

**The Truth About Forgiveness**

**From “How to Stay Married & Love It EVEN MORE!”**

**Chapter 7**

**Do I Have To?**



**“Refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and  
expecting it to kill someone else.”**

**Source unknown**

This may be hard for some of you to hear, but I’m going to come right out and say it. No beating around the bush. It’s true. There are many small and sometimes humongous events that require forgiveness in the process of creating a SoulMate marriage. Even if you think you don’t need this chapter, please read it anyway. If you believe your spouse’s offenses don’t deserve forgiveness, read it anyway. Even if the whole concept of forgiveness makes you want to puke, read it anyway. You may be in for some surprises...

First, you may ask, “Why is this chapter included with the puzzle piece of SoulMate Beliefs rather than the ones on anger or commitment?” Because the reasons we refuse to forgive or ask for forgiveness are based on our beliefs about what forgiveness is, what it does for the offender, and what it means to the forgiver.

### **Some misconceptions about forgiveness:**

- ❑ Forgiveness is something you give when you are too weak to deal out more appropriate consequences.
- ❑ Holding onto anger protects me from further offenses. Without anger, I am vulnerable. My un-forgiveness ensures I will not be hurt again.
- ❑ Reminding him (her) of past offenses keeps him (her) from repeating them.
- ❑ Forgiveness invalidates the pain I've suffered, making me less important than the forgiven one.
- ❑ Forgiveness lets the offender off the hook.
- ❑ Forgiveness gives the offender the opportunity to repeat the offense.
- ❑ Forgiveness robs the offender of the opportunity to learn from his (her) choices.
- ❑ If I don't administer punishment, the offender may believe there are no consequences to his/her actions.
- ❑ Forgiveness is given only after the offender is sorry and asks for it.
- ❑ Forgiveness is something given to the offender.
- ❑ Forgiveness is an emotion and I don't "feel" forgiving.
- ❑ Forgiveness happens in a single moment of time and continues forever.
- ❑ I don't have to forgive because I would never do anything "like that."
- ❑ Forgiveness is only required if you're religious and I'm not religious.

### **Some truths about forgiveness:**

- ❑ Lack of forgiveness (long-term anger, bitterness, and desire for retaliation), blocks the path to personal and relationship growth and damages my health.
- ❑ Forgiveness makes room for better things in my personal life and in my marriage, so forgiveness is a precious gift I give to *myself*.
- ❑ Stubbornly holding on to blame and anger sometimes mysteriously attracts the repetition of similar offenses, even from unrelated sources.
- ❑ Forgiveness is not an automatic pardon for the offender from the consequences of the offense.<sup>1</sup>
- ❑ Forgiveness is not an invitation to continue abusing. Forgiveness and the administration of justice are two separate and *compatible* concepts.
- ❑ Forgiveness is a powerful act of self-liberation. It is taking control of my life rather than leaving it in the hands of my abuser. Refusing to forgive allows the offender and the offense to remain a powerful negative force in my life.
- ❑ There are natural consequences that come with every offense. Whether or not I personally deliver punishment, the offender will "pay" those consequences.
- ❑ Forgiveness is given for personal benefit whether or not the offender assumes responsibility for the offense or asks for forgiveness.
- ❑ Forgiveness does not eliminate the hurt feelings or devastation from the offense. Those feelings still deserve appropriate acknowledgement, comfort and time to heal. Appropriate venting of hurt feelings and being

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<sup>1</sup> Review Book #1, Chapter 4.

compassionately heard is often a first and necessary step in being able to forgive.

- Forgiveness and setting protective, appropriate boundaries for safety often go hand in hand.
- Forgiveness can be a single act or a process that requires strong intention, a great deal of personal commitment, and on-going work.
- Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is an intention—an act of the will. The *feeling* of forgiving usually follows, but sometimes doesn't.
- Although, for many, forgiveness is part of following a spiritual path, it is, first and foremost, a self-honoring part of mental, physical and emotional health for the offended one.
- Forgiveness acknowledges that I, too, am, at times, an offender. If I want my offenses to be forgiven, I must forgive.
- The ultimate forgiveness, and sometimes the most difficult to give, is the forgiveness offered to one's self.

### **So how do these *truths* work out in real life?**

Although neither Jim nor I had trouble forgiving the little offenses, (we were well aware that we both did annoying or thoughtless things that needed the daily sweep of forgiveness) we were both challenged by the greater, over-all forgiving of the pain we each had experienced. After we were enjoying the benefits from our new communication skills; after we'd set up and were abiding by some rules for our marriage that worked for us; when we'd gotten to the place where we could go a week or more without a flare-up that required a mirroring session; when peace and loving were the norm, a sneaky form of bitterness began to invade my feelings for Jim. He never openly or crassly said so, but by little glimpses of his attitude, I knew he held me primarily responsible for the enormous conflict we suffered. I was perfectly willing to assume my half of the blame, but I didn't think it was fair for me to be dumped with eighty percent or more of the responsibility. When asked, he openly admitted that, from his point of view, he was the lesser offender.

