

Audio File Transcript

Forgiving Ourselves

This practice is called forgiving ourselves. And it gives you an opportunity to have a personal experience of the five steps to self-forgiveness. Those steps are mindfulness, self-compassion, wisdom or perspective, the intention to forgive, and responsibility to protect and repair. So the instructions will help you to forgive harm you may have caused to others or to yourself either by your behavior or by a harmful attitude. So please approach this practice with an open mind and a minimum of expectations. The less you focus on trying to feel better and simply drop into your moment-to-moment experience as you go through this exercise, the more likely self-compassion and self-forgiveness will happen. Self-forgiveness operates on its own time and this practice begins the journey. It takes about 20 minutes, so Please make sure this is a good time to do a practice like this that touches on shame. But after you start, any time you should feel free to step away if you need to. Just be merciful with yourself. It would also help if you had something to write with during this practice because writing helps us to remember our experience and also to focus and provide some perspective. So if you'd like to do this, to begin, once again, find a comfortable place to sit.

Feel how the chair firmly supports you. Maybe take a few breaths. Come into the present moment. Offer yourself some compassionate touch, hand on the heart or elsewhere as a reminder that this is a self-compassion practice and we're bringing kindness and compassion to ourselves throughout the practice. And then to have something to work with, please bring to mind a situation in which you caused hardship or pain either to yourself or to someone else. It could be pain caused by something you did or by your attitude. But please choose a situation that's challenging but not overwhelming. So for example, maybe in a not too bad way you had a habit that harmed your body. Or maybe you disrespected your values or your identity. Maybe you spoke harshly to a friend and jeopardized a relationship. Maybe there was someone you needed to protect and you didn't do that. to the extent you wish you did. So the situation that you think of, it could be ongoing, but please think about a specific incident. And to find just the right incident to work with now, let compassion be your guide. And to begin with the first stage on the path to self-forgiveness, we have mindfulness. So please take a few moments to recall the situation as vividly as possible. Even letting yourself feel any emotional distress that could arise when you think about it. This is the toughest part of self-forgiveness practice, opening to distress. And then continuing with mindful awareness, dropping a little further into your body and noticing if there's any particular body part or body sensations connected with how you feel. And if there is, see if you can allow

your body to feel like this. Feel what it's feeling. Perhaps even touching it lightly with kind awareness. And what emotions come up for you when you reflect on this incident or this situation? So do you feel shame? Guilt? Remorse? Embarrassment? Do you have anxiety or fear? Anger or resentment? Maybe grief or sorrow or sadness or confusion? So if you're able to identify a particular emotion, associated with this situation, see if you can validate it in a kind and compassionate way. So inwardly saying, oh, shame, or oh, sadness. I'm feeling shame, or I'm feeling whatever it is. The tone is what matters the most. Validating, understanding, kind, and please feel to write down whatever emotions are arising within you, or if you wish any other reactions you might be having right now. So this helps to identify and also give us perspective. It helps us to take a spacious, mindful approach to the experience of causing harm in some way, usually unwittingly. So now let's explore stage two, self-compassion. So as you recall, the experience of causing pain to yourself or someone else. Please remember that we can't not hurt others as we go through life. And that's not an excuse, it's just a fact. And furthermore, many people would have behaved just as you did in the same situation. Especially knowing what you knew at the time. So we're all fallible human beings with inadequate understanding and awareness most of the time.

So if you feel shame about what happened, please remember that the motivation behind shame is that you, just like everyone in the world, wishes to belong, to be connected, to love and to be loved. Otherwise, you wouldn't feel shame. So the motivation behind how badly you feel about this situation is innocent. And with this motivation, knowing that this is so, please begin to offer yourself kindness simply because you feel remorse about what happened. So if you like, you can put a hand over the part of your body that feels the most distress, or you can put a hand over your heart where we tend to feel things most deeply. And you can allow kindness to flow through your fingers into your body. And if there are any words that you need to hear now or would have liked to hear then, what words would they be? Maybe you would have liked to have heard, it was a tough time for you. You did the best you could. Or you're still a good person. You always were. Or we all make mistakes. You're only human. Or maybe, oh, I feel for you, that's hard. Or maybe you need to hear from someone, please forgive yourself, you have suffered enough already. Or maybe the simple affirmation, I love you. I love you. So if some particular words come to mind, please allow those words to flow over you and through you. Allowing those words to take up some space in your heart and mind, letting yourself hear them over and over, perhaps even as you hold your hand over your heart in a compassionate way. Making sure that the words you hear are just the right words for you. Words that fill your heart. And when you have some good words like this, you can also write them down. You may like to have them for future reference some other time when you feel shame. And now on the foundation of mindful awareness and a self-compassionate response, we will move to stage 3 of self-forgiveness, which is wisdom and perspective.

