

Hello from Ishwari



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Sharing News, Inspiration, Tools, Events, Fun

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News

LICENSURE UPDATE

Well, clearly it has been wishful thinking and a little naïvete - my thinking that my change from Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) to Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC) would move along quickly. At this point, I'm hoping for April... Wish me luck!

THE UBIQUITY OF LOSS

Since late December, I have lost two beloved family members. One was 66, the other was in his 90s. Both went quite suddenly, despite the fact that their deaths were expected. I want to acknowledge these passages with the following quote.

“Death leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal.”

(from an Irish headstone, shared by Richard Puz)

Years ago, in graduate school, I read that at any given time, roughly 10 percent of the population is experiencing a recent significant loss. This fact struck me as a tenderly unifying element of being human. While we don't always show it as we necessarily move about in the world, we all face crushing loss at one time or another. When I am able to remember this, it helps me to find compassion for people I encounter who maybe acting grumpy or distracted.

Here is a sentiment for all who are grieving:

“When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that, in truth, you are weeping for that which has been your delight.”

-Kahlil Gibran

Inspiration

“The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”

-Chinese proverb



Tools

BREATH COUNTING MEDITATION

A deceptively simple technique for calming the mind. This mindfulness practice can be used to develop a greater ability to tolerate the discomfort of anxiety, fear and restlessness.

Instructions:

Sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it.

To begin the exercise, count “one” as you exhale.

The next time you exhale, count “two,” and so on, up to five.

Then, begin a new cycle, counting “one” on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than five, and count only on the exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself counting up to eight or ten or higher, or when you find yourself counting the inhalations, or when you stop counting and get involved in thoughts. When any of these things happen, simply begin again, counting “one” on the next exhalation.

Do this for at least 10 minutes. Practice regularly: daily if possible.



RULES FOR BEING HUMAN

(A copy of this handout was given to me recently by one of my clients. A little research revealed that it was written by Cherie Carter-Scott. I think it is wonderful and I love sharing it with others.)

You will receive a body. You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for the entire period this time around.

You will learn lessons. You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called Life. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or you may think them irrelevant and stupid.

There are no mistakes, only lessons. Growth is a process of trial and error, and experimentation. The “failed” experiments are as much a part of the process as the ones that ultimately “succeed.”

A lesson is repeated until learned. A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. When you have learned it, you can then go on to the next lesson.

Learning lessons does not end. There is no part of life that does not contain its lessons. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.

“There” is no better than “here.” When your “there” has become a “here,” you will simply obtain another “there” that may, again, look better than “here.”

Others are mirrors of you. You cannot love or hate something about another person unless it reflects to you something you love or hate about yourself.

What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours.

Your answers lie inside you. The answers to Life’s questions lie inside you. All you need to do is look, listen, and trust.

You will forget all this.



THE T-SHIRT TOOL



I was doing a crafts project awhile ago, using old T-shirts that I got from thrift stores. One very large blue T-shirt had slogan on it: “It’s Your Job to Make Me Happy.” At first, it struck me as funny, and as I cut the shirt into strips for my project, I wondered about the origins of the slogan. Had the designer of the shirt been serious? Surely not. Who could look at those words and not laugh at the obvious irony? Who actually believes that it’s someone else’s job to make them happy? Then I realized something –most of us actually do believe this.

Some people believe it straight out. “You get into a relationship to make each other happy.” To these people, I say, go for it, as long as it’s working for you – “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

However, most of us eventually come to the realization that our happiness is our own responsibility, and that no one can “make” anyone else happy. In our heads, we know this is true - but do we really operate from that truth?

- How often do you wear this T-shirt inside your head, with the expectation that someone else is supposed to make you happy? (“Why aren’t you making me happy? Don’t you know it’s your job?”)
- How often do you put the shirt on someone else, believing it’s your job to make them happy? (“Don’t you see how hard I am working to make you happy? You’re supposed to be happy.”)

In either case, you may wonder why you actually end up feeling miserable.

