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HOW FORGIVENESS HEALS YOU

Whether it's about something small like a teacher who gave you a poor mark or something big that did lasting harm to you or a loved one, forgiveness isn't about letting the offender "off the hook". Instead, it's about "significantly improving both psychological well-being and physical health", says the American Psychological Association.

To be clear, it's not about improving the other person's health and well-being but rather about improving *yours*, as revealed by a study in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

While the study explains that damage from emotional abuse can remain unhealed long after the relationship is over, the researchers found that forgiveness therapy led to "significant" improvements with lasting effects.

When compared to an alternative treatment that uses "anger validation, assertiveness, and interpersonal skill building", forgiveness therapy was found to improve "Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, self-esteem, forgiveness, and finding meaning in suffering".

Moreover, the Mayo Clinic adds that other benefits of forgiveness can include improved relationships, better mental and physical health, a healthier heart, immunity and blood pressure, and self-esteem.

Forgiveness takes practise. Some steps from the Mayo Clinic:

- Identify what needs healing and who to forgive.
- Join a support group or see a counsellor.
- Acknowledge your emotions about the harm and how those emotions affect you.
- Choose to forgive the person.
- Release the control and power that the person and situation have had in your life.

The Mayo Clinic adds that working on forgiveness "can help free you from the control of the person who harmed you. Sometimes, forgiveness might even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy, and compassion for the one who hurt you."

But the point is not to go back to the person who caused pain, nor is it about changing that person.

The point is to find "peace that allows you to focus on yourself and helps you go on with life", says the Mayo Clinic, reminding us that "forgiveness is a process" that requires us to keep working at it. Be patient, write in a journal, pray, or meditate.

It may also help to talk with someone you consider "wise and compassionate, such as a spiritual leader, a mental health provider, or an impartial loved one or friend."