

Workbook Chapter Twenty-Six Love Unconditionally

Self-Assessment Tools:

Opening Your Heart: A Guided Meditation Barry K. Weinhold, PhD

Directions: Suggested background music: Paul Sutin's "Serendipity" or Vangelis' "Ignacio." You will need to have another trusted person read this script so you can experience this guided meditation.

"This guided meditation will help you open your heart. It will take about 20 minutes. Place your body in a comfortable position.... Close your eyes.... Take a deep breath and hold it in...hold it...hold it...and let go. Begin letting your body relax. Let your body relax. Take a deep breath in...hold it...hold it... hold it... and let it go. Feel your body relaxing and letting go. Once again, a deep breathe in...hold it...hold it...hold it... and let it go.

As you breathe in now imagine that you can breathe directly into the center of your heart, into the area in the center of your chest (place your hand over your heart and feel your breath going directly into your heart center).

What is the first thing you are aware of as the breath comes into your heart? What do you feel? What do you notice as you breathe directly into your heart? Continue breathing and becoming increasingly more aware of your heart. As you breathe in imagine that you are breathing in a light of golden color. With each in-breath, experience golden light coming into your heart. Follow this golden light in with each breath.

Feel it come all the way into your heart center. Feel your chest beginning to fill with golden light. With each breath feel your heart filling with more golden light. This light is warm and as you breathe in now there is a sense of warmth coming in. Feel your breath filling your heart with warmth. Each time you breathe in very gently with each in-breath, experience that this golden light and warmth is filling your heart. This golden light has healing properties to it. This light has healing properties so as the golden light comes into your heart there is a sense of a healing warm light coming into your heart and gently touching your heart.

It is as if you were in the hands of a master masseuse or masseur and they knew your heart perfectly and using this golden healing light began to gently massage your heart. This light is familiar; you know this light and this feeling, this healing touch. In some way, you know this. Keep breathing in warm, healing light.... As you do that you are becoming aware of places in your heart that are closed.....

We all have places of armoring in and around our heart. Places that seem to shy away from the light as it enters your heart. Be aware of any of these places that seem tight or perhaps numb.

As infants, we came into this life with our hearts totally open. We were totally vulnerable; totally alive. We met each moment without expectation with total trust. See an image of yourself as a newborn baby. Your eyes and your heart are wide open. In your imagination, remember this state of trust. See it, feel it, remember it.... Keep breathing into your heart.....

Yet, over time, our infant trusting hearts, our infant selves had experiences that taught us to feel fear and to close down. Remember now some of these experiences that taught your heart to protect itself. These experiences made you feel like the world was not a safe place for your open-heart.

Breathe into your heart. Breathe in warmth; breathe in light. As you breathe in, become aware of some of the armoring your heart is carrying is a result of the wounding it received in this lifetime. Now feel that you are your heart. There is no past and no future. In your heart, it all happens now.

Breathe into your heart. Let the golden light illumine those places of darkness, of uptightness, of numbness in your heart. Keep breathing gently. Don't try to change what you feel or are experiencing. Keep drawing the golden light into your chest with each in-breath. Let your own heart now reveal to you some place in your heart where healing is needed, knowing that this healing is available to you today. Let your own heart show you this now.... Find that place where you need healing and know that you have available some healing for your heart.... Go into your own heart and let your heart show you this place now....

As you breathe in, breathe directly into this place in your heart that needs healing, drawing the golden light in very gently to this place of wounding. This healing light cannot enter your heart unwelcomed, unbidden, so if you are wanting an opening for your heart and if you are wanting to heal this wound in your heart, now you must ask in some way for this.

Therefore, I invite you now to sound a prayer in your own heart, to literally say the words that ask for healing. Sound these words repeatedly in your heart now. Ask that your heart be opened and that this wound in your heart be healed. Call out that the spirit of all life may touch your heart. Do this in your own way repeatedly asking for healing in your own heart and bringing unconditional love into your life. Ask repeatedly now. You may want to put the words softly onto your lips. In addition, as you listen to this song let the words and the music touch your heart wherever healing is needed today.

Play "How Could Anyone Ever Tell You?" by Shania Noll. Follow this song with "The Rose" by Bette Midler

My Journey to Achieve Unconditional Love

Barry K. Weinhold, PhD

Even as an adolescent I had a glimpse of another way to love each other. I didn't know what to call it at the time, but I remember in church praying for "more

wisdom." I wanted better ways to figure things out and knew I needed to be wiser than I was at the time. Maybe that is a reason why I ended up as a psychologist.

My first encounter with unconditional love that I can remember was when I was only about 4 months old. I can recall the scene, as if it happened yesterday. I am in my crib and my mom comes to check on me. I look up at her with a totally open heart, loving her unconditionally. This is the only way an infant knows to do toward someone they are totally dependent on, and she looked away from my gaze.

For some reason that I didn't know at the time, my open-hearted gaze of unconditional love was too powerful for her to experience and she had to turn away from it. What I intuitively decided at that time was that there must be something wrong with the way I love my mother or she wouldn't have turned away from me. As most infants and young children do, I took her response to me as an indication that I did something wrong.

That fear of loving others that way stayed with me for a long time. I don't think I ever felt safe to open my heart again to my mother. She did not open her heart to me either. We got into many arguments and conflicts growing up. During these conflicts I would say now that she used a lot of "dirty fighting techniques to win. After a while, I just tried to avoid her as much as possible. She was not a happy camper and I often became the projected target of her unhappiness with her life.

