

The Torah is the tree of life, and those who hold fast to it are happy.

Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.

Forgiveness –

We are called upon to forgive, but how do we do this? Just saying the words leaves us unfulfilled. How can we deeply feel forgiveness so that we can let go? There are very solid steps that take us through the process of forgiveness. We can go as deeply as we choose to free ourselves of living backward, in order to live forward.

Rabbi Lisa stated in her High Holy Day Sermon of 5775. Forgive.

I guess you could have expected this would be on the list since it is the High Holy Days, but teshuvah, forgiveness, is a real and recognizable key to happiness. It is pretty draining to the soul to harbor hurts and disagreements. Judaism teaches us to take responsibility for the hurts we have caused, and to accept the apologies of those who try to make amends with us. Always work toward reconciliation. Happiness, existential happiness, comes with letting go of the things that poison our soul, and most of those begin with forgiving someone for something, and maybe even forgiving ourselves. Jewish answer to happiness: Let go of the things that poison your heart. There is no virtue in carrying the torch for past hurts.

Torah/Midrash Reference:

Why Are Forgiving and Asking Forgiveness So Difficult?
BY DAVID STANLEY , 9/16/2015

Everywhere I look, I am surrounded by apologia.

Apologia: an apology with no remorse.

Why is forgiveness such a difficult topic? Forgiveness is difficult to grant and equally challenging to request. The journey to real forgiveness is long and arduous. Leviticus teaches that we are forbidden to seek revenge or carry grudges - that we must forgive those who, with a sincere request, ask our forgiveness. According to the ancient Jewish sages, it is a *mitzvah* (commandment or good deed) to grant forgiveness – but that doesn't make it painless.

It's no easier to be on the other side, asking for forgiveness.

You've well and truly wronged a friend. You know it. She knows it. Yet you still can't bring yourself to offer a bona fide apology and ask forgiveness. And even if you do, and she says "no" the first time, you still must ask twice more until, in accordance with Torah, you're good with God.

Why is it so difficult to seek and grant forgiveness?

Hurt and fear, joined together by ego.

You've been wronged, badly. It hurts, deeply. When your transgressor comes to ask you for forgiveness, you are loathe to let go of your pain. One, you've inculcated the pain into your being, and to change one's being is in itself painful. Two, you now realize that the perpetrator is also in pain, and you wish pain upon them in an attempt to balance out the suffering.

But we forget, in our Newtonian world, that for them to continue to suffer, we must also continue to ache.

You long to see them punished. Your ego demands "justice." You've been hurt and you want them to hurt. To refuse forgiveness gives you a new power; the upper hand. To let them go means that they will hurt less; they will have won.

You've wronged someone, badly. You hurt them, deeply. You acknowledge that you must ask forgiveness; for your own peace, for peace with God, and to heal the wounds you caused. Yet, you cannot summon the consciousness to do so. Why? You are fearful that your approach may be rejected. Despite the honor in your request for forgiveness, it is wholly possible that you might be turned away from their home, the phone slammed down, the email returned with a scathing reply.

Rejection hurts. With that rejection, your ego is wounded. While you were originally the sinner, in your ego-driven mind, your plea for mercy now grants you an imagined moral high ground. It is a high ground that exists, to be sure, only in the ego-clouded mist of your mind. To not seek forgiveness, to not grant forgiveness... if every behavior has a consequence, what are the consequences?

More pain, more hurt, more suffering.

Less compassion, less joy, less kindness.

The Dalai Lama says, "My religion is simple. My religion is kindness."

In Judaism, we say: *Chesed*. Kindness.

Originally, *chesed* meant the love that brought God to create the world and the connection between God and the people of Israel. Today, as it is said in the Talmud, “The world stands upon three things: study of Torah, service to God, and acts of *chesed*, of kindness.

To seek and grant forgiveness are *mitzvot* (good deeds or commandments). We do not perform *mitzvot* to raise our standing in the community. Rather, we perform *mitzvot* to perform *tikkun olam*, to heal our broken world.

So whether you’ve been wronged or you’ve done wrong: Leave behind the ego, heal the world, be kind to yourself, be kind to others, and forgive.

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- See more at: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/blog/2015/09/16/why-are-forgiving-and-asking-forgiveness-so-difficult#sthash.plhwZ3J4.dpuf>

Steps to Forgiveness:

Dr. Luskin continues to serve as Director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects, an ongoing series of workshops and research projects that investigate the effectiveness of his forgiveness methods on a variety of populations. In the *Forgive for Good* workshop and class series Dr. Frederic Luskin presents the forgiveness training methodology that has been validated through six successful research studies conducted through the Stanford Forgiveness Projects.

Misconceptions about forgiveness – Summary:

- ❖ Forgiving an offense means that you condone the offense
- ❖ Forgiving means you have to reconcile with someone who treated you badly
- ❖ Forgiveness depends on whether or not the “offender” apologizes, wants you back, or changes his or her ways
- ❖ Forgiveness means that we forget what has happened to us

Steps:

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience or write about your situation through journaling or a letter.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”
4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. 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 ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset practice a simple stress management technique to soothe your body’s flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace and prosperity and work hard to get them.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt seek out new ways to get what you want.

8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.

9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

The practice of forgiveness has been shown to reduce anger, hurt depression and stress and leads to greater feelings of hope, peace, compassion and self- confidence. Practicing forgiveness leads to healthy relationships as well as physical health. It also influences our attitude which opens the heart to kindness, beauty, and love.

Creative Inspiration:

Knowing our failings,
Let us be patient with those of others.
Knowing our will to goodness,
May we see in others a dignity that is human,
A beauty inviolate forever.
Every soul, O God, is precious in Your sight,
And every life is Your gift to us.

Gates of Repentance
Yom Kippur Morning Service