

Kerstin Hack



# Learning to Forgive

The Art of a Life of Inner Freedom

DfE



[www.heartofberlin.de](http://www.heartofberlin.de)

Kerstin Hack: Learning to Forgive – The Art of a Life of Inner Freedom  
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## Learning to forgive

*Living well is the best revenge.*

—George Herbert

■ **Ouch, that hurt! We can all think of a situation when we were hurt, betrayed or abandoned by others. This is often very painful, even long after the incident. How can we overcome this pain, and maybe even restore the relationship?**

In this Quadro we will take a closer look at these questions. Forgiveness is a timeless tool that's useful for letting go of suffered injustices and opening up our hearts once again. Human beings have experienced the power of forgiveness regardless of what period of history they lived in. Nelson Mandela is a living example of the power of forgiveness. For 27 years he was held captive by the South African apartheid regime, but he forgave those who wronged him and led an entire nation to a new beginning. He later became President of this nation.

In our lives, things are usually not as dramatic. The injustices that we suffer may be limited to mobbing, accusations, attacks, and losses. But that doesn't make

it less painful. Every single injustice, no matter how large or small, is painful and requires a remedy.

We need freedom from the reoccurring thoughts about the suffered injustice that we simply can't get rid of. We need release from the painful feelings connected to it. And we need release from the despair and lack of vision that often follow the suffering of an injustice.

The process of forgiveness is a useful tool to deal with a suffered injustice. It sets us free from those thoughts that circle around our minds and it brings relief for our hurt feelings. It also releases us from despair.

It is a path that offers many opportunities, but entering it is not easy. Even people that desire to forgive often don't know how to do it. They have no idea what precisely to do in order to forgive someone.

This is exactly why I have written this Quadro. It is my goal to help find answers to these questions.

I'll start with an explanation of what forgiveness actually is – and what it is not. In the second part, the focus lies on the value of forgiveness. I'll describe the many benefits that forgiveness brings. I consider this to be important because some people try to forgive out of a sense of duty ("I should forgive"). This can actually pose an obstacle to forgiveness, while looking at the benefits can make it easier to forgive. The third part deals with attitudes, thought patterns and approaches that can be helpful in the process of forgiveness. In the final, fourth part, I'll suggest practical steps for forgiving someone. This part provides a kind of roadmap which can help with the practical implementation of forgiveness.

This Quadro is very personal. Life has provided me with plenty of material to draw from. In fact, right when I started writing, I experienced a rather hurtful and confusing situation in my life. I was pretty heartbroken about what had happened.

Through this, I had the chance to – involuntarily but thoroughly – test everything I was writing once again in my own life.

As the author of this Quadro I'd like to express my thankfulness to several sources of inspiration. The readers of my blog [www.heartofberlin.de](http://www.heartofberlin.de) have inspired me by a lively conversation about factors that may facilitate forgiveness. I've also benefitted from Prof. Arnold Retzer's seminar called "The Art of Forgiveness". A warm thank you to you all.

It is bad enough that injustice happens to us. But we don't have to make life worse by carrying suffered injustice around with us forever. It is my hope that this Quadro will help its readers to live well, because that will be the best revenge! Yours,



—Kerstin Hack



## How to use this book

■ This book is divided into 28 chapters. For the duration of four weeks, you can read and implement one passage per day. If one chapter speaks to you on a deeper level, I'd like to encourage you to read it several times.

■ It makes sense to read the chapters consecutively because each one builds on the one before it.

■ You will find questions at the end of each passage. Please take some time to think about them and answer honestly. What you put down in writing will be more tangible for you. That's why I recommend that you answer the questions in a written form and that you also take notes of your ideas on how to implement the suggested applications.

■ It may be helpful to read this Quadro together with your partner, friends or in a group setting so that you can discuss what you've read. Sharing views with one another can help make things clearer and insights may last longer.

■ I recommend reading the quoted Bible verses in their context. This will help you to understand better why the author said what he said.

■ A person who consumes passively will remain passive. I'd suggest that you ask yourself after each reading, which thought or inspiration you would mention as the most relevant one if you told a friend about it.

■ Take a couple of minutes to tell God or a friend about what you've read. This will help to nail it down for you.

■ If you're looking for a lasting change in your behavior, you need to practice doing things differently. Write down which steps were important to you while reading. First practice the step that's most important to you. Later, come back to your list from time to time and choose a new step.

