



# Forgiveness and “Karma”

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*Abstract:* Forgiveness is contrary to animal instincts to attack when hurt, and is also contrary to our natural sense of justice and balance. Forgiveness revolutionized our world, and has fantastic benefits when used as instructed. What does forgiveness entail? How are forgiveness and the “law of karma” both good? What are the effects of forgiving and being forgiven? Divine Forgiveness doesn’t nullify actions that have occurred, but it helps us balance those actions more easily. Using both intellect and heart, and remembering how much we don’t know, can help us to forgive.

## Anatomy of Harm and Forgiveness

**Forgiving** someone who has caused us pain or suffering is at first difficult. Animals have a natural fight-or-flight instinct to immediately attack anything that hurts them, or to run far away. Retribution is instinctual. Humans have this instinct too. We additionally have the intellectual capacity to reason at much higher levels than animals can.

Humans also have an instinct toward justice and balance. When we are wronged, we feel something is amiss in the universe. Something needs to be adjusted. Amends need to be made. Balance and wholeness need to be restored.

This human desire for balance is good. It is just. It fosters spiritual growth, individually and collectively. **Forgiveness** seems to run contrary to our urge for justice—yet forgiveness is also a hallmark of spiritual maturity. How can **Forgiveness** and justice both lead us toward Goodness? ...

## Remorse and Repentance

When most people realize they’ve **Hurt** someone, they feel sad, regretful. **Remorse** is natural. It is the first step in **Repentance**. Apologizing is the next step—expressing regret and communicating a decision to not repeat the **Harm**. Acknowledging one’s culpability is important not only to help the **Harmed** to feel better, but also for the harmdoer, for truth and integrity. Apology sets the record straight in the conscious mind. It is not sufficient remedy in itself, but it is an important part of remedy.

## Restoration

When someone has done **Harm**, there is a need for whomever and whatever was harmed to be restored to wholeness. An injury needs to heal, property needs to be returned or repaired, untrue words need to be publicly retracted, malice needs to be admitted and withdrawn.

**Restoration** is designed to make the situation whole again, to repair damage.

## Penalty

A **Penalty** hopefully compensates the **Harmed** for their suffering, discourages the harmdoer from harming people again, and dissuades others from similar behavior. Punishment can be imposed by the harmed person, or socially by a tribal, religious, or government authority.

**Penalty**, after **Restoration**, is designed to encourage people to choose to not do **Harm** in the future. A choice to never do a certain action again requires a deep, inner commitment, an act of will. When people demonstrate to themselves, and to others, that they refrain from repeating the harmful action, they become more responsible and honorable community members, and are justifiably proud of their increased self-control.

These two steps, **Restoration** and **Penalty**, are outer. They can be externally imposed.

The other important aspects of **Forgiveness** are inner. They involve attitudes of mind, heart and will of the harmdoer and the harmed. These cannot be imposed or forced; they are within the domain of each one of us.

## Personal Forgiveness

When one has been **Harmed**, one naturally feels a desire for retribution, for the harmdoer to suffer; at least, one feels resentment. This arises out of our normal animal fight response. In fact, imagining the harmdoer suffering releases dopamine, a hormone that makes us feel good—although actually seeing the harmdoer punished does not!

When we relinquish this instinctive desire for retribution, we personally **Forgive**. This frees us of a tremendous burden, of carrying the **Harm** around. It also frees us of resentment—which we can otherwise carry around forever.

**Forgiving** doesn't directly affect whomever we forgive. It doesn't erase the action from history. It doesn't eliminate the need for **Restoration**, **Penalty** or social consequences. It doesn't require us to be a doormat.

*Releasing resentment is always wise. Forgetting what happened is always foolish.*

## Personal Transformation

When we realize we have done **Harm**, we normally feel sad, **Remorseful**. We want to rectify the situation. If we go deep inside and make an act of will, a commitment to ourselves to not do it again, and reduce the influences or traits that induced us to do the **Harm**, then we deliberately become more moral. We grow spiritually. We actually change. We **Transform** ourselves.

No one else can do this for us. Only we can do it, by choice.

**Forgiveness** by anyone else cannot cause us to change.

**Transformation** does not start with lip service to **Repentance**. An empty apology, “I’m sorry” without an inner commitment to refrain from repeating it, is a fraud. The universe, our Source, “God,” is not fooled, and we should not be fooled either.

Growth and **Transformation** are part of the purpose of life on Earth. As souls, we mature, develop self-control, and garner wisdom. Physical experience is so valuable!

