

# Conflict is My Teacher

Lessons From Greta Bro

by Angela M. Iovanella

“Peace begins with our relationship to ourselves,” said Greta Bro during a recent interview. “When we learn not to judge or hate ourselves on the inside, we can better show forgiveness and compassion to the outside world.” To truly forgive another, one must first forgive oneself.

Greta speaks from over 22 years of experience as a therapist, workshop leader, speaker, and peace activist. Dealing with conflict is part of her job description, but how does Greta handle conflict in her own life?

“Conflict is my teacher,” says Greta. “If, for example, I feel hurt by a friend, I use the hurt as a lesson on where inside myself I am still unheard and reactive.” She does not judge herself to be wrong for being hurt, but she also does not let herself give in completely to the reaction she feels.

Greta also uses conflicts to identify areas where she can grow. She tries to come from a place of compassion and forgiveness. “I learned that when I come from a place of love, I will more likely attract a win-win situation than a win-lose situation.”

It is important to note, adds Greta, that, “Learning to deal with conflict constructively is a life-long journey. I’ve gotten better and better at it as I’ve learned to open to compassion and risk listening instead of reacting defensively. The trick is to listen to your own voices of revenge and hurt at the same time you are listening to the person with whom you are in conflict.” Greta believes people build peace in the world every day by being compassionate. “Practice forgiveness,” Greta advises. “It allows love to live in you.”

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## A Meditation for Forgiving Ourselves

Sit comfortably, allowing your eyes to close and your breathing to be natural and easy. Let your body and mind relax. Breathing gently into the area of your heart, let yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions you have carried because you have not forgiven—not forgiven yourself, not forgiven others. Let yourself feel that pain of keeping your heart closed. Begin reciting the following words, letting the images and feelings that come up grow deeper as you repeat them.

There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself. I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times in thought, word, or deed, knowingly or unknowingly.

Feel your own precious body and life. Let yourself see the ways you have hurt or harmed yourself. Picture them, remember them. Feel the sorrow you have carried from these burdens and sense that you can release them. Extend forgiveness for each act of harm, one by one. Repeat to yourself:

For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain, and confusion, I now extend a full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself, I forgive myself.

Gently repeat this until you feel a release in your heart. For some great pains you might not feel a release; instead, you might experience again the burden and the anguish or anger you have held. Touch this softly. Be forgiving of yourself for not being ready to let go and move on.

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*Adapted from Kornfield, Jack, The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace. New York: Bantam Books, 2002.*