Now what? How important was it that we equally share the blame for a situation that was over? Must his viewpoint match mine in order for us to move on? Was I willing to create another issue in a marriage that was still trying to recover from years of conflict? Could I "win"? Would it be worth it? What if he never saw it differently? What if, as long as we both lived, he believed that I was the primary reason we went through so much pain? My inner two-year-old (see Book #1, Chapter 14), was shouting, "This isn't fair! Stand up for me! He's being self-righteous! He needs to accept responsibility for his share!"

Fortunately, by that time, I had learned a lot about the management of frustration and other feelings. I heard my inner two-year-old, validated and comforted the feelings by saying to myself, "You're right. It's not fair. I believe that half is your fair share of the blame. But I also choose to build on the success we are enjoying rather than get stuck trying to force him to accept my point of view." Jim has a saying from his Oklahoma background that seemed to apply in this situation: "You can whup a skunk but it ain't worth it." I decided to not let

those immature feelings dictate the future of a relationship Jim and I had worked so hard to save. I decided that living with the awareness of his inequitable division of responsibility was a small price to pay for the otherwise great relationship we were building. In essence, I decided to forgive his judgment of me—let it go—not hold it against him.

For me, this was a process of the “unfair” feelings coming up, listening to them, comforting myself, and deciding, again, to let it go. It happened over and over again for several months. The frequency of this inner dialogue gradually decreased, until, a year or so later, it was rarely even a fleeting thought.

Four years went by without us ever discussing the division of blame. The subject of our troubled years was so painful we could barely refer to it without tears coming to our eyes. We continued to use the good tools we had learned and were enjoying the precious treasure of a loving relationship. We were not conflict-free, but were so determined to protect the marriage we had saved that we would immediately begin the mirroring process<sup>2</sup> whenever a hurtful issue arose.



Jim suggested that we pull all the skills together that had been the most helpful for us and teach them to other couples. I typed up a workbook of sorts and the first workshop was scheduled in just a few weeks. We had agreed that we would only share personal examples that were cleared by both of us. Our highest priority was to make the teaching of this workshop safe for our marriage.

One night after the lights were out, I asked Jim if, before we bared our souls to couples in the workshop, he thought it would be useful for us each to tell the other, from our respective points of view, what happened? It was not my intention to revive my old insistence that he see it my way. I just thought it would help us to keep each other safe in the coming public forum if we had a clear, up-to-date perspective. Jim agreed.

Very, very carefully, using the “I feel...” and “From my perspective....” language we had learned, we each shared what had happened that nearly destroyed our love for each other. There was a soft anguish in the space between us. We held hands. Tears came. The deep grief we’d both suffered was aired. I heard a change in the way Jim described his experience. I said, “I’m hearing something different from you tonight than I’ve heard in the past. It sounds as though you are assuming more responsibility for what happened in our marriage than you have previously. Is that accurate?”

Jim answered, “Yes. In the past I blamed you more than me. I guess it was just unbearable for me to look at what I had done that contributed to all the pain that we and our children experienced. I couldn’t face it. I’m so sorry I dumped most of it on you. I was equally to blame. Would you forgive me?”

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<sup>2</sup> Review How to #1, “The Looking Glass.”

"I forgave you a long time ago, but it sure feels good to hear those words. Thank you for telling me," I answered.

In this instance, Jim needed time to heal the enormous wounds that the trauma of our conflicts had left before he could bear to acknowledge and forgive *himself* for his share of the responsibility. The recognition of his part in the pain, the forgiveness of *himself*, and finally, asking for my forgiveness, were all part of a process of healing that took place over four years. If I had insisted that he come to this place on my schedule, another painful issue would have blocked the healing we both so desperately needed. It was enough that he was working with me to rebuild our marriage.



Adultery is, for most, the greatest violation of trust a marriage can suffer. Until I met Jim and Patty, I could not conceive of a marriage recovering from adultery, let alone building a much better relationship than before.

If you want to hear their amazing story of forgiveness and the rebuilding of their marriage, and so much more that is included in Chapter 7, please order your copy of ["How to Stay Married & Love It EVEN MORE!"](http://www.RelationshipRehabShow.com) at [www.RelationshipRehabShow.com](http://www.RelationshipRehabShow.com).



