# Self-Help Blasphemy

I have come to doubt two of the things that almost all self-help books and religions purport to value: forgiveness and gratitude.

Some of the writers who have led me to changing my attitude towards these values are Esther Hicks, Bert Hellinger, and Linda Howe. And also some of the great sayings from the 12 Steps, for example, “I clean up my side of the street,” and “what other people think of me is none of my business.” Not to mention the endlessly useful, “bless him, change me.”

First, forgiveness.

Stop asking people to forgive you. That’s just handing them your problem. If you think you’ve wronged them, make it right. Apologize, make amends, fix the situation. And then do your best not to wrong them in that way again.

And on the other side of things, let go of the need to forgive someone else. Just release judgment. Whatever they did, they had a reason. It seemed like the thing to do. You don’t know their burdens; you don’t know their story. It’s certainly reasonable to limit or end contact with someone who repeatedly transgresses against you, but you can do that without an opinion, without judgment.

Now gratitude.

Stop thinking you need to be forever grateful for everything. That’s still being attached to not having the thing. Being afraid of its being taken away from you. Still thinking you owe somebody. Still believing the lie that you have not created your own life. I mean, of course, say thank you when someone gives you a gift or opens a door or what-have-you, but stop admonishing yourself to be grateful all the time. Try simple appreciation. It sounds like semantics, but I can tell you from experience, there’s a world of difference in how it feels. Appreciation is relaxed and enjoyable. Gratitude feels like work.

Just ponder this passage from the sci-fi classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, by Robert Heinlein:

> *You are not in my debt. Impossible, because I never do anything I don’t want to, nor does anyone, but in my case, I know it. So please don’t invent a debt that doesn’t exist, or next you’ll try to feel gratitude, and that is the first treacherous step toward complete moral degradation. Gratitude is a euphemism for resentment.*

Maybe a little extreme, but think about it! I think he’s right!