

FOUR QUESTIONS CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

BYRON KATIE'S PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-ENQUIRY AND LINGUISTIC REVERSALS

CAN END EMOTIONAL SUFFERING OF ALL KINDS

by Luis S R Vas

Byron Katie was the second daughter of a homemaker and a railroad engineer. She had a run-of-the-mill upbringing in the Mohave Desert of southern California. After being married at 19, she spent the '60s, and most of the '70s, raising her three kids and becoming a local real estate mini-tycoon.

What happened next knocked this down-to-earth lady sideways. Divorcing her husband at 33, Katie slipped into a downward plunge of rage, paranoia, and suicidal depression. Incredibly obese, for two years she could hardly leave her bedroom, often unable to bathe or brush her teeth. "I had plenty of money, a beautiful home, three kids who were healthy," she maintains. "But I felt ungrateful and confused. I was dying."

Katie moved to a kind of detox facility where she was banished to the attic because the other women were afraid of her outbursts. Katie fell asleep one night in 1986, waking up to find a cockroach running over her foot, whereupon she experienced a stunning, out-of-nowhere shift in consciousness in which four questions popped up that would not only heal her, but lead to discovering what she calls freedom from suffering.

She returned home at 43, completely at peace. "I realised that my thoughts were creating my suffering," Katie has since observed. Gradually, she began to

work with neighbours who wanted to know how she had changed so remarkably. She received invitations to speak. "Our most intimate relationship is the one we have with our own minds," she says. "I was in terrible shape till one day I realised a simple thing. When I believed my own thoughts about myself, I suffered. When I didn't believe them, I didn't suffer. Everything changed for me

after that day. Suffering over things that have happened to us is nothing more than an argument with the past. Your father may have slapped you when you were three, but you've done it now a million times."

"On our deathbeds, we're still saying that he or she ruined my life," Katie explains. "People say life is a dream. Well, let's question the nightmare and have a happy dream! Retiring from stressful thoughts could be the most important retirement there is."

She began holding informal sessions at her Mojave Desert home, and word spread

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of her teachings. Supported by donations and sales of audiotapes and videos from her base in Manhattan Beach, California, Katie now travels the globe as host to workshops for corporate managers, and brings her message to everyone from prison inmates to abused children. "I just know that people want to be free," she says. "And if I have something they believe will help them, then I give it in the same way I got it."

When asked what she does, Katie replies, "I clear people's minds." Since 1992, Byron Katie has travelled the world clearing minds. She gives an average of three free workshops per month, teaching people her method to end emotional suffering. She instructs them to write down their troublesome thoughts: 'My mother should love me more.' 'My wife shouldn't cheat on me.' 'I need to lose weight.' Then they apply to each thought the following four questions: Is it true or can I really know that it's true? How do I react when I think that thought? Can I find one peaceful reason to believe that thought? Who would I be without the thought? She then engages what she calls 'the turnaround,' flipping those initial statements to see if their opposites don't feel equally, if not more, true: I should love my mother more. I shouldn't cheat on myself. I don't need to lose weight.

Resting on this self-inquiry and linguistic reversals, her philosophy can be used, say proponents, to overcome troubled family relationships, problems at work, even the trauma of rape or the grief of losing a loved one to terrorism.

Katie's Work

The Work, as Katie terms her approach (some friends suggested she call it La Cucaracha after the enlightening cockroach), is a simple yet powerful process of inquiry that, she claims, teaches you to identify and question the stressful thoughts that cause all the suffering in the world. It's a way to understand what's hurting you, a way to end all

your stress and suffering.

People who do The Work, she says, faithfully report life-changing results.

* Eliminate stress: Live without anxiety or fear

* Improve relationships: Have a new sense of connection and intimacy with your husband or wife, your parents, your children, and with yourself

* Reduce anger: Get angry less often and less intensely, and eventually not at all

* Eliminate depression: See perfection in situations that were once debilitating

* Clarity: Act more intelligently and effectively

* Energy: Experience a new sense of vigour and well-being

* Peace: Learn how to love what is, and find lasting inner peace

How to do The Work

The simplest way to do The Work is outlined below by Byron Katie herself:

Judge Your Neighbour

For thousands of years, we've been told not to judge, but we still do it all the time – how our friends should act, whom our children should care about, what our parents should feel, do, or say. In The Work, rather than suppress these judgments, we use them as starting points for self-realisation. By letting the judging mind have its life on paper, we discover through the mirror of those around us what we haven't yet realised about ourselves.

Fill in a Judge-Your-Neighbour worksheet below:

The Judge-Your-Neighbour Worksheet

Fill in the blanks below, using short, simple sentences. Don't censor yourself; don't be wise or spiritual. Take this opportunity to express your negative feelings on paper.

1) Who angers, irritates, saddens, or frustrates you, and why?

I am _____ at _____ because _____

Example: I am angry at Paul because he doesn't listen to me, he doesn't appreciate me, he argues with everything I say.