### Hurt and Harm

When someone feels **Hurt**, it doesn’t necessarily mean they were actually **Harmed**. People can feel **Hurt** or offended due to their own opinions, beliefs, emotions, prejudices, or history—if other people wear a particular color, point their feet in one direction or another, write in capital letters, or use a word or make a joke with completely innocuous intent. In such cases, people may actually *feel* **Hurt**, but their feeling is not *caused* by anyone else.

We usually feel that emotions just come over us, but actually, they are voluntary. It is rare that an event or person actually *causes* someone’s emotions. When one is physically injured, the pain is not optional. But adults are normally responsible for their own emotions. Children do not yet have the mental strength and confidence to distinguish and place responsibility where it belongs, so they can be **Hurt** by others emotionally. But adults do, and they have no justification for holding other people responsible for their own feelings.

A few actions are inherently emotionally **Hurtful**, such as breaking a commitment. This disregards and disrespects the person to whom the commitment was made, and can be materially **Harmful** as well. An intent to insult or denigrate someone can also be emotionally **Hurtful**, even if it doesn’t do any damage.

It’s also possible to be **Harmed** without even knowing it, in which case one doesn’t feel emotionally **Hurt** at all. If someone’s funds are embezzled and one doesn’t find out, one is still **Harmed**. Subliminal images do substantial **Harm** to individuals and to entire communities, even though most people are completely unaware of them. Mind control and evil magic do **Harm**, even if the targets are unaware of it or believe they’re not vulnerable to it.

One can also endure actual **Harm** unfazed, without feeling any emotional **Hurt** whatsoever. One can simply repair the damage, and not feel **Hurt** emotionally.

We are also naturally more tolerant when someone, like a child, doesn’t know any better, or is incapable of doing better.

Whether we feel emotionally **Hurt** when we are **Harmed** depends on the harm-doer’s intent and ability, and on our own clarity and maturity.



## Revolutionary

**Forgiveness** is unusual in older cultures. Their belief systems are strong on retribution, from “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” in Babylonian law,<sup>1</sup> to Hindu law stipulating that body parts be cut off or mutilated to prevent a person from repeating a crime.<sup>2</sup>

When a person feels wronged, in most cultures, inflicting vengeance by any means and to any extent is quite acceptable. In fact, if one doesn't take revenge, one is disrespected and presumed weak. In most of the world, it is easy and not uncommon to hire rough men or sorcerers to inflict suffering on one's adversaries—real or imagined.

Throughout history, people have performed ritual sacrifices to one or more gods or saints to obtain freedom from the burdens of their own presumed wrongdoing. The offerings range from food, money, animals or even humans, to penance believed to please the gods—fasting, prayer, solitude, abstinence, or even self-inflicted pain.

Enter Jesus<sup>3</sup> of Nazareth. His teaching of a **Forgiving** God, and to **Forgive** those who **Repent**, was truly revolutionary in the history of the world:

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.” —Luke 17:3

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” —Luke 6:37

“[Forgive] not seven times, but seventy times seven.”  
—Matthew 18:22

“Let he who is without sin throw the first stone.” —John 8:7

And the supreme example, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” —Luke 23:34



Unheard-of! Subdue our natural, animal instinct to immediately retaliate against an injury? Unthinkable! And extend **Forgiveness** on top of it? Impossible!

Yet, during the last two thousand years, humanity has demonstrated that **Forgiveness** is very possible, and has benefits we never would have imagined.

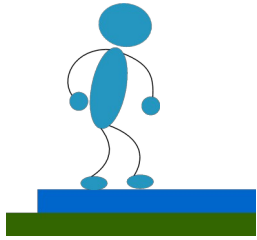


1 Code of Hammurabi, ~1754 B.C., and later in the Bible, “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” — Exodus 21:23-25, also Deuteronomy 19:21 and Leviticus 24:19-20.

2 Dharma-sutras, ~1,200-200 B.C., and subsequently the Laws of Manu [http://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/manu\\_for\\_modern\\_times.pdf](http://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/manu_for_modern_times.pdf). Punishments include: cutting off body parts for defamation, assault, theft or adultery (8:270, 279-280, 282, 334; 9:276, 277); branding (8:281, 9:237); mutilation (9:291, 9:277, 279, 280, 292); thrusting a red-hot iron nail (8:271) or hot oil (8:272) into the mouth or ears; beating (8:299, 369), death for adultery, speaking or flirting (8:359, 372, 374, 377) or for a wife refusing her duties (8:371), or for theft (9:276, 277, 279, 280), dishonesty (9:292), forgery (9:232), or feeding thieves (9:271). <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu08.htm>, and [/manu09.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu09.htm).

3 "Jesus" is the English translation of the name in the original language.

