is necessary at times, as comic actor Bob Newhart once said to someone holding on to a painful grievance, when playing a psychiatrist who does five minute therapy, “STOP IT, and now what do you want to talk about in your remaining three minutes.” So enjoy and celebrate each moment and all the positive possibilities that this special time of year has to offer! ❧❧

*For further articles that I have written on Forgiveness, go to my web site under “Publications.”



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