**To Err is Human … the Rest is Magical**

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Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging

The boss makes a condescending comment. A jerk in a big SUV cuts you off. A best friend steals your girlfriend. A waitress ignores you. A coworker takes credit for your work.

Your pulse picks up. Your mind races with progressively more unkind thoughts. You have been mistreated. You relive the situation over and over and cannot think of much else. You begin to think up ways to “get even.”

**Accepting Imperfection**

We humans are, all in all, a pretty good lot. We can however, whether intentionally or not, get under each-others skin … to offend and injure and even kill. We make mistakes … both small ones and whoppers, for all sorts of reasons: stupidity, ignorance, sickness or strong emotions. It seems to be part of the somewhat darker side of our human nature.

We’ve all been witness to some remarkable events of late. The tragic [Charleston shootings](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/17/charleston-shooting-churc_n_7608738.html) of nine peaceful and beautiful people touched all of us deeply. But what was more compelling happened even before these victims were buried. In the courtroom, we saw the families of the murdered publicly *forgive* the killer. While the grief and loss were still raw, these families… all of them … found forgiveness in their hearts.

*Forgiving murder!* That’s almost incomprehensible to me and probably to you also. It’s one thing to let an insult go. But the loss of a loved one? This is a stunning example of forgiveness, and its amazing power to heal. In fact, the theme of President Obama’s eulogy was Amazing Grace. The song Amazing Grace, published in 1779 delivers a message that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed.

 I am reminded of the remarkable story of [Nelson Mandela](https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/biography), imprisoned for 26 years for fighting apartheid, who forgave those who took away his freedom, and so moved the country, that he was elected President of South Africa not too long after his release. And then as President, he resisted all suggestions to punish those who had so mistreated the blacks. Amazing indeed.

**The Power and Wisdom of Forgiveness**

What Nelson Mandela and these Charleston families knew is that forgiveness is more than being a good person. Forgiveness is about choosing to live free of hate, anger, and negativity. There is a Willie Nelson song about forgiveness and one line is “forgiving is the only way I’ll find peace of mind.” It’s true. Lives are ruined by the inability to let go of those negative human emotions, which follow a real or perceived transgression. [Dr. Paula Bloom](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paula-bloom-psyd/) tells us our minds are like magnifying glasses … whatever we focus on will expand. And motivational speakers tell us we are what we think about. Think anger and hate … that is what fills your life. Think compassion, forgiveness and acceptance of loss … there lies peace. [The Dalai Lama](http://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion) tells us true happiness comes with compassion, and the first step towards compassion is ridding ourselves of anger and hatred. It makes sense, doesn’t it?

*The fact is forgiveness is more about the forgiver than the forgiven.* The forgiver moves through the anger and loss and chooses to replace it with a new hope. Yes, sadness will linger, but it is acceptance of what is, and compassion, that brings peace … and health.

Yes, holding on to negativity or anger is associated with higher levels of stress and the myriad of negative health outcomes associated with it: heart disease, stroke, depressed immune systems to name a few. On the other hand, the New England Centenarian Study finds optimism to be a common characteristic of the very old.

**Six Considerations on the Road to Forgiveness**

So what can you do to make that seemingly impossible step towards forgiveness and the better health and aging that comes with it?

1. ***Choose* to end the negative effect of what happened.** The transgression has occurred. But it’s over *only* when you choose to forgive and move on. You have the power to keep the wound alive and make the negative event even more negative and destructive.
2. **Realize that the transgressor most likely felt there was a good reason to do what they did.** Yes, it may have been misguided, wrong or even insane, but it made sense to them at the time. Think about things you have done that hurt others. You can find compassion there.
3. **Know also that you are the one who benefits most from forgiveness.** Your health, your relationships, your life … are rescued from certain decline.
4. **If you’re having trouble forgiving someone, try forgiving them just for one day at a time.** This small taste of what forgiveness feels like will most likely lead you to more.
5. **Remember to forgive yourself**. Guilt and self-loathing are destructive, self-induced villains.
6. **Realize life is filled with curve balls … some deliberate, some not.** Whether you strike out or stay in the game is up to you.

So now, in order to be healthier and at peace (and not to be a total hypocrite), I’m going to call an old alienated friend and forgive him for what he did. I feel better already!