## Rebuke and Repentance



Jesus taught to first **Rebuke**, and to then **Forgive** people who **Repent**—not people who don't repent.

At the time, the norm was for people to impose vengeance—**Penalty**—on anyone who **Harmed** them. Giving up the desire to punish, to see offenders suffer, was the first step in his revolutionary teaching on **Forgiveness**. He did not say there was no need for **Restoration**. He did not say we should invite more **Harm** or fail to defend ourselves. He also prescribed **Personal Transformation** by telling wrongdoers to “Sin no more.”<sup>4</sup>

**Rebuking** the harmdoer is the first step. It is crucial to inform people that they did **Harm**. If no one tells them, people often have the illusion that their behavior didn't really **Hurt** anybody. Thus, they easily repeat it without conscience, **Remorse** or **Repentance**.

The need for **Restoration** is common sense. Wholeness and balance need to be restored to the extent possible.

Hebrew law additionally prescribed specific **Penalties** for various offenses, such as stoning to death for adultery by a woman (but not by a man, for some reason). **Forgiving** the **Penalty**, the outer, social punishment, of people who **Repent**, is the next step taught by our forgiving Revolutionary.

His directive was to **Forgive** people who **Repent**. This means people who feel genuinely sorry for what they have done. When **Remorse** is heartfelt, people *want* to never do it again. They make a choice deep inside. They want to make amends, to remedy the damage they caused—and they also want to see that they don't do it again.

What happens when we excuse people who don't **Repent** from **Restoration** or from a just **Penalty**? Usually they repeat the **Harmful** behavior, toward us or someone else, often in bigger ways. Either out of reluctance to make effort or change, or out of malice, people who don't **Repent** and are not punished continue their **Harmful** ways.

**Forgiving** harmdoers who don't **Repent** appears to them to be weakness. When malice sees weakness, it has an instinct to attack again and again, perhaps for fun, or to see how far it can go. Malice is natural in some animals that preferentially attack a wounded animal and take advantage of its weakness, but it is not humane.<sup>5</sup>

***It is actually not compassionate at all to Forgive anyone from Restoration or Penalty unless the person has already Repented.*** It does not help the harmdoer in the least. Instead, it sets the person back and encourages becoming entrenched in more **Harmful** behavior. ***It is unkind, unloving and actually Harmful.***

<sup>4</sup> John 5:14, 8:11.

<sup>5</sup> See *Bad and Evil*, Part 3 Relevant Factors, p. 8-9, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Bad\\_and\\_Evil](https://wisdom2joy.com/Bad_and_Evil).



When someone has done **Harm** and feels no **Remorse**, it is foolish to allow the harmdoer the same liberties as before. We should not trust the person with that liberty, for it results in temptation to misuse it again.

When a society **Forgives** people who don't **Repent**, the society itself becomes weaker. **Harm** and malice increase—and are actually rewarded. Self-control decreases, as people who are tempted see that others get away with murder so they don't bother making an effort to do good.

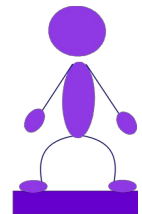
Some people—and actually some belief systems—condone taking advantage of people who **Forgive** readily. It is crucial to recognize when one is dealing with a person who would take advantage of big-heartedness. Love and goodness require both truth and wisdom.<sup>6</sup> When true **Repentance** has not occurred, it is foolish and harmful to excuse harmdoers from **Restoration** or **Penalty**.

Most people **Repent** as soon as they realize they've **Hurt** someone. But some people don't—until they are faced with a scary, painful punishment. Some don't **Repent** even after enduring punishment; they require special treatment.



### Personal Forgiveness Means ...

When we **Forgive** someone who has **Harmed** us, we abandon our instinct to retaliate or see the person hurt. We let go of vindictiveness from our mind and heart. We do not forget or deny what happened, but we give up our personal desire for retribution. We offer it up, release it, to the universe, to our Creator. Desire for vengeance disappears.



We allow healing of our injury to take place—we don't hang on to our **Hurt** or dwell on our wounds. If an injury is ongoing, like a broken bone that is still broken or stolen assets that have not been recovered, **Forgiveness** will be incomplete until it is healed or until we have adapted. But we can **Forgive** emotionally immediately—even in advance!

Many people think that **Forgiving** means absolving the harmdoer of any consequences, forgetting about it, and that everyone is supposed to feel and behave as though it didn't happen. If a person still feels **Hurt**, acknowledges what did occur, or is on guard in any way, people think he or she hasn't really forgiven. This is a misunderstanding of what **Forgiveness** is. Common sense tells us otherwise.

