

*Inspire 2026*  
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# **Creative Methods for Forgiveness and Letting Go**

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*Workshop 4 / Saturday*  
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# Foundation: What Forgiveness Is — and Is Not

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*"If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility."*  
— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Table-Talk* (1857)

Forgiveness is approached as a deliberate inner process aimed at releasing persistent emotional burdens associated with past injuries. It does not imply condoning wrongdoing, forgetting what happened, or reconciling with the offender — but rather reclaiming one's own psychological freedom.

## Forgiveness does NOT mean:

- o Justifying, excusing, or condoning harmful or hurtful behaviour
- o Forgetting what happened or removing necessary boundaries
- o Reconnecting with or reconciling with the person who caused harm
- o A single moment — for deep wounds, it may be a process of months or years

## Forgiveness IS:

- o Simply an act of the heart — a releasing of pain, resentment, and desperate anger
- o A relief for your own heart — you recognise that you need not withhold your heart from any being
- o An autonomous act — you do not need the other person's cooperation or acknowledgment
- o A gift to yourself: the freedom to no longer carry the weight of the past

Source: Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, Bantam Books, 1993, Chapter 20

## A Warning:

- o Forgiveness has its time and place. For someone only just becoming aware that they have been harmed or abused, their reality must first be clearly seen and acknowledged. They must be allowed to move through grief, anger, sorrow, fear, and confusion. It is also entirely valid — and sometimes right — not to forgive at all.

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# Two Pathways: Emotion-Based and Decision-Based Forgiveness

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## Emotion-based forgiveness

One recognises how the emotions — resentment, bitterness, anger — are binding and causing harm, and wishes to free oneself from them. The motivation comes from the felt sense of being trapped by the emotional burden, and the desire for inner freedom.

## Decision-based forgiveness

One attempts to *forgive by understanding* how the injury arose — what led to it, what drove the other person, what the context was. The motivation is cognitive and compassionate: understanding, not condoning.

Both pathways are valid and often work together. The REACH model and the Shantideva method integrate both dimensions.

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## Before Beginning: The Inner Inventory — Three Clarifying Questions

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Before forgiveness can begin, the wound must be clearly understood. These three questions serve as a psychological inventory — making the invisible burden visible:

### *What exactly is causing me pain?*

Locate the wound precisely — is it the betrayal of trust, the lack of respect, the loss, the abandonment? Often it is not the act itself but what it symbolises.

### *What does this person still owe me?*

Make the implicit demand explicit: an apology, acknowledgment of the harm, restitution, recognition? Writing this down makes the emotional debt visible.

### *What would I need to receive in order to truly let go?*

This is the bridge question. When you realise that what you need may never come — or can only come from within — the space for genuine forgiveness opens.

These questions are not answered once and set aside — they set the actual clarification process in motion. The answers make the emotional debt visible, so that you can consciously choose to release it.

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## Introduction to the Two Methods

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In this workshop we explore experiential and well-established paths toward forgiveness:

The first path comes from the contemplative Buddhist tradition of Shantideva (8th century) and weaves ethical self-reflection together with compassion – both for ourselves and for those we have hurt.

The second path is the REACH model developed by American psychologist Prof. Everett L. Worthington Jr., one of the most thoroughly researched and practically tested forgiveness programmes in the world.

Both paths may be practised independently, or as a complementary pair that unites Eastern wisdom and Western science.

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## PART I

# Self-Forgiveness after Shantideva

*A Guide to Forgiving Yourself*

*"Those who judge others have not yet encountered themselves."  
— Anselm Grün*

### Step 1: Recall the Harm Clearly

Bring to mind a situation in which you caused harm to another person — perhaps through hurtful words, a betrayal of trust, or a moment of carelessness. Or, if you feel ready, something more difficult: harm caused to an animal or a group.

Try to see it clearly and honestly — without glossing over it or exaggerating it.

### Step 2: Empathise with Those Affected

Without judging yourself: try to imagine how this harm must have felt for the person (or animal or group) affected.

What did they experience, feel, suffer?

Allow this empathy to arise consciously — it is not an occasion for self-punishment, but an act of human connectedness.

### Step 3: Express Your Remorse

If you truly feel sorry, express this inwardly.

*"I am so sorry" "I am truly sorry."*

### Step 4: Self-Forgiveness – Compassion for Yourself

Come to rest now. Breathe deeply a few times.

Shift perspective — turn your gaze toward your past self:

Why did you act that way? Were you carried away by a strong emotion at the time? Did you simply not fully understand the situation?

