

# Live, Love, Grow Strong!

Winter Edition, 2008

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271 Madison Avenue, St. 708, NY, NY 10016

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*"When we awaken to the call of beauty, we become aware of new ways of being in the world,"*  
*John O'Donohue*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

*Ellen M. Gregory, MA, LMFT*  
Founder and President

## Reflections

Another year has gone by. I am always amazed at the speed by which my life travels. Each year, I promise myself that I will make more time for me. I founded Midtown Counseling in 2001, now marking the seventh year of repeating the same words. Will this be the time to listen to my own voice?

I am entering this year in a very different place. In August, my son Ben came into the world. When I saw his beautiful face, I promised myself that I would start living in the present, for him, and for me. That entails taking a long hard look in the mirror, so I can realize why I put others before myself, why I can always find time for Midtown Counseling but not for Ellen.

The last half of this year, I worked very hard, so I can work less. I created a Clinical Director position, outsourced payroll, benefits, and taxes, and created an Intake and

Marketing Coordinator position. It feels good to let go of what I had held so close,

In this New Year, as I challenge myself to live for the present, I also challenge all of you to be present with your *self* and the people around you. I challenge you to stop living in your future retirement, in your past, in your relationship that you never had, or in your future self. I challenge you to start living for now.

Look into the mirror and describe what you see. Right now—who are you? Can you clearly see? Do you have the strength to accept all that you are today, not what you hope to be? Can you look at your life and accept it for what it is?

The challenge is to say yes: To come to a place within your *self* where you can live for now and stop fighting the loss of what you don't have. To do this means that you need to stop living in denial, blaming others, making excuses, and avoiding what you know is hidden right below the surface. As you are looking in the mirror, just be with your *self*. The challenge is to accept who you are and to witness your own suffering that may come along with that acceptance.

Accept what is before you, then ask...is this how I want to exist? Is this what I want my presence to be in this world? Is this how I want to be with others?

When I wake up in the morning to Ben's cries, I am sometimes tired and resentful to be on

*(Continued on page 4)*

## The Landscape of Relationships

*Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT*  
Clinical Director

*For the fullness of our own being to take shape, we need to connect with others, to experience vital and authentic relationships.*

We are interdependent beings by nature, biologically, psychologically, and spiritually. Our experience is confirmed by the gaze of the other. We see ourselves in reflection. Our family of origin is a complex, interconnected, intergenerational body of relationship from which we individuate. Chiseled from the stone by expectation, love, compassion, discovery, acceptance, encouragement, and rejection, we emerge as no one else could have.

It is worthwhile to study our selves as if writing a biography on our favorite artist, writer, singer, explorer, or courageous historical figure. Asking questions like, who influenced us? Where were we raised? What beliefs were we exposed to? What losses did we suffer? What were we afraid of? What and who did we love? What were our secret wishes? What was left unsaid? Each family is its own unique country with a culture and language all its own. There are explicit and implicit rules, beliefs, and values.

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## Who we are ...

At Midtown Counseling, we provide in-depth relational therapy for a diverse population of clients including individuals, couples, and families. We heal within relationship and our therapists understand deeply the importance of this awareness. They provide for our clients from within their varying specialties and modalities. We aim to provide diverse and affordable services to the community we serve. **Our mission** is to grow organically as a richly layered and vital community of skilled therapists.

Our **Clinical Community** is centered on a commitment to the professional and personal development of all of its members. A shared vision connects the diversity within our community and encourages the unique voice of each therapist to emerge in her/his work. Our community is founded on the belief in the healing potential of the therapeutic relationship and the importance of providing a safe, sacred, and contained space for our clients. It is nurtured by our support of each other and our dedication to continued training, supervision and peer interaction.

Our **Clinical Model** is based in contemporary psychodynamic, transpersonal, and systemic models of psychology. We have a humanistic and holistic approach that listens to and tends to the minds, bodies, and souls of our clients. We work with clients to move through defense structures and into self-expression for the purpose of healing their suffering. Many of us no longer need the walls we built to protect ourselves but would never risk taking them down alone.