**Forgiving does not mean that the Harmful action was okay.** People often say, “It's okay,” when they forgive, but this indicates only that the forgiver has dropped a personal grudge. It doesn't mean that the action is null and void. It doesn't mean the

<sup>6</sup> See *About Love*, Part 3 Love in Action, [https://wisdom2joy.com/About\\_Love](https://wisdom2joy.com/About_Love), and Truth First, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Truth\\_First](https://wisdom2joy.com/Truth_First).

**Harm** wasn't really **Harmful**. It doesn't mean that **Restoraing** the damage is unnecessary.

It is very important to realize that when we **Forgive**, it does not mean we pretend nothing happened, or that we were not **Hurt**. It not require that we expose ourselves again to being **Harmed**, or “turn the other cheek”<sup>7</sup> and invite more **Harm**. We don't need to, and shouldn't, subject ourselves again to the same risk. **Forgiving** does not mean foolishly returning to a violent or abusive spouse or employer.

**Forgiveness** doesn't mean that all is well and that relationships can, or should, proceed as if nothing happened. We can **Forgive** the harmdoer, and at the same time leave an abusive relationship and protect ourselves. ***This is truly loving—to everyone.***

**Forgiveness** does not mean the harmdoer can or should be freed from personal or social consequences.

It is important that both **Forgiver** and **Forgiven** recognize that a wrong really was done, and that things cannot and should not be exactly the same as before. Water flows down through existing channels; similarly, our behavior tends to follow paths we have taken in the past. Effort and will are required to change a behavior pattern once it has occurred. Someone who has been **Harmed** is, and should be, on guard and have protective mechanisms in place until the harmdoer has refrained from repeating the behavior after enough tempting opportunities.

Making ourselves blind, or pretending to be blind, is not wise, or spiritual, or good. Neither is forgetting the incident or our lesson. Releasing resentment is wise and good, but oblivion is not.

The universe, its Creator, is no fool (unlike our present societies). When someone does **Harm**, it hangs energetically around one's soul, visible on inner planes, until true **Repentance** and **Transformation** occur.

**Forgiving** is not a purely intellectual decision. It occurs deep inside the heart. It is never the result of convenience, expediency, or feeling that one has no choice. It is not just words. It is a complete release, a letting go. It is facilitated by a trust in universal order, or in God, although this trust is not required.

This letting go has enormous benefits to ourselves! People who **Forgive** have greatly reduced stress levels, better health, and are happier. They have more successful and fulfilling relationships. They have better self-esteem, better immune systems, lower heart rates and blood pressure, healthier hearts, and require fewer medications. They have less chronic pain and drink less alcohol. These good effects are powerful and profound.

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<sup>7</sup> As explained by native Aramaic speaker and translator Dr. George Lamsa, “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39-40, Luke 6:29) is an Aramaic expression meaning “Do not start a quarrel or fight.” *The Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text* (1985, HarperOne), p. 2147. Aramaic was the colloquial language in Palestine during the time of Jesus.

When we **Forgive** others, we free ourselves of a tremendous burden! When others **Forgive** us, they free themselves—not us!



## The “Law of Karma”

Leaves and branches of a tree do not exist without roots. Our circumstances are rooted in what we have planted, what we have done before, in what choices we’ve made.

When we do any action, it remains in our field—our conscious memory, our subconscious memory, our mind, our heart. This is true of all actions, whether they are good or bad, beneficial or harmful, or a mixture of both.

All of our actions, good and bad, eventually return to us. This is called the “law of karma.”



There is much misunderstanding about the term “karma” and about this law because people have superimposed their concepts of sin and punishment by a harsh, powerful deity. The word “karma” simply means “action” in Sanskr̥t.<sup>8</sup> A karma is an action. Not necessarily a bad action. It’s just an action.

The truth about what has been done, including the thoughts and feelings of everyone and everything at the time, does not vanish. There is always a record in the memory of the universe. **Forgiveness**—even Divine **Forgiveness**—does not eliminate the truth, despite claims of the wishful. In order to escape the difficulties and responsibilities of Earthly existence, some people imagine that one can simply transcend, or ascend, or decide to “**Repent**” and be saved from it all. People have become quite wealthy by promoting this attractive fallacy.



The law of karma is simply the law that **all actions return to their source**. It does not refer to retribution or punishment, although when a **Harmful** action returns to the doer the person may experience suffering. The law of karma is not a set of regulations like human laws we must follow to avoid uncomfortable consequences. It is not punishment or reward by a deity for disobeying or obeying rules.

The law of karma is simply a statement about how things work in the universe.

