

Awakening Your True Self™



Seven Stages to a More Joyful YOU!

Introduction...

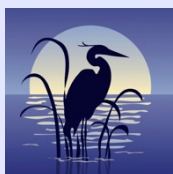
Do you remember what it was like to be joyful almost all of the time? To be full of wonder at a falling red leaf or a cloud that looked just like a pony? To run from one thing to the next, excited by the joy of discovery and happy surprises? If the answer to these questions is “Yes, I felt that way just yesterday,” you are a one-in-a-million adult and I deeply admire you. If your answer is something else, I deeply admire you for a different reason – you are committed to rediscovering your joy and to remembering who you truly are.

The path suggested in this guide can be done in as little as two hours over the course of a day, a week, a month, or any amount of time you need. For most people, it’s best done in more than two hours but the amount of time that you choose to spend is entirely up to you. It can be a fast trip or a long one, and will likely be a continuation of a journey that you have already begun. Any significant change in how we view ourselves and our world takes time and careful consideration unless we experience a life-altering situation like a serious accident, a major health issue, or an epiphany that breaks through our “usual” way of seeing our life. Thankfully, drama need not be a prerequisite for remembering who we truly are and for rediscovering our child-like joy.

In this guide, I propose these seven stages:

- ~ Stage 1: Self-discovery through written expressions (Pages 2 - 5)
- ~ Stage 2: Understanding the weight of unfinished business (Pages 6 - 9)
- ~ Stage 3: Who decides your priorities? (Pages 10 - 15)
- ~ Stage 4: Self-discovery by studying our speech (Pages 16 - 18)
- ~ Stage 5: Creating the life you deserve (Pages 19 - 22)
- ~ Stage 6: Living in the NOW (Pages 23 - 27)
- ~ Stage 7: Celebrating the one and only amazing YOU! (Pages 28 - 31)

Begin whenever you’re ready and commit to being patient and loving with yourself every step of the way. Patience and understanding are gifts we generously give to others, but rarely to ourselves. Let’s make that one of the first things we change. Bon voyage!





Stage 1... ... Self-Discovery through Written Expressions

Setting the Stage

There is no “right way” to get started. The suggestions in this guide are exactly that – suggestions that have worked for me and for other women who have participated in Women’s Circles with a goal of self-discovery, self-appreciation and self-love. Along the way we find that we feel lighter and happier, and eventually more joyful than we have felt in years.

I suggest that you sit in a quiet place (if possible) and give yourself the gift of time that is just for you. Have a journal, paper, or device on which you can capture your thoughts and feelings. If you choose, to print this guide, you can make your notes here. There’s only one suggestion before you begin - try not to filter the thoughts that come to mind as you write them. This writing is for your eyes only, and if you do not restrain or self-edit, your insights will be more profound. And the more you write, the better because what first comes to mind is not always the deepest insight.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes writing the continuation of each of these statements...

~ Some of the many things that I love most about myself are...



~ I am happiest when I am....

~ I have special talents about which few people know. The ones that make me most proud are...

~ If there is anyone whose opinion of me I value more than my own, it is....



~ The person who is most aware of my amazingness is...

~ I am truly amazing when I...





Stage 1... ... Self-Discovery through Written Expressions (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing...

Celebrate YOU. Acknowledge the fact that you carved out this time just for you and that you are committed to recognizing and valuing the qualities that make you uniquely and wonderfully YOU!. No one else on this planet has the special mix of gifts and talents that you have, and I hope that you will learn to celebrate your amazingness as you continue this self-exploration.

Tomorrow, or the next day, I suggest that you reread what you have written and make notes as new thoughts & feelings occur to you. There are no extra points for neatness, so let out the creative and expressive you as you add to your original writing. As you reread your notes, be aware of any unexpected reactions. These will lead you to new insights about how comfortable (or uncomfortable) you are with proclaiming your amazingness. And I hope that believe me when I say, “You are absolutely amazing!”

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Every day, look into a mirror and say, “I am AMAZING!” (This may sound odd to you, but please, please try it.)

~ If you value someone else’s opinion of you more than you value your own, spend some time trying to understand why this is true. The answer will be important in resolving issues concerning self-appreciation and self-love.

~ Reread your written expressions a second or third time and add additional notes if new insights come to you.

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

~ “I am AMAZING!”

~ “I am wise and value no one’s opinion of me more than I value my own.”





