

The Practice of Letting Go

by William Frank Diedrich,
Michael A. Limauro,
and John Bailey

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John Bailey and Transformative Press

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ISBN: 9798861120586

Retail Price: \$25.00 USD

Non-fiction

Printed in the USA

Cover design by Samantha Dillon

Fiction by William Frank Diedrich

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- *The Secret Life of an Ordinary Man*
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Transformative Press
East Lansing, Michigan USA
<http://humanadulthood.com>

To those of you who are willing and
to those of you who taught us how to let go.

From Readers

Reading this book has been truly transformative for me. It provided therapeutic insights, highlighting areas where I need personal growth and enhanced my understanding of my identity. The book's strategies for managing stress, anger, negativity and optimizing one's life with a purpose to bring joy to ourselves and others were invaluable. Thank you for sharing such insightful wisdom and encouraging vulnerability.

Vivek Sreedhar

A stubborn fact about living in this “tired old world,” is that everyone, at one time or another, has experienced some form of pain and suffering, some sense of life being unfair or lacking in justice, as well as various degrees of disappointment, feelings of humiliation, of being misunderstood, of being let down by significant people in our lives. These experiences can continue to affect and influence us in negative ways often long after they have occurred. As a result, our attention can get stuck in these very memories themselves, and can hold us back from achieving our highest potential. Even though we may really want to move beyond these barriers, we may not have found a way to do so.

Here is where the disciplines outlined in *The Practice of Letting Go* can be of great help in freeing us up from that which may be holding us back. The key word in the title of this book is *Practice*. So, what exactly does the word *practice* mean? When one is learning to play a musical instrument, learning to play tennis or some other sport, or learning a profession, there are skills that need to be practiced until these skills become second nature. The emphasis in this kind of training is both on *what* to do and *how* to do it. This book is full of different strategies and practical exercises for illustrating exactly how to *let go* of things that may be holding us back. I recommend it highly!

Paul Hanks

In a world full of human upheaval, and drama, William Frank Diedrich, Michael A. Limauro, and John Bailey have written the book that everyone should read. *The Practice of Letting Go* is not a theological treatise nor a manual on institutionalized beliefs of organized religions. Presented in a format easy to read, with dialogues and short essays, this guide to spiritual fulfillment is a gem armed with healing power. *How do we live a worthy life?* or *How do we love?* are some of the important questions this book has helped me to answer. There is a spiritual solution for every problem, and there is more to human endeavor than the despair and the gloom out there.

Pierre Balthazar

CONTENTS

Introduction	6
How to Use This Book	7
1. Letting Go of Emotional States	8
2. Letting Go of Mental States.	27
3. Letting Go of Shame and Self-Hatred	49
4. Letting Go of Physical Pain and Craving	58
5. Letting Go Spiritually.	73
6. Letting Go of People, Places, and Things.	80
7. Letting Go of Victimhood.	92
8. On Being Resilient.	102
9. Letting Go of Guilt	105
10. Letting Go Through Grief.	108
11. Letting Go in Personal and Professional Life.	121
12. Letting Go of World Events: A Practical Application for: Dealing with World Conflicts and Problems	127
13. Letting Go of Identity.	139
14. Letting Go—Complete Surrender	145
15. The Practice of Complete Surrender	157
16. Conclusions and Next Steps.	172
Helpful Books on Letting Go	174
Acknowledgements	176

INTRODUCTION

This book is an invitation. We invite you to participate in a conversation with us about letting go. We are all emotional beings. The world we live in promotes fear and stress. It encourages victimhood. The media and often the people around us tell us to be afraid, to worry and to protect ourselves from threats. What are the threats? Disease, weather and climate, financial loss, bad people, political and religious groups we disagree with, other people's needs, and situations that may not work out—all of these are perceived as threats. We are often stuck in repetitive emotional states such as anxiety, anger, grief, hurt, depression, shame, and guilt. Our efforts to change the world, to change other people frustrate us because they are ineffective. Our efforts to change ourselves, to be more positive or confident, often fail, and also frustrate us. We need solutions, answers.

There are answers, and they exist within you. The answer is to let go. Letting go does not mean you don't care. It doesn't mean steeling yourself against the world and all of its negative aspects. To let go is to release, to forgive, to no longer hold a thought, feeling, belief, person or group, thing, situation, identity, or idea that does not serve your greater good.

Letting go is the way in which we gain peace, power, and an ability to influence the world around us. Yes, you can find peace in the middle of conflict; exercise power in situations where you have felt powerless; and influence your world in a positive way. It will take some work on your part, but we know you will find it worth your time and effort. We know you are capable of letting go and becoming the powerful being you are meant to be. Yes, you.

Why let go? It ends suffering. Letting go opens you to creativity and freedom. When you let go you are free of fear. No person, no thought, no situation, no illness, no thing owns you. When you let go spiritually you live in a state of certainty and reliance on the One Power and Presence within and all around you.

