

Self-Forgiveness: a Commitment to Love Yourself—No Matter What!

The human capacity to forgive even the deepest wrongs is awe-inspiring. A mother forgives the man who murdered her daughter. A husband forgives his wife for an extramarital affair. A son forgives his parents for being checked out on alcohol during his childhood.

Forgiving others can mean liberation from anger and grievance that leads to a richer and happier life. But there's an even deeper peace to be found through what might be the hardest act of all—forgiving ourselves.

The first part of any conflict we must resolve is not between “me and my neighbor”, but between “me and me.” So believes author and therapist Thom Rutledge, who has written extensively on forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

In his book *The Self-Forgiveness Handbook: A Practical and Empowering Guide*, Rutledge writes that the resentment and grudges we hold against ourselves are every bit as destructive as those we harbor towards others. Every time we tune in to the inner dialogue that says we are not (smart, thin, rich, successful, good, etc.) enough, or berate ourselves for what we did or didn't do, we are choosing to live in blame and resentment—only it's towards ourselves and not others. As Buddhist monk and author Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, to truly practice forgiveness we must first forgive ourselves for not being perfect.

Philosophers, religious leaders and others have known this for thousands of years; one of the basic tenets of most major religions is to love others

as we love ourselves. If we can't forgive and love ourselves, how can we truly forgive and love others?

In her book *The Unburdened Heart: Five Keys to Forgiveness and Freedom*, author Mariah Burton Nelson writes, “When we treat ourselves with love and compassion, we become nicer to everyone else. We become less defensive. We don't worry so much

"The more you know yourself, the more you forgive yourself."

—Confucius

what others' judgments might be, because we're not judging ourselves.”

Forgiving ourselves is not a selfish way to let ourselves off the hook for

behaving badly. Rather, it is the result of looking deeply within ourselves, accepting our mistakes and failures, taking responsibility for our actions, and loving ourselves in spite of it all. Fred Luskin, psychologist and cofounder of the Stanford University Forgiveness Project, writes, “Forgiving is not about condoning bad behavior; it's about taking responsibility and becoming a hero and not a victim in the story you tell.”

To be able to say, “I behaved (thoughtlessly, unkindly, foolishly, etc.) and I forgive myself for not being perfect” could be the biggest—and most healing—act of all. For when you can forgive the imperfection in yourself, it's a lot easier to forgive them in others.

“Self-forgiveness is a commitment to love yourself no matter what,” Nelson says. “It's the generous act of giving yourself a break. Remembering that you're human. Offering yourself the loving kindness that you might offer, on your best days, to those you love the most, no matter what they've done.” *

10 Powerful and Loving Actions

When it comes to “I love you,” there's much more power in action than in words. Whether spoken to a romantic partner, your children or other family members, if the actions aren't there to back up the loving words, it all means nothing. Below are 10 of the best ways to say “I love you” in your actions. But there are thousands more. See how creative you can get in coming up with your own ideas.

- 1. Greet your loved ones with a big smile, a hug and a kiss.**
- 2. Really listen to what your loved ones are saying;** give them your undivided and undistracted attention.
- 3. Support each other, even when times get tough.**
- 4. Do simple (even random) acts of kindness,** such as a foot or shoulder massage, cooking a favorite meal, running a bath.
- 5. Spend one-on-one time with your loved ones,** with no particular agenda.
- 6. Commit to truly accepting each other's faults.**
- 7. Come home on time.** And sober.
- 8. Be impeccable with your word.** If you say you'll do something, do it. And do it and by the time you said you'd do it.
- 9. Take responsibility for your part in any conflict,** and then look at how you can do better next time. Step out of the blame game.
- 10. Share yourself and what lives deeply inside of you.** This is a precious gift to others and conveys trust and security. *

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



If inner freedom is the desired destination, then forgiveness is one of the highways to get there, and the first stop is to forgive ourselves. That's because most of us are our own worst critics. The harshness we heap upon ourselves can be a huge burden. As the cover article points out, it is only after forgiving and loving ourselves that we can truly forgive and love others.

While examining ways to be kinder, consider the Top 10 in this issue. It suggests actions to take (that we might overlook on a day-to-day basis) that say "I love you" in a far deeper way than the words themselves.

Meanwhile the Quiz helps you zero in on the role that fear plays in the way you live and the decisions you make. Awareness of fear is always the first step to overcoming it and living in trust.

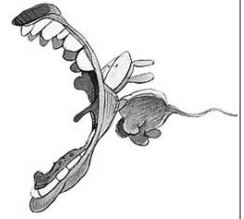
Every day, people tell themselves stories about why others did what they did or said what they said. This internal storytelling can grow particularly loud when the main character is your mate, your child or a significant person in your life. The feature article on page 3 suggests ways to stay out of story and live in truth.

