

# WITH *Forgiveness*

*Are You Ready?*



*Sheri Rosenthal & Susyn Reeve*

# ***WITH Forgiveness ~ Are You Ready?***

## ***A Personal Workbook***

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## How to Use This Workbook

Welcome to a transforming experience as you allow our *WITH Forgiveness* Personal Workbook to guide you on a life-changing journey. We know from personal experience, that when we open our hearts to forgiveness and take action, that the ripple effect has a far reaching impact deepening and expanding peace and happiness in our personal lives and in the world.

We have created this *WITH Forgiveness* Personal Workbook as a way for you to explore forgiveness more deeply by providing an inspiring quote, essay and exercises allowing you to put forgiveness into practice.

Use your *WITH Forgiveness* Personal Workbook individually focusing on each lesson, in the order they are given or based on a particular area where you are currently challenged. Or start or join a [Forgiveness Circle](#) that meets weekly, in person or on the phone, focusing on one lesson each week.

And participate by emailing your forgiveness questions and challenges to [Sheri and Susyn \(askus@withforgiveness.com\)](mailto:askus@withforgiveness.com).

## A Word About Our Words

We would like to clarify the use of some important words found throughout this book.

For us, the words God, Spirit, Source, Goddess, the Infinite, absolute consciousness, the One, the Creator, Higher Power, and the Divine are all different words for the same entity.

When we use the words divinity, divine being, co-creators, expressions of the Divine, and spirituality, we are referring to the human experience of our spiritual nature in this reality.

We also use the words ego-mind, computer mind, programmed mind, dreaming mind, conditioned mind, or domesticated mind when we are referring to our rational and thinking mind.

With all of these words we understand that you may have a personal preference. We have chosen to use a variety of words interchangeably to honor the varied of points of view that ultimately describe the same experience.

We both look forward to hearing your comments and questions. Feel free to [email us \(info@withforgiveness.com\)](mailto:info@withforgiveness.com), as we deeply appreciate your thoughts and ideas on how to spread forgiveness around the world! We are grateful for your commitment to expanding and deepening love, compassion, peace and happiness in your lives through the practice of forgiveness.

*With all our love, Susyn & Sheri*





## Lesson 1: A Message from Sheri & Susyn

*With forgiveness there is compassion, reconciliation, and unconditional love.*

We thought the most powerful place for us to begin our journey together, is by sharing our personal stories with you so that you get to know a little about us and have a deeper understanding of why forgiveness is so important to us! Here are our personal stories:

### ***Sheri's Story***

My whole life I've loved my mom dearly, however our relationship was difficult and tumultuous. We screamed, hurt, and judged one another. I always thought that if *she* went to therapy everything would be fine, since *she* was the problem (from my point of view)!

Over the years, as my spiritual journey deepened, I realized that I had blamed my mom for all the "terrible" injustices I suffered as a child. I was subconsciously punishing her for all the suffering she caused me; I wanted her to pay. And she paid dearly *every day of her life*, believe me!

Then one day I understood that my inner child was angry for not receiving the unconditional love she felt she needed. I saw that I had made an unconscious choice as a child to see my mom as a tyrant. The truth was she loved me so much, and she was doing the best she could. In the moment I made that deep realization – I was no longer angry at my mom. I felt the most intense wave of love and compassion for her come over me.

That evening as I was soaking in the bath, my mom phoned me quite upset. She felt like something significant had changed between us that day. Amazingly, my mom actually perceived the dissolution of the entire energetic prison that had us chained together in a constant cycle of emotional pain!

I told my mom I had let go of all the anger I'd felt towards her, and that I finally realized how much I loved and appreciated her. I said, "I'm sorry for being so mean to you; constantly trying to punish you when you were doing your best." I'd *finally* forgiven her. And just so you know – my mom and I have *never* argued once since that day – and she is my best friend.

### ***Susyn's Story***

Throughout my spiritual journey I've bumped up against the challenges of forgiving. Just before the holidays in December 1985 I had an experience with forgiveness that changed my life.

I'd been divorced for six years when I wrote my ex, Byll, asking for copies of movies we'd made during our marriage. He wrote back that he'd decided not to send the movies. I was shocked. I wrote again, making sure to point out, (with an *attitude*) that I thought he'd understand that I wanted to see the movies of my dad who'd died. His next letter again said "No." I thought – *this guy has a problem!*

## Lesson 1



Months passed. During a workshop I attended on forgiveness, we were instructed to close our eyes and imagine a person we needed to forgive. Byll appeared. I could hear my ego-mind say, "I forgive you for having an affair, and for being unavailable when my father was dying." Then I heard another voice, coming straight from my heart, and saying: "I forgive you for loving me." I was stunned. I knew this was the profound truth beneath all the obvious reasons I'd been angry with him.

In order for me to have accepted his love, I had to *first* love myself, and I hadn't. During our marriage I had projected all my self-loathing onto him.

Ten days later I was in a supermarket in New Hampshire, where we'd lived while we were married. Suddenly I knew Byll was in the store. We said hello. He asked if I'd received the movies he'd sent ten days ago! When I truly forgave Byll for loving me, and ultimately forgave myself for believing that I wasn't worthy of love, the movies were freely given.

### **Practicing the Lesson**

When we begin a journey it's vital to have a destination in mind. We don't need to know all the steps along the way; however, we do need to know where we're headed. On a piece of paper, in your journal, or on your computer respond to the following items to articulate your *WITH Forgiveness* intentions:

1. My goal in making a commitment to *WITH Forgiveness* is:
2. My greatest challenge to being forgiving is:
3. My most powerful experience with forgiveness was:
4. My definition of forgiveness is:
5. The most important thing for me to learn about forgiveness now is:
6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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### **Lesson 2: A Prelude to Forgiveness**

*To err is human; to forgive, divine.*  
Alexander Pope

We could say that forgiveness is the act of pardoning or excusing oneself or another without harboring resentment. If we want to truly forgive, we must understand that forgiveness does not mean we are agreeing or disagreeing that an action in question was wrong, right, bad, good, appropriate or inappropriate.

### **Lesson 1 - 2**



Instead of looking at what is “right” or “wrong,” we recognize that an action was taken in ignorance of our true nature and the action caused pain and suffering. (By ignorance, we mean the lack of awareness of our divine nature.)

The true nature of humanity can be described in many ways, depending on one’s spiritual or philosophical tradition. To be as simple and inclusive as possible: When we *experience* the One consciousness or God that exists within all things, we have *realized* our true divine nature.

With this experience comes the understanding that our concepts, ideas and beliefs create duality and separateness among people, rather than supporting the oneness of our spiritual nature. As long as we hold on to our beliefs, *then* we have something we can argue about and use against others.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Identify 5 issues you argued over this past week.
2. List your beliefs about those 5 issues.
3. Is it possible there are other points of view as valid as yours? What are they?
4. Is your attachment to being right causing suffering in your life? Explain.
5. If so, what was your experience when you acknowledged the other person’s viewpoint by saying, “I appreciate and understand your point of view, can we agree that we both see this differently?”
6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### **Lesson 2 - 3**



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### **Lesson 3: Forgiveness and Compassion**

*Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.*

Luke 6:36-7

In this New Testament quote, why is compassion linked with being non-judgmental? Simple. You can’t be compassionate when you’re sitting in judgment.

If we believe we're better off than a homeless person, for example, this is only the self-important pride of the ego-mind and its concepts and beliefs speaking. (The "ego-mind" is our rational thinking mind that perceives itself as separate and distinct from the world and others.) The feelings of repulsion toward that person cause suffering inside of us and are the result of our ignorance of the oneness and inter-connectedness of all life.

When we truly and deeply experience the oneness of all life, we have humility. We no longer have the desire to put ourselves above or make ourselves less than others. True humility is the result of recognizing that all beings are of equal importance. We call this way of perceiving *equanimity*. When we embody this, we treat everyone with respect and kindness as if they were Christ, Allah, Krishna, Buddha or God. Without equanimity, we cannot have compassion.

It's easy to feel compassion for someone suffering for reasons you feel drawn to, like a child dying of hunger in Africa. But compassion doesn't come easily when we judge the person violent, repulsive, abusive and not worthy of our compassion, like a suicide bomber, rapist or clergy member who's guilty of sexual abuse.

Compassion and forgiveness are unconditional love in action. Are we truly being compassionate and forgiving if we only allow ourselves to love members of our own country, race or religion? Of course not because that involves judgment, separation and is conditional.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Every day take one *compassionate* action towards someone who is suffering, some examples are: giving up your seat on the train to someone who is overloaded with packages, allowing someone to go ahead of you in line who is annoyed, bringing dinner to a sick friend, walking your elderly neighbor's dog, or giving a donation of money to someone you normally would not give to. After taking a few of these kinds of actions, record how you feel when you are compassionate.
2. What conditions to you place on being compassionate?
3. Create a list of ways you can express your compassion to those in need and to those who have a point of view different than yours.
4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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### **Lesson 3**





## Lesson 4: Practicalities of Forgiveness

*When I have forgiven myself and remembered who I Am, I will bless everyone and everything I see.*  
A Course in Miracles

Each day we take hundreds of actions. Often we're doing our best to consider others when making choices, but oftentimes we don't. It's not that we're intentionally unkind and selfish. We often operate from our own limited point of view and are not aware of all the consequences of our actions. As a result, someone is hurt by what we did or said and they become angry with us, or we become angry with ourselves.

We also hurt others when their beliefs, opinions and ideas challenge our notion of what's right. This can happen when a family member doesn't agree with us and we stop speaking with them. It happens on a larger scale when one religious group doesn't agree with the beliefs of another and they choose to blame and terrorize each other.

Humans are the only species who continually punish themselves by re-experiencing past wounds. We regret something we've said or didn't say, something we've done or didn't do, or we blame someone else for their actions or failure to act. Each time we remember the situation we reactivate hurt, anger, sadness and suffering.

Forgiveness involves the action of letting go and surrendering our attachment to judging circumstances from our personal point of view. Conflict arises when people act according to their beliefs and concepts without acknowledging that other people have their *own* concepts and beliefs.

For example, if someone commits a murder, we understand that something in that person's mind compelled them to take their actions. We may become very angry and feel deep hate towards that person and judge them harshly. The solution is to see the "*what is*" in the situation. In this case, it's that someone acted in ignorance of the true nature of humanity and created suffering both in themselves and in others. (This concept was expressed by Jesus when he said; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34)

Forgiveness does not mean we condone acts of violence or physical and verbal abuse. It means we forgive actions committed in ignorance of our divinity and inter-connectedness. This may be difficult to put into practice, but we assure you that expressing unconditional love offers more to heal ourselves and the world, than anger, hatred, blame and violence.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Identify a time that you condemned yourself. Condemning yourself could be as simple as calling yourself stupid. Make a list of examples of this kind of action.
2. Condemning another could be judging their words or actions to be inappropriate and projecting your anger or resentment on them. Again, make a list of examples of this kind of action.

## Lesson 4



3. Can you see life situations from the point of view that everyone takes actions that in the moment seem fine, but later may not? How does this impact your perception of the situation?
4. With this understanding, forgive yourself and/or the other person for what happened. How are you feeling now? If you cannot forgive, what is your mind telling you that is preventing you from doing so?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## Lesson 4 - 5



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## Lesson 5: How and Why We Forgive

*When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.*

Catherine Ponder

Catherine Ponder's words, in the quotation above, give clear instructions about when to forgive. Any time you feel resentment or regret toward yourself or another, it's time to forgive. When you are plagued by a circumstance from the past, it's time to forgive. When you believe you're right and someone else is wrong it's time to forgive. When you are criticizing, blaming and making demands of yourself or others, it's time to forgive.

You may have heard all of this before. But when we go deeper in exploring forgiveness, we see that with forgiveness there is compassion, true freedom from emotional pain, reconciliation between people, unconditional love and world peace.

When we shine light into the very essence of forgiveness, we discover that we are an expression of love in the universe, and powerful creators. It's our made-up concepts and ideas that create separation, conflict, pain, misery, and war – whether we create war within ourselves with thoughts of unworthiness, doubt and fear – or we create war on a battlefield with missiles, rockets and guns.

The challenge we offer is to move past judgment itself. When we say forgiveness is the act of pardoning or excusing, that's saying that we've *judged* a person's acts or words to be wrong according to our point of view or the point of view of society. This is where we get stuck over and over again, constantly judging, becoming angry and then having to forgive.

When we finally let go of the judgments we hold of ourselves and others, we'll *no longer have anything to forgive*. Only when we judge is it necessary to forgive. You might be thinking that we have to judge or society will slip into chaos, but this is not true. With compassion, we can help others take responsibility for their words and deeds committed in non-awareness of their divinity.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Create a Forgiveness Ritual. (Below are some ideas for your ritual or create your own.)
    - a. In meditation, imagine you are talking with the person in question, sending them your forgiveness and love. Feel their gratitude for the freedom you have given them.
    - b. Make a list of the things you want to forgive and then write a forgiveness letter for each item on your list. Then burn your letters along with prayers of thanksgiving.
    - c. Find an object that represents the unforgiven person or situation—a photo, a stick, a stone, or some other symbol—and burn it, bury it or set it adrift on a river or lake representing your detaching and letting go.
    - d. Write a song of forgiveness or do a ritual dance of forgiveness. Whatever you do, follow your heart, and you are sure to feel like a great weight has been lifted.
  2. How do you feel after your ritual?
  3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 5 - 6



### Lesson 6: Sabotage and Intuition

*The mind can assert anything and pretend it has proved it. My beliefs I test on my body, on my intuitional consciousness, and when I get a response there, then I accept.*

D.H. Lawrence

Our lives are filled with choices: from what to eat and wear, to who to marry, and what medical treatments to follow and where to invest our money. Daily life choices are often made automatically based on habits of thinking and actions. Our *bigger* life choices are often influenced by the opinions, ideas and beliefs of others (including our parents, friends, the media, and the prevailing consciousness of our culture). We look outside of ourselves for the *right answer* that will result in living happily ever after. The question is always: *What should I do?*

How many times in your life have you made a decision only to say afterwards, *I should have taken the other job (or moved into the other house, or turned down another street on my way to work). I knew what to do, I just didn't pay attention. The other choice didn't seem logical!* Although we gather the opinions of others in an effort to figure out the best course of action, time after time, we fail to access our most valuable source of information – our intuition, our inner knowing. We fail to acknowledge that we are wired from the inside-out with a fail-safe system which, when followed, illuminates a path that nourishes our deepest desires and our greatest well-being.

Take a moment to identify when you've sabotaged yourself by allowing your mind to edit what's possible for you in life? How often have you made choices and taken actions dictated by the fear-based voice of your ego-mind?

After years of muting our intuition how do we discern between our ego-mind and our inner knowing? The answer is simple: listen to your body. Remember, our intuition comes through our bodies as a sense of absolute knowing that may be experienced as chills, a whoosh of sensation or amplified sensory experiences. The words that follow are simple direct statements: make a left turn, write about forgiveness, buy this house. There's no story, no long explanation or rationale. To strengthen your intuition, clear the slate and forgive the ways you've sabotaged yourself in the past.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Make a list of all the choices you regret in which fear-based beliefs sabotaged your intuition.
  - a. Go through the list one by one and say aloud: I forgive myself for believing I made the wrong choice about: (state the item on your list).
  - b. Imagine an item on your list is inside a helium balloon attached to your body by a string (your string may look like a metal cable!).
  - c. Take a pair of scissors, cut the string as close to your body as possible and watch the item on your list float, up, up and away and disappear.
  - d. Repeat this exercise for each item on your list. It may take more than a day!
  - e. Anytime you feel regret or remorse for a choice you've made, use this technique to forgive yourself.
  - f. Write about your experience with this exercise. What did you learn?
2. Here is an exercise to strengthen your intuition. Start using some simple choices you normally make throughout the day. For example, if you have a feeling that you want to wear red today, do so. Notice how your mind may be saying to you that, "People will look at you. You don't normally dress in those colors. What will people say?" etc. You can see how the ego-mind is editing your experience of life and sabotaging your intuitive feelings. You can use this for deciding: what to wear in the morning; whether to take a shower or bath; and what to order in a restaurant. What did you learn about yourself?
3. Jot down a list of choices you have made in which you have followed your intuition. Keep that list readily available. When you notice that you are questioning your intuition, take out your list as a reminder of the power of your inner knowing. How does having this "proof of intuition" help you in your daily life?

## **Lesson 6**



4. When you have an important choice to make, ask yourself: What is my next step regarding \_\_\_\_\_? Listen to your intuition, pay attention to what you're feeling in your body and follow your inner knowing. When you trust your inner knowing, you don't have to know what the final outcome will be; you simply follow your personal guidance system, discerning between the voice of your ego-mind and your inner knowing. Describe your experience with this exercise.
  5. What holds you back from using your inner knowing for all your life choices?
  6. How do you experience your intuition in your body?
  7. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 6 - 7



### Lesson 7: Judgment and Acceptance

*Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the Gods.*  
Albert Einstein

How often during the course of a day do you find yourself judging, criticizing and evaluating others? Do you defend your judgments because you believe you're right? How often do you disregard another point of view because you self-righteously believe that your view is more loving and more caring? My guess is that if you pay attention to your thoughts and words for just one day, you'll discover that judging dominates much of your thinking.

Countless conversations are focused on gossiping about others, and most of these discussions are filled with judgments about how the person looks, what's going on in their life and our opinions and criticisms of how they're living their lives. We seem to have endless opinions of how others *should* live their lives and we feel enormous freedom to express our views.

Our thoughts form the basis of the world we experience. When the main focus of our thinking is on what's wrong with someone else or ourselves, we're instructing our eyes to *only* see what is wrong, what doesn't work or problems. Let's imagine our judgments and criticisms as invisible poisonous darts aimed directly at the person we're judging. At the same time we're thinking these thoughts, the very poison we are projecting is moving through our own bodies.