So, we invite you to join in this conversation about letting go, about peace and power and influence. We invite you to open your mind and your heart to seemingly impossible ideas—ideas and concepts that will change your life. All it takes on your part to begin this venture, this conversation, is your willingness. Are you willing? Are you willing to take a good look at yourself—your beliefs about self and the world, your ideas about life? Are you willing to take a chance and try something new? It will cost you nothing other than the possible loss of some old ideas that aren't working for you anyway. Are you willing? If so, let's begin.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is meant to be used, not just read. We will ask you questions. You will find great benefit if you respond to them either in your mind, on paper, or typed on a screen. Some sections will hold greater value for you than others. You may want to spend more time on those.

In the Introduction we used the name: *the One Power and Presence within and all around you*. Throughout the book, for simplicity's sake, we will refer to this as *God*. The name *God* evokes images in everyone's mind, some not so positive. When we say *God*, picture *your* version of a Higher Power, or simply whatever is your source of inspiration. Some may see God as a being. Some may see God as intuition, as the Inner Voice. That works! Even if you don't think there is a Higher Power, you can still use this book. Your *source* then is the wise adult within you, or intuition. We all have that.

The purpose of this book is to inspire you to let go, and to show you how to do it. As the book progresses the lessons deepen. Go as far as you are ready and willing. Our purpose here is not to offer a belief system or a new religion. If your current religion or spiritual path is working for you, then use it. This book does not deal in wrongness or rightness of religion or spiritual paths. Our focus is on letting go, and we share our own experiences in letting go.

Our mission with this book is to help those who are ready and willing to let go of all of the stuff that gets in the way of living a joy-filled, purpose-driven life.

Our goal is to offer practical information to help you practice letting go emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Our values include being truthful to you and always being truly helpful.

We don't ask you to agree with everything we write. It can be valuable if you disagree at times. This will cause you to come to conclusions on your own. We, as authors, don't agree with each other on everything. That's okay. We don't have all the answers for you, but you do. We intend to be the spark that will help you find the answers you need.

If you find this book helpful we'd love to hear from you. See our contact information in the back of the book.

Blessings,
Bill, Mike, and John

CHAPTER

1

LETTING GO OF EMOTIONAL STATES

Emotion is the energy that animates thought, memories, and our visions for the future. All thoughts are rooted in emotion, and all emotions may be classified as either *positive* or *negative*, *love-based* or *fear-based*. Usually positive emotion enhances and strengthens life. Negative emotion weakens life. Although we will use the terms *positive* and *negative* in this book, there are exceptions to these identifications. Exceptions will be discussed later in this chapter. What truly matters is your degree of emotional intelligence.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

- › Your awareness of your emotional state.
- › Your ability to accept and flow with the way you feel.
- › Your ability to direct emotion into effective, non-destructive behavior.
- › Your ability to read the emotions of others while remaining calm and centered in yourself.
- › Your ability to influence the emotional states and behaviors of others.

Let's begin with awareness. Emotion is energy in motion. Think of an emotional state you have felt or are feeling right now. What you are feeling is energy in motion. It's moving through parts of your body. If it's positive, your body feels enlivened, or completely relaxed. If it's negative, you feel tense, uncomfortable, or tired. For me (Bill), positive energy feels

like my heart is open, energized and enlivened. Negative energy feels tense in the area of my solar plexus. This tension radiates outward sending an unpleasant feeling into my whole body. If the tension leads to depression I feel tired, unmotivated, stuck.

There are many emotions, approximately 87 according to Dr. Brené Brown in her book, *The Atlas of the Heart*. Think about what anger feels like? How does sadness feel? Or, how about depression? Despair? You will find that each of these emotions feels distinctly different. Anger may energize you and feel powerful at first, but prolonged anger wears you down. Depression may feel powerless, hopeless, like there's a great weight pulling you downward, and there is nothing you can do about it. Grief may manifest as deep hurt in your heart center that produces tears and anguish.

Joy may feel exhilarating, energizing your heart area with a tendency to smile or laugh easily. Calm may feel relaxed, restful, especially in the solar plexus area with a sense that all is well. All of these words are representations of what you feel. The words are only for purposes of identifying what is going on inside you. You don't actually feel the word *joy*. You feel sensations in your heart and perhaps throughout your body that you find uplifting.

Words like *joy* or *sadness* describe a feeling, but they are not the feeling. So, when we say focus on the feeling, we mean that you focus on what is actually going on in your body. Your body is an instrument, and feelings are communication.

Now it's your turn.

Notice the sensations in your body in this moment. We're not asking you to do anything about what you feel. We're suggesting you just feel it without judging or fixing it. Breathe and feel. This takes a little practice because, as humans, we tend to immerse ourselves in the drama around what we feel, or we resist our feelings altogether. What we are asking you to do is to continue to feel, and at the same time be aware of what you feel.

Write down the sensations that you feel in your body right now. This is just an awareness exercise. We are not asking you to change your emotional state.

1. Start with your breath. Is your breathing shallow or deep? _____
2. Are you experiencing any tension or discomfort? Scan your body—your neck, shoulders, arms, back, chest, stomach, hips, legs, and feet. Are you tense or relaxed in these areas?