So let's try to see what happened from a broader perspective because when we know the background, the whole background our reaction is usually quite different. So the question is, were there any unseen factors that probably contributed to your behavior? In other words, factors you may not have considered before, factors you didn't know at the time, and maybe not even until now. So let's take a moment to reflect on the situation. You might say through the perspective, through the eyes of wisdom and compassion. So for example, were you overwhelmed for some reason or stressed for some reason that you couldn't see the larger picture or clearly? Did someone trigger an old wound in you with a habitual reaction in you? Were you under some kind of additional distress, such as physical distress? Or were you just kind of automatically enacting an old habit? Or maybe you weren't quite yourself because you were feeling alone, isolated. It's also possible that you thought you were doing the right thing, but you weren't because you just didn't know enough. So please take a moment and look beyond the story that you've told yourself. That there are many, many additional factors, perhaps outside of your awareness, were there any perhaps less obvious reasons that you behaved as you did? Give this some thought, and as ideas occur to you, perhaps even write them down. And now after having had a chance to look at what happened from a broader perspective, perhaps forgiveness might come a little easier. Maybe the wish to forgive gets clearer. So part 4, stage four on the path to self-forgiveness is the intention to forgive. So do you feel ready? Or at least form, would you like to form the intention to forgive yourself for what happened? And if you're not ready, that's not a problem. There's kind of an integrity to that as well. If you don't feel ready to forgive, and you'd like to just continue practicing mindfulness of what happened, particularly opening to shame or self-compassion, a little kindness, or like to explore the wisdom perspective, learn more about what happened, then just stay there. Do whatever is meaningful to you. Take it slow. If you feel like you wish to begin to forgive yourself, we can put that intention into words. And two ways of doing that might be, number one, may I begin to forgive myself for what I did? for what I did wittingly or unwittingly that caused hardship or pain. Or some other language for the intention to forgive is for harm that I have caused to myself or to someone else through judgment, action, self-blame, or indifference, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word, or deed, may I begin to forgive myself. So please write down one or more lines that capture your wish to forgive yourself in a way that feels just right for you, that's natural, in which there's no inner argument. Let your wish to forgive be the simple truth. And then when you have a phrase that captures your wish, again, it's just a wish. It's not a demand. It's not a declaration. It's just a wish. Say that phrase to yourself slowly, over and over. Let it land. See if the words are just right and if so, let them land.

And then we come to stage 5, the responsibility to protect and repair, the final step. And this gives us confidence to forgive ourselves. So knowing many of the factors that led to your mistake, is there anything you'd like to know or do that could prevent a repeat of what happened. So for example, maybe just for instance, maybe you lied to your partner about how you spent some money. And if so, upon reflection, did you have an inner need that wasn't addressed, or even now do you have an inner need that's not being addressed that you can meet in another way? Or if you have a bad habit, like if you're harming your body with a bad habit, would you like to finally learn how to stop the habit? Even what steps could you take? So in other words, is there any action that you might like to take to prevent you from making the same mistake? Sometimes fierce self-compassion, which is the self-compassion of action in the world, could help to improve your behavior. So for example, maybe you'd like to repeat words of protecting self-compassion. Like say to yourself when you might be inclined to do something harmful, no honey, not good for you. Or maybe providing self-compassion. Maybe you need to be reminded so that you don't behave in a way that you regret. Remember, you are loved just as you are. Maybe that would give you the comfort and the safety to not get in trouble. Or maybe encouraging self-compassion. Maybe you need a strong, loving voice that says you can meet your needs in a better way. You know how. So is there any language perhaps, strong self-compassionate language that could support you not to repeat the same problem? And lastly, is there anything you'd like to do to repair your transgression. So for example, you could write a letter of apology to your body for causing it harm. Or if you acquired some money dishonestly, you could donate money to a good cause. Are there any actions that make sense to you that could help you to repair a mistake? So please take a few minutes and then write down anything that you might like to do either to prevent or to repair what happened. And before we close this practice, it's always helpful to take a moment to reflect on the different aspects of the practice that helps to solidify the learning, to strengthen what we learned. Was there any aspect to this practice that you found particularly interesting, particularly helpful? Is there anything here that going forward, when you feel like you made a mistake and you feel bad about it and you wish to forgive yourself, that you might like to remember? Is there anything from this practice you'd like to remember, maybe even to do, to go straight to, or perhaps all five stages together made the most sense for you? So just taking some final time to reflect and maybe to anticipate going forward how any of this could be helpful to you in the future. And again, thank you so much for your practice.