We live in an interdependent world here on planet earth. To survive and thrive, we're dependent on being in community. Communities fail when there is constant judgment and criticism of its members. Communities thrive when the worthiness, diversity and inter-connectedness of their members is acknowledged.



Isn't it time to free ourselves from the tyranny of judging and see the perfection of each moment, the gift available when our ego-mind is put to rest and we see the world through the eyes of love?

## Lesson 7 - 8



### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Anytime you notice you're judging yourself or others do your best to stop immediately. Pay attention to how your physical body feels and whether you can perceive the poisonous arrows of criticism moving through your body. Acknowledge yourself for noticing, and say the following: "I recognize the voice of judgment within me and I no longer choose to victimize anyone with these poisonous thoughts." What happened when you followed these instructions?
  2. Initiate a conversation with your friends about the poisonous impact of judgment, both on the person you are judging as well as the judge. Enlist the help of your friends to remind you when they hear you making judgments. What did you learn about yourself and about making judgments through this conversation?
  3. When you notice that you are defending your point of view because you feel you're "right," experiment by taking another point of view as a way to expand your consciousness. Remember a point of view is simply a made-up idea. What are the points of view you defend? What makes you believe your point of view is right?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 8: Perfection and Surrender

*Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add,  
but when there is nothing left to take away.*  
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

A main function of the mind is to analyze, compare, separate and qualify. It performs in a manner similar to your computer's operating system. When we align ourselves with the point of view of the mind, we're always going to compare what we perceive with what our personal database considers *normal* or *the way it should be*.

Comparisons in and of themselves are neither good nor bad. It's when we use comparisons to hurt or judge that emotional suffering occurs. We can use the word *perfection* to represent the mental image of the way we *think* life should be. However, each person's computer mind will contain a different model of perfection; and it's not logical to think that every human would have the same picture of perfection.

When we recognize that from the vantage point of the mind perfection is a made-up point of view, we can easily forgive ourselves and others for disrespectful judgments and comparisons.

The bottom line is: The infinite consciousness of Spirit is perfect, and *all of us* are part of that perfection.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Notice how many times in one day you judge yourself as better or worse than others based on your concepts of perfection. Do you use your concepts to feel that you are not good enough, that you are too much (as though your personality is too big for people to handle) or that you are unworthy of love or success in life? If so where is this coming from in your domestication?
2. Make a list of those judgments and then as an act of surrender, burn them. What is the impact of this act of surrender?
3. Now that you have surrendered the concepts you have used to judge yourself, create a new thought acknowledging your perfection and write it down. Then forgive yourself for the pain you have created within yourself from believing that you are not perfect. How do you feel after doing this exercise?
4. Whenever you notice yourself making judgments, practice the following technique:
  - a. Identify what you are feeling
  - b. Identify what you are thinking
  - c. State your desired intention
  - d. Focus your attention on the present moment and the activity at hand
  - e. What have you learned by using this technique?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## **Lesson 8 - 9**



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## **Lesson 9: Unworthiness and Success**

*The Successful Self feels valuable, self-accepting and self-confident.*  
Dorothy Rowe

Success is something we all desire. Getting good grades in school, scoring points for our team, winning the game, dating the homecoming Queen or King, marrying Mr. or Ms. Right, landing a promotion, living on the right side of the tracks – the list goes on and on. As much as we desire success, our experience of success is fleeting.

When we're successful, it's rare that we take the time to celebrate our natural talents as creators. Instead, we set our sights on our next goal – hoping to feel good about ourselves when we get the larger house, fancier car or bigger paycheck – unaware that the process of creation is what's truly important.

We've been raised to believe that success and failure are real. We perceive the world through our definitions – labeling some experiences as successful and others as failures. If we get the job we've interviewed for, we're successful, and if we're not hired we're failures. If we marry we're successful in love, and if we divorce we're failures. The bottom line is: Success and failure are based on the meaning we assign to a particular outcome.

Why is it that humans who began their lives as magnificent creations are so often walking around feeling a sense of failure and unworthiness?

We've been programmed and domesticated, often unconsciously, to believe that we don't measure up to an outside standard of success based on a particular outcome. The truth is we're always successful because we're always creating. While we may not enjoy a particular outcome, we can seize the present moment and successfully create anew. To embody success requires taking responsibility for our actions and forgiving ourselves for believing we are failures and unworthy.

If we could take action from this point of view, we'd never be afraid of failure because we'd understand that there is no such thing. Without the fear of failure hanging over us, we would be bold and adventurous with our lives.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Create a list of thoughts and behaviors that demonstrate how you have been unconsciously creating from your beliefs of unworthiness and/or failure. Here are some examples:

#### **Thoughts:**

Nothing ever works for me.  
I can't do anything right.  
I'll never get that job.  
Nobody loves me.  
I'm fat.  
I never have enough money.  
I'll never be happy.

#### **Behaviors:**

I am habitually late.  
I always misplace things.  
I don't keep appointments.  
I always judge my partners.  
I eat compulsively.  
I spend excessively.  
I'm always complaining.

When you hear yourself thinking the thoughts on your list or engaging in those behaviors, acknowledge yourself for noticing, forgive yourself, and create a new choice in thought and behavior that supports your experience of success. Remember, your behaviors indicate the *real beliefs* that you have your personal power invested in!

2. What do you notice about your lists?
3. What thoughts and behaviors support your desires?

## **Lesson 9**



4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## Lesson 9 - 10

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### Lesson 10: Addiction and Detachment

*I did it to myself. It wasn't society – it wasn't a pusher, it wasn't being blind or being black or being poor. It was all my doing.*

Ray Charles



In our society we tend to look at addiction from a very limited point of view. We judge people to be addicts if they are “hooked” on drugs, alcohol, food, sex, smoking, exercise, gambling, shopping and/or work. Better said, addiction is any habitual psychological and/or physiological dependence on a substance, thought, practice or behavior that one cannot intentionally control. For example:

- If you can't stop arguing with the people you love, you're addicted to your opinions, judgment and being right.
- If you can't end your self-deprecating internal dialogue, you're addicted to self-hate.
- If you can't forgive those you are angry with, you're addicted to resentment.
- If you can't cease making a big deal out of everything, you're addicted to drama.
- If you can't discontinue your need to make yourself better than others, you're addicted to pride.

Taking responsibility for our addiction to the human mind and the things that it tells us to do is a powerful action. For example, instead of saying we are addicted to substances or behaviors, we can say we are addicted to the commands the mind is giving us to hurt ourselves *with* those substances or behaviors. No matter what kinds of addictions we have been engaged in, all of us deserve forgiveness for not having the awareness that we are Spirit using the mind that is thinking.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Now that you have a deeper understanding of your mental addictions, list five that you would like to change within yourself.
2. For each of those items, create one *not-doing*. A not-doing is an action that is different from your normal programmed behavior. For example, if you tend to talk about yourself incessantly to others, a not-doing would be to take the time to talk about some other person who has taken a wonderful action. If you gossip, a not-doing would be to remove yourself from the room whenever that is going on.

A not-doing for sarcastic humor would be to create a sentence that you say to yourself whenever you are tempted to express a cutting remark. Write your list of not-doings and once you have tried them – write about your experience of that not-doing.

## Lesson 10 - 11



3. Observe your addictions. Make a list of the real reason behind those behaviors. In other words, what are the lies your mind is telling you that are compelling you to take those actions? If you're a workaholic, for example, is your mind commanding you to work hard so that you can get ahead and be appreciated and validated? If so, look carefully at your statements. Is it *really* true that we must validate ourselves in the eyes of another to be worthy in life? No, this is absolutely a lie. We are all worthy and the only validation necessary is our own self-love and respect. What did you learn about yourself through your observations?
4. *Refrain* is the key word when it comes to addictions, and that can only be exercised when we have the awareness of what we are doing and thinking in the moment. What support do you need to *refrain* from continuing your addictions? Who can provide that support? Ask for it.
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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## Lesson 11: Victim hood and Divinity

*The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You don't blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the President. You realize that you control your own destiny.*  
Albert Ellis

Our society loves to blame. Where does this tendency come from, and why is our culture so invested in its' victim mentality? Simply put, if we set ourselves up as victims, we don't have to take responsibility for our actions and choices. It's much easier to blame things on others – that way we don't have to feel guilty about anything.

Guilt, shame and remorse are great strategies of the ego-mind to keep us disempowered, weak, and at the mercy of beliefs that aren't the truth. They keep us from embracing our divine nature and the power we've been given to create our reality. Most importantly, they allow us to abdicate the responsibility we've been given by Spirit for our lives.

The truth is there are no good or bad actions – only ones that are taken *with* awareness or *without* awareness. When we totally disempower the judge in our ego-minds we no longer feel guilt, shame or remorse. In addition, if we are not guilty, we do not have to fear punishment. It is the fear of punishment that has us wanting to blame our actions on others.



Once the fear of judgment and punishment is removed, we can take *responsibility* for the actions we have taken in non-awareness with gratitude – rather than guilt. (Taking responsibility means that we make good on what we've done to the best of our ability, which is a more effective approach than simply receiving punishment.)

Then we can clearly see what we've done to create pain and suffering in our lives or the lives of others and take different actions next time. This is called *learning* from our life experiences, and the lessons learned are far more valuable than feeling badly about choices we've made in non-awareness, beating ourselves up and becoming weighed down with guilt.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

List three situations you have felt victimized by. For each one write down why you felt victimized. Look carefully at what you wrote and ask yourself if it is truth. For example, if you wrote that you feel victimized by your partner for having an affair, is it truth that they did anything to you? No. They simply took actions based on whatever they believed at the time. Their choices had *nothing* to do with you.

1. Take the following three actions for the items on your list:
  - a. Take responsibility for your inner guilt, shame, remorse and projected anger.
  - b. Make a choice as to how to proceed forward in your life in a positive fashion.
  - c. Forgive yourself and the others involved for actions taken in non-awareness.
  - d. What was your experience putting this exercise into action?

Next, identify three situations that *you* caused that you feel guilty about. For each one write down why you feel that way and your beliefs about what occurred.

2. Again, take the following three actions for the items on your list:
  - a. Take responsibility for your inner guilt, shame, remorse and projected anger.
  - b. Make a choice as to how to proceed forward (perhaps repay your debt or make amends).
  - c. Forgive yourself and the others involved for all actions taken in non-awareness.
  - d. What was your experience putting this exercise into action?

3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## **Lesson 11**



## Lesson 12: Rejection and Gratitude

*Beauty for me is self-acceptance.*

Lauren Fleishman, The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

Most people I've known, particularly women, usually view their bodies through the lens of criticism, judgment and disapproval. We aren't born with these judgments and criticisms – they're learned, and learned at a very early age.

In the process of growing up, we're socialized, domesticated and programmed with concepts and ideas about what a *perfect* body is, including its size, shape, color and weight. We then go on to spend much of our lives evaluating ourselves and others according to familial, cultural and societal concepts of *perfection*.

It's not necessary to determine which of these images is the true expression of perfection; what's important to realize is that our ideas of physical beauty are concepts – they're made-up thoughts. If a belief is merely a fabricated idea, it's just as easy to make up a new idea.

Consciously or not, with or without awareness, our life experience is based upon our beliefs, which are simply thoughts charged with emotional energy.

This emotional energy has a frequency that includes the experience of unconditional love and well-being, *or* pain and suffering. When we judge, criticize and belittle the way our bodies look, we experience disappointment and dissatisfaction. This judging nourishes the inner critic and separates us from gratitude and love. Make the choice to honor, love and express gratitude for your beautiful body – on bad hair days, when your shape doesn't fit some outside standard, when wrinkles appear – on *all* days.

Remember, it's through our physical bodies that our spiritual essence is able to have a human experience.

The following practice was generously contributed by Carol Hansen Grey from her CD, [\*Lighten Up\*](#).

1. Do this 5-minute a day *Lighten Up* exercise to align body-mind-spirit and to bring yourself into a state of unconditional love for your body.
  - a. Everyday when soaping up in the shower or when you moisturize your body with lotion, say aloud words of gratitude and love to each part of your body. For example, *Thank you [name body part] for serving me so well – I love you.*
  - b. It is important that you do this process everyday, actually touching and feeling your skin with your hands, and saying your words of gratitude and love aloud.
  - c. What did you learn about your relationship with your body?
  - d. What obstacles did your ego-mind present to you? And how did you face them?

## Lesson 12



2. Make a collage or write a poem that expresses your gratitude for your body. Share your creation with three people. What was your experience with this exercise?

3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 13: Shame and Communion

*It's also helpful to realize that this very body that we have, that's sitting right here right now – with its aches and its pleasures – is exactly what we need to be fully human, fully awake, fully alive.*

Pema Chodron

How many of us have heard the statement that our body is the temple for our Spirit? Most of us, I imagine. If we feel there's truth in this statement, then why do we constantly renounce our bodies by labeling the way they function as disgusting, embarrassing, shameful and not Godly?

There's purpose in the design and function of all our bodily systems – we need them for our physical survival. Whether we judge them to be bad or good, doesn't change the fact that these processes are going to occur regardless of whether we like them or not (like sweating, burping and yes, passing gas).

It is the mind, which has no physical form *per se* – think of it as a virtual reality – that judges the body. Allowing our minds to judge our bodies is a disrespectful act of sabotage. In this way, the ego-mind victimizes us with our own judgment, and the result is shame, embarrassment and suffering.

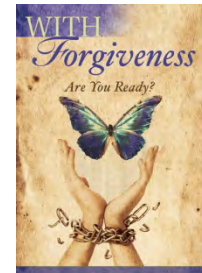
Let's make the commitment to practice self-respect, gratitude and acceptance for our physical bodies. Although the ego-mind is responsible for some pretty clever acts of self-sabotage, it's important to have gratitude for it too. With this awareness, we can practice peaceful and loving communion of the mind, body and Spirit (the meaning of yoga!) rather than the fragmentation and separation that occurs when we reject aspects of ourselves.

Let's forgive ourselves for believing all the judgments that our minds have passed on our physical bodies and have gratitude for all the metabolic and chemical processes our bodies engage in and celebrate them.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Make a list of things you do not like about the way your body functions. Realize that you can either be in resistance to those processes or surrender to them and be at peace. It is your choice! What do you notice about your relationship with your body from this list?

### Lesson 12 - 13



2. When you notice yourself having shameful thoughts about your body's natural processes, forgive yourself in the moment for judging the perfection of the physical creation that is you. Make a list of loving thoughts that support the magnificent body you have.
  3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 13 - 14



### Lesson 14: Abuse and Nurturing

*Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.*  
Jim Rohn

We are spiritual beings having a human experience. Our body is our home which Spirit lives and breathes life through. We can view our body as a finely crafted instrument through which we offer our unique expression of Love to the world. My guess is that at some level you agree with these statements, but how does your agreement translate into action?

Often we abuse our bodies through our thoughts and actions. We complain about, judge and evaluate the way our bodies look, function and feel. We eat poorly balanced diets, overeat or starve ourselves. We wake up early, stay up late, use caffeine to keep us alert and take pills to help us relax. We don't exercise or we over-exert ourselves. We fail to get regular check-ups for our teeth, our eyes and our general sense of well-being.

We take drugs to enhance our sex-life, get surgery to keep us looking young and rely upon legal or illegal substances to manage our stress and mood. We get angry with our bodies when they re-act with aches, pains, fatigue, dis-ease and distress. Generally, it takes a *scream* on the part of our body in the form of a medical diagnosis, illness or debilitating pain to get our attention.

My guess is if you focus your attention for one week on how you treat your body, you'll be amazed at the degree of unconscious abuse you inflict. What are your beliefs about your body? Do they honor this sacred home of your Spirit or do they abuse your physical form as an unwanted nuisance?

Our bodies are amazing creations, and just as with any fine instrument, they require care and maintenance. The perfect place to begin your personal body nurturing routine is to forgive yourself for past mistreatment and abuse. Remember to love and bless your body, it's the only one you've got.

## Practicing the Lesson:

## Lesson 14

1. Ponder the following statements and in your journal, record your feelings towards each one.
  - a. You are being abusive when your mind tells your body to take another bite of food when your body has clearly articulated that it is full. It is not up to the mind to tell the body anything.
  - b. You are being abusive when you over-exercise because your mind is telling your body it is not good enough the way it is. Society has an image of the way our bodies “should” look. If we buy into those ideas we are not honoring the capabilities of our physical body and we are harming our “animal.”
  - c. You are being abusive when you starve yourself because your mind is telling you that to be perfect you need to be thin. When we link our self-worth and ideas of perfection to the current narrow societal standard, we are not having respect for the people we are.
  - d. You are being abusive when you do not get enough rest because your mind is telling you to work harder to get ahead. It is common for us to seek approval and love based our achievements in the world. No matter how hard we work or how far ahead we get in life, it will never be enough if we do not learn to find our self-love and approval from within.
  - e. You are being abusive when you take pills to control your mood because your mind is telling you fear-based stories that you believe and have no control over. Once we understand that our emotions follow our thoughts, we realize that no amount of pills can replace learning to control our internal dialogue.
  - f. You are being abusive when you engage in sexual activities that go against your body because your mind is telling you that you need to be sexy and hot to be loved. Many of us have learned to link our self-worth with our physical bodies and our sexual desirability.
  - g. You are being abusive to your body when you remain in a physically harmful relationship because your mind is telling you that you deserve to be treated that way, or that you will never find anyone better.
  - h. You are being abusive when you engage in self-mutilation because your mind is telling you that you deserve to be punished. No human body deserves to suffer the self-hate contained within the human mind.
  - i. You are being abusive when you fail to take personal time because your mind is telling you that it is selfish to take time out for you. The mind loves to use the strategy of martyrdom to keep us feeling miserable.
  - j. You are being abusive when you fail to get regular medical check-ups because your mind is telling you that everything else in life is more important than you are.
  - k. You are being abusive when you have plastic surgery to enhance your looks because your mind is telling you that your value as a human being is based on appearing youthful. We identify with our outer form as if it is who we truly are.