3. Check in with your heart and solar plexus areas. How do these areas feel right now? When you observe an emotional state without feeding it with thought, but focusing only on how it feels in your body, you will find it decreasing in intensity if it is negative. If you feed a negative emotion with thoughts, or if you resist it through judging or blaming yourself or others, you will intensify it until something else grabs your attention.
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4. Spend a little more time focusing on your body's emotional state. Do not judge how you feel. Just be with your body. If your mind drifts into stories, refocus your attention on feelings.

You always feel something. As you move through your day are you aware that you are feeling something, or do you ignore it? We suggest you become more aware.

Where do emotions come from? They come from within you. Outside influences—behaviors of others, or events—these serve to trigger the feelings already present within you. Awareness of an emotional state begins when you become the observer. That is, you experience an emotion, and at the same time you observe yourself experiencing the emotion. Earlier when we asked you to identify your breathing, your tension levels, and overall how you were feeling, you became the observer in that moment.

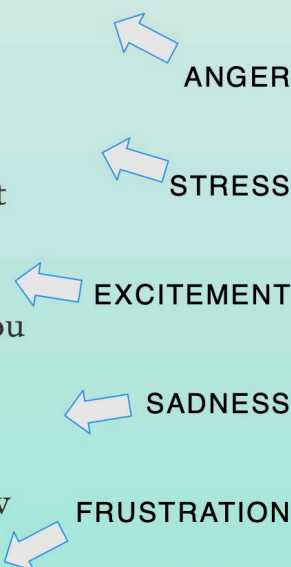
You Own Your Emotions

You own your emotional states. You are responsible.

Emotional intelligence helps you to interrupt patterns of negative emotional reactions.

Awareness of your emotions requires that you become the nonjudgmental observer of yourself.

If you blame someone or something for how you feel, you give up control. You become a victim. Ownership is power.



However you felt at that moment, however you are feeling right now, it's not right or wrong. It just is. If you feel angry, your anger needs to be felt. This does not mean you should act on it verbally or physically. Just be angry and breathe.

However you are feeling in this moment, breathe.

1. Slow down your breathing.
2. Breathe slowly and deeply in through the nose, pulling the air down to your stomach area. Count to four.
3. Exhale even more slowly through the nose or the mouth. Count to six.

The idea here is not to fight or resist how you feel. Just breathe and observe.

Let's talk about triggers.

Triggers

- Triggers are internal and external events and conditions that spark an emotional response that is already within. A thought about an external event can be a trigger
- If someone says something to you and you become angry, it is because there is already anger within you
- We are seldom upset for the reason we think we are. We are usually upset due to an emotional state already present within our minds and bodies
- The external event, the trigger, reminds us, frequently, of some past trauma or event that stuck with us

A triggered reaction is automatic. That is, you don't think about it. Your reaction is conditioned. Triggers are neutral. It is you who gives the trigger its meaning. Someone says something, and you become excited. The meaning you attached to what they said is the real trigger. If you try to manage their emotional state you will probably not succeed. It is only *your* emotional state that needs management. Manage you first, then you will be in a position to help another person. Managing someone else creates stress.

Stress is the gap between *How you see it.* and *How you want it.* Whenever you set a goal there is stress, tension between where you are right now and where you want to be. Stress is a

motivator in situations where you have some control. The goal is attainable then. Stress becomes negative emotion when your goal is unattainable as in:

*I wish that person would be different.
This should not be happening!
That was unfair.*

Unattainable goals come from focusing your attention on things you cannot control. The weather, other people, the world situation, what happened yesterday—are out of your control. All negative emotions can be called stress. Anger, anxiety, resentment, hurt, sadness, irritation—all of these emotions result from the gap between what you want and what you see/have and currently experience.

Stress, in the forms of anxiety, anger, and other negative emotions spark the fight, flight, freeze, or fawn reaction. We react and are unable to think clearly. The prefrontal and frontal cortex areas of the brain, where we do our best thinking, are bypassed, and the limbic system, our emotional brain, takes over.

Stress becomes Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Fawn.



FIGHT

has your arms and hands tensing as if ready to strike someone or something.



FLIGHT

has your large skeletal muscles tensing as if ready to run.



FREEZE

has muscles tensing, freezing up, and unable to move you.



FAWN.

Has you immediately acting to please in order to avoid conflict.

You don't think about these reactions. It's automatic.

What is **your** go-to stress reaction?

Fight?

Flight?

Freeze?

Fawn?

What do you automatically do when you feel anxious, angry, or hurt? Close your eyes and imagine situations from your past. Write down or type your typical stress reaction(s).

On a deeper level our tendencies toward anxiety, fight, flight, freeze, or fawn are conditioned, or wired in and based on past trauma and pain. Letting go at this deeper level prevents us from having to *manage* stress, because it actually removes it. Healing (letting go) does not come from thinking away these deeper issues. True release is accomplished on a feeling level and is often supported by letting go on a spiritual level (regardless of your spiritual orientation). It all begins with your willingness to let go.

