

Stages And Strategies For Healing Pain And Fear And Learning “Authentic Forgiveness”

Introduction

Make no mistake concerning the importance of learning “Authentic Forgiveness.” “Authentic Forgiveness” will **awaken** us from this dream of separation and fear, the chaotic world we now experience. When we do wake up, we discover what we dreamed **was not real**, that in truth, we remain at peace eternally within the Mind of God. This awareness is our salvation.

“How willing are you to forgive your brother? How much do you desire peace instead of endless strife and misery and pain? ... Forgiveness is your peace, for herein lies the end of separation and the dream of danger and destruction...” (ACIM, C.29.VI.1)

“Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world.” (ACIM.L.62)

“Let me not forget my function... Let me forgive and be happy”. (ACIM.L.64)

“My only function is the one God gave me.” (To Forgive) (ACIM.L.65)

The purpose for Learning “Authentic Forgiveness” then, is to awaken from our dream of separation and fear, which is ultimately our only real reason for traveling within this dream. “A Course In Miracles” is entirely devoted to teaching the purpose, process and practice of accomplishing “Authentic Forgiveness,” to achieve this end. Forgiveness accomplishes our final journey through fear to the Love, which is our truth.

What Is “Authentic Forgiveness?”

Before we enter more fully into our discussion concerning the stages and strategies of learning “Authentic Forgiveness,” let us review the clearest definition I have been able to present, after working with ACIM for over 30 years. I think it will prove helpful here. It should also be noted that “A Course In Miracles” does not use the term “authentic forgiveness.” Most often it merely uses the word “forgiveness,” and sometimes uses the term “forgiveness to condemn” when referring to ordinary forgiveness in the way it is commonly practiced within the world. In Lesson 134, “**Let me perceive forgiveness as it is,**” of the Workbook, it uses the expression “***genuine forgiveness***” to make a distinction between its definition of forgiveness and the one more commonly understood and used in the world. I prefer, however, to use the term, “Authentic Forgiveness” for clarity.

“Authentic Forgiveness” means to forget the past and experience everything and everyone now, free from all thoughts, judgments, pain and fear based on our past learning and experience. It also means to accept without resistance and overlook with compassion the parts of our consciousness not of love, (fear-based) first projected from us, and then reflected back to us, or triggered within us, in our dream of separation here.

Stage 1: The Surfacing Of Pain And Fear Within US

Origin Of our Pain And Fear:

Personal Pain And Fear

Some of the pain and fear within our “pain body” originates from experiences we have had in this lifetime or others where we were confronted with people and situations too threatening, overwhelming and traumatizing to deal with at the time. When this happened, we buried the experience deep in our unconscious in a part of our mind that establishes itself as our mental, physical and emotional body, or “ego self.”

ACIM describes our whole ego consciousness as a fear-based illusion or dream that originated when we first separated from God and lost our true Identity as Spirit. It was this

loss of our Spiritual Identity resulting from our separation from God that first birthed fear into our consciousness. In the final analysis, any fear we experience in this material world originates still from this continued “**Separation**.” These traumatizing experiences we have repressed usually revolve around issues like rejection, loss, failure, separation and abandonment. Often they resulted from anger, conflict and disappointment with people we became attached to for our emotional and physical support, as well as from situations where we felt extreme helplessness, pain and fear of injury, loss or death. They can occur anytime during our lives, although more likely as children. Whenever these fears and wounds are reawakened within our consciousness, they bring forth an **extreme** fear and defensive response. This fear and defensive response is usually much stronger than the fear, pain and defensive response awakened from the “collective pain body,” especially when the two combine, which is often the case.

Collective Pain And Fear

Along with our personal pain and fear, our repressed “pain body” also includes pain and fear-based issues from what I call our ego’s “collective consciousness.” These “collective” issues include fear of sickness, despair, emptiness, sadness, pain, change, death, abandonment, loss, and separation to name a few. We seem to absorb these collective fears through some kind of universal and hypnotic osmosis during our human experience in this material world where we lack connection with our Spiritual Self. Joel Goldsmith speaks much about the “impersonal (**collective**) nature” of our “human or carnal mind” (**not our real or Spiritual Self**) as the source of our pain, fear and destructive or defensive behaviour. He reminds us continually to realize and accept that this is not who we are in truth.^ψ I prefer to call this, our “ego self,” which is how ACIM refers to it. Unlike Goldsmith, I also prefer to see the pain, fear and defensiveness or destructiveness it houses as both **personal** as well as **collective** in nature.

