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Conversations with self-16

Can't forgive yourself?

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Forgiving ourselves does not mean whitewashing or condoning our misdeeds. It's an act of realisation, acceptance of responsibility and the first step towards change

We have to be able to forgive ourselves. If we have not forgiven ourselves, then we have not experienced the fullness of our humanness.

Many of us speak of forgiveness, yet this is only at a superficial level, because the deeper aspect of forgiveness that some of us never experience is self-forgiveness.

Self-forgiveness is difficult and demanding. Many of us seem to have a need to punish ourselves. What better way is there than to withhold forgiveness? We do not feel worthy so we attack our self-esteem which causes us to feel worthless. This is a type of masochistic martyrdom. Self-forgiveness, we wrongly think, means condoning what we have done, and so we condemn ourselves irrationally, instead of accepting ourselves the way we are, with all our limitations.

Often we refuse self-forgiveness because we are disappointed in ourselves. Through self-pity, self-condemnation or self-punishment we choose a form of self-centred behaviour and end up blocking the power of healing and love.

This disappointment is so oppressive that we continuously experience failure and thus say, 'So what's the use?' We give up on ourselves.

On the other hand, by forgiving ourselves we can make our failures work for us. We transcend our limitations and gain insight into ourselves. If we persist in not forgiving ourselves, we build reserves of guilt; we become emotionally numb and depressed. The source for many emotional conflicts is the refusal to forgive self.

Finally, self-forgiveness does not mean absolving ourselves of the responsibilities and consequences of our actions but emphasises them all the more. It does not mean self-pity, but accountability and change. It does not mean white-washing or condoning our misdeeds, but facing the reality of our actions and picking up our cross.

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