All of the above is about *giving* forgiveness. The other side of the forgiveness process is *asking* for it.

### **Some misconceptions about asking for forgiveness:**

- ❑ Asking for forgiveness makes me too vulnerable. My "softness" will be taken advantage of. The offended one will expect me to assume all responsibility for any problems we have.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness makes me look weak. Admitting I was wrong will cause him (her) to lose respect for me.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness will invite "punishment" from the one I've wronged.
- ❑ I'm not fully responsible. I'll ask forgiveness when he (she) does.
- ❑ Admitting I'm responsible for any part of our problems is simply too terrifying. Once I ask forgiveness, I'll be expected to change. I don't know if I can.
- ❑ I believe that what I did is unforgivable.
- ❑ Words are cheap. I'll prove I'm sorry by changing my behavior.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness is a manipulative way of getting out of trouble.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness means I must resume full relationship with this person and I would rather not.
- ❑ The offended one must be alive and willing to see me in order for me to ask forgiveness.

## Some truths about asking for forgiveness:

- ❑ Admitting wrong and asking for forgiveness exposes our humanness, allowing another to see our fragile underbelly of vulnerability to mistakes, poor choices, and deliberate hurtful acts, but that vulnerability often strengthens the resolve to change a hurtful behavior. It is often the first step on the path of change.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness is an important part of assuming responsibility for developing emotional intimacy. When emotional intimacy has been hurtful in the past, it may be hard to “drop your guard.”
- ❑ Any person who genuinely wants a relationship with you will appreciate and respect you more for admitting when you’ve been hurtful and asking for forgiveness.
- ❑ Asking for forgiveness is something you do to respect yourself, regardless of how it is received by the offended one. Therefore,
- ❑ Ask forgiveness for your own integrity, even if the other party refuses to accept their responsibility for hurting you or refuses to forgive you.
- ❑ You’re only responsible for your part of the process. You have done your part to bring about reconciliation when you ask forgiveness. It’s up to the other party whether or not they choose to forgive.
- ❑ Asking forgiveness is separate from resuming intimate relationship. Some are not safe persons with whom to be close. The choice of whether or not to be involved in an ongoing relationship is a separate one from giving or receiving forgiveness.
- ❑ Asking forgiveness is manipulative only if getting out of trouble is your motive for doing it. Only you know your heart.
- ❑ Nothing is unforgivable. Forgiving yourself is essential for moving forward.
- ❑ Because asking forgiveness is essentially something done for one’s own mental and emotional health, it is possible to ask a trusted “stand in” for a dead or unavailable person to hear your request for forgiveness. Guideposts and Angels Magazines<sup>3</sup> occasionally share stories of departed loved ones sending signals of forgiveness from the other side.

## How to do it:

“I realize I hurt you when I \_\_\_\_\_(name behavior).

Or, “I was wrong when I \_\_\_\_\_.”

Would you please forgive me?” Simple, isn’t it?

## Please note: (this is very important!)

If you offer any excuses or reasons why you did \_\_\_\_\_, the request for forgiveness is invalidated! No excuses, even though you may think there were contributing circumstances!

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<sup>3</sup> [www.Guideposts.org/Angelsonearth](http://www.Guideposts.org/Angelsonearth).

The offended one may need time to forgive. Or, may grant forgiveness but it takes time for good feelings to return. Or, forgiveness may be granted, but some guidelines for future behavior need to be worked out so the offended one is reassured that the hurtful behavior won't reoccur. Forgiveness is often a process rather than an event on both the giving and the receiving sides.

### **Summary:**

Both the asking and the giving of forgiveness are first, and foremost, something I do for my own mental and emotional health. Refusing to forgive allows the offender to continue to occupy a position of power in my life. The original offense keeps offending, often exerting control over aspects of my life. The offender continues to occupy an important place in my consciousness which may act like a magnet attracting the very qualities in my behavior or attitudes that I despise in him (her).

Refusing to ask forgiveness prevents me from experiencing myself as a person of integrity. If I can't face and accept the "dark" qualities in myself, they'll not be available for me to change. In regard to someone I love, the refusal is a barrier to a better, closer relationship.

Both giving and receiving forgiveness is a SoulMate choice.

### **Puzzle Piece #6: Choose SoulMate Beliefs**

"I courageously choose to ask forgiveness when I am at fault,  
and graciously forgive,  
so that I can experience the best of who I am,  
and enjoy the best possible relationship with the one I love."

*"Only he who never sinned may throw the first stone!"*

*John 8:7*

*"...and forgive us our sins,*

*just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us."*

*Matthew 6:12*