This law is a statement of balance. It facilitates and promotes love, the awareness of our unity with all. **This law is Love itself.**

<sup>8</sup> The word “karma” derives from the root verb kṛ, to do. It simply means, “something that has been done.” (Disbelieving in “karma” is disbelieving in action, which is a puzzling belief.)



*This law is dispassionate, balanced, just, magnificent, awesome in its beauty.*

Once we know the truth about how things really work, being immoral is not appealing because its long-term effects are far more unpleasant than any short-term, ephemeral advantages.

Sometimes hardships in life have roots in past **Harmful** behavior. Difficulties present opportunities to do things differently, to grow stronger, and to gauge our character. The universe cleverly provides mechanism and opportunity for **Restoration**, and for **Transformation**.

Incidentally, when we let go completely of a **Harm** done to us, it returns back to its source immediately. So **Forgiveness** means not only relinquishing a desire that the harmdoer suffer, but also relinquishing a desire that the harmdoer **not** suffer.

If we hang on to a **Harm** without **Forgiving**, we hinder its movement, and it takes much longer to return to its source. When people retaliate, **Harm** can bounce around until the end of time.

An important caution: the law of karma does not imply that if someone is suffering, it is because they did bad things in the past, or vice versa. This could be the case, but people can also choose to experience very difficult circumstances in order to have an opportunity to grow spiritually more rapidly. People who wish to grow at a slower rate can also choose to experience easier circumstances.

A soul can incarnate on Earth for the very first time, with no previous actions. The present era is an extremely difficult time period on Earth, and it is not possible for someone to **not** be abused, poisoned with toxins, dominated, and otherwise **Harmed** in myriad ways. This **Harm** is certainly not deserved by a new soul, and is not deserved by most of the rest of us either. It does, however, afford extraordinary opportunity for spiritual growth!

We need to be **very** careful before applying the concept of “deserving” to anyone. Windfalls are not necessarily due to recent good behavior that we can see, and tragedies are not necessarily due to recent bad behavior that we can see. In this age, windfalls can actually be due to very bad behavior, and miseries can be due to very good behavior.<sup>9</sup>

Is there anyone who has never been misjudged by people who didn’t know the circumstances, the whole story, who didn’t know our intention, or our hearts? As Native Americans say, “Do not judge a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.” Much **Hurt** is caused by misunderstandings and by presumptions that are inaccurate.

<sup>9</sup> Jesus once said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that God’s works would be displayed.”—John 9:3. So the man’s suffering was not due to bad actions. A story goes that Kṛṣṇa once blessed a stingy, rich man with greater wealth and a poor, generous man that he would lose his favorite cow. When asked why, he explained that the rich man would become even more attached to his wealth, and that the poor man would lose his attachment to the cow and reach God, liberation, faster. (*Origin unknown*.)

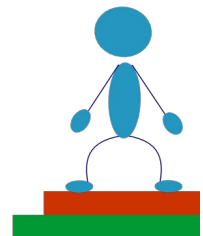
Some religious leaders have beaten, defrauded, publicly humiliated, raped, sodomized, coerced, and otherwise abused their followers claiming that it was because of their “bad karma.” Beware of such behavior and excuses! We are not authorized to deliver anyone’s so-called “karma.” There is a saying in knowledgeable circles, “Someone may need to suffer due to previous actions, but woe be to the one through whom their suffering comes!”

Let us remember the exhortation of our great revolutionary, “Let one who is without sin cast the first stone.” We should not ignore or deny what has actually occurred, but if we adopt a self-righteous attitude that others deserve suffering, we tread on perilous spiritual ground.



### Communities: Restoration and Penalty

Parents, teachers, and valid social authorities have a duty to **Rebuke Harmdoing** and to teach, foster and exemplify good behavior. When someone does not **Repent**, valid authorities have a duty to prescribe and enforce **Restoration** and **Penalty** in order to establish balance, discourage further **Harm**, and maintain a healthy community.



For harmdoers to want to **Transform**, they normally need to feel or experience the type of **Harm** they caused. They need to see the suffering and damage first-hand. They need to look into the eyes of people they **Harmed** and see their **Hurt**. Most people empathize and feel compassion when they see others suffering, and most harmdoers are less likely to repeat what they did when they realize the suffering and damage they caused.

Whether someone **Repents** or not, valid authorities must make an attempt to restore wholeness and balance by requiring harmdoers to repair the damage they caused. **Restoration**, to the extent possible, is necessary in order for younger souls to learn, and in order for any society to thrive.

In addition, it is necessary for harmdoers to compensate the harmed, or society at large. This is a **Penalty**, although it should not be administered with harshness, condemnation, arrogance, or glee. Its purpose is to teach, to encourage **Transformation**, and to keep everyone as safe and as free as possible.