Feeling Tones

Most of us have been taught that thoughts create feelings. Rather, it is feeling that creates thought. Research has demonstrated that feeling tones organize thoughts and memory (Gray-LaViolette, 1981, Feeling Tone Theory). Feeling tones lie in the subconscious as a result of past experience and trauma. All that is needed is for a thought, memory, or an event to trigger the feeling tone. Other research has shown that the unconscious impulse to take a specific action emerges .4 second before the conscious decision. That is, most decisions are programmed in the subconscious. You act before you think. (Dr. Benjamin Libet)

In other words, your thoughts and behaviors are mostly programmed and not decided consciously. You think you are making a conscious decision, but most of the time the decision is already made. It's wired in your brain. The evidence for this lies in the number of automatic behaviors you employ daily. Consider all of the things you think, say, and do without actually thinking. You just do it. Think about the sheer volume of repetitive thoughts you entertain each day. It is estimated the average person thinks upward of 60,000

thoughts per day and 90% of them are the same as the day before. (According to the research of Dr. Fred Luskin of Stanford University)

When we let go of a feeling, we are releasing all associated thoughts. Thoughts are rationalizations of the mind to explain the presence of a feeling. That is, the feeling is triggered, then thoughts arise to justify, explain, or reinforce the feeling. Thoughts are automatic extensions of the energy that is already in motion. Whatever we thought last time we had this feeling is the same this time. Feeling tones are followed by patterns of thought and behavior as is obvious in a person who daily expresses anger, or one who complains every day and feels irritated. All that is needed to spark the emotional response is a trigger.

A feeling tone is in the subconscious as it is based on one's deeply held beliefs about the self. For example, if the feeling tone is resentment, then all you need is a thought, memory, or event to trigger the feelings you may describe as *resentment*. As soon as your brain detects the feeling tone (within .4 of a second) your thoughts begin.

Examples:

Why does she get more than me?

That's not fair!

They always get everything because they're rich.

You don't love me as much as I love you!

The feeling of resentment is based on a core belief in lack, such as a lack of love for the self. You are unlikely to feel resentful if you feel fully loved and loving. If you feel unloved then resentment, disappointment, bitterness, or another negative emotion will flow from that core belief. The core belief is from an identity, a self-image you hold. For example, your belief in lack may come from an identity that says you are unworthy. We tend to hold many identities within our subconscious minds. We will get into identities later in this book.

Most humans have one or two feeling tones that serve as themes. Each theme shows up as a tendency to feel a certain way, to interpret situations as reason for resentment, or anger, or sadness, or whatever the feeling tone may be. Once you notice you have a tendency to react with a specific feeling tone you can begin to let it go.

As we have stated, feeling tones are wired in your brain. That is, every negative feeling tone has a physiological component. Your brain contains billions of neurons. Neurons are cells that serve as information messengers. They use electrical impulses and chemical signals to transmit information between different areas of the brain, and between the brain and the rest of the nervous system. The majority of neurons are in the brain, and there are some located in the heart. When a signal is emitted from one neuron to another neuron, a neural connection is formed. When multiple connections are made between multiple neurons, a neural network is created.

Neural networks are the physiological basis of learning. Each time we learn something a connection is made between two or more neurons. As the learning becomes more complex multiple neurons are connected forming networks. When presented with something new, the brain always searches its neural networks (memory) for something already known to connect to. Physiologically, feeling tones are represented by neural networks.

Neurons fire together and are then wired together. That is, through constant repetition, neurons solidify their connection. Your response becomes automatic. When you practice something many times you form a strong neural network. This is true of specific mental and physical skills such as riding a bike as well as feeling tones such as resentment.

If you have practiced seeing yourself as not good enough, that view of self is wired in your brain and your body as shame. In this example, a neural network automatically engages whenever it is triggered. This is why we cannot just think negative tendencies away. Most of us are unaware of why we are feeling shame, resentment, or another negative emotion.

Your turn again.

Feeling Tones

What is/are your dominant feeling tones? That is, what emotional state tends to show up over and over again.

Resentment? Anger? Hurt? Not good enough? Depressed? Irritation and annoyance? Guilt? Shame? Self-righteous anger? Lack (never enough!)? Disappointment?

What does that feel like in your body? Tension in heart or solar plexus? Frowning? Tension in neck and shoulders?

Stomach tension or pain? Over all tension in large skeletal muscles? Restlessness in muscles—wanting to escape?

Making a fist, wanting to hit something?

What is/are your dominant feeling tone(s): _____

Feeling tones have been practiced, in most cases, for years. They can be let go with intention and practice.

We may not know the why or the how of a negative and possibly debilitating emotional state or feeling tone, yet all feelings can be let go at any time and any where, sometimes quickly. This can be done continually and, with practice, it can be effortless. When you practice letting go of an emotional state, the neural connections of your negative feeling tone weaken. When you follow with a practice of a positive response, you then build new networks that facilitate a healthier response. Example: You feel nervous about speaking in front of a group. You fear being criticized or being seen as incompetent. You are afraid of embarrassment, and worse than that—humiliation. Embarrassment is based on your own perceived mistakes. Humiliation is based on being ridiculed or called out by others in the group.