Finally, when we live in truth, and in choice, we simply cannot consider ourselves victims of others. Still, there are many ways every day that we can unconsciously slip into victimhood. The page 4 article helps us recognize these ways and consider alternatives.

Please do not hesitate to call for additional copies of this newsletter or if you would like help with any issues in your life. Have a beautiful day!

How Much Does Fear Hold You Back?

Fear is both an instinct that helps us survive and a nagging voice inside our heads heralding doom and disaster before we even get started on something. When fear keeps us from taking risks that might enrich our life or holds us back from doing some things we need to do, it's no longer serving our best interests. See what role fear plays in your life by completing this quiz.



True False

Set 1

- 1. My self-talk is filled with can'ts, shouldn'ts and ought-tos.
- 2. If I talk about my fears, people will think I'm stupid or weak.
- 3. I often find myself thinking about bad things that might happen.
- 4. I feel trapped in or avoid social situations where it might be difficult to escape if I wanted to, such as in a crowd or on the highway.
- 5. I tend to need approval from family or peers before going after dreams and goals.
- 6. Making mistakes publicly is horrendous; I just want to crawl away and hide.
- 7. I'd rather not get involved in a relationship because I'd have to surrender personal power and lose myself.
- 8. To avoid being rejected, I try to please people and take my own needs and desires out of the equation.
- 9. I often compromise in situations to avoid conflict.
- 10. A sure-fire way to end up disappointed is to want something too much.
- 11. When things seem to be going really well for me, I get uneasy that I'll do something to ruin it.
- 12. I find it difficult to express undesirable emotions such as anger.
- 13. I'd rather just stick to what I know than risk change.

Set 2

- 1. I expand my comfort zone by taking a small risk every day, such as making one phone call or asking for one thing I want.
- 2. When I feel fear, I keep my mind on the details, not the Big Picture. I complete the report word by word, pay the bills one by one, see the group individual by individual.
- 3. I look to others to model courage for me. Their courageous behavior encourages confidence.
- 4. When something scares me, I get information, replacing fear with knowledge.
- 5. I visualize myself doing what I'm afraid to do; I see myself as graceful, strong and capable.

*If you answered true more than false in the first set of questions, fear may be holding you back in your life more than you'd like. In the second set, a true means you're successfully employing strategies to master fear. If your fears are pervasive or severe, you may be suffering from an anxiety disorder, in which case you should definitely seek help. If your fears are not debilitating, but still get in the way of doing what you need or want to do, asking for help can make all the difference. **

How to Stop with the Stories and Start Living in Truth

Every day, we tell ourselves enough stories to fill a library: *Why my spouse left this morning without saying goodbye. Why my friend hasn't called in a long time. What the tire salesman meant when he laughed at my question. Why my father is so judgmental. Why my daughter is being so difficult. How my boss has it in for me. How I'm such a failure.*

We draw conclusions based on those stories and feel certain of their accuracy. *My friend doesn't want to be around me. The tire salesman thinks I'm stupid (my dad, too). My spouse is done with our marriage and wants to leave me. My boss hates me because I do better work than her. My daughter hates me because I want her to keep her room clean and wants to live with her mother instead of me.*

And on, and on, and on.

We live our lives as if the stories are true. We act and react, often in pain, from our often mistaken understanding of another's words or actions, our assumptions about why they are saying or doing what they are, and our thoughts about how those people—and we, ourselves—should be different.

Yet, it is these stories, and the emotions that come from the stories, that are usually the source of pain in relationships. We want to blame another, but in reality, it's usually our thinking that is causing the discomfort, says Byron Katie, author of her best-selling book *Loving What Is*.

For example, Katie says, when you think the thought, "My father shouldn't be so judgmental," you might get angry, resent his criticisms, his advice, his belief that he knows best. You might avoid him or not listen to what he has to say about anything. You might be silent or rude when you're with him.

But while you believe your father to be judgmental, another might hear his judgments as good advice, or as one man's opinion, while someone else might find his words amusing. Your belief that your father shouldn't act the way he does or say the words he says are what cause you the anger, resentment and possibly even separation.

What we need to do to ease the pain and experience more freedom in our lives is learn to get beyond our stories, to get under our beliefs to what's really living there.

"The result of investigation is often a deeper appreciation of the people in our lives, and a realization that it was not their words or actions that really harmed us, but our uninvestigated thoughts about their words or actions," Katie says.

In her book, Katie outlines a simple path of inquiry into these horror stories we tell ourselves that revolves around four questions:

1. Is it true?
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true?
3. How do you react when you think that thought?
4. Who would you be without the thought?

