

Forgiveness

by [Petr Chylek](#) (October 2024)



Familiar Landscape (Kaoru Yamada)

Being hurt, and struggling with whether or not to forgive, is a common part of the human experience. Very often, those who have been hurt feel little inclination to forgive, and there is no law in our society that says that we have to forgive those who committed an unkind act against us. However, both

ancient religion and modern science have something to say about whether forgiveness is worthwhile.

The most direct connection to forgiveness is found in the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament [\[1\]](#). In Matthew 6:14-15 we read: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This is a clear statement meaning that your trespasses will be forgiven if and only if you forgive the trespasses that others committed against you. Regardless of what else you might do, your trespasses will not be forgiven if you do not forgive the trespasses of others. Although this is a clear teaching of Jesus, it is not what most Christian Churches teach.

The teaching of Buddha, as summarized in Dhammapada [\[2\]](#), is more complicated but conveys a similar idea. The Dhammapada 1:3-4 states: "He insulted me, he hurt me, he defeated me, he robbed me. Those who think such thoughts will not be free from hate. Those who think not such thoughts will be free from hate." This passage advises us that if you want to be free of hate, you must forgive those who committed trespasses against you. Forgiveness is also a part of The Four Buddhist virtues. In addition to kindness, compassion, and joy of good work, forgiveness is stated as overlooking the faults of all. Thus, forgiveness is something you are expected to do, however, it is not stated explicitly that you have to do it. You should do it if you want to be free of hate.

In the Torah [\[3\]](#), which is the foundation of both Judaism and Christianity, we do not find a direct statement concerning the forgiveness of those who committed trespassing against us. However, we can derive it from the story about Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-45). Joseph behaved poorly, boasting about his dreams and belittling his brothers. His brothers, however, went overboard in their reaction, kidnapping Joseph and selling him as a slave to a passing caravan. Thus Joseph

found himself as a servant of a rich person in Egypt. About twenty years later, after Joseph became a Vice-ruler of Egypt, his brothers came to him to buy some grain due to drought and crop failure in their land. The brothers did not recognize him, but Joseph knew who they were. Despite the violence with which they treated him earlier, he forgave them and treated them with respect. Additional more direct references to forgiveness are found in Talmud and Zohar.

It is amazing that wise people of the past, several thousand years ago, recommended actions similar to those of our current medical science. The web pages of the Mayo Clinic [\[4\]](#) define forgiveness as letting go of grudges and bitterness. They write: "Who hasn't been hurt by the actions or words of another? ... These wounds can leave lasting feelings of resentment, bitterness, anger, and even hatred. But if you hold on to that pain, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you also can embrace peace and hope. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to improved mental health, less anxiety, stress, and hostility, lower blood pressure, a stronger immune system, and improved cardiovascular health." Several medical reports reported a connection between stress and cancer. Thus, current medical science, as well as the opinions of wise human beings from thousands of years ago, support the benefits of forgiving the trespasses of others against us.

[\[1\]](#) The citation from the New Testament is from the King James Version

[\[2\]](#) The Dhammapada, J. Mascaro translator, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England 1980


[\[3\]](#) The Chumash, The Stone Edition, N. Scherman and M. Zlotowitz editors, Mesorah Publications, New York 2005

[4] The Mayo Clinic website at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

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