The relationship between therapist and client is a catalyst for transformation. We believe that our clients have within them what they need to effect great change in their lives, and the world, and that therapy is a process of uncovering and actualizing this potential.

We meet our clients where they are emotionally and encourage them to heal within the therapeutic relationship. We discover and witness who they are, rather than telling them how to be. We aim to create a safe environment that responds to, understands, supports, and respects each client.

## Our Clinical Community

*All clinicians at Midtown Counseling are trained in systemic, relational work. Whether working with an individual, couple, or family, our clients find healing within themselves and their relationships. Adding to that, our clinicians each have an area of specialty in which they are passionate about and have extra experience and training.*

### Ellen Gregory, MA, LMFT

Ellen is the Founder and President of Midtown Counseling, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and AAMFT Approved Supervisor Candidate.

Ellen has focused the majority of her clinical career treating anger. Ellen works with individuals, and couples to break the destructive, reactionary patterns of anger. Ellen creates a safe and contained space for clients to understand, explore, and heal the pain and suffering that has been masked by anger.

### Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT

Elena is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist, and Clinical Director of Midtown Counseling.

Elena combines her passion for creative expression with her therapeutic work, creating a safe space for deep healing and recovery of sexual abuse and trauma. Her directive approach is guided by the goals of personal transformation, self-awareness, spiritual connection, empowerment, and living a deeply fulfilling life.

### J. Brooke Radder, Psy.D.

Brooke is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, and a graduate from the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis, holding a certificate in psychoanalytic psychotherapy,

Brooke has worked extensively with groups and individual survivors of trauma. Brooke integrates her psychoanalytic training, interests in Buddhism, and interpersonal style to help bring abuse survivors into greater awareness and acceptance of themselves. Brooke is also influenced by her study of Buddhism, holding an understanding of each individual's inherent sense of freedom.

### Melissa Kester, MA in MFT

Melissa completed her Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, is an Associate Clinician, and Intake and Marketing Coordinator at Midtown Counseling.

Often described as an advocate, Melissa applies her knowledge of social sciences, biology, and evolution to question societal views that encourage inequality. She provides for her clients, a comfortable and unbiased place where they can speak freely about their alternative life choices.

### Linda Reich, MA, LMFT

Linda is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and per-diem clinician at Midtown Counseling.

Linda's passion for healing the family unfolds in her work with adolescents in individual and family therapy, and couples. She journeys with every client as they are stretched to develop the courage, curiosity, and awareness of their un-lived possibilities, helping them to discover the hidden and mysterious potentiality within, moving to self-discovery and healing.

### Rachel McDavid, MA in MFT

Rachel has a Masters Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, a Masters Degree in Spiritual Psychology, and is an Associate Per-diem Clinician at Midtown Counseling.

Rachel is also currently in a certificate program in Somatic Experiencing (SE) based on the work of Peter Levine, focusing on healing trauma through body awareness. Rachel practices with a holistic approach to healing, by having more awareness of the body's process as we experience pain and change.

### Ami Bhladokar-Haque, MPH

Ami has a Masters Degree in Public Health, is currently earning her Masters Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at Iona College, and is an Intern at Midtown Counseling.

Ami works with individuals and couples of diverse backgrounds and is especially attuned to the concerns of interfaith and/or intercultural couples and families. She is particularly skilled at working with pre-marital couples, integrating family of origin work, and (if desired) incorporating spirituality into the therapeutic context.

## Weekly Psychotherapy Support Groups

Our support groups are an extension of specialties we service through our regular individual, couple, and family therapy services. Clients choose our groups to compliment on-going therapeutic work, for the opportunity to share and feel supported with others facing similar challenges, and for the connection to others, realizing they are not alone in their journey.

Our groups run weekly. You must set up an individual intake appointment before entering a group. Call us at 917-968-5599 for more information.

**COST:** \$100 for initial intake appointment and \$60 for each group session

### **Women's Support Group for Anger, Wednesdays 6:30-8:00**

Facilitated by [Melissa Kester, MA in MFT](#) .