2. On sheet of paper make a list of all the ways you have mistreated and abused your body. Forgive yourself for each act of abuse and then, cross that item off the list. When you notice yourself being abusive, forgive yourself in the moment and make a new choice that is respectful. What did you learn through this exercise?
  3. Make a list of ways to care for your body. Your list may include things you are currently doing as well as actions you want to begin doing. Some of ours are: walking outside for 30 – 50 minutes five times per week, eating healthy and nutritious food, enjoying a hot shave, taking a bubble bath, having a massage, consciously checking-in with our bodies while we are eating to know when we have had enough, turning the phone and TV off during meals with our family and friends. When you have finished your list, randomly write the statements in your calendar so when you open it, you will be reminded to take actions that support your commitment to your body.
  4. Create a Wellness Declaration by completing the following statement: I am living my life with health at the center by embodying the following thoughts and actions:
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 14 - 15



## Lesson 15: Disease and Wellness

*Disease is an experience of mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body. Divine Science takes away this physical sense of discord, just as it removes a sense of moral or mental inharmony.*

Mary Baker Glover Eddy

Illness and disability are challenging. We assume that we're entitled to be well, and when we become sick we often feel victimized and angry. Illness disrupts our schedules, forces us to rest when we feel we don't have the time and sometimes it's simply painful. If we're born with or develop a physical or mental disability, we may feel depressed or angry. We also have many theories about illness: Some folks believe it's divine wrath, bad Karma for sinful acts, mentally created, genetically spawned or just the normal course of life.

We've been given an amazing gift in life, called choice. When we're born, we get to experience whatever we feel we need to learn, grow and evolve. Perhaps we can see disease and illness as part of this experience. Does that mean I'm implying that we cause our own illness and disease? Well, many people have successfully healed themselves and others of serious illnesses. How is this possible?

## Lesson 15

We could say that we're in the early stages of recognizing the power of mind, as the key to the entire expression of our reality, including the ability to heal – or to create illness. If you've never thought of taking ownership for your physical experience in this way, consider this point of view.

Recently, I watched a movie called *Emmanuel's Gift*, which was narrated by Oprah and featured as part of the Spiritual Cinema Circle. The story focuses on a young man named Emmanuel Ofori Yeboah, who was born with a congenitally short leg.

He not only transcends the beliefs of his own country (which perceives such disability as a family curse), but goes on to become an advocate for physically challenged people, proving that they can do anything in life, *if* they choose to. Rather than being a curse, his "disability" becomes a gift both for him and for the world.

In the end, it's a blessing for us to forgive all those we blame for illnesses, whether that might be the medical profession (a misdiagnosis from the doctor), poor care in the hospital (resulting in a worsening of an illness or death), a medication, an implant or surgery that caused more illness or a sickness linked to a chemical plant or poisoning.

Also, forgiveness is critical for any illness we feel we've caused ourselves; for example, liver damage from drinking, AIDS, Herpes or Hepatitis C from unprotected sex, physical disability from an accident or from ignoring our bodies alarm systems (like not paying attention to chest pains, bad gums, shortness of breath, etc.).

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Write your beliefs about illness, getting sick, your disability or disease (if you have one) or medical condition. When you are finished, put the story away for a few days. When you have free time, look at what you wrote, highlight all your fear-based judgments and record your comments about them.
2. Have you chosen to perceive those situations and conditions to create a mind-set of peace or resentment? What changes in thought would support a peaceful point of view?
3. If you already have an uplifting point of view about illness, congratulate yourself and have gratitude for giving yourself that gift. If you have not thought of having gratitude for the point of view you have chosen to see your illness from, do so and record what comes up for you in the moment.



4. If you are ill now or have been in the past, take the time to look at the way you have chosen to perceive your experience. Answer the following questions:

- a. Are you angry and resentful about your illness? Why? What are your beliefs?
  - b. Do you enjoy the attention you receive from your condition? If yes, why? And if no, why?
  - c. What purpose is your ailment serving that you have not been willing to look at?
  - d. What have you learned from your condition?
  - e. Have you chosen to create a life for yourself despite your disabilities – like Christopher Reeve, for example? Describe your life.
  - f. How in your thoughts and actions do you fight and resist your ailments rather than finding a place of acceptance? (By this I do not mean that you do not seek healing, but that your attitude is one of war rather than understanding.)
  - g. Do you seek to blame your sickness on others? In what ways?
  - h. Do you consider your disorders inconveniences that are interfering with the things you feel you need to get done? How?
  - i. How can you take what you perceive as a curse and turn it into a gift?
5. We have used a quote from Mary Baker Glover Eddy, at the beginning of this lesson, in which she alludes to the idea that the mind can cause illness. Mary started the Church of Christ Scientist in 1879 and her assertions were certainly challenging to the general thoughts of the public at the time. Dr. Ernest Holmes, who founded the International Religious Science movement in 1927, also believed in the healing of the sick through the power of mind. Charles and Myrtle Fillmore founded the Unity Church around 1889 and believed we are co-creators with God, creating reality through thoughts held in mind. What do you think about these ideas?
6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 15



## Lesson 16: Aging and Unfolding

*You only hurt yourself when you're not expanding and growing. Many people can't stand the thought of aging, but it's the crystallized thought patterns and inflexible mind-sets that age people before their time. You can break through and challenge your crystallized patterns and mind-sets. That's what evolution and the expansion of love are really about.*

Sara Paddison, *The Hidden Power of the Heart*

In the western world, aging is an enemy to be conquered. In recent years the number of men and women having face-lifts, Botox treatments, breast implants, liposuction and a variety of other invasive and non-invasive procedures to capture the fountain of youth, has exploded exponentially. At the same time, the vast numbers of dollars spent on anti-wrinkle creams and lotions continues to grow.

In our youth-obsessed culture, what happens when wrinkles appear, aches and pains greet us in the morning or our sexual drive decreases? We look for a solution to re-capture our youthful appearance, whether that means going under the knife, experimenting with lasers, injections or magic blue pills. Inherent in this quest, is the assumption that aging is bad, and that if I am the one who is aging then I am losing my value and worth in the world.

Right now, acknowledge that aging is as natural as breathing. It's a made-up story to believe that one age is better than another, that younger is better than older. I wonder how many of us would truly want to repeat our teen-age and young adult years when self-consciousness and self-loathing were ruling our thoughts. Especially when our ego-mind was busy judging, comparing and evaluating every word we said and every action we took.

All life experiences reflect the cycle of germination, birth, growth, decline and death. This process is neither good nor bad, nor right or wrong, it is simply *what is*. Time spent denouncing *what is* fills our present moment with misery and unhappiness.

What would it take to appreciate and honor the process of our lives unfolding? What would it take to forgive our bodies and minds for the natural process of aging? In indigenous cultures throughout the world, *Elder* is an honored title. What if in our culture, wrinkles were a symbol of a life fully lived?

### ***A Story from Susyn***

My parents were considered "older parents" by the standards of 1949. My mother was 39 and my father 48. By the time I was nine, I was embarrassed that my parents were older than my friends parents were. I felt ashamed and assumed my friends thought less of me because my parents were "so old."

I'd wake up early on Sunday mornings, long before my parents and older sisters and scrutinize the *Sunday New York Times Magazine*, staring at beautiful young, sophisticated women and handsome successful looking men in the ads; then I'd choose the couple I wished were my parents. Old and mature was bad, young and attractive was good.

## Lesson 16



It wasn't until I was in my late 30's (which seems young to me at 59) that I began to appreciate having an older mom. I was inspired when at age 70, after she'd been a widow for a few years, she moved to another state and began a new life. I admired her at 75 when she joined a choir and sang in nursing homes each week. I was deeply moved when I videotaped her on her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday and she shared about her life, making sure that her lipstick was on before taping began. I shared in her delight as she described her 90th birthday celebration in her water aerobics class and how she and the 50 something year old instructor had become close friends.

After years of shame and embarrassment about my "old" parents, I came to deeply appreciate what my mom had taught me about aging. Yes, it's true she had aches and pains, doctor visits were part of her regular schedule, she became shorter, her skin turned wrinkly, her breasts hung low and before her death at 92 it was a good idea to make sure a wheel chair was in the trunk of the car just in case she got too tired using her walker when she went out. She taught me that age is, more than anything, simply a state of mind.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Write your reflections about the following questions:
  - a. Can you imagine forgiving your body and mind for the natural process of aging?
  - b. How does constant complaining and dissatisfaction do anything to improve your situation?
  - c. What if you learned to view aging as a gift, an opportunity to expand your capacity to give and receive love? How would this affect your point of view?
  - d. What if you truly embraced the wisdom that aging provides? What would change in your life?
  - e. What if, as in indigenous cultures throughout the world, you believed that *Elder* was an honored title and that your wrinkles were a symbol of a life fully lived?
2. Make a list of your judgments, criticisms and complaints about aging. Then forgive yourself for believing those thoughts.
3. Write a story that demonstrates the gifts of aging, a life unfolding. Read your story aloud to at least one person. What did you learn by writing and reading your story?
4. Have a conversation with an elder and ask him/her to share with you the wisdom they have learned through their life. What was the impact of this conversation on you?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### Lesson 16





## Lesson 17: Disappointment and Honoring

*If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.*

C.G. Jung, *Integration of the Personality*, 1939

It's natural for parents to desire the best for their children. When gazing at their newborn, parents have glimpses of an imagined future. In this future, their child is healthy, loved, satisfied in their work and has the financial abundance to enjoy a full life. While these are admirable wishes, too often we have fixed ideas of how our children's lives *should* look and the road they *should* follow. Parents' expectations may arise because of a road not taken in their own lives, or the desire to uphold a family tradition.

Expectations for our children often lead to disappointment. For example; your child gets in trouble in school (you're disappointed with her poor behavior), or your son doesn't try out for the football team and wants to take dance lessons (you're disappointed because everyone knows that dance is for sissies and football is for young men). Perhaps your daughters' first serious boyfriend is of another race and you're disappointed she's not considering the future problems this may cause. Late in the night you receive a call from the police that your son has been arrested for selling drugs, again disappointment and heart-break.

As much as parents may think that their children "belong to them," they are on their own journey in life. We can love our children and illuminate a path for them but when we're disappointed in them, our disappointment is a reflection of the incongruence between our beliefs of how their life should be and the way their life's actually unfolding.

Isn't it time to forgive your children for not doing what you wanted them to do? Isn't it time to free yourself from the expectations that are causing conflict and dissension between you and your children? In your heart of hearts, of course you only want the best for them, so why criticize and judge their choices harshly – isn't it time to honor your children with unconditional love?

### On Children

An excerpt from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the son's and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit,  
even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.*

## Lesson 17



## Practicing the Lesson:

1. Sit quietly with a photo of your child. As you look at the photo make a list of all ways he/she has seemingly disappointed and hurt you. Forgive yourself for taking your child's actions personally. When you have completed this, write or tell your child that you love and honor them unconditionally. What did you learn through this exercise?
  2. Write down the expectations you have for your child. The *should's*, *ought-to's* and *I know what is best for you's*. When your list is complete, as a symbol of forgiving and freeing yourself of past disappointments and wounds based on your unmet expectations, burn the list and use the ashes to fertilize a plant. How do you feel having completed this powerful ritual?
  3. Have a conversation with your child, and tell her/him what you honor and celebrate about his/her presence in your life. Share the lessons you have learned about yourself through your sacred relationship with your child. How has this conversation influenced your thinking about your children?
  4. Everyday, write down five things you are grateful for in relation to your children.
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 17 - 18



## Lesson 18: Control and Parenting

*All the time a person is a child he is both a child  
and learning to be a parent.  
After he becomes a parent he becomes predominantly  
a parent reliving childhood.*  
Benjamin Spock, MD

Is there a more challenging and rewarding endeavor than raising children as far as our *own* spiritual development is concerned? Children test every aspect of our belief system. They're the first to point out when we're not walking our talk. One of the best ways to lose the respect of a child is to tell them to *do as I say, not as I do*.

When we were children, we made many agreements about the way our parents should be, how much love we were receiving and if that love was expressed the way we desired. As children, we judged everything about our parents. These assessments were made from a child's point of view, one that did not comprehend the whole story or circumstances of what was going on at the time.

Those memories, judgments and assessments remain in our minds as adults and we either follow through in raising our children as our parents raised us, or we do the opposite in reaction to our childhood experiences (or a combo of both!). This observation is what Dr. Spock is alluding to in the quote at the beginning of this lesson. The key to being the best parent possible is to avoid the trap of reactive parenting. To do this we must look deeply in ourselves and at what we believe about our childhood, through the eyes of truth and compassion.

Every person must transcend their own childhood and forgive their parents' mistakes in order to be happy. In turn, our children will eventually learn to forgive us for our ignorance and decisions we made out of fear. The difficult part is forgiving *ourselves* because we feel so guilty for hurting our children and for imposing our will on them. Let the guilt and shame go. Know that you did the best job you could've done at that time, based on the awareness you had back then.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Make a list of all the things that you feel guilt or shame for, and all the mistakes you feel you have made as a parent.
  - a. Look at each item and ask yourself if you would take the same action again *if* you were functioning at the *same* level of awareness again (of course you would!). Do *not* use the level of awareness you are at *now* to judge what you did back then.
  - b. Next to each item on your list, write the declaration: I forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. When you are finished, burn the list, detach from your guilt and shame and give it to Spirit.
  - d. What did you learn by doing this exercise?
2. List the beliefs about parenting that support the awareness you have today.
3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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### Lesson 19: Resentment and Unconditional Love

*Children begin by loving their parents; after a time they judge them;  
rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.*  
Oscar Wilde

Parents generally receive the brunt of the blame for their children's unhappiness and misery in life. Countless psychotherapy sessions are devoted to moving through anger, blame and animosity directed toward parents. Either they smothered us with their love, abused us with their words and actions or failed to provide the guidance and love we thought we should've had.

### Lesson 18 - 19



I spent time with a friend recently who told me that she'd been thinking about her father. He died more than ten years ago. She said she's just beginning to experience compassion when she thinks of him. I don't think her story is unusual. I spent much of my life, starting as a pre-teen being annoyed and resenting my parents. Simply that they *lived and breathed* was annoying to me, because they didn't do, say or act the way I thought they *should*.

But what if our parents are the perfect parents for us? Rather than resenting our parents, we can actually imagine that even the most painful actions on their part have assisted us in becoming the people we are today. Isn't it time to forgive, let go of old resentments and see our parents through the eyes of unconditional love?

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Make a list of the wounds that you believe have been caused by your parents.
2. For each item consider the benefits and the gifts of each situation. Now that you can see that each situation has *at least* two different points of view, forgive yourself for believing that your parents meant to hurt you. (Remember that we have *all* acted in ignorance – your parents were at the level of awareness they were at in that moment.) What did you learn through this exercise?
3. Write a letter to each of your parents, whether or not they are living or are actively in your life. Tell them what you appreciate about them. Send the letter (if appropriate), have a conversation with them about it or visualize a conversation with them. Notice what you are feeling and thinking as you do this exercise.
4. Write a new story of your life in which you describe why your parents are the perfect parents for you.
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### Lesson 19 - 20



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### Lesson 20: Rivalry and Respect

*When you focus, not on your siblings so much, but on your own peace of mind, you'll notice that as you become more at ease with life, forgiving others – even your siblings – will be a snap!*

Richard Carlson

Many of us are familiar with the Old Testament story of the rivalry between two brothers, Cain and Abel. Cain, the older of the two, was constantly expected to help care for his younger brother, Abel. With time, Cain became annoyed and frustrated with Abel. Cain resented the expectations and responsibilities he had as an older brother. Finally Cain's anger towards Abel grew, and he murdered Abel.

The concept of sibling rivalry has been part of our collective consciousness for as long as we can remember. I often wonder if the warring in the world today is an exaggerated expression of sibling rivalry.

It is normal human development to seek out mirrors so we can help define ourselves as individuals. This is the process of ego formation. Without the reflection from our siblings and parents, it is hard to know who we are, and what our position in our family structure is. There are so many unwritten family rules that they help us learn. We learn how to assert ourselves thorough our experience with them, or not. We use them to perfect and hone our personalities which we will bring out into the world.

If you are the younger child, you may start out admiring and trying to emulate your older siblings, endowing them, at times, with super-human qualities. So it is confusing when your hero directs their animosity toward you for no apparent reason. And then there is the form of sibling rivalry that occurs due to gender differences. *Daddy's Girl* may be the apple of dad's eye, and no matter what you do as a son, you will never perceive your fathers love for you as equal to the love he bestows upon your sister.

This rivalry is then magnified as children vie for the attention of their parents. The child who receives their parent's attention is the winner, and the other is the loser. As I have mentioned before, the ego-mind develops by defining itself as different and separate from others, and it is important that our parents validate our existence with their attention. If we believe that our parents are paying more attention to our other siblings, it creates subconscious wounds in our minds that play themselves out over a lifetime of interactions.

These dynamics set up daily habits of thought and behavior in which judging, comparing, and keeping score become the norm. Often in their unawareness, parents will pit one child against the other as a means to inspire them to do better, but in the end they may create inner resentment and frustration within their children. This means that from the time we were children, we were unconsciously programmed to be rivals rather than to respect the differences and gifts that we each contribute. So how do we free ourselves from the frustrations of sibling rivalry that began long before that concept was in our vocabulary?

We may never know for sure why our siblings are our siblings, whether it was divine design or random chance. What we do know is that the human you call brother or sister, step-brother or sister, or half-sister or brother is an expression of the divine. Are you learning about unconditional love in relation to your sibling or is the rivalry expanding as the years go on?

