

**Positive Judaism Study Guide #5**  
**To Forgive is to Love: Letting Go of Limitations**

Mahatma Gandhi taught, “the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” Gandhi believed that the power of forgiveness is a positive character strength. Moreover, teacher Gary Zukav said, “the characteristics of an authentically empowered personality are humbleness, clarity, forgiveness and love.” Finally the Buddha taught that “health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship.” From all this, we learn that forgiveness, in all it’s challenge, is a critical act and value to allow for positivity and well-being.

<b>Temperance</b>	<b>Relational strengths that develop sufficiency and wholeness: forgiveness, humility, prudence, self regulation (from l’hargia)</b>
Forgiveness/ T’shuvah	Able to give up requital of wrongdoing and to forgive wrongdoing and move from the need for vengeance.
Humility/Anavah	Being free from pride or arrogance and not regarding oneself as more better than other people.
Prudence/Sechel	Able to show good judgement and caution and avoid undue risks
Contentment/ Sameach B’chelko	Having self-control and disciplining and controlling appetites, emotions, and desire.

**1. Forgiveness is a divine act**

But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and You did not forsake them. - *Nehemiah 7:19*

I hereby forgive all who have transgressed against me, whether on purpose or by accident, whether in this lifetime or on any other plane.... Let no one be punished on my account. —*Hareni Mochel prayer before the evening Shema*

**2. Forgiveness is for self and other**

Forgive your neighbors’ transgressions, and then when you pray, your sins will be forgiven. - (Ben Sira 28:2.) This teaching is not based so much on reward, as it is on transformation. When you do what it takes to forgive another person’s trespasses against you, you change as a person. You become more empathic, more understanding of human flaws – in short, easier to forgive. –*Rabbi Debra Orenstein*

**3. Forgiveness is a step towards joy**

On Sukkot we celebrate not only the material blessings the Lord has bestowed upon us but also the spiritual blessings, seeing that only four days before (on Yom Kippur) we have become relieved of the burdens of our sins. On this festival the expression שמחה is associated with these days no fewer than three times (including **Deuteronomy 15:14**). This joy is due to the harvests of our fields, orchards, and

the forgiveness of our sins. This is why the Torah is able to urge us: והיית אך שמח, “you shall be joyous without any reservations.”

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#### **4. Humility leads to Wholeness**

“Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than anyone on earth.” -*Numbers 12:3*

“Ever let a man be humble in Torah and good works, humble with his parents, teacher, and wife, with his children, with his household, with his kinsfolk near and far, even with the heathen in the street, so that he become beloved on high and desired on earth. -*Tanna de Be Eliyahu*

When humility brings about depression, it is defective; when it is genuine, it inspires joy, courage, and inner dignity. -*Abraham Isaac Kook*

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#### **5. Prudence and good judgement**

A man who strays from the path of prudence will rest in the company of ghosts. -*Proverbs 21: 16*:

Acting in accordance with natural law should merely be an act of prudence for any intelligent human being, why should it merit any reward at all? -*Akedat Yitchak, 3:6*

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#### **6. Finding contentment and the middle path brings fulfillment**

Those who love money never have their fill of money, nor do those who love wealth have their fill of income. -*Ecclesiastes 5:9*

Envy is rotten to the bones. -*Proverbs 14:30*

The Rambam writes that a person must conduct himself according to the middle path. Yet, is there anyone who can fathom this, and is there a seer who can declare, “Here is the midpoint”? This matter cannot be proven by syllogism, nor even by deductive reasoning. Rather, it can only be determined by a wise man using his faculty of common sense, each according to his place and time. The Athenian sages asked, “What is the center of the world?” meaning, “What is the way to determine the middle path?” Rebbe Yehoshua replied, “Here,” meaning, “According to the judgement of your intellect.” - *Rabbi Yisrael Salanter*

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#### **\* Optional Discussion Questions**

1. What is the Jewish understanding of Forgiveness and how does this lead to a transformed self?
2. What is the relationship between forgiveness and wholeness? Forgiveness and joy?
3. What is the Jewish idea of The Middle Path?
4. Many people equate financial success and the social ladder as measurements of contentment. Do you agree?
5. Describe the life of a person that is content in your opinion. What do they have? What have they done?