### **Men's Support Group for Anger, Thursdays 6:30-8:00**

Facilitated by [Melissa Kester, MA in MFT](#) .

### **Reunion: A Support Group for Women Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Assault, Thursdays, 6:30-8:00**

Facilitated by [Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT](#) and [Brooke Radder, Psy.D.](#)

See page 5 for more information or visit [www.midtowncounseling.com](http://www.midtowncounseling.com)

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## One-Day Workshops

Our workshops are an extension of specialties we service through ongoing individual, couple, and family therapy. They provide an in-depth introduction and beginning step toward healing and self-discovery. They offer clients an opportunity to share and feel supported with others facing similar challenges, and they provide for a connection to others, realizing they are not alone in their journey.

We limit our workshops to 6 participants and they are likely to sell out. Pre-registration is required. Call us at 917-968-5599 for more information.

**COST:** Varies from \$100-\$150 for the entire workshop. Call for details.

**WHEN:** Workshops run on Saturdays. Call us for upcoming dates

### **One-Day Anger Intensive: An In-depth Look at the Root of Your Anger.**

Facilitated by [Ellen Gregory, MA, LMFT](#). See page 5 for more information.

### **Workshop for Women Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Assault**

Facilitated by [Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT](#) and [Brooke Radder, Psy.D.](#)

[Click here for a detailed description](#) or visit [www.midtowncounseling.com](http://www.midtowncounseling.com)

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## Workshop Series

These are similar to our one-day workshops just divided into several shorter series.

### **Couples Communication Group (5-part series) Mondays, 6:00-7:45**

Facilitated by [Ellen Gregory, MA, LMFT](#). See page 5 for a detailed description

**COST:** \$500 per couple for the entire series

### **Workshop for Interfaith/Intercultural Couples, (2-parts) Fridays, 6-8:00pm**

Facilitated by [Ami Bhlaodkar-Haque, MPH](#).

**COST:** \$250 per couple for the entire series

## Practice Updates

Brooke Radder, Psy.D., was recently promoted from per-diem clinician to a full-time staff position. Brooke began her journey at Midtown Counseling in September of 2006, as a post-doctoral clinician fulfilling the experience requirement for her Clinical Psychology License. We have witnessed her grow into a talented, and skillful clinician and are honored to be a part of her personal and professional development.

## Student Training Program

In addition to providing therapeutic services by our licensed MFTs, and post-graduate clinicians, Midtown Counseling is an internship placement site and training program for students who are in an MFT Masters program, and who are committed to the therapeutic relationship, have a desire to work with clients on a long-term, in-depth basis, and who are willing to undertake the emotional challenges present in in-depth work.

Our training program in Marriage and Family Therapy consists of two hours of weekly individual supervision, monthly group supervision with our entire clinical community, and participation in our professional organization on a local level. Interns average about 15 hours per week. This includes carrying a caseload of 8 clients or more, attending supervision, and trainings, scheduling and outreach to clients, and appropriate case documentation. Our supervisors are Ellen Gregory, MA, LMFT (AAMFT Approved Supervisor Candidate) and Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT.

Upon successful completion of the training program, and graduation from their Masters program in MFT, students may be offered to move to the next level, Associate Clinician, and continue their work with clients on a per-diem basis.

How to Apply:

Students must submit a cover letter, resume, and three references. Information should be emailed to [info@midtowncounseling.com](mailto:info@midtowncounseling.com).

## Reduced Fee Services

Through our training program, clients receive quality services, at a low rate of \$50 per session. Our interns are closely supervised, have a tremendous amount of support and training, and are selectively chosen for their experience, skills, and specialties.

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his schedule. I think about my schedule for the day, and the hour or so I lost last night by going to bed late. I then go to him. I turn on the light, so he can see me; and, he is so happy. His smile is intoxicating, and he flails his arms and legs so excitedly. I am amazed by the impact it has on my soul. His emotions are so raw, instinctive, and genuine. I wonder sometimes at what point in our lives we lose this ability.