The Healing Journey

The healing journey through this “**ego pain body**,” be it personal, collective or a combination, must be a process where we come to **know through experience** that the pain and fear we encounter is not real and does not have any power to harm or destroy us. This is the healing journey we encounter and accomplish along our path to achieving “Authentic Forgiveness.”

How Our Pain, Fear And Defensiveness Surfaces

The “Law Of Attraction”

As pointed out by Michael Losier and Esther Hicks, both teachers of, “**The Law Of Attraction**,” we attract what we vibrate at the level of our emotional bodies, not necessarily what we think or want. Although our thoughts have energy, the strongest energy vibration of our **emotional body**, whether it is of pain, fear or love, will always manifest. The “Law of Attraction” responds only to our energy vibration and is unable to distinguish between what we want or don’t want. When we cry out painfully, “I can’t stand this abuse,” we vibrate, the pain and fear of abuse and receive just that, more pain, fear and abuse. Whenever we attack or resist any experience, this same principle or law operates to strengthen and bring to us more of that same experience. Unfortunately, our pain and fear-based cries for what we don’t want are usually stronger than what we do want, until the pain and fear within us is brought to the surface, experienced fully and released. The process and practice of this healing is what I hope to accomplish here.

^ψ Joel Goldsmith, “The Infinite Way”

This means that as long as we have repressed pain and fear vibrating within us, we will attract situations and relationships of like vibration that will bring this pain or fear into our experience and conscious awareness. For example, if we house a strong fear of abandonment, we will draw a relationship into our experience where we will be abandoned. If we have an obsessive fear of losing our home, we will draw to ourselves a situation where we will lose our home. The stronger our fear-based vibration and attachment is to the people and things of this world, built upon our ego's dreams, to that degree will they be taken from us. Everything in this world is built and destroyed through the vibration of our wishes and fears. Our Soul Self, operating with or through these inner vibrations, seems to know **unerringly** and draws to us, when we are ready, the relationships and situations that can best serve our need to heal our pain and fear and return us to the peace of our Spiritual Home. To assist in this process, our intimate relationships become important mirrors and triggers that bring to the surface the pain and fear we project from within us that need to be healed. In all these situations, it is very difficult to appreciate or accept that the pain and fear we experience has been called forth from within us through our vibrations. It is equally difficult for us to appreciate or use these opportunities for the healing gifts that they provide us. **“All things are gently planned by One, (Soul Self) whose only purpose is our good.”** (ACIM, L135)

Like it or not, the world we see and experience is a reflection of our own consciousness, a consciousness we vibrate and project onto the screen of our relationships and the situations we encounter here, much like a movie. As such, it becomes an opportunity to heal any part of our consciousness, not of love, **(the pain & fear)** that is being reflected back to us from the mirror of these relationships and experiences in the world. It is as impossible to see and heal our consciousness without some kind of reflection, as it is to comb our hair properly without a mirror. This is why we can never heal alone. This healing is accomplished through learning and applying the process of “Authentic Forgiveness.” **“Seek not to change the world, but to change your mind about the world, and the world will then change.”** (ACIM)

Stage 2: Our Reflex Reaction To This Experience

Whenever our “pain body” is brought into our conscious experience or awareness, our first response is one of fear-based defense, attack or avoidance. Most often we project the responsibility for the pain and fear we experience onto someone outside us with some form of criticism, judgment, blame or anger. We can also sedate and distract ourselves in any number of ways. In addition to this, we can hold on tight or hold back creating chronic muscle tension and armor. Sometimes we just run away. None of these strategies will release or heal the pain and fear within us. The pain and fear will, in fact, persist and strengthen whenever we defend against or attack it. Our “pain body” feeds, grows and survives on the degree to which we resist, attack or defend against it. **“If I attack I suffer. If I forgive, salvation will be given me.”** (ACIM.) It is a tragedy how long it seems to take us to change these choices that do nothing but drain our energy and cause various forms of illness, disease and great unhappiness. Whatever we fight against grows in strength. For example, the war on drugs and terrorism in the U.S. has strengthened both the drug trade and the terrorist movement.

