

## Reading and Meditation

The reading and meditation is a compilation of experts from a writing by the Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh. The full version is available if you Google *Loosening The Knots of Anger* by TNH.

“In our consciousness there are blocks of pain, anger and frustration called internal formations. They are also called knots because they tie us up and obstruct our freedom.

When someone insults us or does something unkind to us, an internal formation is created in our consciousness. If you don't know how to undo the internal knot and transform it, the knot will stay there for a long time. And the next time someone says something or does something to you of the same nature, that internal formation will grow stronger. As knots or blocks of pain in us, our internal formations have the power to push us, to dictate our behavior.

After a while, it becomes very difficult for us to transform, to undo the knots, and we cannot ease the constriction of this crystallized formation. Every one of us has internal formations that we need to take care of.

Every time you give your internal formations a bath of mindfulness, the blocks of pain in you become lighter and less dangerous. So give your anger, your despair, your sorrow a bath of mindfulness every day—that is your practice. If mindfulness is not there, it is very unpleasant to have these seeds come up. But if you know how to generate the energy of mindfulness, it is very healing to invite them up every day and embrace them. And after several days or weeks of bringing them up daily and helping them go back down again, you create good circulation in your psyche, and the symptoms of illness will begin to disappear.

Mindfulness does the work of massaging your internal formations, your blocks of suffering. You have to allow them to circulate, and this is possible only if you are not afraid of them. If you learn not to fear your knots of suffering, you can learn how

to embrace them with the energy of mindfulness, and transform them.”

### Presentation: The Power of Forgiveness

While preparing the presentation *The Power of Forgiveness*, I have gained even more of an appreciation for the enormity of the subject's many faceted layers, dimensions and implications. There is so much to say, that I will do *Part I* today and then we plan to have *Part II* on Sunday, June 28.

I want to start today with a little free-association poem, just to demonstrate how deep these waters run. As I say each term, you might check-in with yourself to identify any memories that you associate with these formations related to unforgiveness: blame, guilt, insults and offenses, resentment, grudges, feuding, anger, pain, hurt feelings, deep wounds, injustice, deception, betrayal, separation, unforgiveness. I imagine that you have personal experience with most, if not all, of these terms. Now let's reflect on the features of forgiveness: communication, compassion, empathy, understanding, acceptance, reconciliation, surrender, release, healing, joining, forgiveness. Hopefully, you have experience with these terms as well. While reading the unforgiveness terms I feel heavy, burdened, and depressed. In contrast the forgiveness terms feel light, energizing, and freeing. Clearly, the freeing process of forgiveness is preferable to the stagnant quagmire of unforgiveness.

Though my UU upbringing has influenced me to be a forgiving person in general, I was not aware of how empowering *active forgiveness* is. A few years ago, I came across TNH's writing, *Loosening the Knots of Anger*, which made a significant impression on me because it made the concept more tangible. I can easily picture a knot that forms in my mind, as well as in the pit of my stomach, as resentment toward a person who has offended me settles into my psyche. I now try to acknowledge that forming-knot as a red-flag-warning to address the issue before the knot tightens and binds to my identity.

Our knots relate to issues from childhood, from parents and siblings, our spouses, our children, friendships, from societal

pressures, and people that we encounter everywhere, every day; from deep trauma and loss, to simple daily interactions. Mindfulness is our ally as we explore and alter our perceptions, and accordingly, our reactions from the past, at the present, and for the future.

I will describe two simple examples, to establish a foundation of the concepts of the forgiveness process that I find helpful and effective. I also encourage you to find relevant books or internet resources that speak to you personally as you explore and develop your own forgiveness system.

I am going to begin with an example that has probably happened to everyone here. Picture yourself driving along a busy street and a shiny new sports car in the left lane speeds up, passes you, then cuts into your lane causing you to hit the breaks quickly so you don't rear-end them. How do you react when someone cuts you off in traffic? Do you get a little bent-out-of-shape? I have certainly had emotional reactions to being cut-off. We can dwell on it and think of all kinds of creative names for the driver. Or... we can apply mindful techniques to heighten our awareness of this simple interaction that didn't go so well.

The first thing I try to do when I feel a knot forming, is to recognize the red- flag-warning and think about it as something I wish to take care of in a loving way, as TNH described. First, we can put the event in perspective; will we worry about this incident a year from now? How about one month? A week? A day from now, will it be on our list of concerns? Probably Not. A hour from now? When we've arrived at our destination and we're involved in our activity? Probably not. How about the next 15 minutes, maybe. But if the event is going to be forgotten a week, month, year, from now, what does it matter? Does it really matter? Consider this, the event may be forgotten, but what about the knot of anger that formed in that moment? We tied a knot, does *forgetting* the event untie it? Probably not. For what if we get cut off again or we see that exact same driver a week later? What would we want to do *then*? Ahhh, there's the knot. In this perspective, wouldn't it be healthier to address and loosen the Knot as soon as possible?