To let go of the anxiety, allow yourself to feel it. Sit with it and breathe. Notice that even though you feel the anxiety, it is just a feeling. *You* are okay. Next, feel embarrassment and then humiliation. Do not feed this emotional state with thoughts, but focus your attention on how it feels in your body. Every negative emotion has an expiration date. That is, if you let it run its course without resistance on your part, it exhausts itself.

Let's use the fear of embarrassment or humiliation when speaking to a group as an example:

1. Sit or stand with the feelings and breathe deeply.
2. Do not feed the feelings with images or thoughts. Simply feel what is going on in your body.
3. Once the feeling begins to fade in intensity, imagine yourself feeling confident and capable in front of a group. Imagine the emotional state of confidence and of feeling connected to the group.
4. Assume the body language of confidence and connection. (Good posture, direct eye contact, breathing deeply). See yourself looking into the eyes of your audience, and observe their engagement with both you and your presentation. Feel this in your body.

In my own experience I (Bill) have felt anxious when speaking to larger groups of around 100 to 200 people. In those cases I recognized that the fear was energy. I let myself feel the energy without labeling it as fear or anxiety, but just feeling the sensation in my body. I began speaking, moving my body (gesturing with my hands, walking a few steps to either side or forward). This helped to expend the energy. Upon hearing my voice come through the sound system I let that strengthen my confidence. Within a minute or two the fear was gone.

Fear is nothing to be afraid of. It is just fear. Feel it. Observe it. Accept it—without judgment, without embellishment. Let it be and move forward toward the goal, which in this case is to speak effectively to a large group.

All negative emotions can be experienced and let go. While it will often take more than one practice session, you will let go with continued practice. Positive emotions can be practiced, and new, more favorable neural networks will be created. Old neural networks will weaken as you become conscious and allow your old patterns to play out without judgment or drama.

Acceptance is the key. Whatever you feel, accept it. Experience what you feel. In other words, feel what you feel, then let it be. Observe it and accept it. Be with it. You are okay as you are and as you feel right now.

Acceptance means not judging a feeling as bad or wrong, justified or not justified. It just is.

Most people go to great lengths to avoid feeling negative or uncomfortable emotions. There are four sets of behaviors used to avoid the perceived unpleasant experience of negative emotion. They are:

- Rejection
- Projection
- Escape
- Overt Expression (Acting out)

The rejected, repressed, escaped or acted out negative energy created by these emotions is stored yet still seeks an outlet. Certain thoughts, other people's behaviors, events, mistakes we make, problems—these serve as triggers to what we have been holding within.

Rejection: To reject is to resist a feeling; not allow it to express; to refuse to accept or own the feeling. This is where you refuse to recognize what you feel. In essence, you are rejecting a part of yourself, because what you feel is part of you. Rejection often includes the subconscious refusal to acknowledge a feeling exists. Rejection of negative energy can weaken our immune systems and our mental abilities. Holding negativity within over time leads to physical disease and unexpected negative behavioral expressions. We hold within what we don't want to feel. Rejected, these feelings lodge in the body. Eventually they manifest as physical discomfort or disease.

Projection: To project is to blame the cause of a feeling on someone, a group, an external event, God, or the world. To project is to refuse to take responsibility for a feeling—to

assume it comes from an external source. Projection includes blaming, complaining, venting, dumping, or emoting a feeling. This is where you cast your negative emotion out into the world, at people or situations.

Escape: To escape is to avoid a feeling through some mental or physical activity. This may include daydreaming, watching TV, socializing, or anything that allows you to not feel the emotion. A common way humans practice escape is through addiction. Addiction is the use of an external or internal means to create a chemical reaction in the body in order to escape or to avoid a negative feeling and create an artificial, pleasurable feeling in its place. External addictions are to substances or activities. (alcohol, drugs, gambling, shopping, etc.)

In addiction, you often don't consciously choose your behavior. That is, the addictive behavior is wired in, automatic. You don't have control unless you can intervene for yourself. Let's say you are focused on a problem that troubles you. You decide to escape the unpleasantness by pouring yourself a drink. It's to relax you. You decide to have a second drink. Now that you're relaxed you decide to return to problem solving. Or, perhaps you call it a day and move on to other activities. This is escape, but it isn't addiction.

In addiction, there is no decision. You escape the problem by pouring yourself a drink. You have a second drink. You continue pouring drinks until something else calls for your attention, or you pass out. Addiction is a self-programmed reaction that has become physiological. Of course some physiologies are more sensitive, more likely to be addicted than others. This is why Alcoholism is called a disease. The addiction runs so deep you have no control and the body insists that you keep drinking.

Internal addictions are thoughts and behaviors such as blaming, complaining, or creating drama. These internal actions elicit a chemical response which creates a charge, or feeling in the body. The charge may feel positive at first, or exciting, but often feels bad in the end. Example: You complain to people about your situation. It feels good inside especially if the other person acknowledges your complaint. But complaining also makes you feel powerless. You don't like feeling powerless so you complain some more. The temporary good feeling provides the illusion of power for a short time. Later you feel worse, and seek to cope with the negative with more complaining. This is an example of the addictive cycle.

