

PEACE & RECONCILIATION

Healing Our Broken Heart



*We are broken,
And we will not be mended
Until we remember
That we are unbreakable.*

—LOUISE DIAMOND

Conflict hurts—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. In our personal and group relationships, we may know loss, abandonment, abuse, betrayal, or rejection.

This hurt, if left untended, can fester. It can leave a legacy of anguish. Our hearts close up; they become hardened against those who have hurt us. We become defensive or aggressive.

Peace requires healing and reconciliation. What appears broken must and can be mended, if we are to know peace as a way of life. We must re-establish the bonds that have been broken through discord, and learn to live again in open-hearted love.

Sometimes the people we need to reconcile with are not physically available, or they don't want to do the healing work with us. Sometimes our grievances are against a whole group, or "the system," making it hard to find a partner in the healing process. That's okay. We do what we can by ourselves, or with whomever is willing to join us in this healing journey. We start; we do the best we can, one step at a time, regardless of what the other party does or doesn't do.

55 KNOW THAT YOU ARE UNBREAKABLE

In one way, you can be hurt. In another way, nothing can hurt you. How is this possible?

This is so because human beings have a deep inner essence that is naturally whole and perfect. No matter what happens in the day-to-day drama of our lives, within the center core of our being is that vast pool of soulforce that we have called our "natural self." At the level of the natural self, peace and wholeness simply are. The words themselves, *whole*, *holy*, and *heal*, mean the same thing. To heal is to remember who you really are—a child of the universe, divine and loving and inherently whole.

- Remember your natural self. Go back to the first chapter of this book and recall how to find your place of inner peace. Confirm and affirm that at your center, which is open like the sky, nothing can hurt you.
- Trace a pathway to this place so you can go there whenever you want. Use an image, a word, or a gesture to be a signpost for your journey home, to remind you of the way when you feel lost.
- Test your unbreakability. Think of a situation where your heart has been hurt. Now center home. Feel the hurt wash over you, like a wave passing over a rock. And like a wave, it rises and falls away. Your center remains strong and clear.

56 SPEAK THE TRUTH OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

To start the healing journey, you need to express what happened to you that was hurtful. Although other people will have a different

version of what happened, you need to touch and tell the truth of your own experience. That is your truth; no one can judge or dismiss your feelings.

Sharing your experience out loud (or in writing, drawing, or movement) is the way to begin to clear the debris that has piled up in your heart. It starts things moving, opening channels and doorways for love to grow again.

- Tell your story. Your story is important. It is how you make sense out of what happened to you, how you understand the context and experience of your pain. Being able to say it, to present it as a narrative, allows you to give meaning to your world, and allows those who listen to understand how you feel.
- Tell your story again. Repeating the story—to yourself, to others—gives you the chance to start to disidentify from it. The story is your experience, but it isn't you. In fact, as you tell the story again and again, the emotional charge in it may begin to dissolve, and you can get a more objective perspective on what happened.
- Tell your story a different way. Adopt some other point of view or a different emphasis. This may give you and your listener new understanding and information about the experience. It may provide a whole other slant on things.

57 ACKNOWLEDGE THE HURT

We all want the hurt that we feel to be acknowledged. We want someone to notice, to care. We especially want those who have hurt us to realize what they have done and take responsibility for it.

We cannot demand this from others, but we can give it. Every damaged relationship has two sides to it. Each party, regardless of who started the conflict, has contributed something to the harm.

- Listen to the other party's story with the same respect you wish for yours. Everyone in the conflict has the truth of their experience, as you have yours. Indeed, there are many truths existing at the same time.
- Listen carefully to hear how the other's story makes sense to them. If you begin to feel defensive or argumentative, just breathe and let it go, so you can be fully present to their pain.

- Acknowledge the suffering of the one who is sharing with you. Just let them know that you hear how they hurt. Affirm their feelings, which is separate from judging who did what to whom and why. The hurt is real, however it happened.
- Look honestly at how your own thoughts or actions may have contributed to the other party's suffering. Even if you think your behavior was justified by what they did to you first, still, own up to your own contribution in keeping the conflict going. Take responsibility for your actions.

58 APOLOGIZE

Saying "I'm sorry" can seem like a difficult thing to do. We can think up all kinds of reasons why "It wasn't my fault." We (or our group) did something harmful because . . . we were only protecting ourselves or our legitimate rights; we were only responding to what was done to us; we didn't realize it would make so much trouble. There are plenty of excuses and justifications for our actions.

Having the courage for peace means being willing to say "Sorry." Only by apology can we begin to mend a broken trust. Only with a true sense of remorse and request for forgiveness can we start healing the wounded hearts.

