

The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

THERE'S NO FORGIVENESS WITHOUT RAGE

THE PRISON OF: NON FORGIVING

"I don't have the godly power to anoint anyone with forgiveness, to spiritually cleanse others for their wrongs. But I have the power to free myself."

Edith Eger shared those opening words as a response to those who wonder how she could forgive the Nazis. She writes:

"Forgiveness is not something we do for the person who hurt us. It's something we do for ourselves, so we're no longer victims or prisoners of the past, so we can stop carrying a burden that harbors nothing but pain."

And forgiveness is not about cutting someone out of our lives, it's about letting go.

"As long as you can't forgive someone, you're spending energy AGAINST rather than being FOR yourself and the life you deserve. To forgive isn't to give someone permission to keep hurting you. It's not okay that you were harmed. But it's already done. No one but you can heal the wound."

And letting go isn't an overnight process. Our desire for justice, revenge or an apology get in the way. Even our will for acknowledgement can block the path.

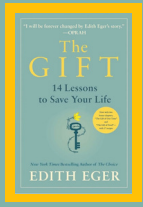
Edith Eger imagined tracking Josef Mengele (the man who forced her to dance her first night in the camp) in Paraguay where she had escaped. Intuitively she knew that revenge and making someone else hurt would never take away her pain. But she still felt satisfaction in imagining his shock when seeing her. Until she realized that it wasn't taking away her grief and rage: it was deferring them.

Of course it's easier to release the past when others see our truth, when there is a collective process towards acknowledgment, healing and retributions. When someone is held accountable. But she reminds us:

"(...) YOUR life doesn't depend on what you get or don't get from someone else. Your life is your own."

She then proceeds to share one of the most important steps of the forgiveness process:

"There's no forgiveness without rage."



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She shares how much she struggled with reconnecting with her anger. She was terrified of even acknowledging it. She feared it would consume her and that it would never stop if she let herself feel it for a moment. But she reminds us again that the opposite of depression is expression.

“What comes out of our body doesn’t make us ill. What stays in there does.”

Since forgiveness is letting go which implies release, we need first and foremost to give ourselves permission to feel and express our rage.

She asked her therapist to hold her down so that she would be physically able to push her back with a primal scream and she invites us to do the same. She writes:

*“Silent rage is self-destructive.
If you’re not actively, consciously, intentionally releasing it, you’re holding on to it.”*

And it’s not about venting either. That can feel cathartic but that doesn’t allow us to heal. It can even become addictive. And she adds:

“You’re not really releasing anything. You’re just perpetuating a cycle—a harmful one.”

Our job is to learn how to channel our anger, that’s how we can dissolve it.

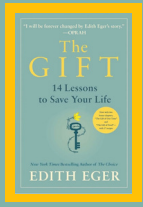
It sounds simple but it’s not easy when many of us have been taught that anger is unacceptable or frightening as a child or when we’ve been wounded by someone else’s rage.

She shares Lena’s journey of reconnection with her own anger while reckoning with the aftermath of a divorce she felt had come without any warning or explanation. She could access grief, sadness and guilt, but not her anger. She felt stuck inside and even when she was actively trying to scream her anger out, no sound would come—she would just go numb. Edith Eger guided her by first urging her to legitimize her anger. She told her:

“You have a right to feel rage. It’s a human emotion. You are human.”

She also reminded her that:

*“When we can’t release anger, we’re either denying that we were victimized or denying that we’re human.
(That’s how a perfectionist suffers. Silently!)”*



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And in both cases we're denying reality. So we can't be free.

"We sing alone in the car. Why not scream alone?"

She invites us to throw our anger into our fists and then onto a pillow. To find a place where we can scream. To beat the ground with a stick. Anything to release it. She often creates a screaming space in her own sessions where she screams with her clients. She adds:

"It's so profound, even exhilarating, to hear your own unadulterated voice, charged with feeling, expressing its most difficult truth."

Because we do not need to identify as a victim, we can stay ourselves and acknowledge that we were victimized.

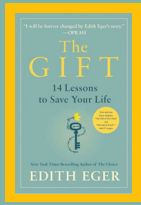
"Anger is a secondary emotion, a defense, an armor we put up around the primary feeling underneath. We burn through anger so we can get to what's underneath: fear or grief."

And that's when the real work begins: FORGIVING OURSELVES.

Our author then recalls when she was pranked by two men who pretended there was something wrong with her water pipes in order to come inside her home and steal her jewelry. She could hear her children and the police congratulate her for obeying and preventing things from escalating by fighting back, but she couldn't forgive herself for believing them. There was a helpful perspective but she still needed to feel the loss of her jewelry—and in particular the bracelet her husband had gifted her for the birth of their daughter and that she had found a way to smuggle out of Czechoslovakia on her way to the US. She also had to reckon with the fear of them coming back and hurting her to prevent her from talking about what had happened. She had to feel her desire to harm them back! And then, there was the shame... The shame that came from labeling herself as gullible, frail and vulnerable. Her freedom came from realizing she was the one putting the weight of those labels on herself.

"What I'm saying is that life keeps giving me opportunities to choose freedom—to love myself as I am: human, imperfect, and whole. So I forgave myself, releasing them so I can release me."

She chose to not give anything more to those two people that what they had already stolen from her. And she chose to reconnect with all the work she wanted to do and all the love she had to share, instead of holding on to fear, anger and shame for any longer.



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On May 4 2019, the 74th anniversary of her liberation, she was invited to a performance by Igone de Jongh, the Dutch National Ballet's prima ballerina, inspired by her first night in Auschwitz when she had to dance for Mengele. She could see herself being portrayed as beautiful and innocent and Mengele portrayed as an hungry ghost.

She shares:

"It took me so many years to work through my anger and grief, to release Mengele and hitler, to forgive myself for having survived. But in the theater with my daughter, watching one of the darkest moments of my past brought to life on the stage, I knew again what I had realized that night in the barracks—that while Mengele had all the power, while day after day he chose with his grotesquely wagging finger who would live and who would die, he was more a prisoner than I was.

I was innocent.

And free."

And here are this chapter's KEYS to free ourselves from not forgiving:

- **Our readiness to forgive:** Let's bring to mind one person we struggle to forgive and look at what's holding us back, what we're waiting for to forgive (an apology, a change, anything). And let's choose to spend our energy FOR ourselves and our beautiful life instead of against someone else.
- **Acknowledging our rage to release it:** Let's make a rage date with ourselves. After legitimizing our anger, we can choose a channel to express it and dissolve it (screaming, cushion beating...). Let's express it until there's nothing left that day! And start again the next day or week.
- **Forgiving ourselves:** Often, when we can't release someone else from blame and guilt, it's because we're holding on to judgment about ourselves. Let's remember that we were born innocent and that we're meant to be on our side. Let's recommit to the purest parts of us and forgive ourselves.

"Forgiveness is not something you give someone else. It's how you release yourself."