2) How do you want them to change? What do you want them to do?

I want _____ to _____

Example: I want Paul to see that he is wrong.

I want him to apologise.

3) What is it that they should or shouldn't do, be, think, or feel? What advice could you offer?

_____ should/shouldn't _____

Example: Paul should take better care of himself. He shouldn't argue with me.

4) What do they need to do in order for you to be happy?

I need _____ to _____

Example: I need Paul to hear me and respect me.

5) What do you think of them? Make a list.

_____ is _____

Example: Paul is unfair, arrogant, loud, dishonest, way out of line, and unconscious

6) What is it that you don't want to experience with that person again?

I don't ever want to _____

Example: I don't ever want to feel unappreciated by Paul again. I don't ever want to see him smoking and ruining his health again.

The Four Questions

Investigate each of your statements from the Judge-Your-Neighbour Worksheet using the four questions and the turnaround below. The Work is meditation. It's about awareness, not about trying to change your thoughts. Ask the questions, then take your time, go inside, and wait for the deeper answers to surface.

In its most basic form, The Work consists of four questions and a turnaround.

For example, the first thought that you might question on the above Worksheet is “Paul doesn’t listen to me.” Find someone in your life about whom you have had that thought, and let’s do The Work. “(Name) doesn’t listen to me.”

Is it true?

Can you absolutely know that it’s true?

How do you react, what happens, when you think that thought?

Who would you be without the thought?

Then turn it around (the concept you are questioning), and don’t forget to find three genuine examples of each turnaround.

Turn it around

After you’ve investigated your statement with the four questions, you’re ready to turn it around (the concept you are questioning).

Each turnaround is an opportunity to experience the opposite of your original statement and see what you and the person you’ve judged have in common.

A statement can be turned around to the opposite, to the other, and to the self (and sometimes to “my thinking,” wherever that applies). Find a minimum of three genuine examples in your life where each turnaround is true.

For example, “Paul doesn’t understand me” can be turned around to “Paul does understand me.” Another turnaround is “I don’t understand Paul.” A third is “I don’t understand myself.”

Be creative with the turnarounds. They are revelations, showing you previously unseen aspects of yourself reflected back through others. Once you’ve found a turnaround, go inside and let yourself feel it. Find a minimum of three genuine examples where the turnaround is true in your life.

As I began living my turnarounds, I noticed that I was everything I called you. You were merely my projection. Now, instead of trying to change the world around me (this didn’t work, but

only for 43 years), I can put the thoughts on paper, investigate them, turn them around, and find that I am the very thing I thought you were. In the moment I see you as selfish, I am selfish (deciding how you should be). In the moment I see you as unkind, I am unkind. If I believe you should stop waging war, I am waging war on you in my mind.

The turnarounds are your prescription for happiness. Live the medicine you have been prescribing for others. The world is waiting for just one person to live it. You’re the one.

Examples of Turnarounds

Here are a few more examples of turnarounds:

“He should understand me” turns around to:

- He shouldn’t understand me. (This is



The turnarounds are your prescription for happiness



reality.)

- I should understand him.

- I should understand myself.

“I need him to be kind to me” turns around to:

- I don’t need him to be kind to me.

- I need me to be kind to him. (Can I live it?)

- I need me to be kind to myself.

“He is unloving to me” turns around to:

- He is loving to me. (To the best of his ability)

- I am unloving to him. (Can I find it?)

- I am unloving to me (When I don’t inquire.)

“Paul shouldn’t shout at me” turns around to:

- Paul should shout at me. (Obviously:

In reality, he does sometimes. Am I listening?)

- I shouldn’t shout at Paul.

- I shouldn’t shout at me.

(In my head, am I playing over and over again Paul’s shouting? Who’s more merciful, Paul who shouted once, or me who replayed it a 100 times?)

Embracing reality

After you have turned around the judgments in your answers to numbers one through five on the Worksheet (asking if they are as true or truer), turn number six around using “I am willing...” and “I look forward to...”

For example, “I don’t ever want to experience an argument with Paul” turns around to “I am willing to experience an argument with Paul” and “I look forward to experiencing an argument with Paul.” Why would you look forward to it?

Number six is about fully embracing all of mind and life without fear, and being open to reality. If you experience an argument with Paul again, good. If it hurts, you can put your thoughts on paper and investigate them. Uncomfortable feelings are merely the reminders that we are attached to something that may not be true for us. They let us know that it’s time to do The Work.

Until you can see the enemy as a friend, your Work is not done. This doesn’t mean you must invite him to dinner. Friendship is an internal experience. You may never see him again, you may even divorce him, but as you think about him are you feeling stress or peace?

“In my experience, it takes only one person to have a successful relationship. I like to say I have the perfect marriage, and I can’t really know what kind of marriage my husband has (though he tells me he’s happy too),” says Katie.

If you can decide to stop arguing with reality, and trying to make a cat bark, as Katie puts it, the four questions should solve your psychological problems. ☺

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