This is where the T-shirt has turned into a valuable relationship tool for me. Whenever I get caught up in anger, blame or disappointment, I envision myself wearing the T-shirt, facing my partner. I go inside and feel what happens when I consciously lay that expectation on him –“It’s your job to make me happy.” It’s usually quite enlightening. Then, I imagine putting the shirt on my partner; I see him facing me, wearing that slogan. I notice how I feel when I believe that it’s my job to make him happy. Again, quite interesting.

I’m amazed to learn what I am telling myself when I am caught in these beliefs and expectations.

- When it’s “his job” to make me happy, whatever he’s doing (or not doing) hurts my feelings and makes me mad. I sulk or become angry: “How can he do this to me; he should know better.” I stay mad and blame him.

- When it's "my job" to make him happy, I can't do or say what is true for me, because he might feel bad, or get angry, or not like me, or... or... or... I then stuff my feelings, do or say what I think will make him happy, and become resentful of him and critical of myself, blaming myself for having "bad" feelings.

In both scenarios, I may feel a need to distance from my partner. The belief that we are supposed to make each other happy backfires; instead of creating happiness and intimacy, it causes pain and separation. Things get even more convoluted when I have both of us "wearing the shirt" at once:

- I am unhappy, for whatever reason. Instead of dealing with what's going on inside me, I "put on the shirt." I tell myself, "he is supposed to make me happy and he is not doing his job." Instead of feeling my own unhappiness, I have made it his fault. I might feel angry or blaming.
- However, I also have him wearing the shirt. In spite of the pain I am feeling, I tell myself, "I am supposed to make him happy. If I say or do anything about the way I feel, he might not like it." Now, in addition to feeling unhappy, angry and blaming ("this is all his fault"), I might feel frustration, shame and guilt ("this is all my fault").

I can't make sense of it; either way I turn, I am in pain. I'm caught in a catch-22. It's easy to see how much tension this creates inside, and how I might end up engaging in some kind of numbing or distracting behavior to relieve the discomfort. I am now on my way to addictive behavior.

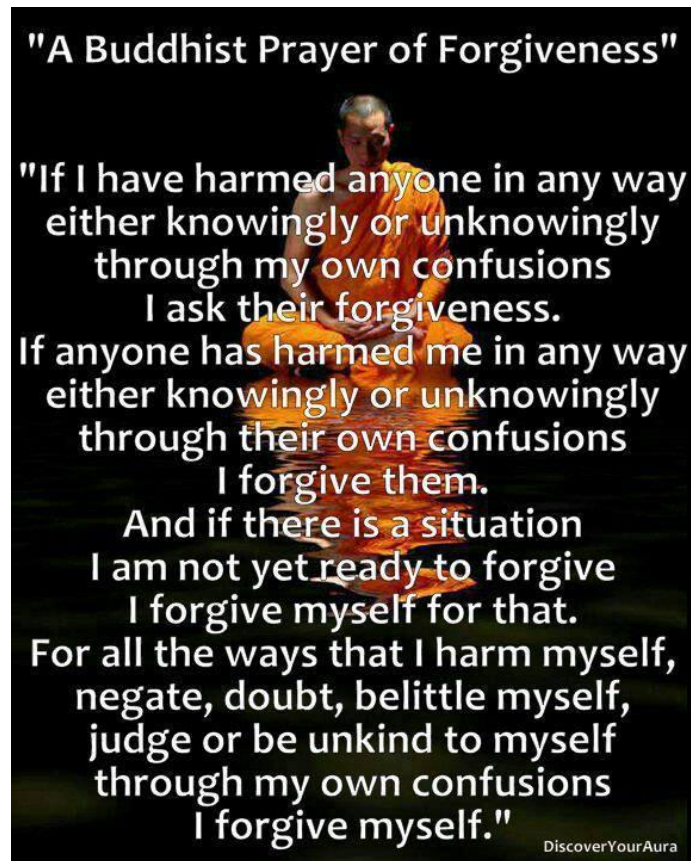
When I am not conscious of these thoughts and beliefs, I can be overwhelmed and mystified by how I feel and how I act. Bringing awareness to them, I begin to understand how these beliefs and expectations drive my actions and feelings. This helps me see that I can choose to think and act differently.

