

Inquiring Into Reality: A Twelve-Stage Clinical Protocol to Deconstruct  
Non-Adaptive Self-Judgments, Including Beliefs, False Identities,  
Roles and Stories

by

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If a person would experience their beliefs and say, ‘Is it true? Who would I be without the belief’, then we would surely see the end of suffering. No suffering can hold in Truth.

—Byron Katie

There is a *stepping back from* a belief before there is a *stepping into* a belief.

—John J. Prendergast

Reality is that which, when you stop believing it, doesn’t go away.

—Philip K. Dick

What is already here?

—Dorothy Hunt

What goes unquestioned and unexamined could fill untold tombs, libraries and planets. This point is especially salient given that dysfunctional behavior and attitudinal patterns typically have roots in not only incomplete traumas, but in unworkable beliefs, roles, false identities and stories that only tend to further reinforce and perpetuate them. It is worth noting that in this clinician’s experience the

overwhelming majority of non-adaptive self-conceptualizations, including beliefs, roles, false identities and stories, are formulated and maintained outside of conscious awareness. Each seems obviously true at the time of their origination, perhaps revealing how they slipped under the conscious radar at their inception. Given that an overwhelming majority of beliefs have neither arisen to the level of conscious awareness nor been carefully examined or challenged, simply their recognition is a clinical milestone of progress in addressing most if not all therapeutic issues.

As a nondual / transpersonal psychologist, inquiring into reality often appropriately takes center stage in therapy. Having been familiar with Byron Katie's "The Work" primarily through her seminal book, *Loving What Is* (2002), it was useful to attend a workshop by psychologist John J. Prendergast in 2006 that adapted Katie's written work of deconstructive inquiry into a conversational interaction inside individual therapy that included the whole body, its sensations and feelings. It has been a labor of love over the last five years to stand on the shoulder of these path blazers and deepen the deconstructive inquiry process to make it a powerful and poignant encounter in the therapeutic context.

The vision of this writing is to present a twelve-stage highly pragmatic clinical protocol to deconstruct negative self-statements, including beliefs, roles, false identities and stories, that can be a remarkably flexible, useful and an everyday standard clinical tool. This format can aid clients to identify and deeply examine thought and conceptualization patterns that are fundamentally negative defeating self-judgments in life. The focus on self-judgments derives from recognizing that judgments regarding others at root are seen as masquerading, smoke-screening and hiding judgments about oneself. The core strategy to realize this vision is to establish a field or context of Awareness itself here-and-now, not the content of awareness there-and-then. It can serve as the primary content-less and object-less attention and, within this observational space, to be guided through a series of open-ended inquiries to see what

you see regarding a specific non-adaptive self-judgment. Accomplishing this in an impersonal, unvarnished presence, without the distorting lenses of the fictive ego-mind, is an opportunity for growth. Colleague John J. Prendergast crystallizes this view in astutely noting, “There is a *stepping back from* a belief before there is a *stepping into* a belief.” Katie Byron’s opening quote reveals that no suffering can be held inside of seeing, speaking and living Truth.

While it would be perfectly understandable to consider such a vision and protocol idealistic, perfectionist and unworkable, it is accessible for the great majority of clients I’ve seen over the last five years. It is contraindicated for what some call “concrete learners” who do not seem capable and/or willing to bear looking at abstract concepts such as beliefs, roles, false identities or stories. It is also not so fitting or appropriate with child or adult attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) since there is very limited ability to give sustained attention to a concept and doing this anyway would only lead to heightening frustration and possibly be counter-therapeutic. Clients experiencing psychotic symptoms, autism spectrum disorders, bipolar disorders especially during the manic or hypomanic phases, borderline, narcissistic and other personality disorders are likely not a good match for this approach either. Using this protocol seems unworkable with children under age nine, the cognitively disabled and seniors going through some form of brain degeneration or dementia, such as Alzheimer’s disease. Adaptive, effective clinicians understand, respect and honor these constraints.

It is best to cultivate an open awareness, one that exudes curiosity, innocence and an investigative attitude that keeps biases, assumptions and expectations in check knowing there is no right way to do this protocol, only ways that it can be most effectively adapted to the client right in front of you in this moment. In other words the savvy clinician takes no ego position to evoke the client taking a

counter ego position, with risk that the therapeutic approach degenerates into a power struggle or contest of wills, being anything but therapeutic. While accomplishing the entire protocol is a wonderfully rich and deep experience of transformation for most clients, it may be enough to simply and crisply identify the non-adaptive self-judgment, or ask a few beginning questions from the protocol given the client's responsiveness or their slower processing time, all of which is perfectly human. This twelve-stage protocol is a flexible structure for clinicians and clients to have fun with, be innovative and spontaneous. While this entire process can be efficiently and calmly done without any urgency or time pressure in about thirty minutes, there also will be times when it is slower and seemingly deeper for the client as s/he makes transparent the different layers of the cognitive onion being shed as it arise each moment.

Some illustrations of non-adaptive self-judgments in each of the four thought forms can be most informative. Examples of beliefs that arise in client's ego-minds are: "I'm unlovable"; "I'm not good enough"; and "I'll never be a success at anything." Common roles and false identities that are self-defeating and can usefully be deconstructed are: "I am my job and when I retire I have no reason to live"; "I am my beauty and in turning 50 I'm over the hill" and "I am my home, and with it being in foreclosure, I am nothing." Then there are the stories our minds confabulate, such as "No one will care for me if I leave my home town," "Since I've divorced, there is no one who would want me so I'll never remarry," and "If I lose my job I'll be destitute, homeless and have to live in my car."