Stage 2... ... Understanding the Weight of Unfinished Business

Setting the Stage

Nearly two years ago I wrote a piece called “The Burden of Unfinished Business.” (Appendix, page 33). I wrote then (and still believe) that “unfinished business is a distraction in our lives, a thief that slowly and silently steals away our energy, time, and creativity. It weighs on us because it chains us to the past and prevents us from investing all of our energy in the present moment. We know that eventually we have to deal with the nagging loose ends in our lives, but the actions required seem too burdensome or unpleasant to begin. So we pack them all away, unfinished, hoping they will sit quietly in the back of our mind or, better yet, magically disappear. We know this is not a likely outcome, but we can always hope.”

I have never met a person who has no unfinished business. My visual depiction of all these loose ends is that of a stuffed backpack that we carry around with us but cannot see, a burden to which we have become accustomed, one that we try to ignore.

If you were ever going to filter your thoughts before committing them to paper (or screen), this would be the most likely topic to spark that choice. So before you move on to the suggested Written Expressions, I suggest that you take several deep breaths and remind yourself that examining your unfinished business and dealing with it will be an excellent way to reclaim wasted energy. Trust me, you can do this – and here’s a tip that helps me. Imagine yourself at the top of a steep spiral staircase. As you explore your unfinished business, imagine that you are doing so from the TOP of the stairs rather than spiraling down to the bottom. Sometimes it is easier to look down at our problems before looking them in the eye.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes on each of these topics...

~ List the nagging loose ends (unfinished business) in your life. Consider all areas: relationships, family, friends, work, health, clutter, commitments, etc.

~ For each loose end, write about why is it still unresolved. Try to get to the core reason, which is usually not the first or second thing that comes to mind. And yes, for this one you may have to walk down the spiral staircase a bit.

~ Are there any loose ends that you choose to wrap up? If so, how you will begin. If not, simply try to understand why.



~ Are there any old disappointments, frustrations, or anger that you have carried for years without considering how you could let them go? If so, what are they? Can you consider letting them go now?

~Is there is someone who can help you deal with any of this unfinished business. Try not to let the apprehension of asking that person (those people) for help affect your answer here.





Stage 2... ... Understanding the Weight of Unfinished Business (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing

Move. Stand, stretch, swing your arms. If you like to dance, now would be a good time to do so. Unfinished business is a “sticky” topic and can easily lead us down a rabbit hole if we let it. Don’t let it. You have just taken an enormous step forward by the mere act of examining the loose ends in your life. Few people have the courage to do what you have just done. WOOHOO! You are truly amazing. If you did not believe that at the end of Stage 1, I hope you KNOW now that you are exceptional.

Sometime over the next few days, I suggest that you reread your writing and add notes that capture the new thoughts & feelings that occur to you when you reconsider the topics. Pay special attention to the question about who can help you in any way.

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Look over your list of loose ends that you want to wrap up and select the easiest one. Decide how you can do this and by when. Most of us do better if we commit to taking action within a specific period of time.

~ Reread your written expressions a second or third time and add additional notes if new insights come to you.

~ If you listed any disappointments, frustrations, or anger that you are still carrying, consider how you can release them once and for all.

~Every day, look into a mirror and say “I am truly AMAZING!”

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

~ “I am free to let go of feelings, memories and emotions that weigh me down.”

~ “I am happy to begin resolving all the unfinished business in my life.”





Stage 3... ... Who Decides Your Priorities?

Setting the Stage

Most of us lead busy and sometimes hectic lives. We can feel pulled by conflicting responsibilities and priorities without deciding in any moment what we really want to do. We may also notice that people around us often confuse busyness with self-worth, believing that if they are very busy, their lives must be filled with very important things. We know this is not the case.

So here are a few questions to consider...Do you ever allow the demands of others to consume most of your waking hours? Are you sacrificing the opportunity to experience peace, stillness, happiness, or joy for more than a few fleeting moments at a time? WHO decides your priorities?

The suggested Written Expressions for this Stage 3 are more numerous and warrant a bit more time, so you may choose to do them all at once or over two sessions. Some important insights are waiting to reveal themselves to you.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes writing about each of these ...

~ How you love to spend your time – how, when, where, why? Really check in with yourself on this and make your response as specific as possible.



~ How do you actually spend most of your time – how, when, where, why? Note what comes to mind without judging yourself or your response.

~ Which people in your life make the biggest demands on your time?

~ What is your favorite time of day, and why? Do you allow yourself to enjoy it?



~ Circle back to your notes on how you actually spend your time. For each item, note if you would like to spend more or less time doing these things.

~ Are there any ways in which you spend your time that you want to stop doing completely? If so, how can you do so?

