



Practice Instructions for Radical Forgiveness

To paraphrase the Talmud: Who is forgiven? One who forgives others (Rosh Hashanah 17a). Many of us know from experience the enlivening catharsis and liberation that forgiveness brings. But we also know that it is not easily attained; it requires a radical shift in our inner life.

Some crucial guidance in this work is provided by R' Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522 – 1570), known by the acronym Ramak, who was a leader of the Tzfat (Safed) kabbalists. His work, Tomer Devorah (The Palm Tree of Deborah) is a highly revered classic which combines Kabbalah with Mussar (character improvement).

Tomer Devorah 1:14

Even if you cannot find any reason to forgive a person, then consider: There was once a time when this person had done no wrong. At that time...they were worthy. Bring to mind the good this person did as a child, bring to mind the love for a nursing babe, “weaned from milk and removed from the breasts” (Is. 28:9). In this way, you will appreciate that no person can be found who is unworthy of you wishing goodness for them, and praying for their wholeness, and having compassion for them.

תומר דבורה א:יד

שְׁאַפְלוּ שְׁלֵא יִמְצָא טַעֲנָה מֵאֵלּוּ הַנְּזָכְרוֹת
יֵאמֶר כָּבֵר הָיָה שְׁעָה קִדְּם
שְׁלֵא חָטְאוּ
וְהָרִי אֶתְּהָ שְׁעָה...הָיָה כְּשָׂרִים
וַיִּזְכֹּר לָהֶם הַטּוֹבָה שְׁעָשׂוּ בְּקִטְנוּתָם
וַיִּזְכֹּר לָהֶם אֶהְבֵּת גְּמוּלֵי מַחֲלָב
עֲתִיקֵי מִשְׁדִּים
וּבָזָה לֹא יִמְצָא אָדָם
שְׁאִינוּ רְאוּי לְהִטִּיבוּ
וְלִהְתַּפְּלֵל עַל שְׁלוֹמוֹ
וּלְרַחֵם עָלָיו

- 1) Decide how long you want to practice for. If you're new to this, try ten minutes. When you feel ready, gradually increase the practice time by five minutes at a time. Twenty minutes is a good sit for an intermediate practitioner, whereas more advanced meditators might sit for 45 – 60 minutes.
- 2) Set your intention to completely forgive a particular person. Do not start with the most difficult person you can imagine – work up to it! Our capacity for compassion and forgiveness respond to wise training, like physical muscles.
- 3) Sit quietly in a comfortable position, with the spine upright, and the body balanced between relaxation and alertness. Close your eyes.
- 4) Let out a few yawns or sighs to relax your body.

- 5) Now just sit, not trying to change or do anything, except observe whatever arises in your body and mind – thoughts, feelings, whatever comes.
- 6) With compassion, bring your chosen person to mind. What do they look like in each moment?
- 7) Throughout the practice, notice what thoughts and feelings arise for you, and keep returning to your intention, with determination and compassion: To fully forgive this person.
- 8) Imagine this person before they did whatever they did that hurt or offended you.
- 9) Imagine this person aging backwards throughout their life until they are a tiny, helpless, beautiful, shining baby.
- 10) If you encounter serious difficulty, it may help to bring to mind another person, anyone who you find it easy to feel positively towards. Once you are visualizing them and feeling compassion towards them, try replacing them with your more challenging person, and maintaining the same positive feelings.
- 11) Notice any resistance that may arise, and simply keep returning to your original intention, with determination and compassion: To fully forgive this person.
- 12) When your practice time is completed, take note of how you feel. What is happening in your body?
- 13) You may find it helpful to write, draw, paint, speak, sing, dance or express what is happening inside you in this moment in some other way.