When I am with him, in that moment, I have no resentment for lost sleep or anxiety about what the day holds. I just *am*. I'm just there, and I really let myself enjoy it.

I'm reminded that this is what it is all about. This moment. Not yesterday, not tomorrow: *now*. Moments are lost forever. I can live for now and enjoy what is before me.

It's not just Ben. Writing this article, I am able to share myself with all of you, to bring you into my experiences with hopes of creating my own impact. It becomes a chain of events, one moment to the other.

Even in times of sadness, suffering, craziness, and insecurity, the moment is precious, and how each moment is lived creates it's own impact. Suffering is part of what makes us human. It is okay to feel bad, to be our own witness and experience the moment. Without realizing that time flies, even in times of suffering,, a new moment will come: a moment filled with hope and promise.

The challenge for me was realizing that I am *not giving less importance to my committed and responsible life by living in the moment*. When the moment comes for work, or others, I will be in it, and I will be feeling productive and useful.

Change is often frightening and may seem impossible to achieve. We all have within us the strength to make a difference: To create the change that is needed for our lives and that will work not just for us, but for those close to us, and those who count on us. The impact our choices have is endless—we need to make it count!

## On Compassion...

*I was not intimately familiar with the work of John O' Donohue before his death on January 3, 2008. Someone who has a profound impact on me introduced me to his work. I came across this interview with him, highlighting his idea of compassion and it touched my soul. I offer it to you...*

Compassion distinguishes human presence from all other presence on the earth. The human mind is one of the most gracious gifts of creation. The human mind is the place where nature gathers at its most intense and at its most intimate. The human being is an in-between presence, belonging neither fully to the earth from which she has come, nor to the heavens toward which her mind and spirit aim. In a sense, the human being is the loneliest creature in creation. Paradoxically, the human being also has the greatest possibility for intimacy. I link compassion immediately with intimacy. *Compassion is the ability to vitally imagine what it is like to be another, the force that makes a bridge from the island of one individuality to the island of the other.* It is an ability to step outside your own perspective, limitations and ego, and become attentive in a vulnerable, encouraging, critical, and creative way with the hidden world of another person.



Compassion is an ability to feel pity for an other. One of the greatest problems in post-modern culture is the problem of otherness, because many of the forces, like electronic media, commerce, economics, and the ideology of rush and speed that we adhere to leave us few possibilities to really engage the difference that we are and that each other is. Compassion is the ability to enter into a world that may be totally different from you, in an imaginative way, naturally, and feel what the others feel. It is related directly to justice. A lot of evil happens because of ignorance and of numbness, and compassion is one of the forces that invites and permits us to step outside our own complacency and see what life beyond our own skin is like.

Within the word compassion is passion. There is an intrinsic connection between passion and compassion. Someone who feels no passion is in pain, a pain that is always a lonesome pain. One of the loneliest things is to encounter somebody whose longing has been numbed. Her personality becomes a mere contour of externality around vacancy. Those who are compassionate are people whose passion and imagination are fully alive and vital.

Compassion is somehow innate to our nature. We have a natural attraction toward the other, a fascination with the other, and are deeply touched when we see the other person in pain. It is natural in those ways, and it is easy to awaken, intensify, and extend. Compassion needs development. If a child is raised in a context where he is taught blame and hate, it is probable that his compassion will be damaged. It is interesting, in psychological terms, to look at the narratives of those who have done awful things in the world. Often, the root of the evil in perpetrators is found in an incredible numbing that happened at a time when they were most vulnerable. Great pain sometimes numbs the soul and quenches the potential for compassion.

*copied from The Presence of Compassion,  
An Interview with John O' Donohue.  
Written by Mary Nurrie Stearns*

## Couples Communication Group: How to express and resolve differences without anger (a 4-part series)

The intention of this group is to help couples communicate successfully, without anger, and to introduce a journey to resolving differences.

