

Inspired Life Formula with Nina Lockwood

Module 4 Access Inner Wisdom

Exercise 1 The Work

The practice that I'm sharing with you here is called The Work, and was created by Byron Katie as a result of a life-changing experience in which, as she says, she woke up to reality. After struggling with her emotions for several years, Katie had a realization that it wasn't the events in her life that were causing her suffering; it was the thoughts about her experience that were the actual cause. When she stopped believing those painful thoughts, her suffering stopped. She realized that whatever is happening in our lives, suffering is optional. It's only when we resist what is with our thoughts, when we argue with reality, that we suffer. Freedom from that suffering comes from questioning those thoughts and discovering the truth for ourselves.

This method, The Work, is a simple form of questioning your thoughts that requires very little other than an open mind. It has the power to transform your world. The Work consists of four questions that you can ask yourself, followed by what's called a "turnaround" in which you ask yourself to consider the opposite of what you initially believed. If you are interested in knowing the truth for yourself, of becoming free of reactivity, of living with ease and compassion, the honesty that's required will not be hard to muster. I've been to some of Katie's workshops and she is a living, breathing example of joyful, authentic freedom.

Katie recommends that you learn The Work by writing down your painful thoughts on paper in the beginning, because the mind is so fast that it can often outsmart and outpace you to come up with justifications and rationalizations. Taking the time to write down these painful thoughts - which will appear as judgments - stops the mind in its tracks long enough so that you can clearly see what your thoughts are and apply the four questions without getting distracted. That being said, it's been my experience that once you're familiar with the process, you can stop yourself midstream in a painful moment, and the questions, especially the first two, will just pop into your mind and you see the truth right in front of you.

These are the four questions that you can use whenever you are feeling upset or stressed. Oftentimes it's easier to start with your beliefs or judgments about other people - what they should or shouldn't do, how they should behave, how they should treat you - things like that. But you can also examine judgments you have about yourself. As you come up with a statement about yourself or someone else that you believe to be true, you'll see that the statement is be a judgment and is always a variation on the (sometimes not so hidden belief) that "this shouldn't be happening. I shouldn't have to be going through this. It's unfair." And there's often some forgiving or releasing of another other person that's needed - the person who you are judging, or even forgiving yourself for holding on to a belief that is making you suffer.

Stephen Mitchell, Katie's husband and a scholar and translator of eastern wisdom teachings, points out that as you begin to look at your judgments of other people and events, you begin to see that everyone and everything outside of you is simply a reflection of your own beliefs. You, as the narrator of your own story, project your thoughts, opinions, judgments onto the world. And rather than change the world, we can change the mind that creates the world.

So Let's try this process out. you might want to get a piece of paper and write down your responses to this sample statement, or you can listen and then start with your own examples.

Here we go: My father never gave me the encouragement I needed. (you can substitute anyone else for the protagonist here).

The first question to ask, is this: Is it true? Then just sit with the question, being gentle with yourself and allowing the answer to appear from that deeper part of yourself. Take as much time as you need with it, and pause the recording if you need to.

The second question is "Can you absolutely know it's true?" 99% of the time you'll discover that the answer is no. Why? Because if you make the effort you will find plenty of examples, at least one, that disproves your statement. Even if the world tells you you should believe the stressful thought you wrote down, even if you have plenty of other examples that

“prove” you’re right, on an absolute level, you either cannot know for sure or you will find other examples to disprove it. However, if you are still convinced that your statement is true, go to the next question.

The third question is “How do you react when you believe that thought?” Notice what happens inside you as a result of this thought (or, as we’ve been thinking about it in this module -as a result of your interpretation?) Let all the feelings and the sensations arise - all the names you might use, all the behaviors you see yourself doing or having done, and notice as well how you are treating yourself and how that feels. Answering this question shows you how your stressful thoughts cause pain and suffering, not just for the person towards whom you’re directing your hurt feelings but to yourself as well.

The last question is this: “Who would you be (what would you be like) without that thought?” (in our example, the statement was that your father never gave you the encouragement you needed). Imagine if that thought had never occurred to you in the first place or if you never even for a moment believed that your father could be capable of withholding encouragement. What would that feel like? What kind of emotions would you feel if you believed your father did encourage you? The world is what it is and people do what they do. It’s only when we object, we resist, or think it should be other than what it is, that we suffer. But we don’t have to suffer, and this last question helps you see who and what your life would be like without that particular objection.

The final aspect is what’s called the turnaround and you make that turnaround by rewriting or reframing your statement. Instead of using the person’s name that you started with, use the word “I” - in our example, you would reword it by stating: I should encourage myself. Or you could turn it around a different way by stating: My father has encouraged me. This frees you from believing that the world or anyone in it is responsible for your suffering. You can discover that you are responsible and you have the power to set yourself free to find peace and happiness no matter what’s going on around you or even within you.

Use this exercise to start unravelling your painful thoughts, especially the ones you brought into this program. Write down your statements, fill in all

the painful details, let yourself judge the heck out of whoever you've been thinking deserves to be brought to task - so you can see where your thoughts have been leading you and how they've been making you feel.

Once this process becomes familiar to you, you won't need to write down your painful thoughts unless it helps you; sometimes when I have the time I find it's quite useful to write it down so I can see right in front of my eyes, what I've been saying to myself that makes me suffer AND keeps me from taking action in my life.