

Setting Yourself Free with Byron Katie

By Jana Silverman from the California Counseling Institute

I would like to introduce to you the work of Byron Katie. You can't even get passed her name without beginning to question your assumptions. Yes, Byron Katie is a woman and read one of her books and you will begin to question your beliefs about others, about yourself and, ultimately, about what it means to be alive.

As a therapist I find it crucial to continuously work on my own feelings, thoughts and behaviors in therapy. In one session, I worked on my frustration with my mother. My therapist suggested that I think about why I hold my beliefs so tightly, and suggested that Katie could help with this process.

My therapist gave me a simple worksheet from Katie to answer questions like:

- Who angers you, and why?
- How do you want them to change?
- What do you want them to do?
- What do they need to do in order for you to be happy

I felt resistant, but answered these questions anyway. When I had written down all my answers, my therapist asked me to read one answer at a time.

"Here we go" my resistant self thought. My first answer was "My mother frustrates me because she does not accept me the way I am." I found that I held tight to the belief that my mother should accept me the way I am. I was asked four questions about this belief.

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

Answering these four questions started a shift in my thinking. I asked these four questions about all the beliefs that I had found were underlying the thoughts about my mother. Working through this simple yet powerful process of inquiry taught me to identify and question the stressful thoughts that cause my suffering. I realized that what had been causing my stress was not my mother, but the beliefs I had about her. Instead of hopelessly trying to change my mother to match my thoughts about how she should be, I could question these thoughts and, by meeting reality as it is, experience a sense of freedom and joy. I felt a lightness in me that brought on a tremendous feeling of love for my mother, myself and all beings.

Following the four questions, I had to find turnarounds of my beliefs like "I should accept myself the way I am." and a whole new set of questions and answers opened up to me. It was not that something completely new was presented to me but the simple way of questioning my beliefs opened my mind and gave me a fresh approach to topics that many of us consider hard to tackle.

Just recently I read Byron Katie's book "A Thousand Names for Joy: Living in Harmony with the Way Things Are" and found myself pushed even further. I had to tackle questions like "How can a sane human being possible find joy and contentment in tragedy?" Katie's approach is not about silver linings on dark clouds; she helps you find the beauty in the darkness by questioning your beliefs about it.

While I would recommend Katie to anyone, I think her insights are particularly powerful to anyone who is dealing with a life transition. It might be a major transition like dealing with a diagnosis of cancer. But even a transition that feels relatively minor, may find you struggling to find the good in your recent life's path.

Katie can help you love what is, and she'll help you find many more treasures inside. It might not be an easy process, and you will likely find yourself shaking your head at times and feeling like she is pushing too far. But even if you don't agree with all of her specific insights, you can be fairly assured that reading Katie's work will make your life's work more meaningful and joyous. It might not be an easy path, but the most meaningful path is rarely the easiest one.

If you think that Byron Katie's approach would help you and you would like to have support in that process, please feel free to call me at 752-5826 to set up an appointment. Also, to find out more about Byron Katie visit her website at www.thework.com.