

*If you only have a minute:* Rooted and unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. When we forgive, we act on our innate desire to restore balance and connect deeply with ourselves and others.

## Choosing Forgiveness

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

*"To forgive is to set the prisoner free, and then discover the prisoner was you."  
- Author Unknown*

Which one is easier for you - to forgive someone else or to forgive yourself?

In our last article, "Take Your Eye Off the Ball," we suggested that the "ball" is an offensive thing that was said or done and that obsessing about it prevents us from taking a wider view of the situation and restoring the connection with ourselves and others. But, what if the offensive thing feels deeply personal? Or, what if the offensive thing came from us and we are awash in fear and shame for having damaged a relationship? How do we return to connectedness then?

Toni Townes-Whitley, *NASDAQ Board Director and former President of Microsoft US Regulated Industries*, proposes that forgiveness is a way back to connection. Forgiveness does not mean erasing a slate, it simply means opening the aperture for love to flow in. It's a pause and a conscious choice. As people show us their limitations, biases, judgements, and assumptions, we can still choose to love them fiercely and without fear. Toni says, "...that love has an engine around it, that travels no matter what the challenge is, even when someone doesn't love me, it's still fierce."

*The first step to forgiveness, as Toni's mother instilled in her, is to assume positive intent. People may have no idea how limited they are in their thoughts and how offensive they are in their language. She acknowledged early on that people around her in school and at work had a very different set of expectations of her, just based on how she looked, how she spoke, and where she lived, and she began practicing 'micro-forgiveness,' choosing to open the aperture to a wider view, every time a microaggression occurred. She says, "[Forgiveness] stems from a desire to connect and that desire you can share with others by practicing forgiveness. You can't just say the words ...your heart and the desire to connect to others is one of the greatest gifts you can give..."*

What may be hardest is to forgive ourselves. When we lose our temper and say hurtful things or harshly judge someone else, the fear and shame can hold us back until we put the situation in perspective and release the negative emotions. "...when you are not forgiving yourself, you are not present," Toni points out. "It's like a block or some kind of hurdle that doesn't allow everything to flow." When we forgive ourselves, we connect with our own heart, opening us up to also connect with others.

We have an innate desire to connect deeply with ourselves and others. Genuine forgiveness opens the door to connectedness. Toni remarks, "...I have yet to meet a human that did not, at some point, in some way respond to someone's authentic desire to connect."