Are you a victim in this relationship, a persecutor, or do you dance between the two? Isn't it time to forgive for your own peace of mind, and to honor, respect and see the perfection of your siblings?

## Lesson 20



## Practicing the Lesson:

## Lesson 20 - 21

1. Identify a situation that is a source of discord between you and your sibling(s). Make a list of the beliefs you have about your sibling(s), yourself and your relationship that is fueling the discord. Even if you believe they have done you wrong, apologize for anyway *you* may have hurt *them*. Forgive them for past rivalries. Make a list of the contributions they have made to your life and let them know how much you appreciate and love them. What did you learn through this exercise?
2. Richard Carlson suggests: *"Notice how much harder you are on your brothers and sisters than you are on total strangers. If you were meeting someone for the first time and they were ten minutes late, they would say, 'I'm sorry,' and you would likely say, 'No worries.' If your sibling did the same thing, you might be inclined to remember all the other times he or she was late, or to put it differently, you might attribute unflattering motives to their tardiness. Instead, give your siblings the same respect that you would anyone else."* How can you be more accepting of your siblings?
3. Richard Carlson shares this great exercise from his friend, Dr. Fred Luskin: *"What if someone offered you \$20,000,000 (that's right 20 million dollars) to let go of all of your anger toward your siblings?" Of course you could do it – right? Well, if that's true, it means that the only thing that is keeping you from forgiveness is your own motivation. You grew up with these people and you love them, so why not motivate yourself to forgive? It's easier than you think."* What prevents you for letting go of anger, resentment and hostility toward your siblings?
4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:



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## Lesson 21: Feuding and Concordance

*You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to  
you, as you are to them.*  
Desmond Tutu

At forgiveness workshops, I often ask how many people in the audience are aware of a feud in their family where one person refuses to speak to another. It always amazes me to find between 50-75% of the audience raising their hands! What does that say about the human state of affairs regarding forgiveness?



We often make the assumption that because we are related, our points of view and the way we see life should be similar. However, familial genetics do not assure agreement when it comes to beliefs, opinions and judgments!

As far as our friends go, we choose people whose belief systems align with ours. We purposely pick people to be friends with *because* they continually reinforce our personal viewpoint. When it comes to family, we don't choose them according to whether or not their point of view agrees with ours – we get what we get, just as former archbishop Desmond Tutu states in the quote above.

How do we deal with feisty relatives and family situations? We start with understanding that everyone is entitled to their personal point of view whether we agree with that perspective or not. If both parties cannot detach from their perspective or at least learn to compromise, then the only thing we can do is agree to disagree. However, seeing things from another's perspective creates an opening for understanding, compassion, discussion and unconditional love. And aren't the qualities of love and harmony the foundation for the structure we call family?

Make the time to forgive yourself for any family discord that you either participated in or perpetuated. As part of the act of forgiving, forgive your family for any actions they took against you in their need to be right, even if it meant they were stubborn and contentious. If your family members are not interested in forgiving, that's okay – you've done your part to open your heart. Who knows what might happen in the future as a result of your action? Miracles are *always* possible.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. If you have made the decision to not speak to a family member, consider forgiving them for whatever you believe they did or did not do. Write them a letter asking for their forgiveness for imposing your personal point of view onto them. Let them know you *acknowledge* their point of view (whether you agree with it or not) and that you would rather they be a part of your family than hold resentment in your heart towards them. Make sure that you *do not* defend your point of view *anywhere* in that letter – that is *not* forgiveness! It is up to you whether or not you send that letter – remember – it takes a strong willingness to detach from one's need to be right to do so. I encourage you to go beyond what you believe you are capable of. Go ahead – create a miracle. Write your reflections on this exercise.
2. If a family member is not speaking to you because of actions you took that they did not agree with, review the situation and make sure that you were not being rigid and self-righteous. If you were, ask for their forgiveness, making sure you are not defending your point of view. If this is not your situation, then send them a note letting them know you do not wish there to be discord in the family. Ask them what you can do to help reconcile the situation. If they do not answer you, light a 7-day candle for them and pray for love and peace to come to your family. If they *do* answer with a suggestion, it is up to you to decide whether or not you can follow through with their suggestions. Again, I encourage you to take an action that you would not normally take. Write your reflections on this exercise.

## Lesson 21



3. Create a Celebrate a Hero book for your family as a way to express your love ([www.celebrateahero.com](http://www.celebrateahero.com)) and reflect on the experience of making and giving this gift.
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 21 - 22



## Lesson 22: Opposition and Union

*I first learned the concepts of non-violence in my marriage.*

Mohandas K. Gandhi

I like to think of the dynamics of marriage and partnership as a microcosmic reflection of global politics. Certainly there's conflict, war, reconciliation and harmony – all present in one bedroom! Conflict and opposition arises because we get more involved in defending our beliefs than in loving each other.

I know very few people who haven't had the opportunity to grow and learn about themselves within the context of partnership and union. A partner is a mirror reflecting our expression of divine unconditional love as well as reflecting us as the Wicked Witch of the West (at times)! If we start from the place of gratitude for our experience, we are less likely to get defensive and be more open to learning.

When I first started on my spiritual path, my teacher gave me a powerful personal assignment. He asked me to thank my ex-husband for having an affair, meeting his new wife and divorcing me. I found his request a bit shocking and so did my ex-husband! He was taken aback when I thanked him for having the affair and asked me why I would share this with him. I explained that I no longer desired to be a victim of any situation. Living my life from gratitude was my goal.

Originally, I could only see the affair as a *bad* thing – but later I realized it could be seen as *bad* or *good*, depending on whether I wanted to be a victim or a co-creator of my life. When I finally took responsibility for my life, I realized I co-created the affair *with* him (it always takes two to tango). I was able to have gratitude for the experience and forgive the two of us for our non-awareness.

Forgiveness allows us to change our old points of view and ways of perceiving the world, which opens us up to amazing experiences. Rewrite those old victim stories taking responsibility for your creation and see it as a powerful opportunity for self-growth and discovery.

## Practicing the Lesson:

1. It is important to recognize the actions that we and our partners are taking, which are causing us to remain in the victim mode, rather than seeing ourselves as co-creators of our misery. I have created a list of items we can forgive our partners and ourselves for. Feel free to personalize the list so it applies to you and is complete. Sit with each item until you can truly forgive it and let it go. If you get stuck, light a candle for that item and pray for clarity, an open heart and for Spirit to assist you in your process. It is all right if forgiveness does not come all at once. You can keep returning to that item until you have finally released it.
2. I forgive my partner, ex-partner and/or myself for:
  - Having an affair
  - Physical or emotional abuse
  - Gossiping to others
  - Taking sides against each other
  - Having “expectations” of each other’s love
  - Not being emotionally available
  - Judging our physical bodies
  - Not supporting each other in work and fun activities
  - Not taking each others needs and desires into consideration
  - Insulting each other in front of other people
  - Using our children against each other
  - Being angry, depressed or hypercritical
  - Feeling victimized
  - Allowing oneself to be treated badly
  - Not respecting each other
  - Not loving oneself 100%
  - Feeling one must settle in life
  - Not feeling good enough to deserve a great partner
  - Not seeing what we were creating in the relationship
  - Blaming our unhappiness on each other
  - Staying in an unhealthy relationship out of fear
  - Not seeing the gift in the experience
  - Judging each other
  - Choosing a partner who was trouble from the start
  - Trying to change each other and not accepting him or her as-is
  - Only giving conditional love
  - Being rude and unkind
3. Having heard my story above, think about how you can reframe some of your more challenging life situations. Can you re-write those old victim stories so that you take responsibility for your creation and see it as a powerful opportunity for self-growth and discovery?
4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## Lesson 22



## Lesson 23: Expectations and Understanding

*Blessed is he who expects nothing for he shall never be disappointed.*  
Alexander Pope

Expectations can be said to be the root of all evil. Think about it: If we didn't have expectations of people and situations we'd never have cause to be upset about anything! We expect our friends are going to show up for lunch, that the business contract we signed will come to fruition and that no one will cut us off in traffic. But truly, we can have all the expectations we want of people; it doesn't mean we're going to get what we want from them – even if they promised.

Every person is doing the best they can from their current point of view and level of consciousness. Measuring others against our personal yardsticks is never productive because other people don't think or have the same beliefs as we do. When we impose our beliefs on others, the result is pain and suffering on both sides.

Whenever I talk about these ideas, people say that we *have* to have expectations or no one will do anything. However, think about this for a minute. When we say that, we're making the assumption that without a contractual arrangement – whether it is verbal or written – people won't be inspired to follow through on their word. If we need the threat of retribution to force people to do what they've promised, this means that humanity is not a very responsible bunch! However, if we are impeccable with our word, we will do our best to follow through with what we've said and not create pain and suffering in others. (By impeccable I mean speaking without going against ourselves or the intent to do wrong.)

We live most successfully when we all operate from wanting to do our best because we enjoy doing so and it makes our heart sing – as opposed to being under the whip of a feisty belief system filled with expectations telling us we must perform in a certain way to be good enough. In one case we are living the will of the Creator moving through us; in the other, we are living the will of our domesticated mind. One way of living is fulfilling and limitless, and the other is limiting, controlling and rigid.

Now that we have talked about being true to our word, it helps to understand why people do not follow through with what they have promised; that way we can have compassion for them rather than feeling anger and frustration. I have created a list that you can use to have clarity about the deeds and words of others – and your own too!

- Sometimes we simply forget what we have promised.
- Sometimes we believe we *have* followed through with what we promised but the other person was expecting something more or different according to their belief system.
- Sometimes we have every intention of doing what we promised, but our unconscious beliefs of “I am not good enough” cause us to actually sabotage ourselves.

## Lesson 23



## Lesson 23



- Sometimes we do a less-than-stellar job on something because we have over-committed ourselves and do not have enough time to do the job to our liking – or to the liking of the other person.
- Sometimes there are cultural differences on timing and contractual agreements.
- Sometimes people make promises in the moment that they later regret or do not want to keep.
- Sometimes people make promises that they cannot follow through on because something has come up in their lives.

Whatever the situation, the bottom line is this: It's not about us. *People do what they are going to do and it isn't always what we want, wish or hope for.* If we could just remember this one statement, we could be happy for the rest of our lives. Let's forgive others for their side of the situation and forgive ourselves for imposing our belief system on them, for not understanding and for using their actions (or lack thereof) to get ourselves upset.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Take a few moments to identify 5 times you have imposed your expectations on others. It could be expectations you have of your family, employees, your partner, the President or even yourself.
    - a. Now that you have more clarity about the reasons why people behave the way they do, can you have compassion and understanding for what has occurred? If not, why?
    - b. What would it take for you to change your point of view?
    - c. Does having understanding help you detach from your need to be angry at them or yourself? If not, why? What would it take for you to change your point of view?
    - d. Forgive yourself and the other person in each of your 5 situations by taking an action – either by saying so verbally, writing them a note, sending flowers or through a creative act of your choosing.
  2. What are the lessons of this exercise for you?
  3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 24: Non-Awareness and Grace

*Each of us at any time and space is doing the very  
best we can with what we have.*

Louise L. Hay

Our thoughts and actions are a direct reflection of our consciousness and current level of awareness. Using a computer analogy our awareness is based on the software installed. Our parents, cultural and societal morals, the media and those people and organizations we perceive as authorities, have programmed our software. This programming is based on thoughts voiced with authority and conviction that, consciously or unconsciously, we have agreed are truth. Once the programming is installed, it functions as an invisible filter directly influencing every relationship and experience we have.

Each version of software has rules and beliefs about the behaviors and actions of others. If their behavior is congruent with our beliefs, peaceful co-existence and indeed a magnificent harmony is possible. If their behavior is at odds with our beliefs, there is conflict, anger and blame.

Every act, whether we agree with it or not, is the very best a person can do based on their current *thinking*. If you really take the time to listen to the reasons someone has for joining a gang, committing acts of violence, having an affair or failing to remember your birthday you will discover that, their behavior is understandable according to the way they perceive the world.

Most people *believe* they are making conscious life choices, when in fact they are responding to their computer software. This isn't true awareness. We take action with grace when we recognize life and Spirit moving through us and make our choices based on *that* wisdom, rather than the "knowledge" lodged in our programming. Each and every moment we have the ability to have a new thought and to upgrade the software of our mind. Forgiveness is a key to upgrading our software.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Ask a friend to forgive you for anything you have done or not done, based on non-awareness, that may have hurt them. What is the result of your conversation?
2. Identify a relationship in your life that continues to cause you pain and suffering.
  - a. What do you believe about that situation?
  - b. How are your beliefs perpetuating your pain and suffering?
  - c. With your newfound awareness, identify the gifts you have been graced with through this situation.
  - d. Forgive yourself for your non-awareness that prevented you from experiencing love.

## Lesson 24





- e. Thank the other person involved for offering you the opportunity to free yourself from self-destructive programming.
  3. Think about all the male-female relationships you have had in your life. As an exercise in expanding your awareness, forgive all men for the way they have treated you as a women; forgive all women for how they have treated you as a man. What did you forgive? What was your experience with this exercise?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 24 - 25



## Lesson 25: Presumption and Listening

*There are men who would quickly love each other if once they were to speak to each other; for when they spoke they would discover that their souls had only separated by phantoms and delusions.*

Ernest Hello

Human communication is complicated at best. How many of us have been in a situation where someone said to us, “I never told you that!” or “I said that, but that’s not what I meant.” When someone is speaking to us, we take their words and filter them through our belief system. Then we come to a conclusion, believing we understood the other person.

To confuse issues further, we know that people don’t always say what they mean out of fear of hurting each other, fear of judgment or retribution. They may say something that isn’t what they actually mean figuring we’ll understand what their true intention is.

While we’re at it, we can add in the difficulty we have translating other languages, especially idioms, colloquialisms and words that have no translation from one language to another. What’s the solution?

Listening! It isn’t about listening to what we want to hear according to our personal point of view. It’s about listening to what the other person is saying from their point of view. This requires putting interpretations and assumptions aside and asking for clarification if there is any doubt. A statement as simple as; “I heard you say x, y and z – is that what you meant?” can make a huge difference in human communication.

It’s also crucial to listen to the emotional quality of the message, the music behind the words. For example, I can say, “I love you” with love dripping from my words or say the same thing with rancor and sarcasm. To truly listen requires being present in the moment. Too often we’re thinking at the same time another person is talking and we’ve answered or judged what they’ve said before they’re finished speaking. Or maybe we’re completing their sentences out loud! If someone’s speaking, focus your attention on them not on you.

## Lesson 25

Listening and being present is an art. There's wisdom in the proverb: *God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak!* Let's forgive all beings for not paying attention when others talk, for distorting their words, for cutting them off, for completing their sentences and for making assumptions about what they are saying.



### Practicing the Lesson:

1. List the ways you sabotage effective communication.
  2. You can work on enhancing your listening habits using these suggestions:
    - a. If you tend to cut people off before they have finished talking, or if you complete other people's sentences, stop yourself as soon as you start taking these actions – and forgive yourself immediately for behaving that way.
    - b. If you often fade off into a dream world when other people are speaking to you, take the action to look directly into their eyes when they are speaking, then forgive yourself for not being 100% present.
    - c. If you immediately launch into your own story when someone is sharing their story with you, stop yourself immediately and allow them to speak until they are totally finished. Then thank them for sharing their story with you. Do not tell them your story at all. See what happens to you, in your mind and body, as a result of this action. Your ego-mind will usually fight to be heard, so let it protest – I promise, you will not die as a result of not sharing your story and you will have done something positive to help tame your ego and self-importance.
  3. What did you learn about yourself as a communicator?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 26: Criticizing and Allowing

*Don't hold to anger, hurt or pain. They steal your energy  
and keep you from love.*  
Leo Buscaglia

Emotions are energy in motion. There are times when our energy flows freely and smoothly. We feel confident, happy, at one. Our body, mind and spirit are aligned in the present moment. This experience has many names: the zone, peak performance, nirvana, love and grace. When we're having this experience, we are peace, we are love, our heart is open and our spiritual eyes see perfection in all creation.

When you pay attention to your thoughts, words and actions you may notice that your attention is frequently focused on what's wrong, problems, who's to blame, past wounds and future fears. Circumstances generating this suffering and misery can be as simple as having to wait in a long line in the supermarket or being on hold on the telephone; or as frightening as a raised terror alert or a diagnosis of cancer.

When we're around people who are constantly complaining, moody and angry, their energy is contagious. Sometimes we "catch" their anger and frustration because we agree with their story. Other times we're critical of their emotions and get angry at them for being moody and angry. We think our anger is justified since they're wrong to be angry!

What causes someone to be angry, moody and miserable? Anger is often sparked when people or circumstances don't meet our expectations of how things *should* be. Rather than acknowledging *what is*, we feel victimized by others for persecuting us, or angry with ourselves for getting into the predicament we're in. We're attached to the story of *poor me*.

When we get angry with someone for the emotions they're expressing, there are now *two* angry people. When we understand that someone's emotional response is based on their current point of view and we no longer judge them, we can have an experience of peace and happiness no matter what someone else is feeling. This doesn't mean we're cold and uncaring when someone is experiencing emotional pain. Instead, we have compassion for their suffering without taking on their suffering.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Identify someone in your life whose emotional responses you have been critical of and ask for their forgiveness for your judgments of them. Recognize that everyone is allowed to express their emotions, and we do not have to stay present if they are being disrespectful to us. Write your reflections on this exercise.
2. Forgive yourself for your past judgments of others' emotional reactions. Remember your past judgments were based on your thinking at that time. With your current awareness you can transform your critical thinking as soon as you notice it. What judgments do you believe are truth?