- Do you feel true remorse? Let yourself sink in to the knowledge that you (or your group) caused pain to another. Can you feel sadness for that? If you cannot feel truly contrite—sorry for the pain you've caused—then you are probably still defending yourself to yourself. Can you stop that long enough to feel regret for your part in the situation?
- Express your regrets. Once you feel genuinely contrite, express your regrets to the person or people you have offended. A simple "I'm sorry," or "Please forgive me," can go a long way toward reconciliation.
- Be specific. Say what you are sorry about. Let it come from your heart. Let your sadness and regret show. Say what you did, and let the other person know that you see how it hurt them. They may not respond in kind. It doesn't matter. You can only take responsibility for yourself.

59 FORGIVE

The other side of apology is forgiveness. Forgiveness is something that happens first in your own heart. You cannot force it. When you're ready and willing to let go of your anger and desire for blame and revenge, then you can release yourself from that burden. You surrender that pain, freeing yourself of its weight.

Forgiveness does not mean you forget, excuse, or condone what was done to you. You can still find the action unacceptable, but you forgive the person for doing it.

When your heart has forgiven, you may choose to extend that to the one who hurt you. By letting them know you have forgiven them (whether they have apologized or not), you make room for a new opening in the relationship.

- Notice what negative feelings you are carrying about what some person (or group) did that hurt you. Notice how carrying those feelings affects your body, your mind, your heart.
- Test if you are ready to surrender, or let go of, those feelings. Imagine being free of them. Can you do it, or do you want to hang on to them? If so, why?
- When you are ready, find a way to release what you are holding. Give it to God, to the Earth, to the wind or water; give it up or put it down, or whatever language works for you. Just let it go. Breathe deeply. Feel the new space opening in your heart.
- If appropriate, share with the person who hurt you that you forgive them.
- You may want to create some ritual of forgiveness, either alone or with the other(s) involved. A simple ritual can give deep and lasting meaning to the act of forgiveness. The ritual can be anything you want—it can include anything from nature, a candle, a formal sharing of words, a feast—whatever lends significance to the event for you.
- Above all, forgive yourself. Whatever you've done in the situation—even the negative feelings you've held about the other that have blocked the healing—you can also let go of. Forgiving yourself brings you back to center, and to a fresh start with your own heart.

60 RIGHT THE WRONGS

Saying “Sorry” is not the end of reconciliation. Remedial action may also be necessary. If we make a mess, we need to clean it up. What can you do to make amends, to fix what is broken? This helps bring closure, and a sense of justice, to the situation.

- Stop the hurting behavior. Once we have acknowledged the pain we have caused, felt remorse, and offered an apology, we cannot continue the same behavior that caused the hurt. We must stop doing it and make a clear commitment not to do it again.
- Fix the damage. If you have destroyed something physical, replace it. If you have harmed something emotional, find out what you can do to heal it. Find out what would make it better, and negotiate a reasonable, do-able plan to repair the damage.
- Make symbolic amends. Sometimes it is not possible to fix the actual harm. In that case, a symbolic offering can serve a similar purpose. Many cultures use restitution or compensation to restore harmony. Find a meaningful gesture that is agreed to by both parties.
- Work for institutional changes. When the reconciliation is at a group level, the damage is usually perpetuated by unjust institutional structures. For instance, healing the damage from the slave trade requires looking at ongoing racial discrimination in our society. Commit to righting the historical wrongs at the societal level.
- Ask for what you want. If you are the one on the receiving end of an apology, say what you need to bring the relationship back to harmony. Tell the one who hurt you what they can do to make amends; help them find a way to complete the reconciliation process.

61 MOURN FULLY

When we lose something important to us—something tangible, like someone we love or our home, or something intangible, like a sense of safety or trust—we are sad. When someone else has taken what we care about away from us, we are doubly sad.

Loss is like a stone in the heart. We need to grieve and mourn our loss, to wash that stone away with our tears. If we don’t complete this process, the stone will stay in our heart and weigh us down.

- Recognize the loss. Sometimes, in our painful situations with others, we don’t even realize that we have lost something of value. The circumstances may seem like a fight, or a rejection, or an injustice. Beneath that, however, there is likely to be some part of our dreams, our dignity, our sense of worth, or our sense of safety in the world that is lost.
- Let yourself feel the range of feelings. When we suffer loss, we are sad, but we are also likely to be angry. We may also be afraid that what we suffered will happen again, or that we’ll never recover. Trust that this whole range of feelings is natural, and may come and go in cycles over time.
- Express your feelings. Crying is a good release, one that we may need to repeat again and again when our loss is big. Find creative ways to express anger and fear without hurting yourself or another. Keep your emotions moving; otherwise they get stuck and you cannot heal.
- Ask for spiritual and emotional help. In some situations, the loss is just too big to handle alone. Calling for help from God, or whatever your sense of a higher power might be, can bring great comfort. You might also seek counseling—pastoral or otherwise. Many big cities have grief centers or special programs for people struggling to heal from abuse, violence, or other trauma.
- Do some grieving ritual to bring closure. When the grief has run its course, or to help it on the way, it is useful to do some ritual to acknowledge an ending and a new beginning. Design your own ritual to bring a sense of completion to the mourning process.