The addictive cycle is where we employ an addictive thought, feeling, behavior, activity, or substance. After the high, or charge, or good feeling, we crash. We feel anxious or depressed or despairing because we no longer have the addictive crutch to get us through. As the negative feelings intensify, as they always do when the high is over, we feel compelled to resume our addictive stuff—drink, take the drug, blame and complain, overeat, work too hard, gamble, engage in sexual activity, etc.—anything to feel good rather than to experience painful emotion. We give in to the urge and use our drug of choice. The addictive practice

makes us feel good for a bit, but then the guilt and shame show up and we feel worse. This leads us to needing more of the drug or addictive practice, and on and on it goes.

Overt Expression, or *acting out* is often in the form of an attack on someone you blame for your pain. This is not to say you shouldn't express anger or hurt. Nor, are we saying you should never yell at someone. Acting out can be helpful to set a boundary or express something that has been previously repressed. Habitual yelling and screaming is unhealthy. Acting out can damage relationships. It can also be addictive. It provides a false sense of power, especially if the person upon whom you acted out is fearful. If you habitually attack people it will be helpful to notice what results you are producing. People don't want to be around you or work with you when you are angry. Accept your anger and let it go. You can tell the people around you what you are feeling and ask for their patience.

People, in general, are desperate to avoid pain. We reject, project, and try to escape what we feel because we are terrified to face it. The mechanisms of rejection, projection, escape and overt expression are faulty and ineffective, and they cause us additional stress. These mechanisms hurt and often destroy relationships. They halt spiritual growth. They prevent us from being our creative selves. Only letting go is effective, helpful, and often miraculous.

Now it's your turn.

Review the section above on rejection, projection, escape, and overt expression.

1. Which do you tend to employ? _____

2. How do you feel when you employ rejection, projection, escape, or overt expression?

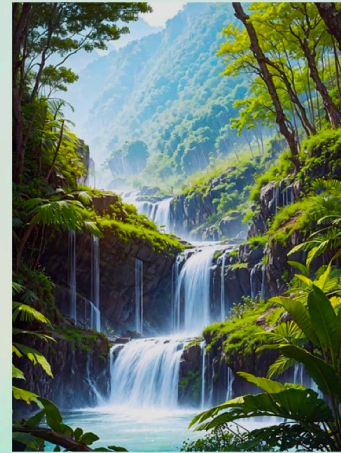
3. What results have you experienced? _____

4. Are you open to practicing letting go? _____

Again, do not judge yourself. Accept and embrace. As you accept what you feel you accept yourself. Acceptance means to acknowledge without judgment, and to own your emotional state. It's yours. To embrace is to love what you feel. We get it. You don't love being sad or anxious. At the moment you are feeling sad or anxious or angry, love that feeling. It is part of you. So, surround the feeling with love.

Practice Acceptance

You either accept the way you feel or you resist it. When you accept the feeling, or emotional state, it tends to move through you. Each negative emotional state has an expiration date. That is, if you allow it to flow within and through you, it will pass. What you resist will persist.



Imagine you have a small child, and your little one is feeling sad. Wouldn't you surround that child with love? Your love helps the child to move through sadness to a more joyful state. Your embrace, your understanding words, your practice of listening to your child's feelings—these help the child to feel better. Do the same for yourself! Surrender your resistance, your unwillingness to feel, and any judgment you may have. To surrender is to let go of any attachment. It requires a willingness on your part to release both the negative feelings and your resistance to them. Surrender the negative feeling itself through accepting and embracing it. In the surrendered state you are no longer a victim of what you feel.

“What is the surrendered state? It means to be free of negative feelings in a given area so that creativity and spontaneity can manifest without opposition or the interference of inner conflicts.” (Hawkins, David R. *Letting Go*)

To be clear, you can let go of negative emotions by allowing yourself to feel them, without judgment, without fighting them, without resistance.

“Letting go involves being aware of a feeling, letting it come up, staying with it, and letting it run its course without wanting to make it different or do anything about it. It means simply to let the feeling be there and to focus on letting out the energy behind it. The first step is to allow yourself to have the feeling without resisting it, venting it, fearing it, condemning it, or moralizing about it. It means to drop judgment and to see that it is just a feeling. The technique is to be with the feeling and surrender all efforts to modify it in any way. Let go of wanting to resist the feeling. It is resistance that keeps the feeling going.” (Hawkins, David R. *Letting Go*)

This is not a thinking process. It's a feeling process. Make the decision to enter the feeling process. If you can't stop the train of thoughts, then focus your thoughts on what sensations you feel in the body. Do not analyze.

“When letting go, ignore all thoughts. Focus on the feeling itself, not on the thoughts. Thoughts are endless and self-reinforcing, and they only breed more thoughts.” (Hawkins, David R. *Letting Go*)

If thoughts do intrude leave them be. Let them run while you stay present with the emotion. Allow the thoughts to be like passing clouds. Don't give them your energy or attention. Your attention is on feeling.