~ Circle back to your list of people who make demands on your time. Do you want to make any changes?



~ List some things you are putting off, even though you know they are important... (No need to care about procrastinating if the things you are putting off are unimportant.)

~ Complete this statement as many times as new items occur to you: “I choose to devote less time to....” (I suggest that you rewrite or retype the “I choose to devote less time to....” for each item you note.)

~ Complete this statement as many times as new items occur to you: “I choose to devote more time to....” (Again, rewrite or retype the “I choose to devote more time to....” for each entry.)





Stage 3... ... Who Decides Your Priorities? (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing...

Acknowledge the importance of what you have written by giving yourself a proverbial pat on the back. How we invest our precious time and energy is a very important topic, and beginning to examine the question of who decides your priorities is a great way to rethink and reprioritize.

As was the case in Stages 1 and 2, I suggest that you reread your writing sometime over the next few days and make additional notes as new thoughts & feelings occur to you. Pay special attention to the question about who can help you in any way.

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Review your list of how you love to spend your time and consider ways that you can incorporate more of these activities in your daily life.

~ Reread your written expressions again and add additional notes as new insights come to you.

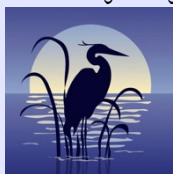
~ Take another look at the list of people in your life who make the biggest demands on your time. Consider ways you could change this.

~ Review the list of important things you are putting off and set a specific timeframe in which you will complete each of them.

~ You wrote about activities to which you plan to devote more time. Think about how you can do this, including references to the items you listed as those to which you choose to devote less time.

~ Consider reading “Nine Words That Are Changing My Life,” a piece that was posted on AwakeningYourTrueSelf.com on March 23, 2014. (Appendix, Page 34).

~ Every day, look into a mirror and say, “I am truly AMAZING!”





Stage 3... ... Who Decides Your Priorities? (continued)

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

- ~ “I am free to choose how I spend my precious energy, and I choose carefully.”
- ~ “I am clear about how I determine my priorities.”
- ~ “I am full of energy and enthusiasm at the start of each day.”
- ~ “I am confident in my choices and know that only I know what is best for me.”





Stage 4... ... Self-Discovery by Studying Our Speech

Setting the Stage

The spoken word is a powerful tool in creating our here-and-now as well as our future. In this stage of self-discovery I urge you pay careful attention to the expressions you often use to describe yourself and your abilities, the way you respond to praise or to a compliment, and the phrases you frequently use when you talk about your future.

If you believe that you create your world in each and every moment, then you realize that language is a critical tool in your creation.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes answering these questions and completing the statements below...

~ How did you respond the last time someone told you that you did a great job?

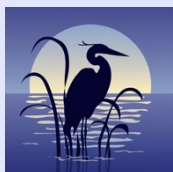
~ Why did you choose to respond that way? How did you feel? Did you believe that you did not deserve the praise you received?



~ When someone asks “How are you today?”, what is your most common response? Do you believe that what you say creates the day ahead?

~ What are the words you most often use to describe yourself to others?

~ “I am know that I am amazing when I...”
(This should be a very detailed description)





Stage 4... ... Self-Discovery by Studying Our Speech (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing...

Take several deep breaths and smile. Stage 4 is one that requires us to pay careful attention to what we are creating in our lives. Were there any surprises in what you have just written, any new insights?

Tomorrow, or the next day, reread your writing and add notes as new thoughts & feelings occur to you.

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Be mindful of the words you choose and consciously reframe your descriptions of yourself. For example, instead of saying “I am not a creative person” consider instead “Up until this moment, I have not considered myself a creative person, but I now realize that my creativity comes through in everything I do.”

~ Think about a few mindful, positive responses to the question “How are you today?” and practice using them.

~ Reread your written expressions again and add additional notes if new insights come to you.

~ Consider the possibility that when you “shut down” someone who compliments you, you are refusing a gift. Gratefully accept praise in its many forms – you deserve it.

~ Each and every day, look into a mirror and say “I am truly AMAZING!”

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

~ “I am aware that I create my world through my language.”

~ “I am fully capable of creating the life I want and deserve.”





Stage 5... ...Creating the Life You Deserve

Setting the Stage

So many of our impressions of ourselves, both positive and negative, are based on the ways that others see us and react to us. And sometimes the world we create is based less on what we truly deserve and more on what we think we deserve. I suggest that you consider this belief: **With Each Choice, We Create Our Life.** To me, this is a beautiful way of seeing the possibility that exists in every moment.

