

CHAPTER 6

The Ho'oponopono Story: A Demonstration of the Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the key to happiness.

Imagine if your doctor could offer you a medicine that would give you the following:

- Steady and consistent peace of mind
- Happiness that fills you from within, simply bubbles over, and is easily shared with others
- A quiet mind that cannot be disturbed
- A sense of deep, abiding rest and comfort
- Feeling cared for, safe, and protected—always—*no matter what*
- A sense of self-worth and beauty that does not depend on anything external
- An ability to be gentle yet never feel hurt
- A certainty of purpose in a world that often seems senseless and meaningless

All you needed to do was take the medicine daily, perhaps even use it several times a day, if necessary. What if you were also assured that this medication caused absolutely no side effects and there were no interactions with other medications you might be using?

What would you do?

Most, if not all of us, would say, yes, of course, we would happily take the medicine! And now, what if I were to tell you that *forgiveness* is that medicine? Forgiveness, a priceless gift from the beloved presence dwelling within our hearts, is like a soothing balm for healing all our wounds. We need this comforting presence to dry all our tears. Whenever we feel lost, confused, lonely, upset or disconnected, a steady practice of forgiveness anchors us in the truth of our being—a changeless, timeless, deathless, and birthless reality that is pure peace, love, and joy. In our fast-paced lives mired in space, time, and form where the only thing that is constant is change, we are apt to quickly forget this reality.

How Does Forgiveness Help Us Heal?

For me, the practice of radical forgiveness is a deeply transformative process that allows us to experience everything and everyone in a new and fresh way. Forgiveness is not a superficial turning the cheek or pardoning the sins of others. It is not about overlooking some wrongdoing from the past that either we did to someone or someone else did to us.

In truth, we are already perfect, whole, complete, and innocent, so there is nothing to forgive. Yet we cling tenaciously to our false beliefs in lack, scarcity, unworthiness, blame, guilt, and punishment.

I have heard many teachers say that all forgiveness is truly self-forgiveness—a deep washing away of how we see ourselves in relation to our world. I believe we all need forgiveness with the same urgency that a drowning man needs air, or that someone hemorrhaging after a traumatic accident needs a blood transfusion. Often, however, we are

not even aware of this need—and even if we were, we may not know how to incorporate a steady practice of forgiveness into our daily lives.

The medicine of forgiveness allows us to see perceived wrongdoing through the eyes of love and compassion, but this doesn't mean we have to forgive everything and everyone overnight. For most of us, it doesn't seem to happen this way. Rather, at a speed and pace that works for us, we decide to see each situation and person differently. In some cases, all we need is an instant and we feel a lifting of the burden of the past as we meet the present without any taint or residue from previous experiences of resentment or anger. Yet at other times, like a savory stew that requires slow cooking for all the ingredients to come together, forgiveness takes time. It is not done until it's done. The speed is inconsequential. What is important is that we clearly understand the value of forgiveness and that we desire it wholeheartedly.

As you are reading this, you might be thinking, "This all sounds marvelous and wonderful, but how does radical forgiveness really work? *How* do we forgive? *What* are we forgiving?" And that, my friend, is exactly the purpose of this chapter—to offer you a systematic practice of forgiveness based on a powerful true story.

A Demonstration of the Healing that Forgiveness Offers

Ho'oponopono [pronounced ho-o-**pono**-pono] is an ancient Hawaiian practice of reconciliation and forgiveness.⁵⁷ It means to make right or to correct an error. According to the Hawaiian tradition, painful memories from the past color and cloud our thoughts and this creates errors in our thinking. The

practice of Ho'oponopono offers a way for us to literally wash or clean away these memories so we see the world clearly.

From the perspective of ACIM, using Ho'oponopono helps us to see ourselves and the world with a healed perception, or through the eyes of love instead of looking at the world through a dark lens that creates a distorted perception. Before explaining the actual practice of Ho'oponopono, allow me to share the amazing story of Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len, a psychologist who applied this practice with miraculous results while employed at the Hawaii State Hospital.

Dr. Len worked from 1984 to 1987 in a high security unit for male patients who had committed criminal acts of murder, rape, drug use, and assault and battery against people and property. When Dr. Len arrived at the hospital, it was a dangerous place to work. All the seclusion rooms were occupied with violent patients. Several patients wore metal ankle and wrist restraints to prevent violence—a common occurrence not only by patients against staff but also among the patients themselves. The attendants and doctors working in the ward walked with their backs against the wall, afraid of being attacked by patients. Staff sick leave was also extremely high.

Remarkably, during this time, Dr. Len didn't do any therapy or counseling with the patients. When Dr. Len reviewed the patients' charts, he watched his mind for reactions of repulsion toward the patients, or any feelings of pain within himself. *Instead of trying to change the patients, he worked on himself*, using the Ho'oponopono prayer to clear and heal his feelings and reactions. He repeated this process each time before, during and after leaving the unit. As he continued this ritual, he started to witness change among the patients.