First, state your belief about someone and ask yourself if it is true and whether you can know absolutely, without a doubt, that it is true. For example, you might say, "My children are uncooperative ingrates." Is it true they are ungrateful? Uncooperative? Have they ever expressed appreciation or done their chores without complaining? Are they cooperative at school or at grandma's house? Do you know for sure that their unwillingness to help around the house is about wanting to make your life miserable?

The next question to ask yourself is: How do you react when you think these thoughts? Do you find yourself angry and resentful? Do you grumble all the while cleaning up after them? Do you yell at them, starting a fight and making chore day more like war day? Are you embarrassed when they forget to say "Thank you" for a gift?

Talk about lack of peace and harmony!

Imagine that you don't have this story any more. Who would you be?

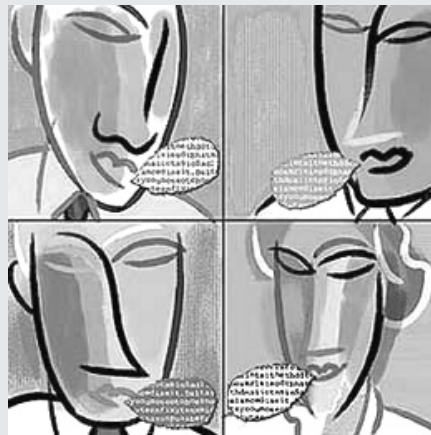
Perhaps you would be a happy parent who merrily modeled the joy of having a clean house or work space. Perhaps you would be less concerned about what others thought of your parenting. Perhaps you would be a parent who expressed love rather than resentment to your children, and whose children then expressed it back to you. Perhaps you would be calmer and more peaceful.

The final step in this investigation is to turn around the statements you've been making. Try them on. See if they fit. Do you express your gratitude enough? Do you thank your children, express appreciation to your mate, your parents, your co-workers? How about to yourself?

And how cooperative are you? Do you work together with your children on their wishes and desires? Would your boss say you are a team player? Do you cooperate with your different inner "parts" to make sure you get enough rest and good food, new things to learn and fun time off, mixed in with all of your work?

With an inquiry like this, there is no right answer. The goal is not perfection, but truth.

"Who would you be without your story?" Katie says. "You never know until you inquire. There is no story that is you or that leads to you. Every story leads away from you." *



8 Clues that You're Giving Others Power Over You

Sarah doesn't realize it, but she's given herself a life sentence. Though she wears a sunny disposition outside, inside, the perky 42-year-old mother has resigned to three ideas:

1. It's too late in her life to go back to college like she always wanted to. She'd look ridiculous, and who has the time, anyway?
2. Her ex-husband is to blame for her financial problems and for her children's disrespectful behavior.
3. No matter what she does—no matter how many self-help workshops she attends or how much inner work she does with herself—things are not really ever going to change for her.

The life sentence she's given herself? Hopelessness and helplessness, twin offspring of the same poisonous parent known as "Victimhood."

When we operate from a victim mentality, we give the power to create our own life to someone else, and then we moan about how controlling the other is. To avoid taking responsibility, we create a dangerous illusion that we are always right. We blame others for our circumstances and remain stuck in a silent

"poor me" that keeps us small.

This is not to say that we can always control what happens to us. Some people's behavior is abusive. Hurricanes or other natural disasters occur. The company downsizes.

We can, however, always control how we respond. We can refuse to accept abusive behavior, leaving a relationship, if necessary. We can recognize that others can only have control if we let them. We can see the banquet of choices before us and choose what appeals to us, even if that means going back to college at age 42.

Here are eight clues to help you recognize when you're carrying around a victim mentality and robbing yourself of your personal power:

1. Your first response to a setback is to blame someone else for what has happened.
2. You often find yourself beginning thoughts with phrases such as: "I can't..." or "I'm no good at..." or "I've never been able to." You believe that nothing you do ever works out.



3. Conversations with friends and family are often about how hard life is.

4. When friends offer advice, you usually counter it with a "Yes, but..." since they can't possibly know how difficult your situation really is.

5. You're always so busy with work and the things you need to do to survive that you just don't have time to do things you want to do for yourself.

6. You think that other people cause you to feel the way you do, that you'd be more centered if it weren't for them.

7. You're convinced that if you weren't tied down to all these obligations, or if only you had more support, you could really do some of the things you always think about doing.

8. When angry, you usually begin sentences with "You" instead of "I."

So now you choose. Do you remain powerless, a victim of others, or do you take responsibility and step up to live the life you want—warts and all? Which will it be? *

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For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 713-562-7819.