



WELLBEING
WITH KATIE BYRNE

Learning to forgive and forget

Many of us struggle with forgiveness, but it is simply a state of mind, writes **Katie Byrne**

FUNERALS are no place to hold a grudge. I learnt this the hard way last year after attending a number of funerals where people I had “phased out” of my life were also in attendance.

Squabbles seem very petty indeed when there’s a eulogy being read – and it’s hard to avoid someone’s gaze when they’re crying.

Reconciliation and funeral rites go hand-in-hand. It’s an eventuality worth considering next time you have an estrangement with a loved one.

Many of us struggle with forgiveness. The trouble is that the initial slight eventually becomes a summary of all their wrongdoings.

We tell ourselves the same story over and over to validate our decision.

It’s not a detailed report, though. It’s a sensationalised front-page headline.

Sometimes we find cheerleaders – people who support our decision and agree that we have every reason to feel angry. Sometimes we seek revenge.

Yet, very rarely do we examine our own part in it. Yes, there are times when we are wronged plain and simple.

However, in the vast majority of cases, we are complicit in causing the rift, just as we are complacent about mending it.

Anger and ego make unbiased analysis near on impossible. Hence, when we fall out with a loved one, it’s crucial to tell ourselves another story: the one they would tell. Next, tell yourself the story from an objective third person point of view, and be mindful of any contributing or mitigating factors.

It’s an exercise that requires a relaxed and open state of mind. Try it when you’re walking in nature or after yoga.

Often, you’ll realise that the person touched on a shortcoming of yours that you’re not willing to accept. Indeed, sometimes the most entrenched resentments are the ones that are too close to the bone.

It’s also helpful to honestly ask yourself if you’ve behaved in a similar manner in another situation. This can help you approach the situation with a degree of empathy.

Other experts advise that we acknowledge the inner child of the person

who committed the wrongdoing. This exercise makes us realise that we are all fallible, and it’s especially effective where parents are concerned.

Alternatively, you could try a letter-writing exercise. Write a letter to the person who hurt you, detailing what they did and how it made you feel. Read it

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aloud and then get rid of it. Some advise the ceremonious burning of the letter, but the delete button works too.

A friend recently introduced me to the Hawaiian forgiveness ritual known as Ho’oponopono. She says it “takes the charge” out of a situation, and I’d be inclined to agree.

It’s a profoundly simple exercise that is comprised of just four sentences: “*I am sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Thank you.*”

Repeat it like you would a mantra while thinking about the person or situation you want to forgive.

Another exercise involves turning resentment into gratitude. You wouldn’t have met your new partner if your ex-partner didn’t cheat on you. You wouldn’t have the job you have now if your ex-boss didn’t make your life miserable. Sometimes progress requires pain.

Forgiveness is also linked to fulfilment. Notice how easily you forgive when you are content and satisfied with how your life is progressing. Don’t make the mistake of finding a target for your

feelings of ennui and discontent.

Likewise, resist the temptation to latch on to a minor wrongdoing when the real reason for your anger has been simmering long before the fallout.

If we’re honest, grudges are the easy way out. They help us avoid uncomfortable conversations and protect us from appearing vulnerable.

This is why we create ultimatums – *I need her to admit she was wrong. I need him to say sorry* – they give us a false sense of control in an otherwise emotionally fraught situation.

Real forgiveness has no conditions. It’s a state of mind that occurs when we transcend the ego. The rest is just window-dressing.

Indeed, forgiveness isn’t about them. It’s about you. Remember that our inability to forgive others is often linked to our inability to forgive ourselves.

As Louise Hay writes: “When we forgive and let go, not only does a huge weight drop off your shoulders, but the doorway to your own self-love opens.”

Resentment and self-resentment is one and the same thing.

The other fallacy of grudges is that they don’t remove people from our lives. On the contrary, we remain attached to them through the never-ending narrative that we tell ourselves about their wrongdoing.

When you continue to hold space for people – even those you resent – you block other people and opportunities from entering your life.

Eventually this resentment leads to bitterness, hatred, jealousy and trust issues. As Deepak Chopra says: “Holding on to resentment is like holding your breath – you will suffocate.”

And the person carrying the resentment always suffers more. Nelson Mandela knew this. “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison,” he said after spending 27 years incarcerated as a political prisoner.

Resentment holds us prisoner to our past. Forgiveness releases us.

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