

# On learning to forgive\*

*Anshi Zhou*†

TRANSLATED BY *Brian Chung*‡

The myriad teachings of the wise and sagely all encourage people to reflect on their own behaviour, and for those in whom the habit of self-reflection and improvement is cultivated, there can be no time to spare for blaming others. Offences done by accident are easy to forgive, but wilful wickedness is hard to forgive. However, those who wish to cultivate themselves must start by forgiving all that which is hardest to forgive. If even intentional mistakes can be forgiven, then all lesser offences can be easily forgotten. If the offences are grave to the point of being completely intolerable, they must still be tolerated, no matter how hard doing so is. How could we accomplish this level of forgiveness? There are three methods:

1. Recognise that the offender's actions are born out of their ignorance. It would be unreasonable to judge them in accordance with the standard of the sages, or to expect much from them. Our disappointment is due to our own excessive expectations, so the fault lies with us.
2. Pity the short lifespans of the offenders [*i.e. evil deeds karmically shorten a person's lifespan*]. Their human life passes as fast as a bolting steed, with the days decreasing constantly, like a condemned person being led step by step to the gallows. How could we not pity them?
3. Use them as medicine to heal ourselves. As our own faults are often unknown to us, we can only identify them by observing the wickedness of others, using them as a mirror to self-reflect. Therefore, as they are like our teachers, how could we not be grateful?

When our hearts were not at peace, we were afflicted by a field of thorns, and even little ants seemed like mighty obstacles. A heart at peace is as stable as a citadel.

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\* This is an edited extract of Brian Chung's translation of Upasaka Zhou Anshi's commentary on Wen Chang's Buddhist text *Yin Chih Wen (The Tract of the Quiet Way)*. Brian Chung released this translation into the public domain. See Brian By Sheng Chung, 'Why is it so hard for people to forgive?', in *Quora*, 15 October 2021, p. 88 of original.

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