One way we could do this is to turn the tables and think, "Have I ever cut someone off in traffic?" In the many years I have been driving, sure, I have needed to get to a turning lane, or not paid as much attention as I should have. I have cut people off, maybe not as aggressively, but yes I am sure I have caused some knots of anger in other drivers. So if I called the offending driver an 'idiot,' am I not *also* an 'idiot' for my similar actions? And wouldn't assigning the label 'idiot' serve to tighten the knot?

The next step in my thought process would be to come up with some reasons *why* the driver *might* do this. Maybe he *is* just an inconsiderate driver. Or maybe he was in a hurry because he was late for work. There have been times when I have been running late. Or maybe it was an emergency. I have broken a few rules of the road in an emergency. We don't know what the real reason is, but there *may* be a valid reason that he was driving that way.

The next step in the thought process can prove even more helpful and is not commonly listed in most forgiveness exercises. We can try to *translate* the episode into its symbolic components. I believe that everything in our lives can have symbolic meaning; we can use this as an opportunity to learn about ourselves. We can ask ourselves, how have we symbolically cut ourselves off from our Source? Or could this refer to us getting ahead of ourselves, rushing, over-extending (we wouldn't do that would we?) We can ask, how does needing to 'hit the brakes' symbolize current issues in our lives? Do we need to put the brakes on something in our lives that isn't working? Do we need to slow down a bit? As we reflect on the incident which initially triggered an emotional reaction, we might even find ourselves feeling thankful to the driver for helping us heighten our awareness about where *we* are heading. Considering that, we could chose to forgive him, give him a break, releasing the driver and ourselves from any resentment or constraint.

We could even take it a step further. We could use this single experience to forgive all events that this incident represents in our life, at all levels of our being, in all dimensions of our existence, past, present, and future. I'm going to repeat that concept. We could use this single experience of being cut off, to

forgive all events that this incident represents in our life, at all levels of our being, in all dimensions of our existence, past, present, and future. Can we connect with that empowerment? Can we envision the potential forgiveness of this singular event? Imagine the healing potential of universal forgiveness through mindful compassion. To how many incidents in our lives could we apply this forgiveness system? How freeing would that be?

The next example has an added component. We probably won't be seeing the aggressive driver again. But what about when an incident occurs between acquaintances, whom we interact with on a regular basis. I'm going to give another very simple example of an interaction that caused me to form a knot of anger. My 11 year old son, Brett, was excited to participate with his class in a depiction of some of the events in colonial history. He wanted me to attend so I had to drive to Rose Hill from my office in Wichita after an appointment. I was rushing because I thought I might be late. I went into the school's main office to check-in and get the required visitor sticker. The main secretary, I'll call her Patty, had stepped out of the office, and the other, I'll call her Donna, was talking with a Life-Touch Photographer. I signed-in and waited at the counter for my sticker. Donna continued talking to the photographer. I waited for my sticker. Then another parent came in and I stepped to the counter on other side of the photographer so the parent could sign-in. Donna very slowly opened the drawer for the stickers. Still talking with the photographer, she gradually retrieved two visitor stickers. In a sloth-like motion, Donna handed the other parent a sticker, but kept my sticker, and set it on the counter in front of her. The other parent promptly walked out with her precious sticker, well on her way to her child's activity. I waited for my sticker, thinking Brett must be worried that I would miss the performance. I should have said something, but it seemed so obvious, I didn't *need* to interrupt if she would just hand me the required visitor sticker. When Patty, the other secretary returned, she asked if I needed help, I told her that I just needed a sticker, Donna got it out, I just need her to hand it to me. Patty even made a comment, "Well, yes, she should have given it to you, we need to get the parents on their way after they sign-in." I finally had it, and was on my way to an enjoyable performance with Brett and his classmates. But.... a knot of

anger had formed in my mind and in the pit of my stomach. Why had it taken so long to get the sticker? She gave the other parent a sticker, but held mine back. She ignored me. Oh me, oh my, what a pickle... Then, I recognized the red-flag-warning. Over a certain time-period, I mindfully reconsidered the incident analyzing it like peeling off the layers of an onion.

First, I asked myself, How long will this be a problem in my life? Will I worry about it years from now? No. Am I going to lose sleep over it a month from now? No. Does it really matter? No. But, I will remember it when I have to go back in and see her again. Oh, yes. That knot could tighten when I interact with her again.

In the next onion layer, I asked myself, What reasons *might* she have had for doing that? Was she exerting control over me for some reason? Was she intentionally with-holding the sticker? Or was she unaware of what she was doing? Did she perhaps think that I had a question to ask and she was waiting to help me after the photographer was done? It could be any of these reasons or something I haven't thought of.

Peeling back the next onion layer, the next step was to consider, whether *I* have ever ignored some one, or made them wait. Upon reflection, Yes, I have occasionally ignored certain people and I have made others wait. This could serve as a reminder that I don't like being treated that way, so in the future, I will try to be more considerate of my actions so that I don't treat others that way.