Individuals benefit by relinquishing a need to see retribution, but communities, and people acting in a valid authoritative capacity, do not. When one has been entrusted with authority, one has a consequent duty—to serve the welfare of the entire group. When **Harmdoing** is not followed by **Restoration**, the group is internally out of balance. If imbalances are allowed to remain, the entire community eventually suffers, is vulnerable to external attack, and can ultimately disintegrate or be destroyed.

It is not spiritual or good to allow badness or evil to thrive in any community. Sri Yuktेशwar, teacher of yogi Yogananda, brought lawsuits against people who made

fraudulent claims attempting to acquire his property.<sup>10</sup> Courage, strength, and persistence—not passivity—are appropriate and spiritual in the face of wrongdoing and deceit.

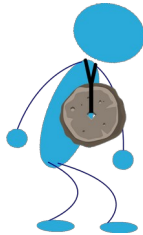
It is vital for any community to face **Harmdoing** that occurs, **Rebuke** it, enforce **Restoration** and just **Penalty**, and maintain balance.



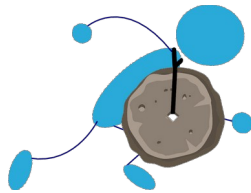
### Personal “Karma” and Transformation



When we do anything **Harmful**, it’s like a weight around our neck. The more **Harm** we do over time, the heavier the weight becomes.<sup>11</sup> It remains in our “field”—our memory, our mind, our heart—until we transform ourselves.



This weight is both psychological and spiritual. It keeps us from progressing very far spiritually, until we return to the level at which we did it, make amends, and act differently.<sup>12</sup> We then continue growing with balance restored.



This heaviness comes from doing **Harm**, even if it’s very subtle—not from disobeying rules. We can feel it somehow, if we pay attention. Following regulations can never guarantee that we won’t accumulate a burden.

As long as the **Harm** we did remains with us, if we were to grow more powerful, the pattern could erupt and we could do it again, creating even more damage this time. We are not ready for more power until we’ve demonstrated—to ourselves—that we’ll use our power well.

Each of us is responsible only for our own actions, our own decisions, not for anything we are truly forced to do. If a master or armed agent really has the power to make us do something, the principal who gave the order is responsible for those actions. If a deceiver or fraudster induces us to make a decision, the deceiver is responsible—unless we **wanted** to believe the deceit due to our own greed or desire.

When we have caused **Harm**, we of course need to repair and make amends as soon as possible. If we caused damage we can’t remedy, we first of all need to see that we never do it again. We do this through an act of will, deep inside. When we make this inner commitment, our self-esteem is restored.

10 Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), Ch. 12, p. 101, <https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Autobiography-of-a-Yogi-by-Paramahansa-Yogananda.pdf>, p. 108.

11 Jesus referred to this accumulation in John 5:14, “Don’t sin any more or something worse may happen to you.”

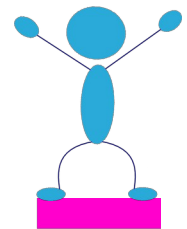
12 It is often our soul’s wish to do things differently that draws us back to physical incarnation.

It does no good to anyone for us to walk around with heavy guilt.<sup>13</sup> In due time and place, when we're able, the universe will present us with an opportunity to remedy similar damage, perhaps with different people. Until then, we need to continue life cheerfully and help others when we can.

Other people do not have the capacity to make us act better—only we have that ability. Similarly, we do not personally have the power to make anyone else **Repent**, **Transform** or **Restore** the imbalances they created.

It doesn't matter at all to our own souls or "fields" whether the people we harmed **Forgive** us or not. What matters is whether we actually do things differently the next time.

What matters even more is that we do things differently again and again, until our goodness grows into a permanent habit of our character and memory of our soul. Even the tendency to do that **Harm** disappears completely. At this point, we are free of the **Harmfulness** and the heavy stone is completely gone. We have **Transformed** ourselves. We are in balance with our universe: "pono."<sup>14</sup>



We feel freer, and the responsibility that comes with freedom is now natural, habitual. Our freedom is a direct result of paying its price: doing what is good and best in the moment ("dharma"). It's well worth it! ***This freedom cannot be obtained by any other means.*** If it could, our Creator would be a fool, and the universe would have fallen apart long ago.

Sometimes a person **Harms** us and it doesn't even faze us. We take it in stride. We've **Forgiven** in advance. We might have done such an action long ago, but if so, we've already eliminated our tendency to do it again. We've changed inside and built good character. When we've **Transformed**, "bad karma" is easy to bear. We might not even notice it.