If you can see that this was genuinely the case — that you were *blind* or *too weak* to act otherwise — then try to acknowledge this clearly:

- o The emotion was stronger than you. It swept you away like a powerful river.
- o Being blind or weak is not a moral failure — it is part of the human condition, shaped by the emotions I was caught in and the understanding I had at the time.

You would not punish a blind or weak person — you would want to help them see, to become stronger.

Why should you treat yourself more harshly?

I couldn't have acted differently at that time — given my inner state, and perhaps the outer circumstances too, such as never having been shown how harmful this was. If I had seen it then as clearly as I do now, or had been as strong as I am today, I would have chosen differently.

Place a hand on your heart — or hold yourself, inwardly or physically.

***"I forgive myself. I forgive myself."***

### **Step 5: Shift Perspective Again – Ask for Forgiveness**

Turn your gaze back toward those you have hurt.

Imagine meeting them – even if they are no longer alive.

***"Today I see far more clearly what I did to you and how it hurt you. At the time I was blind and too weak. I truly regret what I did and the pain I caused."***

***"Please forgive me. Please forgive me."***

Imagine these beings sensing your sincerity and genuine remorse.

They nod to you and say:

***"I forgive you." – or: "We forgive you."***

### **Step 6: Resting in Lightness**

Imagine – and try to feel – that you have forgiven yourself and been forgiven by those you hurt. Rest for a moment in that feeling (of certainty).

Then allow yourself to rest in the stillness and lightness this process can bring.

### **Step 7: Gratitude and Resolve**

Take a moment to say a quiet inward 'Thank you.'

Then make a clear inner commitment:

***"I will not do this again. I have truly learned from this."***

– or, if that feels like too much:

***"I will do my very best not to let this happen again."***

### **Step 8: Letting Go of Shame and Self-Blame**

If feelings of shame or self-reproach arise, ask yourself honestly:

***"Does holding on to this shame and self-blame bring any benefit to me or to others? Does it make anyone stronger? Does it create any good?"***

If you see clearly that these feelings serve no good purpose – try to let them go.

***"If they bring no benefit – why am I clinging to them? That makes no sense."***

And acknowledge: "I truly gave my best."

### **Step 9: Closing with Good Wishes (Metta)**

Complete this practice by sending out good wishes:

- o To those you have hurt – wherever they may be, even if no longer alive:

***"May you be at peace. May you be healthy and happy."***

- o To yourself: ***"May I be at peace. May I be healthy and happy."***

## PART II

# The REACH Model of Forgiveness

*by Prof. Everett L. Worthington Jr.*

*(Original Version)*

The REACH model was developed by Prof. Everett L. Worthington Jr. (Virginia Commonwealth University) and is one of the most thoroughly scientifically investigated forgiveness interventions in the world. It focuses primarily on forgiving other people who have hurt us. The acronym REACH stands for five steps:

### **R – Recall the Hurt**

Bring to mind the injury that was done to you as clearly as possible.

Try neither to minimise nor to dramatise it. See what actually happened.

Name the feelings connected with this memory – pain, anger, sadness, disappointment.

The aim is not to dwell in the pain, but to see it clearly: as the starting point for forgiveness.

Use the three clarifying questions: What exactly hurts? What does this person owe me? What would I need to be able to let go?

### **E – Empathize**

Try – even if it is difficult – to take the perspective of the person who hurt you.

Ask yourself: what might have driven them to act this way? What history, pain, or limitations do they carry?

Empathy does not mean condoning the behaviour. It means recognising human weakness and vulnerability – even where it has caused us harm.

This stance is often the most difficult – and at the same time the most decisive – step in forgiveness.

### **A – Altruistic Gift**

Recall a time when you yourself made a mistake – and were forgiven by someone. How did that feel?

Forgiveness can be understood as a gift you give to the other person – not because they deserve it, but because you yourself want to be free.

Worthington emphasises: forgiveness is an altruistic act. You offer it out of generosity – not out of obligation.

This step moves forgiveness from the reactive to the intentional: I forgive because I choose to forgive.

## **C – Commit**

Make your forgiveness real – through a clear, concrete decision.

Worthington recommends recording this in writing: a forgiveness letter (which need not be sent), a written note, a symbolic gesture.

***"I have decided to forgive [name]." or "Today, [date], I forgave [name] for [event]."***

This public or written commitment strengthens the binding force of forgiveness and helps to meet later doubts.

## **H – Hold on**

Forgiveness is not a single event – it is often a process.

It is normal for memories to return and old feelings to resurface. That does not mean you have not forgiven.

When old thoughts or feelings arise: remember your decision to forgive. Trust the step you have taken.

***"I have forgiven. I hold to my decision."***

Worthington emphasises: emotional healing takes time. Forgiveness is the first step – not the end of the journey.