To be clear, you can let go of negative emotions by allowing yourself to feel them, without judgment, without fighting them, without resistance. Practice acceptance.

There's always more until there isn't. Feelings return when there is more to be released. Other feelings emerge because they need to be released. This continual uprising of feelings is necessary in order to let go of your negative patterns. All negatively charged feelings are opportunities. All negative emotions have an expiration date, but only if you allow yourself to feel them without judgment.

If a negative emotion continually emerges within you, you may think you have had enough. This is counterintuitive we know, but the real problem is you *haven't* felt it enough. That's why it continues to show up. You have resisted it through avoidance, projection, rejection, or overt expression. You have blamed yourself or others, therefore you have not allowed the feeling to run its course.

All emotions are meant to be felt and then released. They flow in and then out. Your resistance impedes the flow. Your judgment or blaming impedes the flow. All emotions are okay. There is no need to justify how you feel. How you feel is how you feel. No one, including you, is to blame. Listen to your feelings, accept them, and embrace them. They are part of you.

When you notice patterns of emotional states such as anger or resentment or disappointment, you can let them go and end the repetitive tendency of those feelings. This is what you can do:

1. Observe yourself feeling pain, stress, frustration, anger or discomfort or any negative emotion.
2. Do not judge yourself.

3. Feel the feeling without adding thoughts or trying to change it.
4. Don't analyze. Answers show up without you figuring it out. Keep this on a feeling level.
5. Let the feelings play out. Focus on feeling. Do not engage in explaining why. Focus your attention on how it feels. It's okay. It has only been your resistance that has allowed this feeling tone to continue. What does it feel like in your body?
6. Negative or fear-based feelings will play out and fade if you don't feed or resist them. Let them run their course.

Mike: When my son died I had to fly from Michigan to Texas where he had lived. I cried the whole flight. I sat near a window; the seat next to me was empty (the only empty seat on the whole airplane); and I pulled my cap over my eyes. I cried until there were no more tears. When my wife flew down the next day, I cried with her.

By allowing my grief feelings to flow I was able to move forward a little more. If I were to stifle or resist the feelings the grief would still be inside, and it would affect my relationships, possibly my health and my work. I will not forget my son, and I may still feel sorrow and loss as the years pass. Each time these feelings arise I will feel them, accept them, embrace them and let go.

If repressing hurts us, and overtly acting out negativity also hurts us, what can we do? We can allow ourselves to feel. Emotions felt and then released are valuable. Each feeling is telling us something. Each feeling, positive or negative, is an important message. Consider this: Intuition comes to us through our feelings. This makes all feelings, positive or negative, valuable.

Bill: With grief you can express the sadness and loss associated with grief with crying and tears. What about anger and other disturbed emotions?. Can we express anger in a healthy way? Mike, do you think it's possible to express hurtful emotion without collateral damage?

Mike: I like to practice my letting go in the car. If I'm angry I scream. No collateral damage. There are times I'm crying so hard I have to pull over. I play music that reminds me of my son. It triggers any grief feelings or regret or guilt that is still within me. I can feel it without resistance, without fear. When I get out of the car I feel lighter, like a different person. That allows me to let it go. All emotions have an expiration date. When I can play those songs and the hurt is no longer triggered—it's gone.

Bill: We are not all created the same when it comes to feeling our emotions. For some, feeling comes easily. For others, the feelings seem buried or non-existent. An author and a teacher of mine, Thomas Mycal Powell, teaches that some people are *Jellos* and some are

Rocks. The *Jello* people feel easily, and they can do these exercises with great success. The *Rock* people struggle to feel anything.

Rock people can do these letting go exercises by first feeling their resistance. That is, you know something is going on inside that makes you somewhat angry, or sad, or resentful, or hurt, but you can't seem to access the full feeling. You can access your resistance. Feel the resistance. Feel the inability to feel. What does that feel like inside? For some, it feels like everything is frozen or that the heart area is confined by concrete. However you might describe your resistance to feeling emotion, feel the resistance.

Work with this until you can reach the actual feeling beneath your hard defenses. Once feelings start to emerge you might feel panic or vulnerability—feel that. The key is to feel whatever shows up. Allow it.

Moods

We should say something about moods. Moods are prolonged emotional states that color our perceptions and influence our behaviors. If you are in an irritable mood then nearly everything and everyone irritates you.

Moods are usually triggered by a thought, physical discomfort, pain, or an external event. Pain or physical discomfort can make it difficult to express positive emotion. A friend once told me she had been in an irritable mood for a week. She could not figure out why. She asked every day for an answer. One day, while driving on the expressway, the answer came.

The truck trailer in front of her was dirty and someone had written a message on it. It read: "Nothing goes right when your underwear is too tight."

She realized she was feeling discomfort for just that reason. She had gained weight over the past several months, but, being in denial about it, she had purchased undergarments that were too small. She laughed at herself and purchased something more comfortable.

You can let go of moods in the same way you release other emotional states. Acknowledge the feelings, accept them, and embrace them. If there is something you can do to eliminate the trigger, like buying new underwear, that can help, too.