## Lesson 26



3. How do you know when you are making judgments? How does your body communicate judgments to you? (Do you feel palpitations, sweaty palms, stomach knots, anger, frustration, impatience, anxiety, etc?)
  4. What will you do in the future when you notice you are making judgments?
  5. When you see someone suffering, send love their way and thank them in your mind for giving you the opportunity to practice compassion and unconditional love. The more we strengthen this muscle the stronger it gets. What did you notice when you practiced this exercise?
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 26 - 27



### Day 27: Selfishness and Generosity

*The value of a man resides in what he gives and not in  
what he is capable of receiving.*  
Albert Einstein

Our ego-mind develops when we're young and learning to have a sense of ourselves as individuals. Our Spirit is eternal whereas our ego-mind, matches our chronological age. The mind is young and impetuous with many wants and needs, like a two-year-old child. Our ego-mind is often frightened by other people while our Spirit is patient, at peace and the expression of unconditional love.

When we operate from the childlike wants and needs of our ego – we spend our lives afraid, constantly trying to figure out how to protect ourselves from others, how to get what we believe we need to survive or to look better than others. We can see this pattern mirrored in the larger global picture.

Every country worries about the resources they have, whether or not someone else is going to try to take them away – and how they can get what they believe they need.

Generosity, when it comes from the ego, is the need for validation in disguise. When we give to receive the accolades of others, this is selfishness. The motivation for *true* giving is an open heart and the desire to live and love audaciously, without fear or boundaries. When we can give and it no longer matters to us what anyone thinks – we are free of the ego's habit of linking its self-worth to others. Imagine if you no longer lived your life needing love, approval or validation, and no longer had the need to be right and make others wrong to bolster your ego.

We are compelled to take actions from our wounded ego-mind, which has us behaving in hurtful ways towards others. At the same time we are compelled to take action from Spirit moving through us, which has us expressing our unconditional love. In each moment, *one force* will prevail. That's why humans can be so beautiful, loving and generous in one moment, and mean, hurtful and selfish in the next. It is up to us to make a conscious choice – do we live from selfishness or generosity?

### Practicing the Lesson:

Watch how you interact with people. Notice if you express any of the behaviors listed below. If you do, forgive yourself in the moment and do your best to practice new behaviors. Remember, these are challenging aspects of ourselves to look at. Make sure that you do so with kindness, forgiveness and lots of unconditional love.

1. Do you find yourself only expressing your love to those you know or approve of? If this is true, what do you believe is causing you to act this way?
2. Are you kind only when you know you will be noticed or acknowledged? If so, where do you believe this behavior stems from in your past?
3. Do you do things that you really do not want to do, but do anyway because you want the approval of others? If yes, what are you afraid will happen if you would say *no*?
4. If you do not receive a compliment or appreciation for something you have done, do you complain? Do you believe that you should receive kudos if you are kind and if so why?
5. Do you manipulate others for the purpose of getting something you feel you need or want, rather than just asking for it directly? If you did ask for something directly, what do you believe people will think of you?
6. Do you feel like people are trying to drain you of your time and energy and do you become defensive or irritated as a result? Is it truth that people can drain you of *anything* – or is it closer to the truth to say that you are allowing people to have that affect on you? What can you do to honor your energy and eliminate your defensiveness?
7. Do you often want to buy things to make yourself look better in the eyes of others? Did you learn this behavior from a family member? How has this behavior paid off in your life? Does this behavior work for you? If not, what changes do you want to make?

### Lesson 27



8. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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**Lesson 27 -  
28**

**Lesson 28: Other and Self**

*It was he [John the Baptist] who said, "Love your enemies," not J [Jesus]. J wouldn't have any concept of an enemy.*  
Gary Renard, from *The Disappearance of the Universe*



The dream of life we unconsciously live in is filled with labels, stereotypes and definitions. These create a distinction between what we perceive as our *self* and *others*. Throughout history these differences based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual preference have resulted in verbal abuse, physical violence and genocide. Just as we swat a fly at a picnic, step on a cockroach in the kitchen or initiate chemical warfare against ants in our home – we treat those who are not like us as the enemy and less than human.

Our world seems to be in the midst of chaos. As I write this, fear-based beliefs of the *other* in the Middle East create daily images of violence and destruction. We can witness heartbreak on the faces of people as missiles and rockets annihilate those we call *the enemy*. Isn't this an extreme and traumatic expression of the judgments we hold against people who are not like us?

In seeing *others* as the enemy, we agree to a set of beliefs that justify our fears. Our beliefs are so much a part of the fabric of our consciousness that we have an automatic response that goes into effect when we are in the presence of the *other*, independent of how politically correct we may try to be.

What would our experience be like if the definition we used when seeing people were: *They are an expression of the divine*? What would it be like to see and experience the world through those eyes?

We can change our thinking and acknowledge that we are one and interconnected. Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." We can see the true enemy is *fear itself* – *not* the people who we perceive to be different from us. Forgive yourself for your fear-based beliefs about those who appear to be the *other*.

You'll discover compassion, reconciliation and unconditional love when you give yourself this gift of forgiveness.

**Practicing the Lesson:**

1. List your fear-based beliefs about other races, ethnic and religious groups. Where did these beliefs originate? Forgive yourself for thinking these beliefs are true.



2. Have a conversation with friends about your fear-based beliefs and how you intend to change your programming. Write your experience of this conversation and how your friends responded during this conversation.
3. Create a personal mantra/affirmation that you can use when your fears arise. The mantra I use is, *I see thorough the eyes of the Divine. We are One, we are love. There is no other.*
4. When you greet people practice saying *Namaste* (pronounced nuhm'-uh-stey), a Sanskrit word that translates to: *The Divine in me honors and acknowledges the Divine in you.* After practicing this action in the world – how do you feel?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## Lesson 28 - 29




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## Lesson 29: Separation and Oneness

*Those who wish to embody the Tao should embrace all things.  
To embrace all things means first that one holds no anger or resistance  
toward any idea or thing, living or dead, formed or formless.  
Acceptance is the very essence of the Tao.  
To embrace all things means also that one rids oneself of any concept of  
separation: male and female, self and other, life and death.  
Division is contrary to the nature of the Tao.  
Foregoing antagonism and separation, one enters in the  
harmonious oneness of all things.*

Lao Tzu

One of the more challenging aspects of being in a physical body is reconciling the seemingly obvious physical separation between each of us and the spiritual notion of the oneness of all beings. How is it possible that both concepts can exist simultaneously when they appear to be in opposition? How can we say there are no differences between humans when we obviously look different?

The reality we perceive depends solely on our point of view. If we take the point of view of the human body (using our sense of sight and touch), we perceive things that are either us – or *not* us. However, take the point of view of a quantum physicist and you'd find that there is no difference between you, your chair and the person sitting in the next room.

Just because we can't perceive the universe as being one with our physical eyes doesn't mean that it's not truth. When we open our *spiritual* eyes, we see reality with as energy – *not* with our physical eyes which are conditioned to see reality as separate objects. We're seeing the same reality, but from a totally different point of view, one that is inclusive of all individual and limited points of view.

In the above quote, Lao Tzu refers to the acceptance of, or non-resistance to, all people and things. When we no longer believe there is anything to resist, essentially we are saying there is nothing out there *to* resist. What encourages us to create something or someone to fight against is the incessant habit of the mind to separate, judge and label.

That is why Lao Tzu asks us to surrender our attachment to our abstract concepts that encourage separation and division, like male vs. female, heterosexual vs. homosexual, USA vs. Middle East, Republican vs. Democrat and Catholic vs. Muslim. Embracing all individual points of view allows us to have the experience of harmonious oneness.

If all humanity perceived the oneness of life rather than seeing us as separate, it would become ludicrous to even consider the thought of eliminating entire races, genders and/or ethnicities. When we're caught up in these superficial differences, we feel justified to hurt people of seemingly different races and ethnicities. We must forgive ourselves and others for perceiving ourselves as separate, and for all harm done in ignorance.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. When you have some quiet time and you can sit undisturbed for about 30 minutes, focus on the following meditation and after doing so, record your experience and feelings:
  - a. Sit comfortably so that there is no stress on your physical body, but do not lie down in a way that will cause your body to want to sleep.
  - b. Close your eyes and focus your attention on the feeling within you that feels like a *buzzing*. Follow that feeling and allow it to take you deeply within yourself and then beyond.
  - c. Put all your focus on that feeling, doing your best not to focus your attention on any of the other thought forms going through your head.
  - d. Let each thought go like a balloon in the wind and do not allow any internal conversation to hook your attention.
  - e. Relax, stay alert and go deeply into that feeling.
2. If you were to distinguish people by their deeds and actions rather than their superficial appearances (as if you were blind and deaf), what qualities would become most important to you? How can you honor these qualities in the people you know and meet?
3. National Geographic is currently working on a Genographic Project, the theory behind it being that it is possible that we all have one common ancestor originating in Africa 60,000 years ago. For those of you who are interested in having your DNA tested for the project go to: [www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic](http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/genographic).

## **Lesson 29**



4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

**Lesson 29 -  
30**

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**Lesson 30: Supremacy and Humbleness**

*Racism is man's gravest threat to man -  
the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason.*  
Abraham Joshua Heschel



The roots of racism seem to lie deep in man's nature. Sometimes I think racism began with original sin, but what is original sin? Sin is a word used in archery to mean *being off the mark*. I have come to view original sin as being off the mark with our connection with the Divine – having forgotten we are all connected. We all live and die, and if cut, we bleed. We laugh and cry, and for whatever mysterious reason we share time together on earth.

Throughout history, stereotypes and generalizations have been made about different races. Africans were seen as subhuman, taken from their homeland, loaded on ships, and brought to North America as slave labor. Jews were viewed as *cheap*, charging unfair interest rates in business. Italians are associated with organized crime. Blacks excel at sports. Japanese are brilliant in math. Name an ethnic or racial group and there is a stereotype ultimately serving to compartmentalize people.

Once we believe the very stereotypes we have created, we are then empowered to take action based on those notions. If we feel that Africans are ignorant, then that justifies our decision to take them from their homeland and use them as mindless labor. If we believe that the Jewish people control the banks, are cheap and are the downfall of our financial success, then we can rationalize our plan to eliminate them from the face of the earth. If we believe that the American Indians are savages and heathens, then we are absolutely correct in taking over their homeland and destroying them.

The only way we can follow through on such self-centered and devastating actions is if our egos can find a way to exalt ourselves to a position of such authority that we can justify those actions. By making ourselves superior to others we can feel good about ourselves and make everyone else *less-than*. This behavior is the hallmark of the ego. The only way to counter this type of thinking is with humility. Again, we know that humility is not making ourselves less-than another, it simply means we recognize that we are all equal in the eyes of the Creator.

No human deserves to be eliminated, punished or enslaved, nor do any of us deserve to suffer. Yet the history of humanity is filled with such behavior. Only by each one of us recognizing and taking responsibility for the desire to be superior, present within our own minds, will we be able to eliminate that desire in the global arena. It is easy for us to look at the behavior of others and blame them for the atrocities of the world. However, in the end we each must take responsibility for the seed of superiority that exists within our own minds.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. This is an exercise that is challenging and very profound, best done with a friend who is of another race or ethnicity.
    - a. Explain to them that you are practicing forgiveness in all areas of your life and would be grateful if they would assist you in an exercise in forgiving yourself for all the times you discriminated against or stereotyped a person of different race or ethnic group.
    - b. Assuming they say yes, ask them to please forgive you for all the times you treated another person as anything less than Christ, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed or any religious master that you have absolute reverence for.
    - c. Let them know that you are very sorry for any harm or pain that you have caused and that you acted in ignorance of the divinity within all people.
    - d. To end, give them a heartfelt hug and thank them for being in your life.
    - e. Record the feelings and emotions you had during this exercise.
    - f. How did your friend react?
    - g. Do you feel like something in you shifted from doing this exercise? If so, what?
  2. Have a conversation with your family and friends acknowledging how your judgments and stereotypes have resulted in your feeling superior to a particular race and how you are now focusing on seeing the Divine in all people. Ask them to point out to you when you make prejudiced or judgmental statements about other races. What were the response from your family and friends to this conversation and how did you feel about their responses?
  3. Step out of your comfort zone and into an environment where you are not a member of the predominant race. Go below the surface of skin color and prejudices to see the similarities between all humans. Express how you felt during this exercise. Were you afraid, uncomfortable, angry or judgmental? If so, why?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 30



## Lesson 31: Stereotyping and Inclusiveness

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation  
where they will not be judged by the color of their skin,  
but by the content of their character.*

Martin Luther King Jr.

Ultimately, we must understand that from the perspective of Spirit there are no ethnic groups or races. These labels are simply ways that we, as humans, have separated and defined ourselves. As Spirit, we are *no-thing* (as opposed to nothing). That is, we're not objects to be placed in limiting boxes. It's amazing how we've created a whole hierarchy of humans with our minds, stereotyped them and then used those very labels to condemn each other.

Let me share how these ideas work within the context of gardening. Let's say you plant a garden based on what your analytical mind deems lovely. You might have rules about what kinds of flowers should be growing in your garden and where. When a plant grows in your garden that you don't like, you call it a *weed* because it is undesirable, unattractive, troublesome, useless, detrimental or worthless according to your personal point of view – especially if it's growing where it's not wanted.

Now take this mindset and apply it to people. Perhaps you are African-American and you don't want an Asian person living on your block. You've decided in some way that they're a weed and they don't belong in your neighborhood, as they're considered undesirable, unwanted and possibly troublesome.

It's not up to us to determine what grows in this wonderful garden of manifest reality. Many humans in history have been compelled to *weed out* or exterminate the races and ethnic groups they've judged to be unworthy of living because they were *dangerous* or *useless*. Truly, it's not up to any individual flower to decide the fate of any other. It's up to the Creator. All of us have the ability to see beyond the superficial illusion of duality and multiplicity. All we have to do is acknowledge the truth of inclusiveness, which is that we are all One.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Think back to when you were growing up. What kinds of racial slurs and fear-based talk did you hear at home with your family?
2. How did that impact the way you view the world today?
3. Do you still feel some fear come up inside of you when you are in the presence of someone of another race, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference? What current beliefs are fueling your fear?
4. When you notice yourself feeling that way, forgive yourself and others for judging and discriminating. Know with all your heart that when you forgive, you heal not only the wounds of your generation, but all the human wounds that existed before your time. Why would we suggest the truth that: forgiveness and love heals all wounds?

## Lesson 31



5. Stereotyping is not just about race, ethnicity, sexual preference and gender. It can be used against people of different parts of the world, or even to divide people of the same nation. Either way, whenever we create separation between us, we weaken ourselves rather than supporting the strength born of inclusiveness. Make a list of all the stereotypes you have of *other* people within your own country. For example, in the southern USA people call northerners *Yankees*. In the north people call southerners *rednecks*. See how many of these kinds of stereotypes you can come up with. What did you learn about your stereotypes from this exercise?
  6. Make a list of all the stereotypes you have regarding gender and sexual preferences. No one enjoys being stereotyped. Having made your list, make a commitment to yourself to do your best to *never* put another person into a conceptual box again.
  7. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 31 - 32



## Lesson 32: Punishing and Loving

*Wherever you are, God is.*  
James Dillet Freeman, *The Prayer of Protection*

When I was in my early 30's, my friend Johanna asked, "Who do you pray to?" What a provocative question. It opened the door to many questions and years of personal exploration.

One idea is that God is a supreme, judging, authority determining what is good, bad and sinful. This God not only doesn't forget; he doesn't forgive. And he is a he – which makes it hard to be made in his image if you are a she. If you don't measure up as a good person, you can expect an afterlife in the fires of hell or perhaps you'll wait in purgatory, until the end of time. With this idea of God there are endless opportunities to be punished. This God ranks species and decides what caste you will be born into, some more privileged than others.

Another concept of God is that of a loving, embracing, compassionate being who loves all creations. He's accepting and forgiving. Yet, even with this concept, there is the notion that God is outside of us somewhere. Many people believe in this idea of God, but lose their faith when bad things happen to good people. After all, why would this loving God punish people with unhappy circumstances causing them to suffer?

These ideas of God reinforce a sense of separation. As my personal consciousness has evolved, I started to experience God from a different point of view. I saw God-Goddess-Consciousness-Source as energy, and everything that exists is part of this absolute whole. I saw that nothing stands outside of creation. I realized that humans are the creators of our human experience.



I understood that creation or the manifestation of form into a three-dimensional reality is based on where we focus our attention. I witnessed that it is God-energy moving through us directed by our thoughts, which ultimately determines our experience.

Examine the concepts and beliefs you have about God and if the idea that God is Love resonates within your heart – then do your best to live your life as an expression of that Love.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Have a conversation with God. Write down God's responses to:
    - a. Who are you?
    - b. How can I get to know you better?
    - c. How can I be an expression of your love in the world?
  2. Have a conversation with your family and friends about their concept of God and how that relates to forgiveness. What were the responses of your family and friends? Were any of the responses fear-based? In what ways? Does forgiveness come across as a chore or as a opportunity for a deeper experience of love?
  3. Forgive yourself and others for using concepts about God to punish and judge. What is your experience of putting this into practice in your life?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### **Lesson 32 - 33**



### **Lesson 33: Extremism and Embracing**

*At least two thirds of our miseries spring from human stupidity, human malice and those great motivators and justifiers of malice and stupidity: idealism, dogmatism and proselytizing zeal on behalf of religious or political idols.*

Aldous Huxley

There are so many religious traditions and philosophies; and of course it's natural to feel that ours is best. Each religion is a system that's leading us to become good, respectful, kind, peaceful, enlightened people and to know and experience Spirit/God. All religions espouse the idea to love our neighbors, our family and our earth. Yet, religion is one of the major causes of conflict and war on our planet. How can this be?

Let's take Christianity and Judaism for a moment. There are so many branches and types of each; Roman Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Born Again, Mormon, etc. The same exists in Judaism: Reformed, Conservative, Hasidic, Orthodox and Reconstructionist. If we look at other religions, we find the same kind of multiplicity.