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Scientific note: More than 1,200 studies show that practising forgiveness is associated with significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as improved self-esteem and relationship quality. (Worthington, 2006; Toussaint et al., 2015)

## PART III

# REACH – Deepened by Shantideva

*Science and Contemplative Wisdom United*

*(Integrated Version)*

This version combines Worthington's scientifically grounded REACH model with the contemplative deepening of Shantideva. Each REACH step is enriched by a layer of practice or reflection drawn from the Buddhist tradition.

### **R – Recall the Hurt**

Bring to mind clearly what happened. Name your pain.

Deepening (Shantideva): Allow yourself to pause for a moment and truly feel the pain – without immediately reacting. Pain that is seen loses some of its power.

### **E – Empathize – with the One Who Hurt Us**

Try to see the action through the eyes of the other person. What was their story, their pain, their blind spot?

Deepening (Shantideva): Remember the process from forgiving yourself. The blind and the weak deserve compassion, not punishment.

Whoever hurts us also acts from blindness or weakness – had been carried away by a strong emotion or compulsive actions.

This insight weakens resentment – not by minimising harm, but by seeing more deeply.

***"You too were blind or too weak at that time. I see that." (And perhaps: "I understand – you couldn't have acted differently then.")***

### **A – Altruistic Gift – Forgiveness as a Free Gift**

Forgiveness is not agreement with the wrong done – it is a free act of liberation: for yourself and for the other person.

Try to find a bridge from your own experience of forgiving yourself: "Like me who harmed others because the emotion was too strong to cope with or out of a lack of understanding or a moment of evil-mindedness, you harmed me. I see that. If you had been stronger, if you had seen it more clearly that this is so wrong, if you had more self-control or insight, you wouldn't have harmed me.

Instead of continuing to hurt myself with resentment and anger and keeping our painful past in my heart so that it causes me pain again as soon as I remember it, today I decide to forgive you!

***"I forgive you. I forgive you!"***

## **C – Commit – Make a Binding Decision to Forgive**

*"I have decided to forgive."*

You can visualise yourself signing a document and placing it in your heart.

*"Today, [date], I forgave [name] for [event]."*

Visualise the dark cords that bind you to this pain and the past — fed by the hope that the other will still change or apologise. With a breath in, and on the out-breath, visualise cutting these cords with a sword of clarity. Speak inwardly:

*"I claim nothing more. I am free."*

## **H – Hold on – Stay with Your Forgiveness**

When old feelings return: you have forgiven – that stands. Emotional healing takes time.

Deepening (Shantideva): When feelings of resentment or pain arise again, ask yourself:

*"Does holding on to this pain bring any benefit to me or to others?"*

If you see clearly that clinging brings no good – open your hand. Let it go.

You can close this practice with a loving gesture and dedication toward yourself: both hands on your heart, a quiet

*"May I be at peace." "I rejoice in my practice of forgiveness. Through this may I be free from this pain and live happily and at ease. "*

## PART IV

# Kornfield's Forgiveness Meditation

*Three Directions — A Path with Heart*

For most people, the act of forgiveness is a longer process. If you have been very deeply hurt, the work of forgiveness may take years. It develops step by step — grief, anger, sorrow, fear, and confusion — and finally, when you have allowed yourself to be fully exposed to the inner pain, forgiveness comes as a relief, as a liberation of the heart. You recognise that forgiveness ultimately serves your own good, because you no longer have to endure the pain of the past. And when it concerns the forgiveness of your own guilt — of what you have done to yourself or to someone else — the process is the same.

Begin the formal practice of forgiveness by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes, and letting your breath flow lightly and naturally. Relax body and mind. Breathe gently into the area of the heart and sense the inner barriers that have been there because you have not forgiven — yourself or others. Sense the pain of the closed heart. Breathe gently into the heart area for a while, and give the feeling of forgiveness space. Then recite the following words, allowing them to open your forgiving heart. Let the words penetrate more and more deeply as you repeat them, so that the images and feelings they evoke grow in intensity.