When we are in balance and harmony, "pono," our bad actions are not erased as if they had never happened; the **Harm** we did is repaired and restored by our good actions. In the process, our character grows in goodness.



## Divine Forgiveness

***When we **Forgive**, we remove a burden from ourselves.*** Although our **Forgiveness** can inspire someone, it doesn't intrinsically affect the person we are

<sup>13</sup> See *Lifting the Heaviness*, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Lifting\\_the\\_Heaviness](https://wisdom2joy.com/Lifting_the_Heaviness).

<sup>14</sup> "Pono" is a Hawaiian word meaning a state of balance and harmony with all, resulting from doing right by oneself, other people, and the world.



forgiving. We do not have the power to excise the deed from history. We don't have the power to nullify the law of karma! Only the Creator of the universe has that power.

Jesus prayed to the Father to **Forgive**. He didn't say, "**I** forgive your sins," but rather, "Your sins are forgiven"—by the Father, or by one who was actually in union with the Creator.<sup>15</sup>

There is much misunderstanding about **Forgiveness** because people have claimed for centuries that if we give them money or valuables, or if we **Repent** verbally once, all our previous bad actions—and even future ones too—are eternally removed as if we had never done them and never will do them. If this were true, the universe and its Creator would be dishonest, corrupt, and stupid. Instead, evidence all around indicates that the universe and its Creator have genius and wisdom far greater than we can imagine, and have the essence of Goodness itself.

Another misconception is that if we **Forgive** someone, "God" automatically **Forgives** them too, and their actions are erased as if they had never occurred. This supposition implies:

- (1) that **Forgiveness** eliminates all the consequences of the actions—a leg suddenly isn't broken, stolen funds suddenly re-appear, a burnt house is suddenly un-burnt; and
- (2) that we human beings have the ability to easily alter the three-dimensional system in which we live and move. If this were the case, our entire three-dimensional universe would disintegrate—there would be no cohesion, no facts, no history, nothing could be agreed upon, everything would be changing and disappearing constantly. The system in which we find ourselves can only be changed by its Creator—with full awareness of the mechanisms and purpose of every aspect of that system.

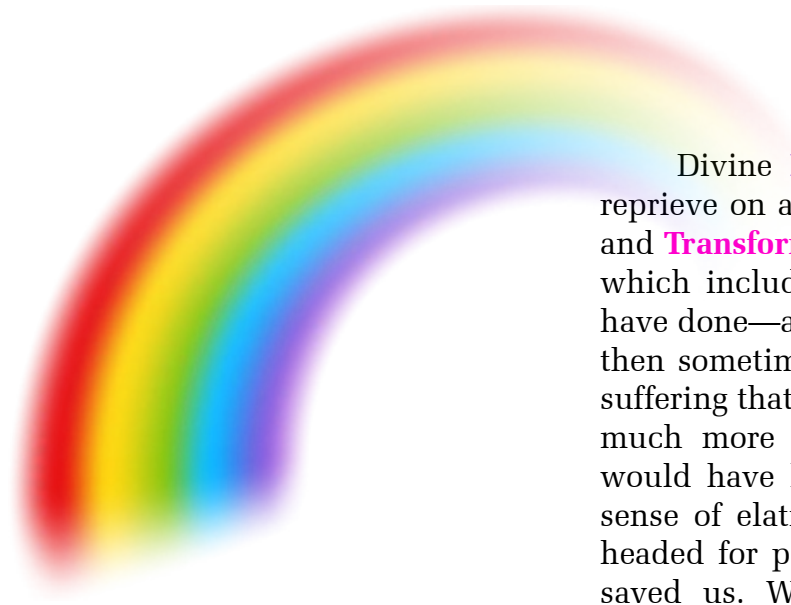
Imagine that we receive a loan and after some regular payments, we have a setback and get behind. We have no reserves and our income equals our loan payment. We're stuck—there's no way to catch up.

However, we have some skills and abilities. If we could purchase some equipment and materials, we'd have the ability to produce something that could earn a good income, and then we'd be able to pay back our loan. But we don't have any resources with which to purchase the equipment and materials.

Imagine that our lender sees our plight and believes we could and would work to produce our new products. Our lender suspends our loan payments for a period of time so we can use our income to purchase what we need. When our products are ready for sale, our loan payments resume. We are able to repay the loan in full. We benefit, the lender benefits, and others benefit from our products.

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 5:20, 7:48, Mark 2:5; Matthew 9:2, 9:6, Mark 2:10.