The reason for this multiplicity is that over time, humans came up with different concepts that they felt better represented the true message of their religion. This encouraged them to create new branches of their religion, and the people who resonated with those concepts and ideas became followers. With so many thousands of religions present around the world, can any one religion or philosophy be the true one? In our world of concepts, ideas and points of view, can only one be right?

When we use religion to create separation between people that doesn't truly exist – we create conflict. When we evangelize what we believe to others and make what they believe *wrong* – we create discord. When we are so certain that what we believe is the only way – this can compel us to take extreme and violent actions.

When we are kind, compassionate and expressing our unconditional love – we are embracing what our religions are teaching us. Tolerance, respect, acceptance and understanding are all qualities that most religions would consider beautiful attributes. Condemnation, impatience, intolerance and disrespect come from fear of differences that truly don't exist, and are not from God or Spirit. How can we love unconditionally if we're busy putting conditions on others? It just doesn't make sense. Heaven on earth cannot come if we practice extremism.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

Here are some behaviors you can look for in yourself to gauge your ability to embrace and tolerate the religious beliefs of others:

1. We are often very excited about our spiritual path and wish that the people we love were experiencing the same joy as us. When you speak about your path with others, what is their reaction? How do you react to their point of view, if it is the same or different than yours?
2. Are family members and friends tired of hearing about what you have learned? If so, this could be a clue that the people in your life are not enjoying what you are saying to them, and your enthusiasm has crossed the line into critical evangelism. Forgive yourself for your enthusiasm and make a choice to respect their beliefs and simply love them as they are.
3. If someone has religious beliefs that are very different from yours do you feel uncomfortable in their presence? Why? What do you believe? Are your beliefs based in fear or in love?

### **Lesson 33**



4. Can you see that you may be judging them, even if it is subconsciously? Make a list of what thoughts are going through your mind when you are in their presence. Discomfort in your body is a clue that you are feeling fear rather than compassion towards them. If you notice this, forgive yourself and send them compassion and kindness instead.
  5. When you see extremism on TV, do you get upset and project anger towards that group? If so, is it possible to refrain from judging and condemning them and instead take the action to forgive them for being possessed by their fear-based beliefs? When you feel yourself getting angry, forgive yourself for projecting anger rather than compassion into the world dream. As you keep letting go of your anger, what is the quality of your life?
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 32 - 33



## Lesson 34: Authority and Accountability

*The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.*  
Edmund Burke

In recent years there've been countless scandals depicting the abuse of power by religious authorities. We've witnessed televangelists who've used their congregations' donations for personal benefit, buying expensive cars, houses, first-class travel, jewelry, clothing and lavish vacations. How many times have we seen the church hierarchy cover-up sexual abuse of congregants? How often has the news reported gurus who've influenced their followers to leave their families, give away their money and even commit mass suicide?

There's an implicit assumption that religious authorities and people ministering to the spiritual lives of others should live according to a higher moral code than mere mortals. Religious leaders are endowed with power that evokes trust. Indeed, some believe they are the intermediaries between a congregant and God, or that they are God's messengers with the power to free us of our sins. We see them as interpreters of the word of God, and count on their authority to guide us during the dark nights of our soul when our vulnerability is at its height.

This is a lot of power for a mortal human. The danger with power is that in the hands of our ego-mind, we can begin to believe that we're above or outside the law and rules do not apply to us. Egos become inflated and an addiction to power can override one's conscience. Simply because a person is a religious authority, doesn't automatically mean they're capable of dealing with the power their position is endowed with; or is free of personal demons.

It's easy to condemn the acts of others; to expect that someone in authority *should, would* and/or *could* act in a particular way. But life is messy, power is enticing and when power and ego are combined – the results can be explosive. Yes, it would be nice if each of us was accountable for our behavior and took responsibility for our actions, but that's not necessarily the way it is.

What if our journey on earth is to deepen our experience of love and compassion? What if the abusive acts of clergy are opportunities for us to strengthen our muscles of compassion, forgiveness and unconditional love? This is not a request to condone harmful behavior, this is an acknowledgment that each human, regardless of the title and power they hold, is doing the best they can based on their *thinking* and beliefs about themselves. Granted, some of this thinking results in experiences that cause harm and suffering, but does our condemnation do anything but nourish continued suffering?

### ***Story From Susyn***

I'm an InterFaith Minister. I clearly remember the discussion in seminary about the high incidence of sexual abuse on the part of clergy of all faiths. The reactions in the room were numerous and varied. There were gasps of horror as one woman described an incident of abuse that had been a source of deep emotional wounding in her life. The emotional charge in the room amplified as disgust and outrage were expressed. Then the director of the seminary, in a calm, powerful and loving voice asked us to look at our reactions – our jumping to condemn and to judge. She asked, "What conditions do you put on forgiveness?" She was not condoning the acts of abuse; rather she was asking us to shine the light on our personal list of conditions that block our desire and ability to forgive unconditionally. The room became quiet. Then she spoke about the power that is attributed to religious authorities. How were we, as ministers, going to use, manage and respect that power?

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. How have you abused power in situations where people trusted you? It could be something as simple as yelling at an aging parent or spanking your child too hard in a fit of anger. What beliefs did you use to justify your actions? Each one of us is accountable for our actions that create suffering. If you see yourself behaving in this way, forgive yourself, apologize and make the commitment to make a different choice in the future.
2. Forgive all people with religious authority for acts of abuse, whether the abuse has been political, sexual or the cover-up of an abuse of power. Thank these people and circumstances for the opportunity for you to open your heart to greater forgiveness and compassion.

### **Lesson 34**



3. Have a conversation with a religious authority about the dangers of the abuse of power. Did the conversation surprise you in anyway? Did they share some insights with you that you were not aware of – and if so what were they?
  4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 34 - 35



## Lesson 35: Justification and Justice

*Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some die that deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the wise cannot see all ends.*

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

It's too easy for us to be tempted to take our religious teachings and distort them for our own fear-based reasons to protect ourselves from *others*. We can consider it evil when we use our holy writings to justify murder and war in the world and call it *justice*.

The people who wrote our holy books and documents are dead and gone. They're not around to let us know if we're interpreting what has been written in the way it was meant to be read. The language was different then and there can be multiple meanings for certain words and phrases. As long as we have words and concepts, we can turn them around to mean anything we want them to mean. Once we've done that, there's *nothing* we can't justify.

It's easy to do this. There are Christians who'd *never* kill or destroy anything as life is sacred (like St. Francis of Assisi). Yet, there are Christians who killed *witches*, and participated in the great Inquisition and more recently have killed physicians working at clinics providing abortions to women. In the Islam tradition, the Sufis, (the mystic tradition of Islam) follow the path of love to God, *The Beloved*; their point of view of love is clearly expressed in the poems of Rumi and Hafiz. Yet, there are Islamic terrorists who see fit to destroy anyone they see as an infidel – actions taken out of fear.

How can there be within the same tradition such opposite translations of the same religious texts? How can some readings lead to unconditional love and other readings empower people to murder? The truth is it is not the texts themselves, but the fear-based minds that are interpreting those texts.

For us to have compassion, it's important to understand that it's not the religions that are to blame. We must forgive those people who are angry and afraid, who look for any reason to lash out at others. Let's forgive all beings for *justifications* masquerading as *justice*. This deep understanding can help us change the way we perceive the religious tension in the world today, and allow us to open our hearts and minds to one another.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. On a personal note, can you find one thing you did or said today to *justify* your point of view and anger? How is this any different than a religious zealot justifying their point of view?
  2. What concept did you use to defend yourself with? Notice how you can use anything to justify your position. When you see yourself doing this in your personal life, it is easier to understand and forgive it on a global level.
  3. Now that you recognize how you have used justifications and called them justice – when you see yourself feeling angry during the world news, take a deep breath and forgive the people who are creating war and terrorism using religion as their justification. How do you feel as a result of this action?
  4. How can there be within the same religious tradition such opposite translations of the same religious texts? How can some readings lead to unconditional love and other readings empower people to murder? What is your opinion of this part of this lesson?
  5. Within your own religion, how can you be sure you are interpreting your religious texts in the way they were meant to be read?
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 35 - 36



### Lesson 36: Blaming and Ownership

*If you judge people, you have no time to love them.*  
Mother Teresa

We have discussed that our thoughts and beliefs have a direct impact on our experience and the collective global consciousness. Nothing illustrates this as clearly as the subject of politics. Politics generate strong emotional reactions. Our attachment to our personal ideals compels us to project our anger, disdain and frustration on people who express points of view differing from ours. In the political arena we see this played out as adversarial mudslinging. On the international level this is sometimes expressed as war.



When we see our point of view as *right*, we can justify and blame the problems of the world on others, abdicating responsibility for our words and deeds to them.

As we hold fast to being *right* about our political position we are usually unaware of the impact our anger, frustration and sometimes, hatred is having. It is therefore vital for each of us to take ownership for projecting our emotionally charged points of view into the world. It is much too easy to sit around and blame people who disagree with our political agenda for not doing enough to make the world a better place. A greater challenge is to responsibly take ownership of our thoughts.

What is most important for each of us to understand is that when we are engaged in judging, blaming and not respecting others opinions, then the thoughts that we personally contribute to our collective global consciousness energetically supports discord, conflict and war. Angry, hateful thoughts of blame create disharmony, and loving, compassionate and forgiving thoughts create peaceful coexistence.

Let us play with the idea that the variety of political points of view expressed, are simply a reflection of the vast number of human ideas in our group consciousness. While you do not have to agree with the content of a particular point of view, allowing someone the right to their personal point of view is vital for greater peace. Keeping in mind that each one of us is constantly and powerfully contributing to the collective global consciousness, what thoughts and emotions are you projecting when faced with views that differ from yours?

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. We all get caught up in arguing with others about political issues we are passionate about. Think of a situation where you have argued with your family or a friend about differing political points of view. (For example, do you want to bring our troops in Iraq home, or do you want to send more? Do you believe income taxes should be higher or lower?) What happened to your family or friends during those arguments and how did that feel to you?
2. Make the choice to take ownership for your views and stop projecting your anger and blame on the other person for having a different idea or for the problems of the world. Do you find it difficult to be passionate about something without *having* to project anger? What beliefs are supporting your anger?
3. Now think of a politician you have expressed anger and blame towards. Forgive yourself for your intolerance towards points of views that are different than your own. Acknowledge your gratitude to them for allowing you to see your own judgments.

### **Lesson 36**



4. Imagine that the world is unfolding perfectly and that what we see on the surface of events and circumstances is just that, the surface. Is it possible that you do not know all the information about the very topics that you are passionate about? Does knowing that change the way you chose to react to political issues? Why?

5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 36 - 37



### Lesson 37: Contempt and Sensitivity

*Anger and intolerance are the twin enemies of correct understanding.*  
Mohandas K. Gandhi

There are many topics that we deal with as a society that challenge the very foundation of our beliefs. Most of these issues revolve around moral concepts, which come from our sense of conscience of what is *right* and *wrong* – and much of *that* originates from our religious beliefs. We learned in Lesson 35 that we can read our religious texts in many ways to justify our actions. When we realize that we base our morality on our interpretation, it becomes more difficult to know what's really *right* and what is not.

As soon as issues of *morality* come into politics, it's like throwing a match into dry brush. Gandhi's quote, above, is critical because if we approach these political issues with anger and intolerance, understanding can never be the result. Understanding does not mean we *agree* with one another; it simply means we can see another point of view.

It's easy for us to become passionate about what we believe because we're so deeply attached to our perspective, but we lose our *compassion* when we cross the line from passion to contempt. Gandhi once said, "*I am prepared to die, but there is no cause for which I am prepared to kill.*" That is because we lose our *humanity* when we kill and maim for a belief.

When we're able to listen and take the time to understand what others are thinking and feeling it becomes possible to find a way to communicate rather than kill. Even if we don't come to any conclusions, at least the doors to understanding are open. Why must we take the attitude of *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*? Does it truly make sense for us to all be blind and toothless?

There are times when political issues are critical and all options have been exhausted – we may be forced to make a choice to go to war. But there's a big difference between fighting when we are filled with contempt and hatred for the other, and taking that same action with compassion, sensitivity and the desire to end the conflict as quickly as possible. Let's forgive ourselves for any contempt we have held towards each other and for the lack of sensitivity that accompanies that type of thinking.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Begin this lesson by asking yourself and making a list of the political issues that are most important to you. Some examples are: right-to-life or pro-choice, the future of welfare, stem cell research, animal rights, tax money used for war or for education, Social Security, health insurance for all Americans or private coverage for those who can afford it and grounds for sending our military personnel to a foreign country.
2. When you start talking about these issues, how do you feel? What emotions are you experiencing? Are any of your emotions fear-based? In other words do you feel anger, frustration, righteous indignation, hatred or contempt? Make a list of all the emotions that you are feeling.
3. Is it possible for you to have a point of view without projecting anger when talking about it? If it is not possible – why is your mind telling you that? Are you in control of your mind or is your mind in control of you? Do your best to express your point of view with compassion for the *other side* rather than anger. When you see yourself getting upset, forgive yourself for allowing yourself to use that political issue to make yourself suffer.
4. When discussing politics, make an effort to hear other points of view. It is possible that you might learn something that you did not know or consider before. What happens when you take the time to listen deeply to other points of view?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### Lesson 37 - 38



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### Lesson 38: Drama and What Is

*Transported to a surreal landscape, a young girl kills the first woman she meets and then teams up with three complete strangers to kill again.*  
Marin County newspaper's TV listing for *The Wizard of Oz*

I was a child in the 1950's when television was a new invention for sharing stories, a practice that most likely began around a hearth long, long ago. While newspapers and radio were available to report current events, having a real live person joining us in our living room was a miracle.

Now more than fifty years later it's often difficult to distinguish news stories from entertainment, and extreme reality TV from the drama that fills the news screens. News pundits yell and denounce one another for voicing different points of view.

With twenty-four hour news stations on radio, TV, and the internet stories of terrorism and violence are repeated, insuring that images sustaining fear of the *enemy* are imprinted in our consciousness.

When I hear the word television, I actually hear tell-a-vision. In a 30-second sound bite we view a vision of reality filled with commentary and judgments. And that's all it is, a particular point of view. Confusion occurs when we don't understand the difference between *what is* and drama. The *what is* can be viewed as what's happening without all the judgment, points of view and assumptions – *just the facts Jack*.

Drama occurs when we add all kinds of judgment to the events, and suffer the emotional turmoil that results from the judgment. With awareness, we can learn to distinguish between the dramatic interpretation of a story and *what is*, and not fall prey to the emotional manipulation of the media. In addition, we are then able to listen to the news without losing our happiness or raising our blood-pressure.

What is crucial to remember is that instead of blaming, complaining and judging the media we each have the choice to change the channel and listen to a new story when drama and fear are being served as steady diet by the media. It is up to each of us to determine the best images and stories with which to nourish our minds.

So what will you decide to fill your plate with – drama or the *what is*? Rather than blaming the media, embody your power and consciously choose the thoughts and images you allow to capture your attention.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. How many hours of news and entertainment do you watch, listen to and/or read about each day? How do you feel emotionally after every exposure to the media?
2. As an experiment, go on a media diet for one week. No TV, radio, internet news, newspaper, magazines, books, movies or music. Use this time to quiet your mind, and *hear* what you are thinking. What is your experience of this experiment? Do you long for the noise of the radio or TV? What is your emotional state during this week?
3. After your media diet, when you re-introduce media into your life, you will be more conscious of what you choose. It is up to you to use your awareness to view what is happening from a neutral place, rather than from a fear-based point of view. What is your experience of listening to the media again after a week of quiet? Did you truly miss anything during that week? What is your rational mind telling you about your experience? What justifications and rationalizations is your mind making for wanting to watch so much media?
4. Forgive the media, friends, family and yourself for any stories that promote drama, anxiety and fear; and forgive yourself for being seduced by these stories. When you notice yourself judging, change the channel. Record how you feel when you do this.

### **Lesson 38**



5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

## Lesson 38 - 39



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### Lesson 39: Greed and Conscientiousness

*A grandfather talking to his young grandson tells the boy he has two wolves inside of him struggling with each other. The first is the wolf of peace, love and kindness. The other wolf is fear, greed and hatred.*

*"Which wolf will win, grandfather?" asks the young boy.*

*"Whichever one I feed," is the reply.*

A Native American Proverb

It's easy to be angry with our political leaders and government when we perceive so much injustice and seemingly inappropriate action. It is especially challenging when we observe what appears to be lies, greed and blatant abuse of power. (It's no wonder that confidence in the government is low.)

We're all tempted at some time in our lives to take advantage of a position of power, rank or title. What makes it possible for this temptation to occur is our belief that we don't have power in the first place, and so we seek the illusion of it outside ourselves. Although all of us have the absolute power of the creator inside us, we see ourselves at the mercy of others who are smarter, have more money and/or greater positions in society than we do. The desire to make ourselves better than others, and make them less than us, empowers us to be abusive.

Coming from this point of view makes it easy for us to victimize others and feel justified in taking advantage of them. After all, we need something that they have and they *owe* us. The ego-mind operates from the place of constant want and need. Only if we have awareness of what we are doing can we move past that kind of selfish behavior.

Rather than losing our temper and patience with people in positions of power in our government, we can have compassion for their lack of awareness and ignorance of the desires of the ego-mind inside of them. We can clearly see their motivation and desire for power. That doesn't mean that we condone their actions, it simply means we can be free of the need to project our anger, hate and frustration on them. Instead, we can choose to take action to change things, perhaps by getting involved in organizations that work in peaceful ways to change policy.