The "T-Shirt Tool" has become very helpful to me, in bringing conscious awareness to my own negative patterns of thought and behavior. As I imagine wearing the shirt (It's my partner's job to make me happy), or putting it on him (It's my job to make him happy), I can more easily see through these erroneous beliefs, making it possible to think, act and even feel differently. I can direct my energy toward creating my own sense of happiness, rather than blaming it on, or expecting it from, my partner. I often find that my sense of humor kicks in, which is another very helpful tool. When I can laugh at the silliness of the whole thing, I know I am on the road to real and lasting change.

I use this tool in my own life, and also with clients.

I still wonder about who designed that T-shirt. I sort of wish I hadn't cut it up and used it in my project – a rag rug on my kitchen floor. Then again, I walk on that rug every day, and often I remember the slogan that's woven in there. Maybe it's a good thing I used it after all. Meanwhile, as often as I can, when I get caught up in relationship issues, I ask myself: "Who do I have wearing the T-shirt?"

Inspiration



"I used to think that to become free you had to practice like a samurai warrior, but now I understand that you have to practice like a devoted mother of a newborn child. It takes the same energy but has a completely different quality. It's compassion and presence rather than having to defeat the enemy in battle."
-Jack Kornfield

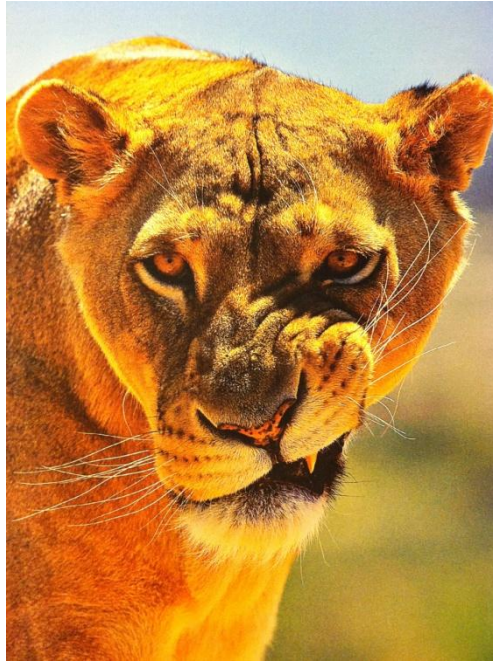
"Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its troubles, it empties today of its strength."
-Corrie Ten Boom

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."
-Thomas Edison

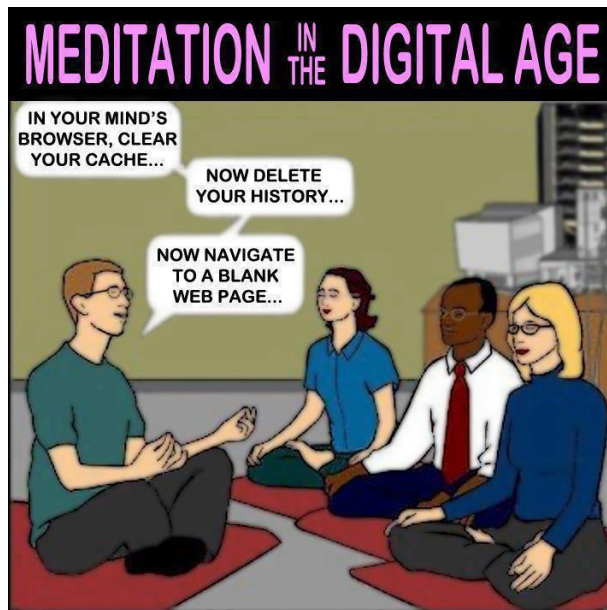
"I don't know who – or what – put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer yes to someone or something – and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal."
-UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld

Fun (Good for a Laugh - or at Least a Smile)

I have to chuckle at myself - and my own snarkiness - every time I look at this. Don't we all just feel this way sometimes?



Snarling lion, photo by Reed Nelson



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