Critical Thinking

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Forgiveness has a negative connotation these days. We see forgiving each other as weak — as not standing by one's values, as giving up one's pride. This view is incredibly counter-productive and, in my opinion, the cause of many problems in today's society. Here is the actual definition of forgiveness:

forgive (verb)

- to cease to feel resentment against (an offender)

Source: Merriam Webster

This definition is all that forgiveness has to be — not pardoning or excusing someone for their actions, but instead letting go of anger towards them. Grudges may appear to make someone "tough" and "strong," but all they do is keep someone's mind tormented by the people they despise. It is very easy to hold a grudge—grudges make one feel powerful without requiring them to do anything. However, true power in one's life stems from overcoming this negativity and taking control of one's emotions.

Forgiving Others

Forgiving others is much easier than it sounds and is one of the quickest and simplest ways to *improve your mental state.* This will be more challenging for deep, long-term grudges, but you can displace surface-level anger as easily as saying, "[Person], I forgive you" aloud—even when alone. Forgiveness helps get negative people out of your head who don't deserve to be there. It also helps you understand others instead of hating them.

Letting go of blame/resentment helps focus on finding solutions, instead of blaming others for problems—this results in *better decision making.* Your thought process goes from, "If only this person didn't do that, everything would be so much better" to "This happened, what can I do about it?" It's not possible to control the actions of others, but we can control our own responses. This attitude *sharpens social skills,* as you learn to respond maturely instead of reacting passionately when upset.

Forgiving Yourself

What does forgiving yourself mean? In line with our definition from above, it means to cease self-resentment. Many toxic behaviors stem from insecurities and regrets people have. If people were content with themselves and their accomplishments, the world would be a kinder place. Self forgiveness can be a much more difficult task than forgiving others (since you can't exactly put yourself behind you), but can reap the greatest benefits. *Self forgiveness helps guide one's life towards inner peace and self-love and away from a dependency on external stimuli (such as degrading others) for happiness.*

One of the best ways to help forgive yourself for shortcomings is to work on improving them. Hate how you look? Exercise! Hate being socially incompetent? Practice talking to people! The amount of effort you put into change doesn't have to be significant, as long as it's consistent. You should be able to say, "I don't like this aspect of myself but that's ok, because I'm taking steps to improve." This will *increase self-esteem* and thus *increase happiness* in your life.

An alternative to changing who you are is accepting your flaws. No one is perfect! This skill is difficult to master, but promotes loving who you are instead of trying to change into who you want to be. Self-acceptance doesn't require you to change everything you despise about yourself, but also can lead to a life of mediocrity where you always settle for "good enough". I find a bit of each mindset to be ideal—I try to improve the qualities I can control and accept the ones I can't.

If you hold self-resentment for past actions, try talking to a professional counselor/therapist! They are skilled at helping patients work through complex and specific issues. They suggest solutions you might not have thought of and call you out when you need it, making your problems much easier to tackle.

Recap & Final Thoughts

- Forgiveness means letting go of resentment, not justifying an action or person.
- It is easier to stay angry than to forgive.
- It is not stronger to stay angry than to forgive.
- Forgiveness increases confidence.
- Forgiveness improves communication.
- Forgiveness clears the mind.
- Forgiveness allows you to learn from others.
- Forgiveness in some aspects of life help you forgive in others.
- Forgiveness makes the world kinder.
- "I don't like myself because I am inferior," can turn into "I love myself because I'm trying to grow."
- "If only this didn't happen," can turn into "This happened, how do we respond?"

Note that this writing isn't citing scientific studies or telling anecdotes—it is presenting a set of ideas for the reader to consider. These beliefs do not cover the entire subject nor do they universally hold.