Letting Go

Why holding on to anger just isn't worth it

May 28, 2009 By Kellee Terrell

African-American poet Maya Angelou once said, "We cannot change the past, but we can change our attitude toward it. Uproot guilt and plant forgiveness. Tear out arrogance and seed humility. Exchange love for hate—thereby, making the present comfortable and the future promising."

While moving forward seems promising, letting go of the past can be extremely difficult—some misdeeds are easier to get over than others. It's one thing to shrug off your mother reading your e-mail or a friend gossiping about you, but can you forgive a partner who cheated? Or someone who physically or sexually violated you?

In any case, internalizing anger can be a health hazard. Past studies indicate that letting go of grudges and absolving others might lower blood pressure and heart rate, decrease the risk of alcohol and substance abuse, reduce chronic pain and stress and usher in more positive friendships and healthier relationships with others.

And remember: Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting what happened to you, and it doesn't entail saying to the person who hurt you, "It's okay." Forgiveness is a way for you to release past negativity and ensure that it won't influence your present and future. It's about seizing control and living life to its fullest. And who doesn't want that?

WORDS OF WISDOM

"You're only human. Let's break free of this gravity of judgment and fly high on the wings of forgiveness."
—India.Arie, singer

"In a very real sense, without forgiveness, there is no future."
—Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner and spiritual leader

"The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less."
—Eldridge Cleaver, author and American civil rights leader

“An act of forgiveness sets the victim apart from the perpetrator, who failed to act humanly towards the victim at the time he committed his crime.”
—Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, PhD, psychology professor and author of A Human Being Died That Night: A Story of Forgiveness

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