Clients can expect:

- A deep, insightful look at your core way of existing in relationship to your *self* and others, including your hurt that has been masked by anger.
- We will discuss struggles in your current relationship and identify the patterns from your past which have been replicated. It is these patterns which trigger your anger today.
- Couples will learn about their anger patterns, when they are triggered, where there anger comes from, and the root (emotional pain and wounding) hidden beneath the anger. We will identify family of origin struggles and trauma that have made a lasting imprint on who you are today.
- Couples will learn to really hear each other through an exercise that teaches active, empathic listening, through conscious awareness.
- Couples will learn the destructive dance they are stuck in, as they keep re-triggering each others' anger and emotional wounds, and how to finally break free.

Cost = \$125 per couple per session (5 sessions), or \$500 for the entire group

Meets on Monday evenings from 6-7:45pm

\*\*Space is limited to 3 couples and is likely to sell out. Registration is required and includes a \$150 deposit to hold space in the group.

Cancellation with a full refund is permitted no less than 72 hours before the start of the first group session. Late cancellation results in forfeiture of your deposit

This group is facilitated by [Ellen M. Gregory, M.A., LMFT.](#)

## Reunion: A Weekly Support Group for Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Assault

*Midtown Counseling is providing a psychotherapy group for survivors to tell their stories, support others, and discover ways of healing their trauma.*

If you are a survivor of sexual abuse, molestation, incest, rape, assault, sexual domestic violence you may benefit from this group. The group is dedicated to reuniting women with their sense of safety, their bodies, their inner peace, and their creative essential selves.

You can expect an invitation to tell your story in a safe, supported, open environment, and an opportunity to offer compassion to others, as they tell their stories. We will process shame and recover self-esteem. We will help you to reflect on your dreams and nightmares, and to explore the ways in which your traumatic experience has influenced your relationships and way of being in the world.

We will then offer suggestions for new ways of coping and teach you how to become your own safe refuge.

The group has 3 areas of focus:

**The Past:** Developing trust and safety, telling YOUR story, relieving shame, countering alienation, and witnessing.

**The Present:** Relating to others, exploring your relationships within and outside of the group, restoring intimate connections with yourself and others, remembering the wisdom of your body, your creativity, and your intuition.

**Moving Forward:** Reuniting with faith, living your beliefs, reconnecting with your spirit, and finding refuge in your body, both emotionally and physically.

In closing, we will prepare all group members to move from the group out into their lives, with all that they were reunited with, and with all that they created in the community of the group.

Facilitated by [Elena Hull, MA, LMFT, CAT](#) and [Brooke Radder, Psy.D.](#)

## One-Day Anger Intensive: An In-depth Look at the Root of Your Anger.

Saturdays, 11-4pm

*Call for dates*

Midtown Counseling provides an in-depth look at the core of client's anger. If you experience frequent, intense anger and behave destructively to yourself or others when angry, you may benefit from this workshop.

Clients can expect:

- A deep, insightful look at your core way of existing in relationship to your *self* and others.
- In a safe, supported environment, with others facing similar challenges with anger, we will explore hurt that has been masked by anger.
- We will identify family of origin struggles and trauma that have made a lasting imprint on who you are today.
- We will discuss your current relationships and identify the patterns from your past which have been replicated. It is these patterns which trigger your anger today.
- Introduction to the idea that anger as a defense creates destructive patterns in relationships, but anger, when recognized as a protection, becomes a red flag, a signal that we need to make a change,

Through a new insight into the protection anger provides, clients will learn to focus and witness their own wounding that precedes anger, to stop waiting for the source of their anger to change, and to find within themselves the strength and courage to accept the call to action: a voice holding us accountable for our own suffering.

Pre-registration is Required

**Tel: 917-968-5599**

**Workshop Fee: \$150**

This workshop is facilitated by [Ellen M. Gregory, M.A., LMFT.](#)

## ~ Free Falling ~

It's a blindness  
A lonely, needy sensation.  
It scares me.  
I tread lightly sometimes,  
Knock myself out other days. I  
Know I need you,  
Want to touch you,  
Desire the comfort of your arms.  
It's a blackness  
I fall through an endless space,  
There are no boundaries  
From which I can bounce  
To steady myself once again. I  
Know I need you,  
Want to touch you,  
Desire the comfort of your arms.  
It's a blindness, my fear.  
I've climbed mountains to get here  
Only to falter at the peak.  
Is this the way it is?  
Can we go on together, or  
Must I see my own path,  
Even while I'm in your arms?