■ Don't try to take all steps at once. Change doesn't happen in an instant. Allow yourself to learn at your own speed and to grow into freedom. Step by step.

**Week 1**  
**What forgiveness is (not)**



*"Pardon me, sir. I meant not to do it."  
(Famous last words of Marie Antoinette  
to her executioner, whose foot she had  
accidentally stepped on.)*

*—Marie Antoinette*

## Forgiving is not excusing

■ When looking at a certain topic, it is always helpful to first define what is actually meant by it. Different people think of different meanings when they hear the word "forgiveness". That's why I'd like to make clear what it means to me, and what it does not.

### Forgiving is not excusing

A person that steps on someone else's foot begs for pardon or asks to be excused. It is a way to ask the other person to look over this – usually unintentional – mistake. Being excused is for the small stuff. It's for all those little inattentive actions and unintended hurts that can happen when people interact with each other in everyday life.

It's easy to say "never mind" with these things. We don't necessarily expect the other person to make up for their mistake. One could also compare excusing someone with leniency. It's understandable that others make mistakes, too.

Excusing someone is suitable for things that bother us, but that don't hurt us deep down in our hearts: a friend who is late, a meal that got cold etc. It's like a band-aid for the small wounds.

Forgiveness, however, is like surgery. It's a measure we can take when something has hurt and grieved us deeply. It wouldn't make sense to do surgery on a little scratch. In the same way, it would be crazy to only put the band-aid of excusing someone on a serious injury.

### ■ Time to think

For you, what's the difference between excusing vs. forgiving? What things can you not easily excuse?

### ■ Time to act

Pay attention to situations when someone (including yourself) says "excuse me". What's typical for these situations?

# 3.4



## For they know not ...

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

*—Jesus of Nazareth on the cross*

■ Someone makes a careless comment and I am deeply hurt. I forget a promise I made and someone else's trust is broken. It doesn't always have to be true guilt. Smaller mistakes and inadvertencies can have fatal implications on relationships, too.

We humans often have difficulty to assess the consequences of what we do. For instance, one night a woman feels the urge to send an email to a friend. She brushes the thought away and tells herself that she can send it tomorrow. That night, her friend commits suicide. Had she been able to sense what was going to happen, she would of course have listened to her inner voice. But how should she have known? If we were able to tell what effect our actions will have on others, we would often act differently. While this is true for our own behavior, it's also true for those who hurt us. Many would have acted differently, had they known how much something they did would hurt us, or what something they said would trigger in us.

That's why I consider the words that Jesus spoke when he was crucified very relieving. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Or, said a little differently: "Father, forgive them – they can't assess the consequences of what they're doing." In order to forgive, it can help to realize that the other person (often) couldn't perceive what a specific action might do to us. This makes it easier to be merciful – with ourselves and others.

### ■ Time to think

In what situation would you have acted differently, had you known what effect your action would have ended up having?

### ■ Time to act

Imagine Jesus, or another loving person telling you, "You knew not what you were doing" concerning this situation. What does that change?



*Decisions are necessary whenever they are impossible.*

—Niklas Luhmann

## Compensation is impossible

■ Soccer World Cup 1966. Final match in Wembley. Germany against England. The referee gave a goal that wasn't one. England is the new world champion. For 44 years, Germany claims that it was deprived of its rights.

Soccer World Cup 2010 in South Africa. Round of sixteen. Germany against England. The referee does not give a goal that was one. Germany wins 4:1 and moves on in the tournament.

Some Germans rejoice: "That was our compensation for Wembley! Finally we can let go and let bygones be bygones." Others claim: "We would have won that match anyway." Or "That doesn't compensate for (potentially) being deprived of the champion title." So was South Africa compensation for Wembley, or not?

When injustice happens, it's our natural reaction to want compensation. But perfect compensation is in fact impossible to reach because the two sides measure with different scales.

Usually we perceive the injustice that we suffered as heavier than the injustice that we did to others. Who then can really say what a fair compensation would look like? Once we recognize that a perfect settlement is impossible to reach, we might as well let that idea go. This will free us from the battle over compensation, which, by the way, isn't always necessary for living a good life.

### ■ Time to think

In what situations have you not succeeded in negotiating a fair compensation with someone?

### ■ Time to act

Think about what really would have been a fair compensation in that situation. First from your own point of view. Then from the other side's.