Delving deeper into the onion layers, I took an inventory of how it made me feel. I felt a frustrated, helpless longing for something just out of reach, and that I was being ignored. I asked myself how have I treated *myself* this way? How have I kept *myself* waiting? How have I been so close to reaching a goal, but held *myself* back? How have I ignored *my own* needs? When translated in those terms, the answers come flooding in. As awareness of my current issues becomes heightened, I can make changes, I can let some things go that no longer serve me. I can acknowledge my needs and create strategies to help balance those needs in a healthy way. Then, I consciously

forgave her and forgave myself for reacting to her. In my heart, I thanked her for helping me see my own patterns acted out in front of me.

At the core of the onion, I applied the universal forgiveness technique by using this event to signify all the related patterns within my being.

I want to mention a wonderful concept I came across while reading the book *The Web That Has No Weaver*, the author Ted Chaptchuk, discusses a concept called the Divine Penetrating Illumination that some physicians are able to connect with when diagnosing and treating patients. When I read those words, Divine Penetrating Illumination, I felt empowered by the term and I now incorporate it in my visualizations. The final step, the universal forgiveness technique, is one of surrender, as I invite and welcome the Divine Penetrating Illumination to permeate my being to release all blocks and formations represented by this singular event, at all levels of my being, in all dimensions of my existence, past, present, and future. As I did this, I recognized that Donna is a beautiful spirit, that we are connected in essence, and a peaceful feeling of release swept over me.

If I had not paused for reflection, I can assure you, I would have continued the mildly tense association with Donna in the form of a subtle grudge. Whether consciously or subconsciously, I would have remembered this incident and I would have tightened the knot every time I saw her. Fortunately, the next time I went in to the office, I looked her in the eyes with compassion, I had a friendly conversation, and went away feeling free and at peace.

An important consideration is the part *we* play in the interaction. We tend to react from a conditioned ego response. When I stood in front of the secretary, my ego was actively reacting to her. I was in a hurry, fearing that Brett was worried. It wasn't her fault I was in a hurry. I was also fearful that she wasn't recognizing me as a person. She recognized the other parent but not me. But if I depend on others to validate me, I am setting myself up for knots of anger. If I had been centered in my own-self worth, it would anchor me so that I wouldn't need anyone else to recognize it. Donna's actions or inactions do not define me

unless I let them. Why should I give away the power of affirming my self-worth to anyone else?

A reading from Greta Crosby's book of meditations, *Tree and Julibee*, helped me evaluate the incident in this light. In a meditation titled "Worth" she writes, in part: "If I could give you, one key and one key only, to a more abundant life, I would give you a sense of your own worth, an unshakable sense of your own dignity as one grounded in the source of the cosmic dance....once we are sure of our own innate worth, (something that cannot be taken from us), we no longer need to prove it in elaborate ways so often damaging to others and to ourselves. Once secure in our own dignity, we no longer need someone to hurt, whole classes of people to despise. Secure in the sense of our own worth, we can rejoice in the worth of others and love out of fullness, instead of an inner emptiness that eats others alive..."

Had I been anchored in my self-worth, *I could have avoided tying the knot in the first place.* I would have centered in waiting, no matter how long it took. I could have recognized her compassionate essence and just breathed, remained in the present, knowing it would all be just fine. If I had done that, there would have been nothing to forgive in the first place. Bearing this in mind, I now try to minimize my ego-reactions, reducing the *frequency* of the formation of my internal knots.

As we conclude Part I of the presentation, I would like to propose an experiment. You can participate to your level of comfort. Later today or whenever possible, write: my experience with forgiveness on a piece of paper or word processor. Make a list of people who come to mind, and journal your feelings as they surface. It may be painful to stir up certain memories. Long-forgotten images may surface, and it is good to be aware of your physical reactions. Tension in your abdomen, clenching your teeth, needing to swallow, and tearing-up are all indicators of knots that have been dormant.

Take it from there as you are comfortable. Then, sometime before June 28<sup>th</sup>, those who wish to, can submit their summaries of experiences with forgiveness. You can email them to my address which is in the directory, or hand them to me. It can be

a few sentences or paragraphs. They can be signed or unsigned. If possible, I will share them at the June 28th service. Let's see what develops from our little experiment.

My own preference has been to address the less complicated issues as a form of practice, developing the foundation concepts in a system that works for me. And *it is all a process*. I am still working through deeper issues with painful memories and deep emotional wounds, but I am making progress. Progress that would not happen, if I felt too fearful to face the issues, or if I ignored the self-imposed ties that bind me and just hoped they went away. We may forget, but if we can't forgive, the dormant knots will remain ever-present in the mental quagmire of unforgiveness. Mindfulness and active exploration are keys to releasing the formations that block our true nature.

I believe that our purpose in this existence is for all beings to join with each other in mind and spirit; To experience the Oneness of the Source. The major impediment to achieving this mission of Joining... is various formations of unforgiveness.

In the words of Martha Kilpatrick "We are all on a life long journey and the core of its meaning, the terrible demand of its centrality is forgiving and being forgiven."

Lara Pollock