~D



(Continued from page 1)

We need to recognize the country we were born into, a country that is not easily delineated by geography and borders. We should map all the places we have been to inside of our own individual landscape as if surveying a new frontier. How we experience belonging in the country of our family is internalized and directs from within how we search for belonging in the world.

We long to be loved. We long to be known.

*"We long to be loved. We long to be known."*

We search for our true selves in the reflection offered by others and they search for themselves in us. This moving in and out of relationships is what can lead us to feel our own essence. It is a journey complete with suffering. We risk rejection, abandonment, betrayal, and loss. We risk meeting the limitations of others when we are open and longing. It is a journey we must take to know ourselves

fully, beyond the external form we have taken...like weathered earth exposing its own rich clay.

## Must Reads...

[The Secret Life of Bees](#), by Sue Monk Kidd

14-year-old Lily Owen, neglected by her father and isolated on their Georgia peach farm, spends hours imagining a blissful infancy when she was loved and nurtured by her mother, Deborah, whom she barely remembers. The search for a mother, and the need to mother oneself, are crucial elements in this coming-of-age story set in the early 1960s against a background of racial violence and unrest. This is a remarkable story about divine female power and the transforming power of love.

[When Things Fall Apart](#), by Pema Chodron

How can we go on living "when things fall apart" — when we are overcome by pain, fear, and anxiety? Pema Chödrön's answer to that question contains some spectacularly good news: there is a fundamental happiness readily available to each one of us, no matter how difficult things seem to be. But to find it, we must learn to stop running from suffering, and instead actually learn to approach it — fearlessly, compassionately, and with curiosity. This radical practice enables us to use all situations, even very painful ones, as means for discovering the truth and love that are utterly indestructible.

[The Velvet Rage](#): Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World, by Alan Downs, PhD

A gay psychologist demonstrates how to heal the trauma of being a gay man in an uncompromisingly straight world. Whether he is flamboyantly fashionable with a body chiseled to perfection or chronically dissatisfied and without lasting relationships, the stereotypical extremes of male gay behavior are fueled by the same dark force: shame.

[House of Sand and Fog](#), by Andre Dubus III

Three fragile yet determined people become entangled in an escalating crisis over the same small house. Combining unadorned realism with profound empathy, *House of Sand and Fog* is a devastating exploration of the American Dream gone awry.

[The Memory Keeper's Daughter](#), by Kim Edwards

This stunning novel begins on a winter night in 1964, when a blizzard forces Dr. David Henry to deliver his own twins. His son, born first, is perfectly healthy, but the doctor immediately recognizes that his daughter has Down syndrome. For motives he tells himself are good, he makes a split-second decision that will haunt all their lives forever. He asks his nurse, Caroline, to take the baby away to an institution. Instead, she disappears into another city to raise the child as her own. Compulsively readable and deeply moving, *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* is a brilliantly crafted story of parallel lives, familial secrets, and the redemptive power of love.

## A New Years Resolution to Remember...

*Happy New Year! May this year be a time of health and peace. As best wishes abound, many of us find ourselves compelled to re-evaluate; to reflect upon the past as we anticipate the future with a sense of renewed hopefulness.*

In what seems to be an annual experience, an almost 'natural' event, the beginning of the New Year invites introspection more than any other season of the year. This looking back, this "taking inventory" of the past while casting eyes forward and pondering the future, can evoke a sense of awe or dread. There is a sense of freedom that accompanies contemplation which allows for adjusting attitudes and allows an offering of healthier possibilities for the future.

Contemplation is the initial step that leads to adjusting one's life direction. The beginning of a New Year provides the space, the opportunity, the perfect time for a person to try once more to rectify the past and, thereby, find hope for the future!