# 4.6

## Symbolizing forgiveness

■ Sometimes it works to forgive swiftly. Somebody did something specific that hurt us, so we forgive and everything is fine again.

But often things are a little more complex. Let's say we were betrayed and cheated on by our partner. Even after we forgive something like that, we will notice that the entire family is still affected by what happened. That in itself will cause new pain, grief, accusations and the desire for compensation. When these emotions show up, we can easily start to wonder whether or not we had honestly forgiven in the first place. However, discovering a new level of pain does not mean that we had not properly forgiven earlier. It simply means: there is more pain that wants to be recognized, and there is more that can be healed by forgiveness.

Some people seem to be able to forgive on a whim. I personally find it helpful to be as precise as possible, to name things in detail.

*A picture is worth a thousand words.*

—Saying

On top of that, symbolic gestures may reinforce the effect of forgiveness. I know a man who was left by his wife. Without her knowing it, he went to the house where she then lived with her new partner. That's where he forgave her. Being at that location helped him to experience forgiveness in a powerful and tangible way. Some people symbolize forgiveness with a list that they burn or stones that they throw into the water. Others find a witness in whose presence they want to forgive, someone like a friend or confidant.

### ■ Time to think

Who or what could help you to forgive in a tangible, concrete way?

### ■ Time to act

Try one of the three variants for substantiating forgiveness: the scene of events, symbols or finding a supporting person.



## Risks and side effects

■ Careful! I certainly don't recommend forgiving prematurely. Forgiveness involves unforeseeable risks and side effects. If we've been attached to someone for a long time through our accusations against them, letting go of our claims will totally change the dynamics of the relationship. It could even open the way for a new beginning in the relationship, this time based on a different foundation. But it could also signify an ending point in a relationship. Once our expectation for compensation does not keep us attached to the other person any longer, there may not be many reasons to stay in contact.

When we forgive someone, we also lose our status as a victim and therefore possibly the compassion and support we had previously received from our friends. Our friends may have supported us for a long time in our battle against the offender. If we forgive now, they may consider this a betrayal. Last but not least, forgiveness calls for a redefinition of our own role.

*It's hard to forgive.*

*But it's even harder not to forgive.*

—Kerstin Hack

If I'm no longer a victim, what am I then? You'll lose something when you forgive. That's why it's worthwhile to look thoroughly at possible risks and side effects of forgiveness. Are you ready to let go of the emotional benefit that you've enjoyed so far by not forgiving? Are you prepared to face the risk of an unexpected change in the relationship? The decision is yours.

Thank you for having gone through this Quadro with me. Enjoy letting go and living on!

### ■ Time to think

Looking at a specific situation, identify what you would have to give up when you forgive.

### ■ Time to act

Write down which situations have become resolved over the last weeks, and which ones you'd still like to resolve.



## Don't forget

■ These thoughts and ideas have become meaningful to me.  
This is what I don't want to forget:

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■ In the next weeks I'd like to address the following issues.

Tip: Explain what you want to do, by when you want to do it and what the first, smallest possible step for that is.

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### ■ Experience coaching yourself

The author Kerstin Hack offers coaching. She helps people who have suffered injustice to find solutions. Coaching is available in person in Berlin, Germany, or over the phone or via Skype.

For more information write to: [info@kerstinhack.de](mailto:info@kerstinhack.de)



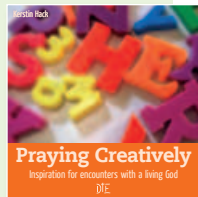


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*Experience the love of God, 40 pages*

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*Micro-book No. 40*

# Learning to Forgive

We can all think of a situation when we were hurt, betrayed or abandoned by others. Incidents like that often make us prisoners on the inside, and the pain related to them can last a lifetime.

Forgiveness is an effective tool to deal with a suffered injustice. But it is not always easy. Even people who would like to forgive often don't know how to do it. This Quadro shows why forgiveness is worth the effort, which attitudes may help to forgive and what practical steps can be taken to make forgiveness happen. For 28 days, this Quadro wants to accompany you on the journey to inner freedom.

Questions and practical inspirations help you not to get stuck in the theory, but to put what you have read into practice. The Quadro inspires and accompanies you with four impulses per day:

- A concise quote
- Some food for thought
- A provocative question
- A practical activity

Ideal for all who want to let go of suffered offenses and achieve inner freedom.

 **Quadro**

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