

Apologies, Forgiveness, Reconciliation

Part 1: Apologies

Human relationships can be complex. We all make mistakes and must take responsibility for their effects. One way of doing this is by giving and receiving apologies effectively. Here are a few tips that might help:

• *Giving Apologies*

1. Express sincere remorse (e.g.: try to use words that take responsibility for your part in the situation, like "I'm sorry" instead of "my apologies").
2. Humbly state what actions that you are sorry for in order to make sure that it is clear to you both. (e.g.: "I'm sorry I did [specific behavior]. I can see how that would be hurtful if the situation was reversed.") This is not an issue of "being right", but an understanding of how we affect one another.
3. State plainly how you plan on changing the behavior and follow-through on it; ask for a reminder of the promise you have made should you slip up again in the future. Strive to keep your word! If you don't, then what good is it? Empty promises are meaningless noise.

• *Receiving Apologies*

1. Generally try to determine if it is sincere. If it is apparent that it is not, do not react emotionally and engage in argument. Instead, decide whether or not to take the conversation any further before reflecting on the situation some more.
2. If it is sincere, thank them for their apology. It can take courage to admit our mistakes and make steps towards growth.
3. Clearly state how you were impacted by their behavior and try to understand their motivations in relation to what you did. If the motivations were benign, then explore together how you can both prevent further misunderstandings.

Depending on the severity and frequency of the situation (e.g.: someone who continually manipulates our trust), we might not even attempt to work it out with them at all. It is not unreasonable to expect a certain standard of behavior if we have made it clear that is what we need, and do not hold others to a "double standard" in the process. Therefore, we can and should find a way to safely exit any "toxic relationship" that we might be a part of once we become aware that we are.

However, this is different from avoidance because we are ashamed of our own behavior. Sometimes we run away from relationships out of cowardice, being unable to face the people that we hurt. Yet it is only pride and callousness that keeps one from being able to say "I'm sorry" and truly mean it.

It can be a delicate balance sometimes. While we should always strive to be understanding, we cannot let it degrade into justifying another's destructive behavior. A severe violation of one's being (such as abuse) may not be healed "instantly" with just an apology, especially if that apology is insincere (e.g.: given only under the threat of punishment). There are even some

instances where an apology may not be given at all, and it would only hurt someone if they continue to expect one. Which leads us to our next topic...

Part 2: Forgiveness

• *Forgiving Others*

Forgiveness may seem "automatic" when two people are able to work out their issues together, but sometimes we do not get the closure that we seek. This is when forgiveness is imperative. Forgiveness is to learn whatever we constructively can from the events and then choosing to move on from them completely.

It is not ignoring or "forgetting" what must be addressed, using it as an excuse to be mean, becoming bitter by holding onto it and allowing it to fester, making assumptions about others, or seeking revenge. None of those approaches resolve the issue and just end up harming us.

This is often easier said than done, especially if the hurt is etched very clearly into our memory and so many things seem to trigger it. In order to reach healing, we must carefully process the emotions involved.

For example: Anger often arises from a personal sense of justice being violated. Instead of reacting in anger, find its cause (i.e.: acknowledge how one's sense of justice was violated). Then, from an inner space of calmness and well-informed perspective, respond to future circumstances as necessary. True Justice and Peace are maintained when we do not add to the imbalance through a hasty reaction that we may later come to regret.

Anger is never resolved through violence. Again, acknowledging the reason for anger arising can be done constructively without reacting through it and causing harm. It can be wholly transformed into a discernment which can help us to handle situations more effectively.

Retaliation does not heal hurt, but only perpetuates it. Someone has to choose to do something different in order to change the cycle. Therefore, being stubborn and mean does not serve us or anyone else.

• *Forgiving Ourselves*

Forgiving oneself does not include rationalizing one's own destructive behavior. Instead, it is to take personal responsibility for a mistake and making honest efforts towards resolving it. Even when it seems that there is nothing that we can do (e.g.: another person involved has passed away), our sincerity will eventually lead us to the response that is most appropriate.

Guilt is a natural reaction when it is brought to our attention that we have done something destructive. It is a signal to heal rather than continue on. When we are of a balanced heart and mind, we never take pleasure in purposely causing another pain or harm.

One who chooses to do something destructive, because they think "no one will know" or are under the assumption that they will be forgiven, only harms themselves. They block out honest people from coming into their lives through such behavior. Never take others for granted, take advantage of someone vulnerable, or "kick someone while they are down".

With that said, we must also not allow guilt (e.g.: "I've done something wrong.") degrade into shame (e.g.: "I'm a bad person."). Rather than getting caught up in self-pity, we must cultivate the habit of being dedicated towards living out the constructive, despite whatever mistakes we have made before. It is never "too late" to grow.

Part 3: Reconciliation

Reconciliation is synonymous with what some might call "negotiation", resolving an issue together and coming to a mutual agreement. Both sides change. It is marked by acceptance of each other's constructive qualities and living in peaceful co-existence. This is accomplished through collaboration, integration, and equality rather than competition, fragmentation, and disparity.

Unfortunately, apologies and forgiveness may not necessarily lead to reconciliation in every case, but it is something worth striving towards whenever possible.