Divine **Forgiveness** is like a temporary reprieve on a loan. If we have truly **Repented** and **Transformed**, developed good character—which includes **Forgiving** others of what we have done—and deeply wish to benefit others, then sometimes we are given a reprieve from suffering that would otherwise occur. We have much more energy to help others than we would have had otherwise. We often have a sense of elation, feeling inside that we were headed for pain or tragedy, but Divine Grace saved us. We feel grateful and even more committed to doing good and being good because of this Grace.

Divine **Forgiveness** doesn't erase the history of what happened. It doesn't eliminate the natural consequences of action, or nullify the law of karma. It does give us a boost to do good, build good character, and make spiritual progress without being weighed down. It helps us to restore balance more easily and quickly.



### Forgiving More Easily

How can we **Forgive** more easily so that we can live more freely and experience more of the wonderful, healthy benefits?

There are many logical reasons to suspend our judgment and **Forgive** others. Our mind and memory help us to maintain wisdom and forgive at the same time.

Underneath resentment is either a **Hurt** or an unfulfilled desire, or both. We can lay our **Hurt** and tears at the feet of the Divine, and, childlike, heal without condition or thought of anyone else. We can release an unfulfilled desire to the Divine, knowing that in due time, in due place, It will fulfill our desires, and we can be happy in the meantime.

First, it's important to remember that we've **Harmed** other people. Most of the time it was by mistake, or we didn't realize that it would be **Harmful**. It's the same with other people too—most people don't want to do **Harm**. The vast majority of **Harm** by people we encounter is unintentional. Remembering that we've made mistakes helps us to **Forgive** others who make them too.

Much **Hurt** arises from misunderstandings and presumptions that were incorrect. We humans project what is inside us outward onto others. We assume that other people are the same as we are, with the same goals and motives. But actually we're so different!



Even though we might not be able to imagine that someone else doesn't realize what we think everyone knows—maybe they really don't! In Europe, people stand when the king enters, but in Siam people sat down because the king's head had to be highest. Some people believe it's sinful to point one's feet toward someone else but it's okay to tell lies, and others believe it's sinful to lie but the direction of one's feet doesn't matter. Some people think it's rude to burp, and others think it's rude not to burp.

Many people assume that everyone else has the same goals as they do, and the same motives they would have if they did the same things. But very often other people have very different motives and goals!

If we knew everything someone else knows, and had the ability (or lack of ability) that they did, we might very well do exactly what they did.

Someone might be operating under extenuating circumstances or severe pressure that we're not aware of. This happens routinely in politics, and frequently in arenas of worldly power.

Once a father was riding on the subway with his many children who were raising a ruckus, completely out of control. He was not paying attention to them, so finally an irate passenger voiced a strong complaint. The father replied, "Oh, I'm terribly sorry. Their mother just died and we're returning from the hospital." The passenger's anger quickly turned to helpfulness and complete **Forgiveness**.

It is also helpful to remember that anger is a normal response of the body to toxins, to insufficient blood supply to the heart or brain, and to some illnesses. All of us are being bombarded with toxins of all types from all directions. Both our resentment and the anger of others may be due to toxic overload or illness.

Sometimes **Harm** occurs truly by accident—no one was negligent, and no one is to blame.

Sometimes a harmdoer really didn't know any better. In these cases, someone needs to point out the results, explain why one shouldn't do that, and suggest better alternatives.

To **Forgive** is to leave judgment and retribution to the universe, to our Creator, or to beings who know a lot more and love a lot more than we do. Letting go is easy when we realize that we don't know everything—in fact, we don't know most things! We haven't walked a mile in everyone else's moccasins. We don't know everyone else's heart, or circumstances. We don't know everything we have done to others. We know so little!

Most of us don't want to **Harm** others in our pursuits ... but we do. We've been trained to believe that **Hurting** others is unavoidable: that when we gain, someone else has to lose. There are many examples to the contrary, but deep-seated collective beliefs do not change easily.

Despite these beliefs, most of us wish each other well. Time after time, especially in emergencies, humanity naturally pulls together and strangers help one another.<sup>16</sup> Even animals in loving human care nurture and protect orphans of other species.

Compassion is natural—and humans naturally lead the way.

We can practice finding the divine spark in each and every person. We are all souls created by the same Creator.

“I have inside me the winds, the deserts, the oceans,  
the stars, and everything created in the universe.  
We were all made by the same hand, and we have  
the same soul.”<sup>17</sup>

As souls, we are spiritual family members. Remembering our essential point of unity helps us to **Forgive**, and helps all of humanity along our way.



16 See *Humans Prefer Cooperation*, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Humans\\_Prefer\\_Cooperation](https://wisdom2joy.com/Humans_Prefer_Cooperation).

17 Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* (1988), p. 348.

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