Let's forgive our government officials for feeding the wolf of fear, and let go of our anger and resentment towards them so we can assist them in taking more positive actions. If we empower the anger and resentment within us, we are feeding *our* wolf of fear – and then we're doing the same thing they are.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. To envision feeding the wolf of fear versus feeding the wolf of love, make two lists. On the left side, make a list of all the actions you have taken in the last week to feed your wolf of fear. On the right side make a list of all the actions you have taken to feed the wolf of love.
2. Is your list longer on the left side than the right side? If so, forgive yourself for not realizing what you have been doing. What actions can you take to shift the balance from fear to love? Make a commitment to take those actions.
3. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### Lesson 39 - 40



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### Lesson 40: Nationalism and Humanism

*Our true nationality is mankind.*  
H.G. Wells

When we view earth from space, we see no boundaries separating one nation from another, no political philosophies that inform a particular area. We see the geography: the landmasses, mountains, water, deserts, forests, clouds, the rising and setting sun, and the waxing and waning moon. We see a sphere that is our home planet, the home of all humankind.

There is a notion in Chaos Theory known as the Butterfly Effect. The idea is that one butterfly flapping its wings can have a far-reaching ripple effect on subsequent events in another part of the world. If the wings of a butterfly can have this impact, then it seems clear that the actions of humans in one part of the world can have lasting consequences in another city, state, country or continent.

Yet when we look at life on earth from a closer vantage point, we are bombarded with manmade boundaries that divide neighborhoods, towns, cities, states, countries and nations. It's understandable that national and cultural diversity exists. There was a time that mountains, oceans, forests and lakes separated one area from another. Each tribe, clan or kingdom formed its own way of governing, based on the prevailing consciousness.

As communities expanded and explored unknown territories, one group would eventually come upon another. The group claiming superiority based on notions of religious supremacy, military or divine right would conquer, harm and/or kill the other, claiming the new land as their own. This practice of *nationalism* continues today.



As a result of mass global communication, we can instantaneously view on our televisions and computer screens the devastation, misery and suffering that war and discord cause. Yet at the same time, the images of earth from space have imprinted on our global psyche that we are one. Let's choose the humanistic point of view. Are you willing to state, *I am a global citizen*, rather than support the old and outdated concepts of nationalism?

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. List three actions that your country has taken recently to create further suffering, anger and death in the world in the name of nationalism and democracy. Do you think the actions were justified? Why?
  2. Forgive all governments including your own for their adherence and promotion of nationalistic philosophies that have resulted in conflict, abuse and war. If this is difficult for you, write down why and what you believe about not being able to forgive. How is your position of resistance helping to heal the situation?
  3. Make a list of all the world issues that could be resolved if we worked together to solve them.
  4. Read the Earth Charter at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) and become a global citizen. What do you think and feel about the intent of this document?
  5. Search the web and see one foreign film each month from a country you have judged and criticized. Visit communities and countries to learn more about the global community you are a citizen of. What have you learned from this exercise?
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 41: Disaster and Evolution

*There are two big forces at work, external and internal. We have very little control over external forces such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, disasters, illness and pain. What really matters is the internal force. How do I respond to those disasters?*

Leo Buscaglia

Earth is an amazing entity. She supports the lives of billions of living creatures and is a living sentient being. Truly, she's our mother and we owe our lives to her.

### Lesson 40 - 41



But what happens when major shifts in our planet occur, and we must endure hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, floods, draughts and earthquakes? How do we choose to respond to things that we cannot control, as Leo Buscaglia asks above?

Whenever the human mind cannot grasp the immensity of what is happening in life, it searches for a reason or an entity to blame; it has the need to know *why*. But most of what occurs in this reality we don't have the answers for. Yes, we're responsible for the way we care for our planet – there are definitely reactions to the way we live on earth. However, in the end, it's not the fault of God or retribution for the evil acts of man. We may simply be observing and experiencing the natural evolution of our planet in action.

Mother Nature affects our lives in so many ways; weather influences our weekend activities, it contributes to car accidents, mold in our homes and bolts of lightening frying our computers. Planes are put on hold, flights cancelled and vacation plans laid to rest. No use being frustrated, it's just life unfolding creating multiple opportunities for us to practice being centered in forgiveness.

We can choose to say these events are terrible and be devastated, or we can accept them as part of life and remain calm. Our emotional reaction is important in these times because if we use our energy and personal power to be upset, we won't have the energy and clarity to do what is needed to help the people who are suffering.

Having the ability to forgive our Mother Earth in these difficult and challenging times is important. Blaming accomplishes nothing other than allowing us to feel like victims. No one promised that life would be without glitches. If we're comfortable with the uncertainty of life, we'll always meet these ordeals with grace, compassion, positive action and respect. Let's appreciate our relationship with our planet as we evolve together. Putting our attention on *gratitude*, rather than feeling victimized by the environment, changes our emotional state to one of peace and acceptance.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. When was the last time your life was affected *adversely* by Mother Nature? What happened and how did you feel about what occurred? Did you feel imposed upon, financially compromised or inconvenienced?
2. Now that you have a deeper awareness that both inclement weather and planetary disasters are nothing personal, take the action to forgive Mother Nature and let go of feelings of frustration, injustice or anger. What action would you like to take to change your point of view?
3. Make the choice not to take the environment personally or allow yourself to become upset by natural events. Use gratitude to change your attitude. What ways you can shift your point of view from being a victim to feeling gratitude, regardless of the destruction involved?

### **Lesson 41**



4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 42



### Lesson 4: Condescension and Tolerance

*Men are disturbed not by things,  
but by the view which they take of them.*  
Epictetus

In relation to our environment and how we use, share and sustain our natural resources, there is much conflict and dissension between people and groups. Scientific data reveals that carbon dioxide and other gases naturally warm the surface of the planet by trapping solar heat in the atmosphere. This keeps our planet habitable. However, by burning fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil and clearing forests it seems we have dramatically increased the amount of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere. As a result, some scientists believe that rising temperatures are causing glaciers to rapidly melt, and category 4 and 5 hurricanes to become more frequent.

Some reports call for radical changes in our use of fossil fuels, particularly oil in order to halt future devastation. This information is compelling. Yet at the same time, other scientists suggest we may in fact be experiencing the effects of the natural fluctuations of the earth's environment.

These are extremely different points of view, and if we look to data and physical evidence – we'll never come to any firm conclusions. The reason is that physical evidence can easily be manipulated to confirm any number of view points. In the end, the truth is that we don't know what our earth would or wouldn't be doing right now if we hadn't been around to effect the environment.

Knowing this, it behooves us to be tolerant and understanding of all points of view. Being tolerant doesn't mean we ignore caring for our earth. It simply means we do the best we can, understanding that we don't know the answers. As a result, we're always going to have different ideas about what's good or not good for our earth. Let's forgive our condescension and intolerance of points of view unlike our own.

Regardless of where we stand regarding the environment, it doesn't solve anything to be poisonous in our words and actions toward folks whose opinions are in opposition to ours. What is most helpful is for all of us to communicate with respect and discuss all possible outcomes and options honestly.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Make a list of all the current environmental issues that are in the news. Here are a few for you to begin with: climate changes, decrease in biological diversity, the growing human population and its impact on resources and pollution, availability of fresh water, energy sources and the loss of our forests.

2. Get together with a group of friends and discuss each of these issues and offer what you believe are solutions to these concerns.
  3. After hearing what everyone has to say, what have you discovered?
  4. Is it possible to take action when you have opposing views? What happens in this kind of situation?
  5. What have you discovered about condescension and tolerance within yourself? Forgive those who do not share your point of view and forgive yourself for believing that there is one *right* answer, one perfect point of view.
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 42 - 43



### Lesson 43: Exploitation and Responsibility

*You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.*  
Abraham Lincoln

Time changes all things. This applies to us as a country, as well as a planet of human nations. Where the initial focus of our country was more on the ideals of freedom and democracy; now our attention resides more on the bottom line, profit margins and stockholder interests.

When the bottom line becomes more important than the planet, problems may arise including: chemical poisoning, ozone problems, global warming, destruction of marine life, acid rain, sewage issues, illegal dumping, erosion and deforestation. When the bottom line becomes more important than humanity, we may be creating a situation that exploits people and drains our creative resources.

The global ego can be as dangerous as an individual ego. Our ego engages in exploitation any time we utilize another person, group or entity for selfish purposes or for some kind of advantage. Just as each of us is responsible for exploiting others in small ways and not taking responsibility for many of our actions, the same behavior is at work on business, governmental and global levels. When we only think of ourselves, *our* happiness, and *our* financial situation – as individuals or nations – suffering is the result.

As far as the larger picture is concerned, rather than getting frustrated with these companies, we can forgive them and take action to create change. Pretending to be unaware of the possible outcomes of our actions is not an excuse for our lack of responsibility. As President Lincoln suggests, we cannot escape the responsibility we have for the future by avoiding it today.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Honestly look at the way you *exploit* and/or manipulate people in your life. Take responsibility by making changes, in those relationships, which are supportive of both parties. What actions do you commit to take?
  2. Think about it: Do you keep employees in the office beyond their contracted hours? Do you take advantage of people in your life by repeatedly asking them for favors because you know they will not refuse? Do you ask your children to do things that might be considered beyond the call of duty? How do you use people in your life to get what you feel you need or deserve?
  3. How do you exploit the environment, even if it is in an indirect way? For example: Look at your stock portfolios, the stores you patronize and the products you buy. Do these companies support your intentions?
  4. Get involved with an organization that creates change in a non-violent way. There are many such groups – find one that resonates with the way you would like to see the world. Name that group, what they do in the world, and how you are going to support them.
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 43 - 44



### Lesson 44: Disrespect and Discernment

*This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*  
Chief Seattle

As humans, we possess the most amazing power of creation. We can mine metal from the earth and transform it like magic into a refrigerator, an airplane or a car. On the other hand, we can also transform that metal into a gun, a tank or a missile. We have the ability to devise creations that uplift our lives and make our existence more effortless, or to destroy and mutilate ourselves and the planet.

Creation and destruction are ever present in our illusion of duality, they go hand in hand. For every wonderful invention, there is its shadow. Whenever we utilize Mother Nature's gifts, we create the potential for great abuse and exploitation.

We've mentioned that every action has a set of reactions. As humans we don't have the ability to see all the outcomes for each of our actions and this can create a very narrow way of perceiving the world.

For example, most people would agree it's lovely to use what Mother Nature has to build a home. But how often do we think about the number of birds, insects and squirrels who've lost their homes as a result of those felled trees?

I'm not suggesting we stop building homes or inventing all of these creations that use Mother Nature's resources. As responsible beings utilizing the massive power of creation, we must be cautious not to be egocentric and disrespectful. We must remember we are an ecosystem and are unable to live without the other creatures on our planet. It all comes down to having respect for creation, and clarity about cause and effect. Then we can use our discernment to make uplifting and wholesome choices about how to use Mother Nature's resources.

Let's forgive ourselves for misusing the power of creation and for taking helpful inventions and using them to destroy and harm living beings. Committing to have more awareness, discernment and clarity will positively affect our world.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Take a few minutes to contemplate and list all the items in your life that come from this earth that make your life comfortable.
2. What are the most obvious reactions in the environment to those conveniences?
3. Do you think these reactions will affect the function of the earth in the future? In what ways?
4. Do you think that these conveniences have already created issues on our planet? If so, what are they?
5. Forgive yourself for making use of inventions that have possibly harmful effects and make a choice to take at least one action to shift those effects. What action did you choose?
6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

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### **Lesson 45: Ignorance and Acknowledgement**

*How far must suffering and misery go before we see that even in the day of vast cities and powerful machines, the good earth is our mother and that if we destroy her, we destroy ourselves?*

Paul Bigelow Sears

### **Lesson 44 - 45**





Humans have often viewed the environment as a thing, something outside and separate from us. While the environment may be inconvenient at times, like raining on a day we planned to go to the beach, we rarely pay attention to our inter-connectedness. While we all learned in school about photosynthesis and our dependency on trees for the air we breathe, we are often ignorant about the deep relationship we have with the environment.

It wasn't until I read Peter Russell's book, [\*The Global Brain\*](#), in the early 1980's that I *got* that all life on earth is connected; and that the earth herself is a living being. Yet, even with this information it took me many years to consciously change my behavior and honor my part and my responsibility in respecting the environment. My guess is that there are many – actually millions of people like me. In the end, there's no excuse for our ignorance, only forgiveness and the desire to acknowledge our responsibility for our current level of consciousness.

Even when the veil of ignorance dissolves and we are able to acknowledge our intimate relationship with the environment our tried-and-true habits have us continuing to do what we have always done. Our apathy, ignorance, self-consciousness and laziness direct our actions more than our desire to live harmoniously with our environment.

Imagine what the world would be like if each of us acknowledged our intimate relationship with the environment. What actions can you take to honor the earth and natural environment that provides the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat? How would you express your gratitude and how would your actions be a reflection of your love of our home, our earth?

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Make a list of what you can do to honor the environment and commit to specific actions you will take from your list. Items on your list may include: recycling, in the winter keeping the heat low and the windows closed, using reusable bags for your groceries, reducing the use of plastic utensils and paper plates, turning off the water when it is not needed, using energy efficient light bulbs, disconnecting electrical appliances when they are not being used.
2. Be an example for your family and friends through your actions. Do not go on a crusade and make others wrong. When you simply walk your talk, you offer others the opportunity to see a new possibility. How do people react to your taking action rather than preaching?
3. If you have not always honored the environment, forgive yourself for any laziness, lack of awareness or for believing that your individual actions do not make a difference. What were the beliefs that fueled your previous inaction?

## **Lesson 45**



What beliefs support you in taking actions to honor the environment?

## Lesson 45 - 46

4. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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### Lesson 46: Poverty and Abundance

*Poverty is the openmouthed relentless hell which yawns beneath  
civilized society. And it is hell enough.*  
Henry George

When most of us hear the word *poverty*, we immediately equate it with not having the money to live in a decent way or the lack of material possessions. But poverty can be found in many other situations, such as poverty of spirit, kindness, gratitude, love or self-worth. Abuse of power, greed, and unbridled neediness all contribute to the economics of poverty. Judgment, condemnation and harsh opinions lead to the inability for us to open our hearts to others, causing poverty of spirit and love.

Truly, there's no reason for anyone to suffer any type of poverty in our modern world, as we live in an abundant universe. There's plenty of food, water, clothing, money, love and friends to go around. Poverty exists because people operate from their egos, hoarding what they believe they need to feel safe. As a result, many of us exist in simultaneous states of poverty and abundance, both materialistically and spiritually.

Each of us must look deeply into ourselves and see where we're suffering from poverty. Mother Theresa once said, *"The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved."* Love and kindness are two of the simplest actions we can take to end poverty of spirit. Why hoard and withhold your love – especially from yourself? If we don't share our love unconditionally, we can say we're a cause of spiritual poverty in the world, and with this awareness forgive ourselves.

If we have a surplus of money and resources, we must ask ourselves if we are reaching out to assist others with those assets. Resources don't have to be money; they can be a teachable skill or simply a smile that can be shared. A cautionary note here is: What is your point of view when you're offering your resources? Are you the *have* and you are giving to the *have not*? Are you better because you're not in a position of need? If any of these judgments are present, forgive yourself, as the intent of your action is clouded.

When we share from our inter-connectedness as human beings we experience wealth and abundance that is life sustaining. When we allow ourselves to give without any restrictions or conditions, we abolish poverty and strengthen our global family.

## Practicing the Lesson:

## Lesson 46

1. Make a list of the ways you hoard your possessions and love. It could be your clothing, money, CDs, compassion, kindness and friends – anything. This exercise is meant to open your mind to all the ways you are creating poverty in your own life and in the lives of others. When you see yourself taking these kinds of actions, forgive yourself and take an action to change that behavior.
  2. Many of us have difficulty receiving and accepting gifts from others. When we take this action we stop the natural flow of abundance and are being selfish. Why? Because we are preventing that person from expressing their love abundantly. If you see yourself having these kinds of reactions, what beliefs are fueling your inability to gracefully receive? Forgive yourself and practice accepting love from others, no matter what form that love takes.
  3. When in need, ask. All too often, we support poverty in our experience by our shame. Remember ASK is an acronym: A-ask and it is given you; S-see and you shall find; and K-know and it shall be opened unto you. “For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (adapted from Matthew 7:7-8) What does it feel like to ask for help? What are the beliefs that you have that prevent you from asking for help? What beliefs would enable you to ask for help?
  4. I learned this powerful exercise from Olivia Mellan, the author of [\*Money Harmony\*](#): Since money and how much we have or do not have is often linked to our value and worth as humans, use this exercise to begin a conversation with money in which your goal is to create a loving relationship with money. You can start your conversation with money by writing, *Hello Money, I'd like to get to know you better and treat you with respect and love*. Write down Money's response. Use this conversation to explore your relationship and to apologize to money for any ways in which you have been abusive and disrespectful. What have you learned about your relationship with money through this conversation?
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 47: Genocide and Coexistence

*What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?*

Mohandas K. Gandhi

Human holocausts and genocides are by far the most devastating outcome of the expression of the human ego-mind. Nothing creates more physical and emotional suffering and pain than the mass murder and torture of people. It's the ultimate manifestation of all human fear-based lies – the most destructive one being, *"They are not me and they are not divine."*

All justifications and rationalizations for war, ethnic and racial cleansings, start from this belief. In the end, it doesn't matter what concepts we use as the basis for our justifications, as Gandhi suggests in the quote above. Once we make that agreement, we're empowered to attack what we perceive to be outside of and separate from us because what's outside of us is *dangerous*.

Let's look at some of the larger genocides and holocausts during the past two thousand years: Hitler in Europe, Africans taken to America, Cortez in Mexico, the nuclear bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hutus killing Tutsis in Rwanda, Pot Pol in Cambodia, the Armenian genocide, the Crusades, and the list goes on.

