

When “What Is” Isn’t What You Want!—Part 1

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Do you remember “The Serenity Prayer”? “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Ah, but what happens when you find it impossible to accept the things you cannot change? Suppose you have a boss who consistently expects one thing today, but demands something different tomorrow? You’ve given feedback, made requests, and begged for consistency, but the habit persists. You don’t understand why he refuses to respond to your appeals, and it’s really bugging you!

Or how do you tolerate the poor decisions your adult daughter repetitively makes? She squanders her money, spends time with questionable people, and treats you with contempt. Your offers to help are ignored, dismissed, and criticized as selfish interference.

The world is filled with individuals and situations that dissatisfy. I’m sure you have examples that are more frustrating than these. How do you increase your tolerance of “the things you cannot change”?

Byron Katie’s book, *Loving What Is*, may help. I confess I was skeptical when her concept was recommended to me. I will not be surprised if you are skeptical, too.

I’m sorry that this article will have to appear in two parts, but space considerations won’t allow me to pack everything into a single article. So, put a note in your calendar to pick up next week’s newspaper to allow you to read the second portion of Byron Katie’s concepts.

Psychologists sometimes explain that we get frustrated with behaviors in other people because we are subconsciously “projecting” what we don’t like in ourselves onto them. That awareness doesn’t help me feel better about something I don’t like in my wife, for example. I just want her to stop what she’s doing! And it doesn’t help to think she can’t change, because I think she could if she wanted to!

Please keep in mind that “accepting the things I cannot change” (even in someone or something other than my wife) is not easy for me. I am a “maximizer.” That means I’m always looking to improve whatever currently exists into something that is superb.

Knowing my tendency just adds to my frustration when facing such a situation. So, it’s not easy for me to even write this article!

However, I have found Byron Katie’s approach to be thought-provoking and practical at helping me get unstuck from the frustrating, helpless anxiety associated with the things that I cannot easily control.

The process starts with a questionnaire that you are to fill out when you are really upset. Though we’ve been taught to not judge others, we all do it. (If we didn’t, we wouldn’t be upset, would we?)

So, allow yourself to deeply feel the anger or pain associated with this particular situation or individual. Find a blank piece of paper and a pen and start writing down your answers.

1. Who angers, confuses, saddens, or disappoints you, and why? What is it about him/her/it/them that you don’t like? [Your answer: “I am _____ at (name of person or situation) because_____.”]
2. How do you want him/her/it/them to change? What do you want him/her/it/them to do? [Your answer: “I want (name of person or situation) to _____.”]
3. What is it that he/she/it/they should or shouldn’t do, be, think, or feel? What advice do you want to offer? [Your answer: “(Name of person or situation) should/shouldn’t _____.”]

4. What does he/she/it/they need to do in order for you to be happy or satisfied? [Your answer: “I need (name of person or situation) to _____.”]

5. Name some characteristics that you think describe him/her/it/them. Make an extensive list. [Your answer might be something like, “He is thoughtless, stubborn, unfair, insensitive, and selfish.”]

6. What is it that you don’t ever want to experience with him/her/it/them again? [Your answer: “I don’t ever want to _____” or “I refuse to ever _____.”]

Use these questions to brutally uncover what it is that has been bugging you about someone or some situation. Acknowledging “what is” starts any process of improvement. We will only continue to experience our pain if we deny or ignore what offends us, or if we pretend that we’re really not upset.

Allow yourself to examine your anger and pain. You have a week to generate your most highly charged issues. Please take advantage of this opportunity.

Next week I’ll share what Byron Katie calls “The Work” that you can do to accept what can’t be changed.

If you can’t wait for a week and you want to jump ahead, go to www.thework.com on the internet. There Byron Katie lays out her simple yet powerful approach, and you’ll learn a lot more about freeing yourself from your frustrations than I will be able to describe in just these two articles!

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