After a few months, shackled patients could walk freely and those requiring heavy medications were able to taper off their dosages. Some patients were even released from the facility. Staff absenteeism was reduced as employees began to enjoy coming to work. Soon there were more staff members than needed because 28 of the 30 patients were released and the remaining two were transferred to another facility. Eventually, the ward was shut down.

Understanding the Practice and Applying It to Our Daily Lives

The updated Ho'oponopono process was not created by Dr. Hew Len but attributed to his teacher, Mornah Nalamaku Simeona, a *kahuna* (traditional Hawaiian spiritual leader and shaman) who taught him this method in November of 1982. According to Mornah, each of us is a product of our past experiences. Somewhere within our consciousness, we still carry a burden from our past.⁵⁸ Whenever we experience stress, discomfort or any fear in our lives, we react not to the present event but to a memory of a past hurt or wound that is superimposed on the current situation. But because this memory is stored in the subconscious, we continue to believe our upset is caused by the present situation.

In the traditional Ho'oponopono practice, a moderator officiated and facilitated the healing process and the patient's entire family was required to attend. Mornah transformed the forgiveness process so it became an inside job, making it possible for anyone to practice Ho'oponopono without the need to have a family gathering.

The process of forgiveness that Mornah shared with Dr. Len, which he then applied in the psychiatric ward, is a simple and beautiful prayer of the heart to restore our minds to our original state of love, peace, and joy. We ask for a healing of

all the thoughts and beliefs that seem to be holding us back from connecting to that “zero state” where there are zero limits.⁵⁹ From this space, anything is possible and miracles can occur, as they did around Dr. Len.

Briefly, the three parts of this forgiveness process are:

- Repentance (we acknowledge our reactions and whatever feelings may be coming up for us in whatever situation we are facing, whether it is within ourselves or in our family, community, or society at large)
- Asking for forgiveness (for holding the false beliefs that prevent us from seeing our true Self in ourselves or others)
- Transmutation (we ask love, or the divine, to heal our upsetting feelings, emotions, beliefs and memories)

The actual Ho’oponopono prayer used by Dr. Len involves four phrases:

- ▶ I’m sorry
- ▶ Please forgive me
- ▶ Thank you
- ▶ I love you

Let us look at each of these phrases separately, drawing from the radical forgiveness shared by ACIM.

I’m sorry

I am sorry that I do not see our true Self—the place of love and light, of purity and innocence. I accept responsibility for the error that lies in my perception.

Please forgive me

I seek forgiveness for the mistakes in my perception whenever I see lack, guilt, powerlessness, pain, fear, or unworthiness in myself or others.

Now, let's consider application of this part of the Ho'oponopono process. Most of us would agree that if we did say or do something unkind toward another, then being able to say we're sorry or ask for forgiveness would feel helpful and even therapeutic. We would feel less burdened and the other person whom we might have hurt would feel a sense of healing as well. But what if we are the ones experiencing emotional and/or physical pain? Or, what if someone else in our family or community is suffering? How would we then apply this prayer? What have we done for which we need to say we're sorry or ask for forgiveness?

According to Dr. Hew Len,

The purpose of life is to be restored back to Love, moment to moment. To fulfill this purpose, the individual must acknowledge that he is 100% responsible for creating his life the way it is. He must come to see that it is his thoughts that create his life the way it is moment to moment. The problem is not people, places, and situations but rather thoughts of them. He must come to appreciate that there is no such thing as "out there."⁶⁰

This is exactly in alignment with what we learn in ACIM:

I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked.

Let's look at this from a scientific perspective. I love when we can find scientific support for what may seem like New Age pop lit. Peter Russell, a British scientist with an extensive background in physics, psychology, and meditation and who serves on the faculty at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, points out that what is outside us is really a reflection or interpretation that we make in our minds, based on past experiences. When we look at an object like a tree, for example, we believe we are seeing the tree directly. Yet when the light enters our eyes, it triggers chemical reactions in the retina. This in turn produces electro-chemical impulses which then reach the brain through nerve fibers. The brain analyzes and interprets these signals and creates its own picture of what seems to be out there. We then have an experience of seeing a tree. However, in truth, we are not really seeing the tree at all but only an image inside our minds. Russell further states that this phenomenon is true of everything we experience. It includes music, color, and even the fragrance of a rose.^{61,62}

Dr. Russell states:

Everything we know, perceive, and imagine, every color, sound, sensation, every thought and every feeling, is a form appearing in the mind. It is all an informing of consciousness.⁶³

I have discovered that in my own life and in my coaching practice this concept of taking responsibility for what we see outside of ourselves can be a difficult one to understand and even trickier to apply. Let's turn once more to Dr. Len. When he was working at the hospital psychiatric unit, he would review the charts of the patients and observe his mind for all the judgments, ideas, and beliefs he held about them. He did not engage in any sort of intellectual theorization of why

these patients were acting and behaving the way they were or even what should be done differently in terms of treatment. He did not try to change them. He took 100% responsibility for his judgments, opinions, and interpretations, essentially his overall perceptions about these patients, inside his own mind.