There's a concept that Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book, [\*The Tipping Point\*](#). He suggests that there's a point in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass and expands exponentially. The same thing happens to consciousness, the moment when the prevailing point of view of humanity shifts. Each one of us, by changing our beliefs of separation to an experience of oneness, can be responsible for tipping the scales from a mass mentality of fear-based beliefs (leading to torture, genocide and death) to an infinite consciousness of love, harmony and happiness.

It seems that in our world it's easy to blame, judge and ultimately annihilate those who are different from us. We've already seen the horrific suffering caused by holocausts and genocides. Isn't it time to forgive ourselves and see the divine in every being? We'll never create world peace until we first create personal inner peace.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Considering there has been a genocide or holocaust in almost every religious, racial or ethnic group, it is likely that someone you know has suffered this experience. How do you feel when you hear their stories? What are your judgments of the perpetrators of those events?
2. Do you believe you have forgiven them?
3. After what you have learned in this Lesson, can you forgive them for their unawareness? If not, what is your mind telling you about them or what occurred that is making it difficult to forgive?

## Lesson 47



4. How do you *annihilate* others in your thoughts and actions – from simple things, like calling someone’s point of view stupid, to more serious actions, like physically or emotionally abusing someone? When you notice these actions in yourself, forgive yourself and remember that every person is an expression of the Divine and our lives are interconnected.
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 47 - 48



## Lesson 48: Stories and Truthfulness

*Anger so clouds the mind, that it cannot perceive the truth.*  
Cato the Elder

Every ethnic and religious group in the world has a long history of storytelling, whether they are about creation, family lineages, historical events, wars and conflicts and/or religious traditions. These stories are passed from generation to generation and are beautiful expressions of our humanity. But other times we use these stories to pass on our resentments, anger, sense of injustice and grudges.

There are groups of humans fighting all over the world as a result of these stories of injustice. Some groups want to totally eliminate their enemies, others want to win (whatever that means), and still others just want to have the injustice acknowledged and amends made. A story of injustice in and of itself is not bad. When we take a story about the past and use it as a filter through which to view the present and future, it corrupts the way we perceive life. Then we cannot see what is truth.

So what is the truth in these stories? Well, let’s make a list and see if we can agree on this:

- People were killed, maimed and suffered.
- Buildings, homes and land were destroyed.
- The environment was adversely affected.

This is the end result of *all* human conflict, no matter who was involved and where in the world it occurred. The key is to let go of the lies we have been telling about each other. Statements like, “They need to pay;” “We need to get even;” “We’ll teach them;” “When they’re gone then we’ll be okay;” “They need to suffer for what they did” and “God wants them to die.”

Until we stop blaming others and start taking responsibility for our half of those stories, the cycle of ping-pong warfare will never end. The answer is in compassion; the understanding that we’ve all suffered and that we wish to end the suffering. It takes a commitment on the part of each human to make the choice to say – *no more*. When we see suffering, our desire to move past the pain is so great that we’re willing to forgive and let the injustice go. We realize that in our insanity and fear, we forgot we are all divine, and that our greatest enemy is the ego-mind.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. To better understand how we use stories to create conflict globally, it helps to see how we do the same thing in our daily lives. Take a few moments to consider some stories you have been telling in your family. It might be a story you are telling your children about your ex-partner to make them side with you – or maybe it is a story about a sibling who did you wrong. Perhaps your family tells a story about another side of the family whom you are not speaking with to make yourselves feel *right*. Make a list of all such stories and then answer the following questions.
2. What am I accomplishing by telling and re-telling these stories?
3. Am I trying to get people to side with my personal point of view about an act of injustice?
4. If people side with me, does that change anything in the end? What have I accomplished?
5. When I tell these stories, am I feeling unconditional love or righteous indignation?
6. When you find yourself telling stories that do not have the intention to create peace, love and resolution in your family – forgive yourself for your selfishness. Make a commitment to yourself to put an end to those stories by taking action to heal what has been broken. What actions do you plan to take?
7. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

### Lesson 48 - 49



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### Lesson 49: Terrorism and Peace

*If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm any hostility.*  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Before September 11, 2001, the idea of a terror alert was foreign to most U.S. citizens. Stories of terrorism as well as the changing color of the terror alert have become an ordinary part of world news reports. When I first heard about the terror plot that was uncovered in England in early August 2006, I thought: *This isn't surprising, with so much attention paid to terror it seems natural that it would come to form and be created in our three-dimensional experience.* What we give our attention to persists and grows and during the past 7 1/2 years, terrorism has gotten enormous attention. President Bush declares regularly that we are fighting a war on terrorism. Well isn't war a form of terrorism?



What is terror? It's extreme and overpowering fear. It captures our attention, and floods our consciousness with concerns for our safety and our life. Fear is the result of our ego-mind believing that there is someone out there, an enemy who is different from us and can hurt us. If I can destroy the enemy then all will be well. The truth is that the real enemies are our beliefs and fears: that one religion is better than another, one race is superior to another and one political party better than another. Terror is a strategy to control people by arousing their fear so they will submit to the will of the perpetrator.

Given both the intense psychological effects of terror (in the form of heightened fear and anxiety) and the horrendous violence (resulting in death and destruction), is it possible to truly forgive terrorists and terrorism? The answer, if we want to experience peace and happiness in our personal lives and contribute to peace on earth is *Yes*.

When we remember, person-by-person that we are one and that inflicting pain on any part affects the whole, we open the door more widely to heaven on earth. If peace is truly what we desire then we must *be peace*, not just with people who are like us, but with all people. We must acknowledge and love the seed of the divine that is present in *all* of God's children. We must be the worlds' greatest lover. Are you ready to forgive terrorists and forgive yourself for the same kind of hatred?

#### **Practicing the Lesson:**

1. Do you remember the emotions that you felt as you watched and listened to the news on 9/11? (For example; shock followed by fear, frustration, anger, numbness, compassion.) Make a list of some of the thoughts that were running through your head in that moment, and then make a list of what you believe now.
2. Have a conversation with your family and/or friends about their emotions, thoughts and beliefs about 9/11. Explore what it would take for each of you to take the powerful action of forgiving terrorists. What was the result of that conversation?
3. Read [\*Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust\*](#) by Immaculee Ilibagiza.
4. Acknowledge the *terrorist* inside of you. If there are people who you hate, who you wish were dead or who you believe the world would be better off without, then forgive yourself for those thoughts and beliefs. Forgive past and present terrorists for forgetting that we are an intricate, inter-connected web of humanity. It helps to have clarity about our beliefs – list why you believe you would be better off without those people in your life?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:

#### **Lesson 49**



## Lesson 50: Doctrine and Equanimity

*Truth is eternal, knowledge is changeable.  
It is disastrous to confuse them.  
Madeleine L'Engle*

There are countless human concepts; we've spoken about many of them over the course of our time together in this book. Let's make sure we understand the definition of doctrine and dogma that pertains to our discussion in this chapter. A common definition for dogma would be an authoritative principle, belief or statement of ideas or opinions, which are considered to be absolutely true without proof. Doctrine is somewhat similar, as a principle or body of principles presented for acceptance or belief, by a religious, political, scientific or philosophic group (dogma).

Many people have the idea that dogma is bad, but dogma is neither good nor bad. It's a system of knowledge or information. Just because something is considered doctrine or dogma does not mean it's transcendent truth, it simply means that a group of people have *chosen* to take that knowledge as their personal truth. To be clear, transcendent truth is the absolute knowledge of God-consciousness that cannot be put into words without distorting it. This way we don't confuse universal or transcendent truth, with human *knowledge*.

For example; it can be a republic, democracy, autocracy, monarchy, dictatorship, aristocracy, ecclesiarchy, totalitarian, socialistic or communistic system. Or perhaps it is Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Bahá'í, Confucianism or Jainism. Although some of these systems may said to be inspired or directed by God, dogma and doctrine are still conceptual human knowledge and are based on human agreement, rather than universal or transcendent truth.

Peace will only come when we understand that these are simply doctrines, and in the world of concepts they're all equal. Each one of these systems is capable of creating great suffering or contentment, depending on how we choose to use them. As soon we say that one system is better or worse than another conflict begins.

Human evolution occurs when we can acknowledge other's doctrines and learn from them. As a result, the world's viewpoint shifts holographically and is inclusive of multiple points of view. Otherwise, evolution comes as a result of one viewpoint consuming another through war and domination, and this becomes exclusive, limiting and linear. Let's forgive ourselves for condemning the belief systems, dogmas and doctrines of others. When we operate from the place of unconditional love, doctrine becomes our assistant in life rather than our master.

### Practicing the Lesson:

1. Use this exercise with your family, a group of friends or your partner. Make a list of all the doctrines that you feel are wrong and list your reasons.

## Lesson 50



## Lesson 50 - 51



2. Now take a moment to ask, is the belief system itself the problem, or the way that people have been interpreting the beliefs the real issue? (For example, there are some Christians who are liberal, and others who are fundamentalists. Is the problem Christianity, or the way we interpret and use the doctrine of Christianity against each other?)
  3. Is it possible to change the way you feel about your list of doctrines to become more accepting of them even if that isn't what you believe?
  4. If you cannot accept the existence of your list of doctrines at this time, can you see that your choice might perpetuate human conflict?
  5. Can you forgive humanity's attachment to concepts and your own attachment to what you believe is *right* and *wrong*? If not why? What are the beliefs that you are holding on to that are preventing you from doing so?
  6. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## Lesson 51: Duality and Holism

*We are one, after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist,  
and forever will recreate each other.*  
Pierre Teilhard De Chardin

The dominant evolutionary shift occurring today is from a consciousness of duality to holism. Duality views life through separate and opposing polarities, experiences including: life or death, secular or spiritual, inner or outer, right or wrong, good or evil and love or fear.

The consciousness of holism is based on a *both-and* point of view including: life and death, love and fear, art and science. In this rapidly manifesting consciousness, the circle of life contains all experience. All is part of the creative process: the suffering, the bliss, the fear and the love. There is nothing outside of the whole.

Some of the fundamental shifts taking place are:

**We are eternal:** Rather than viewing death as the enemy robbing us of life, we can recognize that our physical existence offers us the opportunity to savor, enjoy, celebrate and honor the mysterious gift of human experience. At the same time, we can recognize that there is neither birth nor death, our divine essence is eternal and it's our human experience that appears finite.

**We are one:** While we look separate, as though there is space and distance between us, we are moving through the world breathing the very same air. I walk toward you, I exhale, and your next inhalation includes air that just moved through my body. At the same time, let's acknowledge, embrace and embody that we are one – an interconnected matrix of consciousness.

**We are creators.** While it is a common belief that we have a limited ability to make changes in the physical world, it's actually our innate birthright as creators to have the power to project our entire reality into being. We can create anything the human mind can conceive, from the horrors of war to the heartwarming harmony of beautiful music. This is the process of Spirit moving through us expressing itself as form and matter.

It is crucial to remember that duality is not bad and holism is not good, they are simply different points of view. Holism is a natural progression, the natural expansion of consciousness. Knowing this affords us the opportunity and the responsibility to forgive all beings for forgetting that we are one, for forgetting that any action we take in thought and behavior affects the whole and for any failure to consciously create experiences based on compassion, unconditional love and harmony.

### **Practicing the Lesson:**

If you truly embraced the idea of holism, how would these aspects of duality change for you?

1. If you knew you were eternal and could never die, how would the way you currently live your life change?
  2. If you knew yourself as Spirit, would you have any doubt that you are anything but 100% responsible for the creation of your life?
  3. If you knew that every other living being was you, could you reject anyone?
  4. Forgive yourself for all the ways you have believed in duality. Make a list of some actions you would be willing to take to support an understanding of oneness rather than supporting the non-truth of duality.
  5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:
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## **Lesson 51**



## Lesson 52: Epilogue

*A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*

Albert Einstein

We are finally at the end of our journey together and we'd like to share a few closing thoughts with you.

Albert Einstein was on the mark with his quote above. As soon as we change our perspective from the optical illusion of human ego perception to that of absolute consciousness – we can feel whole – part of the oneness of all creation. Through compassion, unconditional love and forgiveness we can all experience this state of existence.

What can you do now that you've finished reading these lessons? In your life, when you're tempted to argue for or against an idea or concept, we hope that something you've read causes you to stop for a moment and consider what you're doing.

The way you choose to perceive and interact with the world is up to you. Your emotional state of being is at stake here. If you chose peace and happiness then you'll be willing to let go of your attachment to your point of view and simply see *what is*, not what you want to see according to what you believe is *right*. If not, you'll always be taking the world personally and living your life offended by the words and deeds of others. As a result, forgiveness will be a very difficult and arduous task for you, rather than a natural expression of the freedom of your mind from judgment.

Rather than this closing lesson being an end, we encourage you to:

- Create or join a [Forgiveness Circle](http://www.withforgiveness.com/circles.html) (<http://www.withforgiveness.com/circles.html> ).
- Participate in our [WITH Forgiveness Teleclasses](http://www.withforgiveness.com) ([www.withforgiveness.com](http://www.withforgiveness.com) )
- Join us at Journeys of the Spirit® for a spiritual journey or retreat. <http://www.journeysofthespirit.com>

**Each one of us plays a vital role in creating greater peace and happiness. Remember, we are in this *together*.**

## Lesson 52



## Practicing the Lesson:

## Lesson 52

1. In your life, when you are tempted to argue for or against an idea or concept, we trust that something you have read here causes you to stop for a moment, consider what you are doing and ask yourself, *Am I treating this person with the respect I would show the Divine? Am I condemning, judging and projecting my righteous indignation on this person? Can I simply hear their point of view, even if I know it may cause suffering?* What is your experience of putting this into practice in your life?
2. If a person takes an action and you are in a place of judgment, your emotional response will always be some kind of fear-based emotion (anger, frustration, righteous indignation, shame, guilt, vengeance). What happens when you put this realization into practice in your life – what do you observe?
3. If a person takes an action and you can see the *what is* – that the person is acting out of ignorance of their true nature, your emotional response will always be some kind of love-based emotion (compassion, calmness, empathy, understanding, inner peace). What happens when you put this realization into practice in your life – what do you observe?
4. Review your goals from Lesson 1 (page 5). Have you embodied your intentions? What have you learned about forgiveness? What have you learned about yourself? What is your definition of forgiveness today?
5. Today my personal Forgiveness Affirmation is:



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### Time For Giving by Susyn Reeve

*It is time for giving thanks for the rising sun for  
the possibility alive within each moment  
for all things great & small.  
Forgiving those we blame and judge  
the person we see in the mirror.  
For Giving our Love to those we embrace with open arms  
our Love to those who have forgotten we are one  
our Love with each thought we think, each action we take  
each word we speak.  
Yes, Now Is the Time For Giving*



## About the Authors:



**Sheri A Rosenthal DPM** has worn many hats in her lifetime. She was trained as a podiatric surgeon and ran a surgical residency program at Northside Hospital in Florida. Currently she is a Master Toltec Teacher trained by don Miguel Ruiz (New York Times bestselling author of *The Four Agreements*®) having apprenticed with him for 9 years. She acted as Executive Director of Sixth Sun Foundation, a Toltec non-profit corporation from 2000-2002. There Sheri had the opportunity and privilege to design and run don Miguel Ruiz's spiritual journeys, and co-teach with him at his workshops.

Sheri's most recent passion is forgiveness and is pleased to be able to co-create the [www.WithForgiveness.com](http://www.WithForgiveness.com) project with her dear friend Susyn Reeve. She is also the author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Toltec Wisdom*, a wonderful book on everything you could want to know about the Toltec tradition. In addition, she also has written *Banish Mind Spam: Four Steps for Deprogramming Self-Limiting and Self-Sabotaging Beliefs*.

Sheri is passionate about spiritual journeys and is owner of Journeys of the Spirit® ([www.journeysofthespirit.com](http://www.journeysofthespirit.com)) a tour company that specializes in adventures that open the heart and heal the mind. Over the past years Sheri has had profound experiences that have ripped the structure of her life apart and changed the way she sees this reality. It is her goal to share the possibilities of that reality and the light of the divine to all those she meets. Participating in the active creation of the dream of heaven on earth is her idea of personal freedom.

You can visit Sheri's websites at: [www.sherirosenthal.com](http://www.sherirosenthal.com) and [www.withforgiveness.com](http://www.withforgiveness.com)



**Susyn Reeve, M.Ed.** has had 30 years of professional experience in a variety of roles including: Organization Development Consultant, Executive Coach, Author, InterFaith Minister and Inspirational Speaker.

Her Organization & Personal Development Practice began in 1980 and her clients have included: Exxon, Mount Sinai Medical Center, New York University Medical Center, Albert Einstein Medical Center, Continental Airlines, The Plaza Hotel, New York University, YPO (Young Presidents Organization), The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Genesis Worldwide. She has designed and facilitated experiential training programs focusing on developing and aligning Leadership Skills with the needs of an ever-changing workplace.

Her award winning first book, *Choose Peace & Happiness* was published in 2003 and has been the basis of Stress Management and Employee Wellness Programs in corporations throughout the country. During 2005 - 2006 she traveled in New Zealand, Australia, Europe, Mexico, Canada and throughout the United States reading her second book, *The Gift of the Acorn*, an inspiring parable of the mighty expression of Love alive within every person. Her story, *An Umbrella to Remember*, is included in Marlo Thomas' NY Times Bestseller, *The Right Words at the Right Time*, vol. 2. On September 11, 2006 she launched, with Dr. Sheri Rosenthal, *WITH Forgiveness*, an international multi-media project focusing on forgiveness.

She has apprenticed with don Miguel Ruiz, best selling author of *The Four Agreements* ® and studied with Joseph Campbell, Jean Houston and Robert Fritz. She has been a featured speaker at events with Rev. Dr. Michael Beckwith, of *The Secret*, Immaculee Ilibigaza, author of *Left to Tell* and award winning author Marianne Williamson.

Visit Susyn's website: <http://susynreeve.wordpress.com/> and [www.withforgiveness.com](http://www.withforgiveness.com)