62 LOOK AT HISTORICAL PATTERNS

Sometimes the pain in our relationships feels eerily familiar. We may feel that we been here before. That’s because we tend to repeat patterns of relationship until we figure out the pattern and how to change it.

In our group relations, deep-rooted conflicts will occur in cycles. There may be periods of quiet in between periods of violence. We may inherit stories and myths about the conflict from our parents or grandparents, and feel we are still fighting the same fight. The Four Principles of Peace can help us break these cycles.

- Think of a relationship that is distressing you. Does the situation feel familiar? What does it remind you of? Have you experienced something like this before? How is this the same, and how is it different?
- Can you identify the pattern that is repeating itself? Give it a name. (For instance, this is the Betrayal scenario, or a case of Blame the Victim.) What is the basic story line of the pattern? This gives you some perspective on the pattern.
- If the pattern has a story line, how could you change the story to change the pattern? What can you personally do to make it different? What could other people do? Since we can't control other people's behavior, focus on your own power to try new behavior.
- Do the unexpected. If the story line suggests a certain course of action, do something entirely different and unusual. See what effect that might have on changing the dynamics.
- If the pattern is a hand-me-down from earlier generations, make a commitment not to pass it along to the next generation. Do whatever it takes to break the cycle.

63 LET LOVE FLOW

Peace is love in action. When we have been hurt in our relationships, we close our hearts. Like Pharaoh in Egypt, we harden our hearts against those whom we perceive as harming us. Until our hardened hearts can be softened, and love—which is our natural state—can flow freely, we cannot be in peace.

Love is like a river. It flows until it comes to some obstacle that blocks the way. Then the water backs up or gets diverted. The need for reconciliation is like a dam in the stream of our loving nature. We must remove the dam so the river of our life force, our love force, can move on to the great ocean.

- Imagine your heart melting. Think of a situation where you have hardened your heart toward someone or some group. Picture how your heart is tight, closed, hard. Now imagine it melting, softening, opening. What do you notice?
- Think of someone you love deeply, with whom there are no obstacles. Feel your open-hearted, unconditional, boundless love for that person. Now think of someone (or group) with whom you are in conflict or by whom you feel hurt. How does your heart feel now? Experiment with feeling that first sense of pure love toward your "opponent." Can you do it, even for a brief moment?
- Find something to appreciate about your "opponent." They can't be all bad. What's one quality that you like about them, one thing that they've done that you truly respect?
- Be grateful. Some say that our greatest enemy is our greatest teacher, for he gives us the opportunity to learn and grow in patience and compassion and teaches us about reconciliation and love. Think of your "opponent" with gratitude for all the lessons you can learn through this relationship.



REVIEW

Practice the Four Principles of Peace and Reconciliation

COMMUNITY

Realize that you and your "opponent" are in this together.
Saying "Sorry" and making amends can help keep the heart open.

COOPERATION

Work with your "opponent" to create meaningful healing rituals.

NONVIOLENCE

Stop hurting and start healing. Take the
first step by forgiving yourself and others.

WITNESS

Remember that you are unbreakable,
and that your true nature is love.



OPENING THE HEART WITH "SORRY"

Sometimes we don't even know we have something to apologize for. We may be fighting about this or that, but until we touch the place of deepest hurt, we cannot start the healing process. It helps when our friends tell us how we have hurt them, so we can acknowledge what we have done and ask forgiveness. In this story, a woman realizes, for the first time, how much she has hurt her husband, and offers a heartfelt apology.

In a divorce mediation session, my two clients were struggling hard over every issue they had to deal with. Finally, I asked to see each of them privately. The wife said to me that she felt annoyed at her husband's inability to be clear and to know what he wanted. Privately, the husband said that he was having a hard time, as he always did, talking with her. I asked him to explore this more, which he did. I then asked what of this he wanted to share with his wife.

Back in joint session the husband said, "I always am aware of how smart you are and what a good mother you are. I start feeling like I can't ever be what you are so I get unsure and awkward. I know I annoy you—I can see your irritation. Then I get more unsure."

The wife thought for a moment and said, "I am sorry that I have contributed to that feeling for you—that should not happen." After a moment's silence, there was the sound of soft crying. The husband said, "Thank you. Did you know that in 17 years of marriage you never apologized once to me?"

The wife looked startled, and then blurted out, "You are right, I could never allow myself to feel like I was wrong. I'm so sorry."

From this honest moment, the couple was able to move ahead with a new level of genuine appreciation for one another.