Shortly after New Year, many folks establish New Year's resolutions. The sports clubs become overcrowded with men and women hoping to lose added weight, the same weight that is gained year after year! Others choose to secretly search for new and insightful methods to manage their lives differently or to treat others with greater respect and dignity. The manner and type of the resolution becomes the reflective mirror one stands before, speaking to the authenticity of his/her desire for greater wholeness.

To consider the notion of forgiveness is to take up the ultimate challenge of transformation. In one's lifetime, somewhere and in some manner, someone might have done something to offend, hurt, or humiliate you. Whatever the hurt, the residual emotional ties might still be binding you, connecting you to the particular incident. In the perpetual motion of the sea of anger, the water's never calm enough to dissipate the energy that feeds the emotions. Feelings spring up with mere thoughts about the particular situation.

Forgiveness can be best understood through trial and error. In other words, forgiveness

becomes easier to accomplish with increased experience. By choosing to forgive, you make a decision; you choose to shift so that the situation does not have control over you. How does one begin the difficult task of forgiving? Dr. Fred Luskin, author of the book entitled Forgive for Good, assists readers with his unique insight into understanding how forgiveness can be incorporated into everyone's life. He demonstrates how forgiveness embodies the power to be transformative. If there is a need or a desire for inner healing, and you have considered the road of forgiveness as one of your New Year's resolutions, then you hold the power to change and make a difference this year.

Dr. Luskin explains that forgiveness is for YOU, not the offender. By blaming someone else for your suffering, you lose your power to do something about it. Holding another person accountable for his/her actions is not the same as blaming that person for how you feel. Forgiveness is taking responsibility for how YOU feel. Forgiveness is about YOUR healing and about a choice that YOU make.

Acceptance is a part of forgiveness, accepting the faults, shortcomings, and misdirected anger of the person (s) who caused you pain. Acceptance entails finding compassion within yourself to see the struggles of the other. Your residual anger is a sign that you may still be denying what happened and refusing to accept that experience as a part of you. Accepting the other, and the experience, allows you to accept the part of yourself that has forever been changed.

How can the hurtful and painful situations, or the strained relationships and circumstances that have created the need for forgiveness, be re-evaluated or reconsidered to bring you more time of health and peace for mind, body and soul?

Since forgiveness is a learned behavior, everyone - if he/she chooses to do so, has the potential to learn to forgive. Forgiveness is not forgetting that something painful has happened. Forgiveness is not denying or minimizing your hurt. Forgiveness does not mean that you hide or bury your feelings. Quite the contrary, forgiveness is about asking the question, "What can I learn to help myself suffer less?" Dr. Luskin

challenges his readers as does the whole premise of forgiveness. When forgiveness becomes a chosen option, a way of life, there is acknowledgement that the past cannot be changed; however, space is created for healing to take place. Hurtful, painful situations, or strained relationships and circumstances are a definite challenge to individual and familial relationships.

We can start by taking a look at our first experiences of forgiveness within our family of origin. What did forgiveness look like when you were growing up? Who was forgiven, and how did the process of forgiveness work, if it was even present at all?

Recognizing how you have learned to forgive, or not forgive, can help create a new path for you to identify how you can be able to forgive. The challenge is—How do you want to be that will lead you to less suffering?

As we journey into this New Year, there will be days that demand strength and courage to face the darker and more troubling aspects of our lives. We know that, because of our human condition, people hurt each other by words and action. Sometimes these hurts are intentional, yet many times, through misinterpretation,

unintentional hurts have to be calmly translated and handled delicately. From within any given situation, identify the times when you can re-evaluate or reconsider what happened for the sole purpose of remaining "unhooked" and personally unattached. Realize that this simple shift of becoming emotionally disconnected has the potential to nurture a calmer and more peaceful approach to the present situation.

Many men and women have also come to appreciate the opportunities available to their unique situations that "free" them from the past and provide healthier choices for the future. May each of you find that "space" that allows for a deeper look into an attitude of forgiveness - an attitude and a willingness that brings each of you greater peace of mind, body and soul.

Written by Linda Reich, MA, LMFT.

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