### Forgiveness of Others

In the many ways I have hurt and harmed others, betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering knowingly or unknowingly, out of my own pain, my fear, my anger, and my confusion —

Recall the ways in which you have hurt others. Look at the pain, feel the pain you have caused through your own fear and confusion. Allow the feeling of your own sorrow and regret to arise. Make clear to yourself that you can free yourself from this burden and ask for forgiveness. Let each of these memories that weigh on your heart appear as a vivid image, and repeat each time:

*"I ask for your forgiveness! I ask for your forgiveness!"*

### Forgiveness for Yourself

In the many ways I have betrayed myself, harmed myself, abandoned myself — through thoughts, words, and deeds, knowingly and unknowingly —

Hold before you the preciousness of your life. Then recall the occasions when you have hurt yourself and caused yourself harm. Allow the pain you have caused yourself to arise, and make clear to yourself that you can free yourself from this burden. Then say to yourself:

*"I forgive myself for every injury I have caused myself out of fear, pain, or confusion, actively or passively. I forgive myself. I forgive myself."*

## **Forgiveness for Those Who Have Hurt or Harmed You**

In the many ways I have been hurt and harmed by others, betrayed or abandoned, through thoughts, words, or deeds, knowingly or unknowingly —

Recall these events precisely. Allow the grief and pain to arise that you have carried from the past, and make clear to yourself that you can free yourself from this burden by extending forgiveness as your heart is ready. Say now to yourself:

*"I see the many ways in which others have hurt or harmed me, out of fear, pain, confusion, or anger. To the extent that I am able and ready, I offer my forgiveness. I have carried this pain in my heart for too long. For this reason I offer my forgiveness to all of you who have harmed me. I forgive you."*

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Gently repeat these three directions of forgiveness until you can sense a lightening of the heart. For very deep pain, you may feel only the inner weight, the anguish, or the anger. Take gentle contact with this. Forgiveness cannot be forced or artificially produced. Simply continue with this practice, and allow the words and images to do their work gradually. You can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your practice, learning to release the past and open your heart to each new moment with wise love and kindness.

Source: Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, Bantam Books, 1993, Chapter 20, pp. 371–374

## CREATIVE & SYMBOLIC PRACTICES

# Anchoring Forgiveness in the Body

### *Four Elemental Rituals*

To feel forgiveness not just intellectually but in the body and in action, ritual gestures are enormously helpful. Choose what resonates with you:

#### 1. Releasing the Weight — Earth

**The action:** Take a heavy stone for each burden you are carrying. Hold it until it becomes uncomfortable.

**The ritual:** Go to a river, a lake, or deep woodland. Say aloud: "I release this weight now." Throw the stones away with force, or place them down deliberately.

**The effect:** Notice the immediate bodily change — the sudden lightness in hands and arms symbolises the inner space that has opened.

#### 2. The Fire Ritual — Transformation

**The action:** Write everything you regret or that causes pain on a sheet of paper. Be as detailed as possible.

**The ritual:** Burn the paper in a fireproof bowl. Watch as the words become ash.

**The effect:** The destruction of the paper signals to the brain: this process is complete. The old story no longer exists in this form. The ash can be given to the wind.

#### 3. The Growth Ritual — New Life

**The action:** Buy a plant seed or a small flower.

**The ritual:** Dig a small hole in the earth. Before placing the seed, speak aloud what you have learned from the experience. Plant the seed directly over those words.

**The effect:** Each time you water the plant, you are reminded not of the guilt, but of what has grown from it. You are tending your own development.

#### 4. The Cleansing — Water

**The action:** A long bath or a conscious shower.

**The ritual:** Under the water, imagine it washing away not only dust but old accusations and bitterness from your skin. Use a special oil or salt as a symbol of renewal.

**The effect:** The physical freshness links with the felt sense of an emotional new beginning.

# Closing

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Whatever has touched, moved, or stirred something within you today – receive it with kindness. Forgiveness is not a linear path, nor a state one reaches and then simply holds. It is an orientation we can choose again and again.

*"Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is remembering – and still being free."*

If you wish, take a few minutes after the workshop to write down for yourself:

1. What touched me today?
2. What do I want to take with me?
3. What is one small next step on my own path of forgiveness?

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If you find yourself on difficult terrain – if old wounds run very deep, or if the exercises have stirred something up – please speak with someone you trust. Forgiveness sometimes needs a companion.

***May you be at peace.***

*May you be healthy and happy.*

*May all the good you have sown today bear fruit.*

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## Key Principles: What This Workshop Stands On

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- o Forgiveness does **NOT** require reconciliation.
- o Forgiveness does **NOT** mean forgetting or removing boundaries.
- o Forgiveness is **NOT** a gift to the other person — it is a gift to oneself
- o Self-respect and safety always remain essential.
- o Self-forgiveness is an integral and equal part of the process.
- o Forgiveness cannot be forced — it unfolds through repeated, patient practice.
- o For deep wounds, forgiveness may be impossible (and that is ok) or can be a process of months or years.
- o Forgiveness is a psychological strength that supports emotional integration, resilience, and long-term wellbeing.

### The Wisdom of Forgiveness

“I think we worry that forgiveness means we’re letting someone get away with something, but it’s more to do with releasing ourselves from the burden of resentment.”

- Ruby Wax



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