While we have used the terms positive and negative to describe emotions, consider the words constructive and destructive. Your emotions can be constructive or destructive. We, the authors, discussed this, questioning whether anger can be constructive. It is obvious how destructive anger can be. Your anger can trigger anger or fear in others. If you are not used to expressing anger, it may trigger guilt. But, can anger be constructive?

It can. Many years ago I (Bill) worked as a therapist. I facilitated a group of women whose children had been sexually abused by their fathers (the husbands of these women). I asked the women, 21 of them, how many of them had also experienced sexual abuse as children. All 21 raised their hands. They were abused as children, grew up and married men who abused their children. Many of the men had been abused as children, also.

One evening the women in our group began expressing anger toward men. Their anger was palpable. After an hour or so of angry expression they looked at me, the only man there, and showed concern. I told them it wasn't personal to me, and that their anger was needed in order to begin to establish healthy boundaries. They needed to be strong enough to protect their children. Anger was a step toward that goal.

People who have been physically and emotionally victimized need to express their anger in order to step out of their feelings of powerlessness, of victimhood. Of course, we don't want to be angry for the rest of our lives. We move through the anger by feeling it and accepting it. Anger as a step is healthy. Anger that never goes away is unhealthy.

How do you direct emotion? By accepting and embracing what you feel you are directing your emotions toward a healthier state. Once you have allowed emotions to play out you can decide how you want to feel. For example, you want to feel joyful. Intending to feel joyful is the beginning. Follow up with deep breathing and good posture. Smile as if you are already joyful. Laugh, even if it isn't real yet. Move your body through dance, yoga, stretching, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, or some other movement. By engaging your body you can move into a more joyful emotional state. See the Practice section on the next page.

Your positive emotional state along with your confidence to express it will influence others, and in many instances, affect their emotional states.

Every morning I (Bill) I walk three miles on a local nature trail. I smile and say "Good morning." To everyone I pass. Most people return the smile and the greeting. My daily smiling action may help to lift someone up emotionally. I am already up emotionally because for most of the hour or so that I am walking, I am also praying—affirming my own well-being and affirming the well-being of everyone in my life.

Throughout my day, wherever I go, I greet people with a smile. This communicates to each person that I recognize them as important, as worth my attention. If I wake up in the morning in a negative emotional state or unpleasant mood, I go through the actions recommended in the practice section on the next page. After years of practice I find I can accept and let go of negativity within minutes, sometimes seconds. You will attain this same proficiency when you practice the letting go process as a regular and essential part of your day.

• PRINCIPLE •

You have to feel it to heal it. Explanation: Emotions are meant to be experienced. When you allow yourself to experience whatever emotion shows up, if it is negative or unpleasant, you heal it.

• PRACTICE •

When any negative or unpleasant emotion shows up:

1. Allow yourself to feel it.
2. Observe yourself feeling it. Notice the sensations in your body.
3. Accept what you feel without judgment.
4. Don't analyze it, and don't add thoughts to it. Just feel the sensations in your body.
5. Focus on the sensations. Your only thoughts should be on identifying what you are feeling.
6. Embrace what you feel. That is, surround it with love.
7. As you allow yourself to feel you will be letting the feelings go.

Next, Create Positive Emotion:

As you let go of negative feelings clarify for yourself how you want to feel. That is, if you feel hopeless in a situation, choose an opposite and positive emotion to replace the hopelessness. Examples may include: confidence, faith, strength, powerful, calm, enthusiastic, energized, or joyful. Practice your new positive feelings. Do this with your whole body. That is, say you choose confidence—stand, hold the posture of, breathe, and move as a confident person would. Be confident in every part of your mind and body. Practice this. Every practice moment serves to build healthy neural connections making your way of being (confident) automatic.

Your Emotional Landscape

This page offers a visual way for you to observe your emotional state. On the left you see stormy weather and to the right you see a sunny day. Emotions can be dark, stormy, unsettling, and make us feel vulnerable to our surroundings (Negative or fear-based). Emotions can also be joyous, contented, upbeat, calm and make us feel as if our surroundings are meeting our needs. (Positive or love-based)

Use the space below to map your emotional tendencies—your stormier, darker emotions to the left. Identify fearful emotions (worry, anger, feeling down, resentful, disappointed, anxiety, irritated, etc.) You can write the emotion on the map or simply place a dot or small sticker to represent each emotion.

On the right side name your love-based or positive emotions (joy, peace, enthusiasm, contentment, calm, love, confident, etc.) or put a dot or heart on it to represent those emotions. When you are complete you will have a collection of words, or dots or hearts distributed between both sides of the picture. This is your emotional landscape.

It is common to feel more negative or fearful at this point, not because you are more negative, but because you are paying closer attention. You are more aware. Accept this. As you continue acknowledging, accepting, and embracing how you feel, you will find yourself feeling more positive, love-based emotion. Each time you accept and embrace a fearful emotion you are turning fear into love.



I spend ___% of my day in fear (negativity). I spend ___% of my day in love (positivity).