Stage 3: Gaining Readiness

There will come a time of readiness through suffering where we will turn and face our pain and fear without defense. Through this trembling and courageous act, we find our freedom and inner Peace.

Before we can begin to practice “authentic forgiveness,” we need to learn better ways to handle the emotional pain and fear that arises within our consciousness, projected onto and played out through the dramas of our relationships, life situations and during times of stillness and surrender. Remember, until we give up our **resistance and defensive reaction** to the pain and fear we encounter within this dream of separation, it will remain unhealed within us and strengthen. Until we allow ourselves to **fully experience** our pain and fear and find out it does not destroy us and that it “**can have no power over us,**”^ψ we will be unable to release it and practice “authentic forgiveness.” The steps for healing or releasing our pain and fear and practicing “authentic forgiveness” are relatively straightforward and simple. The difficulty arises in developing the awareness of our defenses or destructive reaction **at the time** and the courage and willingness to give up our reflex, well learned, defensive resistance, attack or retreat. This means becoming **defenseless** at a time when our well-trained ego response is to defend, attack or retreat while holding in repressed anger. “**In my defenseless my safety lies.**” (ACIM.W. L.153)

Stage 4: Gaining Skills To Experience Pain And Fear

1. Begin to pay attention to your inner physical body, especially in the area of your stomach, chest and abdomen in an **ongoing way**. Emotional pain and fear are always felt in the body, usually in these areas.
2. At the same time, and when you go to sleep at night as well, begin to train yourself to relax on your out breath; let go and practice breathing abdominally, more slowly and fully. Place your hands on your abdomen and feel them rise and fall as you breathe in and out. Let go and let yourself sink downward and deeper with every out breath. This is called grounding and it will reduce the fear you experience because it places you fully in the present where all healing energy is.
3. Then, as soon as you begin to feel any kind of pain, fear, upset, or tension within your mind or body, begin to practice this more relaxed and full abdominal breathing. Be sure you let go and sink deeper and deeper on every out breath, into the area of your body where you are experiencing your pain and fear. Learning to breathe abdominally in a relaxed and full way under stress, will take almost a year to learn, but it is a sure gateway to reducing the amount of pain fear and panic you experience. It will also allow you to achieve “authentic forgiveness” more quickly.
4. It is very important that you **give into** the pain and fear you experience, without resistance. Whatever you resist will always persist and strengthen. Letting go physically into the pain and fear you experience, on every out breath, is the way you accomplish this very difficult task and lessen the pain and fear you feel.
5. The willingness to experience your fears and pains and suffer through them more fully, will release the unconscious, catastrophic fear you hold that feeling this pain and fear will somehow destroy or hurt you beyond repair. Free from this “**false fear factor,**” You can then face them with less panic, resistance and defensiveness the next time they arise. This also allows you some time to think and decide how you want to deal more constructively with every fear-based situation you encounter.

Stage 5: Releasing and Healing Pain And Fear

Important Preparation

“You do not know the meaning of anything you perceive, not one thought you hold is wholly true. The recognition of this is your firm beginning.” (ACIM.T.C.11.VIII.3)

^ψ Joel Goldsmith, “The Infinite Way.”

1. Although from your ego's perspective, when the pain and fear within you becomes activated, it will seem like you are being attacked from without and need to defend or attack back, you must begin to appreciate **at a very deep level** that this is a triggered reflection of the pain and fear **within you** that cries out to be healed. You must also understand and accept that what your ego perceives at this moment **is not real, is not the truth**. You are facing a "mirage in the desert." There is no need to respond in any way. Also, be very clear that if you attack or defend, you will strengthen this pain and fear within you, the hold it has over you, and lose any chance to release or heal it.

By keeping these ideas in mind **at all times**, you will have the understanding, motivation and determination necessary to set aside your reflex defenses and deal with your activated "pain body" in a more constructive way. Just "**accept what is,**"^x without resistance.

2. Your pain and fear will be caused as much by your past and future fear-based **thoughts** as by current situations and relationship issues. Use the same strategy for dealing with all cases when they arise. All are misperceptions of your fear-based ego.