So right now, in **THIS** moment, you can begin creating the life you want, the wonderful life you so richly deserve. In fact, you have already begun creating that life and if you stop for a few moments and notice, you will become aware of new beginnings that have already begun taking shape.

Written Expressions

Creativity requires us to let down our own filters, to be confident and courageous, to **KNOW** that we need not hold ourselves back in any way. Keep this in mind as you write your responses to these questions...

~ What are some of the positive “new beginnings” that you have begun to observe in your life?

~ What are other the other “new beginnings” you want to create in your life?
(Describe them with language that you feel rather than think.)

~ What can you do to nurture these new beginnings in your life?

~ Are you aware of any potential obstacles (people or things) that you believe may threaten your new creation (Try to respond without a filter about having to do anything about the obstacles.)

~ What can you do to create space in your life for these new beginnings?

~ Who are the people who can help you nurture your new beginnings in any way? (Answer this without a filter about having to ask these people for help).

~ Describe a perfect day (in great detail)...





Stage 5... ...Creating the Life You Deserve (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing...

Close your eyes for a few moments and envision the life you are creating, the life you know you deserve. It may be very similar to or very different from the life you have been living, but it is yours to create in every detail. When you open your eyes, realize that you can choose to see the possibility that exists in every moment of every day.

Put your writing aside for a day or two. When you decide to reread what you have written, feel free to revise or embellish your notes so they reflect any additional thoughts you have.

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

- ~ Decide if there are actions you want to take to nurture the changes you are creating in your life.
- ~ Review the list of potential obstacles you thought could threaten your new creation. Is there anything you want to do about them?
- ~ Consider saying this mantra out loud several times throughout the day...
“With each choice, I create my life.”
- ~ Reread your written expressions and note new insights that come to you.
- ~ As you think about the people in your life...
 - ...who is most likely to support the changes you want to make?
 - ...who might not want you to change? Why?

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

- ~ “I am now creating the most amazing life I can imagine.”
- ~ “I am certain that in each moment I make the perfect choice.”
- ~ “I am much stronger than any perceived obstacles that may appear in my life.”





Stage 6... ... Living in the NOW

Setting the Stage

There are many excellent books, articles, blogs and videos about the importance of living in the present moment. If you are well on your way to living in the NOW, living each and every moment to the fullest, you can skip Stage 6.

We can fill our present moment rehashing the past or thinking about the future, all the while overlooking the opportunity to experience the “now” with gusto. When I need an image of living in the present moment, I think about watching a happy toddler play, totally consumed with what she/he is doing and totally unconcerned about who will prepare the evening meal, whether it will rain tomorrow, or why Aunt Laura was so unpleasant when she visited last week. Instead it is all about the ball or the block or the book with which he/she is playing. It is about experiencing the NOW.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes writing the continuation of the statements or answering the questions...

~ “I am most fully in the present moment when...”

~ Describe a magical moment you experienced at some point in your life. How did you feel? What made it such a special moment? (Please note: if the word “magical” does not work for you, choose another word.)



~ Are you aware of specific situations or experiences that anchor you in the past? If so, describe them. Do you understand the hold do they have over you?

~ Are there people in your life who prefer who you once were rather than who you are becoming? If so, how do you feel about that?

~ Do you know someone who will enthusiastically support the changes you are making in your life?



~ Can you remember the details of the most joyful day you experienced in the past two years? If so, describe it in great detail.





Stage 6... ...Living in the NOW (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing

Close your eyes and take several deep, deep breaths. Open your eyes and look around with the intention of noticing your surroundings in greater detail than ever before. Be aware of the rhythm of your breathing, of the sounds around you, of the aliveness of the moment. THIS is present-moment awareness. Congratulate yourself – you are amazing!

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Consciously choose to practice present-moment awareness several times a day. Most of us do not immediately switch to mindfulness, so if you are wondering how to initiate the practice, three very basic suggestions follow, but there are thousands of variations, of course...

- Choose a piece of your favorite fruit or vegetable. Study its color and shape. Slice it into bite-size pieces. Appreciate the way the pieces look on the plate. Inhale any scent the fruit or vegetable has released. Bite into one of the pieces and savor the flavor and consistency. Relish each bite.

OR

- Find a comfortable spot where you can look up at the sky. If it is in the daytime, carefully observe the various colors of the sky, the changing shapes of the clouds, the movement of sunlight. If it is nighttime, study the stars and planets and feel your connection to them and to the night sky.