It is important to realize that taking responsibility is not about our feeling guilty or holding ourselves as somehow bad or wrong for what is going on around us. This can be a very common misuse of these ideas, which prevents our healing. *We are not taking responsibility for the form of what we see, but rather, for the content of our mind.* Dr. Len did not hold himself guilty for the actions of the prisoners. Yet he did not turn away from them in separation or judgment, but instead, joined with them by using the prayer repeatedly as a bridge. Dr. Len demonstrated how to become a master alchemist, one who can transmute heavy energies of judgment and resistance toward oneself or another into the light of love.

We can apply this prayer to ourselves as well, whenever we are holding ourselves in a space of self-blame, judgment, or guilt. When we say, "I'm sorry," or "Please forgive me," we are essentially asking for forgiveness of ourselves (or a washing or clearing away) of all our interpretations, reactions, and self-judgments. Forgiveness is spiritual alchemy that transforms our mind. It offers us a way to neutralize the energies of our judgments and re-set our minds to a state of being open, empty, and clear—a blank slate. Into this empty space, the love and light that was there all along but merely covered with layers of fear and judgment can shine through.

Thank you

Thank you for the opportunity to become aware of the errors in my perception. Thank you for being the catalyst for my reaching more deeply into my mind beneath the surface of fear and lack to the place of healing and wholeness.

With the third phrase of the Ho'oponopono prayer, we affirm our gratitude for each of our experiences. We clearly understand that everything and everyone in our life provides us with an opportunity for deep healing. In the words of the great Sufi poet Rumi, we treat our life as a "guest house."⁶⁴ We learn to welcome everything as it comes, however undesirable or unappealing it may seem to be on the surface. Even if our challenges "violently sweep" the landmarks of our life as we know it, we can make a choice to see it differently. We make a conscious decision to give this challenge the healing purpose of acting as a "guide from beyond" to "clear (us) for some new delight."⁶⁵

I love you

Only love is real and all else is false. Inner light, please shine brightly inside me and clear away all darkness and ignorance inside my mind so I may see everyone and everything through the eyes of love and light.

Love is the true healer. Love leads the way. As the beautiful prayer from Corinthians reminds us, "Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love."⁶⁶ We are not responsible for healing or fixing anyone or anything. We simply surrender and allow the inner teacher within our hearts to step forth and do the rest. Often, we may receive inner guidance about some inspired action from our inner wisdom to support our healing or that of another.

Perhaps we feel prompted to call a friend, go for a walk, watch a movie, or work with a health care practitioner if we are dealing with an illness. Yet all of this will emerge naturally, just by our being present to our inner wisdom and acting as it feels inspired moment-to-moment and day-to-day.

We Are One

In the movie, *Little Buddha*, there is a beautiful scene that underscores the power of the Ho'oponopono prayer. It offers us a way to join with others facing challenges rather than looking away in avoidance from a stance of separation.⁶⁷ Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who will later be known as the Buddha, has lived a sheltered life inside his father's kingdom since his birth. One day, he asks his charioteer to take him outside the palace. For the first time, the young prince witnesses suffering in the form of old age, sickness, and death. He realizes that neither his wealth nor his palatial comforts can protect him or his family from this suffering. During this scene, the prince sheds tears before a burning funeral pyre because he realizes that the suffering of everyone is truly his own. There is no separation. There is no difference.

The Ho'oponopono prayer can empower us. Instead of feeling paralyzed or overwhelmed by our emotions when we witness suffering in our family, larger community, or even in the world, we can use this practice. As we receive healing of our perceptions, we behold a different world. In the healing of others, we find our own healing as well.

Summary

Let's review the process once again:

- We take responsibility for all our interpretations, reactions, and judgments about whatever we perceive and experience (in ourselves or others around us)
- We express that we are sorry and ask for forgiveness (of ourselves or another, or both)
- We express our gratitude for this opportunity for our healing and for the healing of the whole
- Then we simply say, "I love you."

The Ho'oponopono prayer is an effective way to stop the monkey-mind and ask for forgiveness and correction of our thoughts in that moment. It is a form of mental cleansing that allows us to regain our inner balance. From that place, the most helpful action and words seem to flow naturally. It is an easy practice we can do anywhere and anytime. The other person need not be involved. All that is required is our willingness to change our minds with a sincere desire for peace. I invite you to explore this practice and see what you discover.

Without a clear desire for healing, we can accomplish nothing. In the following chapter, we explore the power of this healing desire.