3. Anger is always a defensive strategy used to cover, control and protect you in situations where you are feeling vulnerable and threatened. Remember also that anger is always a "**cry for love.**" This will make it less threatening for you to deal with when it arises in yourself and others. When we are feeling anger, it becomes necessary to release it and get beneath it in some constructive way. Through this awareness and acceptance, you will be able to discover feelings like helplessness, sadness, despair, loss, etc, beneath your anger. These are the emotions that need to be experienced and healed. Remember, anger is an ego defense, not an emotion. Try releasing it constructively by screaming into a pillow or taking a tennis racquet to a mattress or going for a long walk or run. Remember that your anger is just the projected cover-up for your own fear and pain, being reflected back to you for your healing.

Steps In Releasing Pain And Fear

1. If you are feeling anger and blame, identify and **express** the anger, blame and judgment long enough to find the **pain or fear that lies beneath**, feelings like sadness, worthlessness, emptiness, aloneness, loss, and separation. To achieve this, imagine the person who upset you in an empty chair and express **out loud**, "**I'm hurt and angry that you When you did this, I felt...!**"
2. Then apply the suggestions of #3, Stage 4. Relax, breathe and surrender into and through **any painful feeling** as deeply as you can. Experience this pain and fear in your physical body letting go into it as fully as you can on each out breath. Remember, you will usually find the pain and fear located somewhere in your stomach, abdomen, or heart area.
3. If you can, allow yourself to release this pain and fear through tears. The relief will come sooner and the peace you gain as a result will be great.
4. A steady, full, breath of relaxed surrender must flow continually beneath the process of all these steps. There must be a determined willingness and ability to let go and relax into any fear-based tension on **every out breath**, without defense.

"Whatever is given to the Holy Spirit that is not of God is gone. Yet you must look at it (first) in perfect willingness (without resistance) for otherwise his knowledge remains useless to you." (ACIM.T.C.12.II.4)

^x Eckhart Tolle, "The Power Of Now"

Summary:

1. Keeping this quote in mind, respond to any fear or pain, initiated through thought or circumstance, with a willingness to breathe and relax fully, on every out breath, into the physical experience, without defense or resistance.
2. While you continue to let go fully into the physical experience of your pain and fear **without resistance**, holding it on the altar of you consciousness, begin to address it with these words:

“There is only ONE POWER, a power of Good or God. I am an expression of this ONE POWER. You are appearance only; you are not real, without power. You can have no power over me.^ψ Holy Spirit I give this appearance of pain and fear to You to dissolve into the nothingness from which it was born.”

Then, let it go, for it is gone! With much practice, your ego’s fear-based hold over your mind will dissolve and the peace of your Eternal Self will awaken fully.

What We Achieve Through This Process

The rewards we achieve through this process are monumental. By experiencing the pain and fear of our emotional body and surviving, we eliminate the catastrophic fear we hold concerning its unknown depths, that somehow, by experiencing this part our ourselves, we will be swept away and permanently hurt or even destroyed. Much of the fear and pain we have experience around our emotions and “pain body,” has come from this catastrophic “fear of the unknown.” Without this fear, we travel through the world with far less defensive armament, much lighter and brighter. Giving up our resistance to feeling our pain and fear reduces chronic muscle tension (armor) and this releases trapped healing energy. It also further dissolves this pain and fear within us that feeds on our resistance and fear to survive. “What we resist persists and strengthens.” With the continued practice of feeling our emotions, we will dissolve all fear around them. Then we can deal with them without this **fear factor** as a natural and non-threatening part of our human experience. This gives us the readiness to begin the practice of “**Authentic Forgiveness**.” Next, we begin this practice immediately when any pain or fear surfaces.

Stage 4: Offering “Authentic Forgiveness”

Important Preparation

We begin with the recognition and acceptance that all our human experiences are ego or fear-based, **not of God**, therefore not real and without power. The world our ego experiences through the **misperceptions** of its mental, physical and emotional body, blocks the real world, created by God. This is the infinite and eternal world of Spirit, filled with peace, power, joy and love. At the level of truth, wakened from the ego dream of separation, we are all one with this Divine Consciousness. This is not an easy understanding to accept. It takes time and readiness. The foundation for this understanding grows from the increased understanding and belief that the ego does not perceive the truth. From the strength of this growing belief, we gain the motivation and determination necessary to start overlooking what is not real to find the truth. “**The world I see holds nothing that I want. Beyond this world is a world I want.**” (ACIM.W.L.) Our painful life experiences then become trials and opportunities for us to practice overlooking **what is not real** to find this Eternal Truth. Once we have turned this corner in our spiritual development, this whole world becomes our practice field for