OR

- Listen to your favorite recording of a musical composition or song that you love. Try to notice something new in this familiar recording, and take note of how you feel as you listen, how the rhythm of your breathing changes.

~ Consider making notes for your mirror, desk, computer screen, car with a simple reminder to be in the present moment (Examples: “I am here”; “NOW”; “Present now & always”; or “There is only now”)

~ Reread your written expressions again note and new insights come to you.

~ Notice people in your life who consistently try to pull you into the past or the future.

Suggested “I am...” Statements for the Coming Weeks

~ “I am fully aware in the present moment.”

~ “In each moment, I am grateful to savor the details of all that I see, hear, taste, smell and feel.”

~ “I am living my life one moment at a time.”





Stage 7... ... Celebrating the One and Only Amazing YOU!

Setting the Stage

By now you are well on your way to realizing how truly amazing you are. Here's an important question – Are you celebrating YOU? You are probably generous in praising and supporting of others, encouraging those around you on their respective journeys. In Stage 7, I encourage you to focus some of that generous praise on yourself! And this may be one of your biggest challenges – overcoming your own reluctance to acknowledge how amazing you are. I suggest that humility is not your best friend here, but self-love is.

Written Expressions

Spend a few minutes on each of these...

~ Make a list of the people in your life who support your love of yourself. Be specific about how they do this and how it makes you feel.

~ Now, make a list of the people you believe are consciously or unconsciously undermining your love of yourself. Be as specific as possible.



~ Is there anything for which you blame yourself and for which you have not, until this moment, forgiven yourself?

~ You can decide to forgive yourself now. Is there anything that is holding you back from doing so? If so, write about it here.

~ “I forgive myself now and forever for ...”



~ I love this one...Imagine for a moment that you have a fan club of over 1000 people who KNOW that you are the most amazing person on the planet. They write an “over the top” blog post about you and all of your inspiring qualities. Now, write that piece yourself, banning all humility and filtering. Make this an unabashedly POSITIVE description of you because you are truly amazing!





Stage 7...

... Celebrating the one and only amazing YOU! (continued)

When You Have Finished Writing...

Stand, stretch, dance, and celebrate YOU! Be impressed with all you have written, with the personal insights, and what you have chosen to release that might have been holding you back in any way.

As in the other stages, I suggest that you reread your writing and add additional thoughts & feelings as they occur to you.

Suggestions for the Next Few Weeks...

~ Plan a few hours to celebrate you, ideally sometime over the next few weeks. This can be time just for you or, if you would like someone to share the celebration, invite that person to join you. Plan to make it a special time doing something that you LOVE to do.

~ Circle back to the list of the people in your life who support your love of yourself. Consider ways in which you can thank them for this support.

~ Review the list of people you believe are consciously or unconsciously undermining your love of yourself. Can you let go of any attachment to their “judgment” or to what they think of you?

~ Every day, look into a mirror and say “I am truly AMAZING!”

Suggested “I am...” statements for the coming weeks

~ “I am the most amazing version of myself that I have even been in my life.”

~ “I am strong, confident and fearless.”

~ “I am a gift to the world.”





The journey continues!

When we commit to rediscovering our joy, it is a journey of many stages. The exploration you have been doing for the past days or weeks is likely a continuation of your commitment to self-awareness and self-love. It is a rewarding, liberating and yes, sometimes challenging, journey. One of the most important lessons I have learned through my travels is that I do not have to do this alone. If you are like me, your bias may be (or may have been) to try to do everything yourself. So here's a final suggestion before we go our separate but interconnected ways... learn to ask for help. This may seem easier said than done, so I suggest that you adopt a practice of writing "this is the help I need from you" letters to people who can help you. Write these letters without the filter of ever having to send or speak the request. This helps us frame for ourselves what we really need from others before we decide if we will actually ask them for help. I have found this a very effective tool.

I hope that you are feeling lighter, more joyful, more aware of your many unique and amazing qualities. As you continue your exploration, I would love to hear from you and invite you to contact me at Sharon@AwakeningYourTrueSelf.com.

In the meantime, I wish you joy and encourage you to share your love and gratitude with the world!

Sharon



APPENDIX

“The Burden of Unfinished Business”

Posted on AwakeningYourTrueSelf.com on July 17, 2012

I sat at a departure gate at Newark airport, watching a woman struggle with more bags than she could possibly take onto the plane. She looked around and the only open seat in the waiting area was directly across from me. She sat and immediately began to unpack and repack the contents of four bags, trying to rearrange her belongings to meet the airline's carry-on limit of two. Within a few minutes, this woman seemed frantic. We would soon be directed to board the plane and many of her things were still strewn on the floor. I could almost feel her desperation as she shoved items back into her bags.

