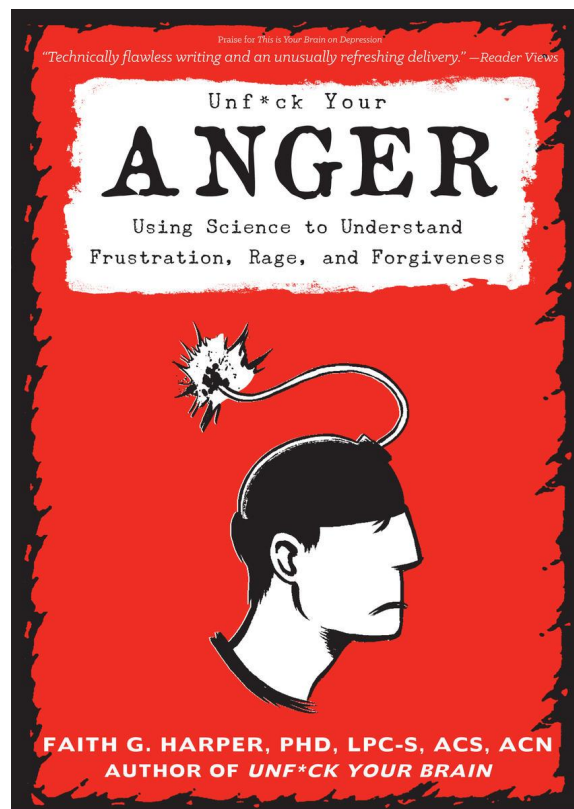


Unfuck Your Anger (Preview)

Using Science to Understand Frustration, Rage, and Forgiveness

Faith G. Harper



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We all know someone whose health deteriorated after a major, traumatic blow in their life. We've all known people or at least heard stories of people who "died of a broken heart." Or were "never the same again" in both emotional and physical ways after being subject to great hurt.

Forgiveness researcher Dr. Matt James has found over decades of study that the people who are hurt the most are usually the people who are most determined to forgive. I have also noticed this in my own practice. My guess is that at some cellular level, we recognize how much holding on to anger and hurt from the past is damaging our present and future. Or, as Dr. James notes, the more horrible the crime against us, the more we resonate with the truth that forgiveness is a matter of life and death.

So many physical health issues have been correlated with the inability to forgive. The list is endless (increased cortisol levels, autoimmune issues, heart issues, etc.) but essentially, the inability to forgive keeps the body in a chronic state of inflammation. Dr. Candace Pert, a researcher known for her work in psychoneuroimmunology, stated that forgiveness creates a quantum shift in our bodies at a cellular level that frees the energy we need to heal and thrive.

Ok, that sounds all kinds of woo-woo. Let's try putting it another way. Frederic Luskin, the founder and director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, has a fantastic analogy for describing what's happening when we hold on to our anger past the point of it serving its purpose. He says, envision yourself a police officer. You see someone haul ass past you at 90 miles an hour. You set off to pull them over, but the engine on your squad car fails and you're stuck. Ok, so you write them a ticket and stick it in the glove box or what? And you continue to do that for every violation you see speeding past? You now have a glove box full of unenforceable tickets? What are you gonna do with that mess? You are now drowning in tickets. Since you can't enforce them, you have to continue to contend with them. Do you want to sit around counting and sorting tickets or do you want to use that energy to go do bad-ass, world changing shit?

In other words, forgiveness, done right, is selfish as fuck.

It's about taking your power back. It's about owning your own energy again. It's about making space for something other than pain in your life. *There's nothing wrong with selfish as fuck when it comes to self-care.* Face masks and cold press juices are all good, but forgiveness is the ultimate form of self-care.

That's it. It's not about being a better person or a better practitioner of a particular religious faith. I mean that's cool AF if it happens. But if you go into it with that goal and expectation, you are setting yourself up to fail. And be frustrated. And then have something else to be mad about.

It's also not about eating shit to keep the peace. Or letting others gaslight you about their fucked up behavior. Forgiveness doesn't mean letting people continue to stomp all over your boundaries. Instead, forgiveness takes the emotionality out of a toxic relationship, which helps you establish and maintain more solid boundaries in the future. The angers and resentments you still hold empower the people who have hurt

you in the past to control your life in the present because they maintain an energetic link to them. You can think of that in a metaphysical woo-woo sense if you are down for that, or you can just consider it in terms of the energy it takes for you to continue to be angry at someone for shit they did a long time ago. That's a lot of fucking energy going down the drain every day. And fuck that, they don't get to have that much control over you anymore.

How Do You Know There Is Something to Forgive?

It's not always super obvious, is it? Sometimes we think we are over something and then it bites us in the ass. Dr. Luskin has developed a few tells in the course of his research.

- When you remember a past incident, do you have a strong emotional and/or physical response to it? Like some level of reliving the initial pain you were caused?
- Do you find yourself stuck in the story of the event? Like the same thoughts or storytelling (internal or to others) whenever you are activated?
- Do you focus on this negative experience from the past more than you focus on the good in your present? Or even just your life in the present and your goals for the future?

These are all good indicators that you are trapped in a cycle of anger and pain that won't dissipate without some serious forgiveness work. The anger and hurt you experienced when the event took place was an important and valid response. Those feelings are activating to provide you protection at the occurrence, but they aren't beneficial to you in the future.

In other words? Your baggage does not have to be your identity.

Types of Forgiveness

Back to Dr. James' forgiveness research. He differentiates *episodic forgiveness* from *trait forgiveness*. Episodic forgiveness refers to the work we do to forgive someone who hurt us. This is generally what we think about when we think about forgiveness. But Dr. James' research demonstrates that people who practice episodic forgiveness develop something termed trait forgiveness. All this means is that you center forgiveness of others as a fundamental part of how you navigate the world for your own emotional health. They are calmer, have better skills for overcoming obstacles, and are less likely to take the actions of others as personal attacks.

You know how there are just some people out there that seem to human a bit better than most other people? It's not that their lives are golden, it's just that they handle their shit with healthy coping skills and integrity. Those are the people that have integrated trait forgiveness into their personalities. They chug that shit like its emotional electrolytes. Probably because it is. And I can testify that once I realized that my childhood induction into the Temple of Grudge-Holding was of zero help to my adulting, and began letting go of shit on the regular, I started glimpsing a life steeped in trait forgiveness. I'm getting there, and it's been worth the work.

(End of Preview)

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