I think That incident really hampered me in my ability to love myself and others unconditionally. Mostly, I think it made it hard to love myself unconditionally. All my life I have been self-critical when I made a mistake. I have trouble loving myself unconditionally at those times. If I drop something, I always used to have some comment to myself like, "You are so clumsy."

Very gradually, I have stopped doing that and just pick up what I dropped and move one. I think now I am able to love myself unconditionally more than I ever have in my life. That now also extends to others as well.

I remember a number of years ago when I had to be in Las Vegas for a professional convention for 10 days. I was giving a preconference workshop and a presentation at the actual convention. I dreaded going there. At the end of the 10 days, I looked back and found that I actually enjoyed my stay.

My presentations went well, I ate some really good food and attended several excellent shows. The last night there I went to a midnight show that was terrific and when I came back to my room past 3 a.m., I felt so good that I took off all my clothing and stood in front of a full-length mirror and exclaimed, "Barry, I love you." That was the first and, not the last time, I felt strongly loving toward myself.

Case Example:

The story of Ann Marie illustrates this. "I grew up in an upper middle-class family in a beautiful suburban neighborhood. We all went to church every Sunday and, in every way, we were the envy of all those who knew us. They saw us as the perfect family. The only problem is that we had a terrible secret. I was the youngest child of seven, (five girls and two boys) and I guess when I was born my parents

decided not to have any more children. Being good Catholics for whom birth control was considered a mortal sin, the only alternative for my parents was abstinence. I didn't know this then, but apparently my father decided to get even with my mother for not having sex with him by trying to get his sexual needs met by using me and my older sisters."

With tears flowing she recalled, "I can only remember back to about age 8 when it began with me, although I could have been younger. I can remember hearing my parents' door open every morning before I got up, and I could hear my father's footsteps as he came down the hall. He would come into my room and crawl in bed with me. I can remember him rubbing his erect penis up against me and I can remember his hands on my genitals, but then I blank out. I don't remember what happened after that. I would just freeze with terror and everything would go blank."

She looked at me with a hope that I would understand. She said, "This happened every morning of my life from the time I was 8 years old until I left for college. It was the same every day. I was absolutely terrified around my father and tried to do everything I could to avoid contact with him during the day or in the evening. The feelings of terror would start when I heard his car drive up the driveway. My mother was always chiding me for not being nicer to my father. She would tell me how I had hurt his feelings by not paying enough attention to him."

She continued her story, "After I left home I forgot about all that had happening. In fact, later it seemed like just a fantasy or bad dream. After college, I married a man they approved of and our first couple of years were really rough sexually, but I never connected any of our difficulties to my father. I guess I had really married someone more like my mother, whom I got along with, but never felt close to.

It wasn't until my early 40s that any memory of what happened with my father began to return. After a messy divorce from Bob, mostly brought about my desire to become my own person, I began to have trouble being sexually responsive to men. I hadn't had much experience sexually, so at first, I thought it was just my lack of experience. However, my lack of sexual responsiveness got worse with experience."

She said with some despair, "Finally, I dated and eventually married a man who helped bring it all to the surface. I wanted so much to be able to enjoy sex with him but couldn't. Every time we made love I would feel the panic and terror rise in me, and then I would just freeze. I tried everything I knew, including hypnosis and therapy, but with few results. There were lots of things that my husband said or did that would remind me of my father, and I could feel my body stiffen each time one of those things would happen."

She explained, "I felt this dark mass over my left shoulder and it was always present. I never seemed to escape it but, if I was careful, I could keep it from taking over under most conditions, but sexually it was difficult to avoid. It seemed as if one small thing that my husband did, the way he looked at me or if he touched me in a certain way that I hadn't anticipated, I would be immobilized by the old feelings, and the pain in my body would be almost too much to bear."

She continued, "My husband was understanding, but he began losing patience with me. I decided to confront my father by writing him a letter, only to

have him go senile as a result. My mother apparently knew a lot about what was going on and only once was I able to talk to her about it. All she could say was 'I was too afraid of him to do anything to stop him.' Ann Marie continued, "I felt so guilty and ashamed that I wasn't able to do anything to stop him. I often thought, Why me? Why does he have to pick on me? What have I done to deserve this?" Ann Marie added, "Lately, I have been despairing about all this. I wish I had started work on all this earlier in my life. I waited more than 35 years before I ever knew what was causing me these problems.

That is too long to bury something as pervasive as this. I told my husband that I don't think I will ever be free of these problems and that I'm not sure I want to go on living. He tried to offer me some hope but he, too, is getting worried that we couldn't get through this."

A week after Anne Marie told me all this, she was killed in an accident. Because of what she had told me, I wondered whether this was more of a suicide. After her death, one of her four older sisters revealed to me that she, too, was a victim of her father's lust, but was older when it first happened and was able to fight him off. This sister also told me that her other three sisters were incest victims as well, although they banded together to protect themselves from their father.

It did not occur to any of them that Anne Marie might have suffered the same fate. The conspiracy of silence among her sisters prevented Anne Marie from ever knowing that she was not alone in her plight. She truly believed that there was something wrong with her and that her sisters were spared because whatever was wrong with her was not wrong with them. It led her to live a life of shame. With this level of shame, it is almost impossible for someone to truly love himself or herself.