^ψ Joel Goldsmith, “Infinite Way”

learning “authentic forgiveness,” to accept without resistance and overlook with compassion what is not real and find the real world of Spirit beyond. **“The ego effects can be dispelled merely by denying their reality.”** (ACIM.C.11.V.2.4)

Steps In The Practice of Authentic Forgiveness

1. When you meet any form of pain, fear, upset or discomfort, your first response must be to take a deep breath. Then let go into it and recognize that what looks and feels real to your ego self is not real. It is an appearance and has no power to harm your Eternal Self. Respond with, **“This is only an experience. This is not real. This can have no power over me.”**^Ψ You can once again offer this experience to the Holy Spirit with the full affirmation found in the **“Summary” on p.6**, if you wish.
2. Your next step will be to accept, **without resistance**, and overlook, **with compassion**, this aspect of yourself that is not of Love (God) that is being reflected or triggered within your dream of separation. Keep looking beyond what your ego perceives, waiting with to see the world of Spirit beyond, the real world that God created, the world of Spirit.
3. Continue to reaffirm in your mind that this fear-based experience is not real, is an appearance only, so in truth, there is nothing to forgive. There is no guilt.
4. If you need to, call upon Spirit to help you forgive with an expression like: **“Spirit, teach me to forgive here. Help to see (this person, this situation) NOW, without thought, judgment or pain based on my past experience and learning. Help me overlook with compassion this part of me, not of love, not real, being reflected or triggered here.”** Then let go and watch patiently for the light to rise and your peace to surface.
5. Finally, if there is a person you feel wronged by, place them before you, in your mind and say to him or her, **“What you did to me is not real. I called this forth from you. I give you my blessing holy (son / daughter) of God. I would behold you through the eyes of Christ and see my perfect God-Self in you.** This is “authentic forgiveness.” When you give “authentic forgiveness,” you receive it and **awaken**.

Conclusion:

It is important to keep in mind that all our life dramas, with all their pain and fear, come from **within our own consciousness** and were projected **by us** onto the screen of our relationship or life circumstance for healing. If we can accept and overlook with compassion these wounds and fears as they are being reflected back to us, in other words, offer “authentic forgiveness” to the person or situation that triggered or reflected them for us, we will find freedom from them and peace for ourselves. **“If you forgive, salvation will be given to you.”** (ACIM) The person who hurt or frightened us has thus brought salvation to us. The people, who play these very difficult roles in our learning dramas, here in this world, are always courageous members of our Soul Family, Soul Mates, who chose the difficult roles to play for us. They are worthy of much gratitude.

Finally, forgiveness strategy needs to be applied to **every situation** where we feel upset, threatened, hurt or fearful. These situations can be caused by past, present or future fear-based thoughts, relationships, life situations, pain and disease. We apply the same forgiveness strategy to all. **“This is only appearance. It has no real power. I hold my faith firm in God and His Kingdom as the only power and truth.”**^Ψ Eventually we will come to the point where we realize and accept that every ego perception, whether it is one of **pain or pleasure**,

^Ψ Joel Goldsmith, “The Infinite Way”

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is not real and needs to be forgiven, in other words, overlooked with compassion. This is the final, mystical part of our healing journey in this world. Here we walk in the world but remain apart from it. During this part of our journey, we hold our faith firm in the knowing that **there is only one power**, a power of good or God that expresses itself only as **Spirit**. Because we experience our oneness with this power and remain so fully anchored in this experience or knowing, we can heal others by raising their consciousness to this same level. When the strength of this knowing awakens in the consciousness of those seeking healing, all illness, sickness and disease disappears into the nothingness of the ego illusion where they were born. This was the healing demonstration of mystics like Jesus, Buddha and more recently, Joel Goldsmith. Rather than becoming overwhelmed with the magnitude of such a journey, it is important and necessary to ask for help from the Holy Spirit and allow Him to guide the way. All things have been perfectly planned for us. (ACIM.L.135) Then we can begin to travel more lightly and brightly on our healing journey, **one forgiveness step at a time**, trusting that **“the crooked way will be made straight before us.”** **“This holy instant would I give to You. (Holy Spirit) Be You in charge. For I would follow You, certain Your direction gives me peace.”** (ACIM, L.361-365, the final lessons)