Weeks later, I am still thinking about her but now in a different way, realizing that I AM that woman. No, I've never entered an airport with more than the acceptable number of carry-on bags, but every day I lug around invisible baggage that weighs me down, bags full of my "unfinished business." I unknowingly unpack and repack those bags just as my frenzied counterpart did that day at Newark airport, not getting rid of the contents but hoping to rearrange them so they do not interfere with my life. It's simply not possible.

Unfinished business is a distraction in our lives, a thief that slowly and silently steals away our energy, time, and creativity. It weighs on us because it chains us to the past and prevents us from investing all of our energy in the present moment. We know that eventually we have to deal with the nagging loose ends in our lives, but the actions required seem too burdensome or unpleasant to begin. So we pack them all away, unfinished, hoping they will sit quietly in the back of our mind or, better yet, magically disappear. We know this is not a likely outcome, but we can always hope.

There are many categories of unfinished business, but with a nod to brevity I believe that these are the top three:

- **Unresolved Conflicts with People We Love** - This category can be a wellspring of unfinished business. We often avoid resolving conflicts or disagreements with those we love, sweeping big issues under the rug rather than having the "real" and predictably difficult conversations required to address them. And because these issues remain unresolved, they weigh us down. Sometimes we are aware of this weight, sometimes not, but we must never doubt that it is there.

- **Unresolved Conflicts with Other People in Our Life** - For many of us, this can be a long, long list that includes people in all aspects of our lives. Take a moment to think about the many people in your life. If you feel any tension when a name comes to mind, you probably have unfinished business with that person. Right? You may choose not to do anything about these unresolved issues, but being aware will help when you assess the weight of this baggage.

- **Unresolved Internal Conflicts** - Yes, I have saved the biggest bag for last. We weigh ourselves down by carrying around all of the old disappointments, anger, pain and frustration that we have not yet chosen to resolve or heal. The circumstances that have triggered these feelings may go back many, many years. Some of these are still in our awareness, while others are deeply buried away so we can avoid looking at them. In either case, they hold us back from fully loving and being at peace with ourselves.

Recognizing that we carry our unfinished business with us each and every day is a good beginning, and choosing to do something about it is even better. I'm off to begin unpacking now.

“Nine Words That Are Changing My Life”

Posted on AwakeningYourTrueSelf.com Sunday, March 23, 2014

I often arrive at the end of my day having accomplished a lot, although rarely all that I had hoped. I've tried many approaches to setting and resetting priorities, and confess to being a nearly obsessive list-maker. While lists remind me of what I want to do throughout my day (and sometimes my evening), they do not help determine how much time to spend on any one activity or project. By now you may be thinking, “It’s just not that complicated,” and you are absolutely right. It’s not – except for me.

I love simple solutions but had never found one that helped me navigate the day and, at its end, feel great about all I had done. Even on my most productive days I often felt that what I had accomplished was less than what was possible. Then, while driving to work one morning about six weeks ago, I was thinking about the overly-scheduled day ahead, wondering (and in total honesty, worrying) about how I could possibly accomplish my priorities for the day. I couldn't help but smile because I frequently advise others that the answers to our questions lie within. So I took a very deep breath and asked myself, "What expression can I keep top-of-mind throughout the day to help me accomplish the most in the time available?" In a moment the answer came..."Is this the best use of my precious time?"

It was a simple question and over the next several days, when I was responding to e-mail, working on a project, heading to a meeting or returning phone calls, I silently asked, “Is this the best use of my time right now?” The answer always came immediately to mind. When it was “Yes” I continued what I was doing, and when it was “No” I moved on to something else. After a few days I was feeling much better about how I was spending my time, but also realized that what had prompted this experiment wasn't just about the use of my TIME, it was more precisely about how I invested my ENERGY. I understood that if I ventured out of the present moment, if I worried about people or situations out of my control, I was expending energy that would be better invested in what had to be done NOW. After careful consideration, I modified my question to a variation of the original -- “Is this the best use of my precious energy?” Much better.

Since reframing the question, I have asked it many, many times each day and evening. It has helped me be choiceful about how, where and on what/whom I invest my precious energy. My natural tendency to “push through” in an attempt to get everything done has now been tempered by the realization that every moment of my time and every ounce of my energy truly are precious. For me, asking the simple question “Is this the best use of my precious energy?” has made all the difference in the world.