For the sake of keeping continuity in our discussion throughout the stages, attention will be on deconstructing a belief, which is nothing more than a thought given many repetitions and growing credibility. At every stage the client is invited to experience nondual "suchness" of Being as non-separate relationship within and standing inside the Whole, especially when the concept being deconstructed concerns relationships.

This author is deeply indebted to Byron Katie and John J. Prendergast for their influential trailblazing work. Readers might be interested to follow how this current protocol developed, including changes and additions, by referring to Appendix II that offers the precursor protocol “Deconstructive Inquiry Into Negative Self Judgments” (Revised 2011) by John J. Prendergast, Ph.D.

1) Ask, “What is wanting to happen today?” or “What is coming up inside of you that wants to be addressed today?”

This first open-ended question or open awareness inquiry aims to create a welcoming space for clients to pause, watch and see for themselves what is arising for them in this present moment. The clinician is conspicuously absent, and appropriately so since it wholly concerns the client’s life experience right here and now. Creating a safe, calm space to be curious and investigate is the hallmark.

2) Ask the person, “Notice a defensive or distressing judgment, feeling or sensation on yourself.”

This inquiry invites the client to tap into the three building blocks or elements of their subjective experience—thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. When any one of these is missing, it is helpful for the clinician to ask regarding it. For example, if someone shares the belief of thinking badly about himself or herself over something, you can gently invite them to be aware of the feeling and sensation herein. While having all these elements makes for a very rich therapeutic experience indeed, it is not essential. At the least, having clarity of the self-judgment, whether a belief, role, false identity or story, is necessary to proceed through this therapeutic protocol. Many times this question remains unsaid since the non-adaptive self-judgment spontaneously arises in therapy and can straightforwardly be identified. Therapists have found value in asking clients to let their bodily sensations, feelings and emotions have a

voice and literally “speak” for itself. This invitation to speak allows the client to more deeply listen to the bodily feedback in a way that can be appreciated and understood, opening space for self-compassion.

3) Now say, “Since this judgment, feeling or sensation is within you and may get tangled up inside, let’s have you step back and see it as an object outside of you, perhaps written on a blackboard or white board, or written on a paper tablet.”

This statement, actually an implied question, is the golden opportunity for clients to take a backward step to see the self-judgment as an object worth observing and deconstructing. Many refer to this experience as enlisting the “observing ego” and can often be an unusual, novel and stimulating experience, especially if the client is not used to engaging in contemplative prayer or one form or another of yoga, chi gung / tai chi or meditation, or other regular spiritual practice. As a great majority of people are visual learners and processors, suggesting a blackboard, white board or paper tablet to print or cursively write the self-judgment works well. You can also have the client hear the self-judgment spoken for those clients who prefer audio learning and processing. Either modality works.

4) Next state, “Notice there is the *content* of Awareness and then there is *Awareness itself*. In turning the board/screen/tablet around, without paying any attention to what is on the other side, see for yourself that something is aware of this blank back of the board/ screen/ tablet. What does this Awareness itself feel like, the felt sense of Awareness itself? So as you put aside the words, symbols, concepts and contents of the mind or head, experience the feeling that remains of Awareness itself” and perhaps, “What is already here?”

This inquiry, reminiscent and inspired by sages like Ramana Maharshi and his emphasis upon self-inquiry and Nisargadatta Maharaj’s “I-sense,” is constructed to draw attention or point to the ever-

present background awareness or spacious openness from which all thought arises beyond all contents of awareness. Of all the inquires in this protocol, this one is the most discombobulating, awkward and disorienting one for most people, probably because it powerfully calls into question the ordinary accepted reality of our perceptual experience. Moreover it indirectly moves our attention to noticing the apparent or illusory doer, perceiver or experiencer. People familiar with this spacious openness simply give themselves to it naturally, while people unfamiliar with the space of awareness itself will often seem to struggle to understand what is being asked of them to do, when no doing is being asked. [See the sidebar “The Felt Sense of Awareness Itself” for illustrations of common answers to this query]

Instead of asking, “Who is aware?” or “What is aware?”, usually evoking a more cerebral response, you can stay on-point by asking the client to bring their attention to their direct experience in this moment—the feeling experience or felt sense of the awareness itself. When clients say, “I don’t know,” you can respond with, “Tell me more regarding this not knowing.” When clients respond with a comment about themselves, such as “I am” or “It’s me”, you can say, “What is your direct sense of this I am or me?” When clients get frustrated or stuck, you can help level the playing field and normalize the experience by making light of it and say that it can be an unclear or confusing question for many people. Sometimes it is helpful to suggest, “So as you put aside the words, symbols, concepts and contents of the mind or head, experience the feeling that remains of Awareness itself” By engaging in this inquiry you are inviting clients to be comfortably okay and relax into this awareness. Therapist, author and presenter Dorothy Hunt encapsulates this perspective by elegantly asking, “What is already here?”, another very useful inquiry at this juncture.

5) Ask, “Now from this sense of (give client’s own description of their felt sense of Awareness itself), casually, lightly and innocently ask yourself, “Is this true?” and patiently wait for a reply. Afterwards, follow it up with asking, “Could it ever be true, under any conditions, as a belief?”

Thanks to Prendergast’s contribution, all the beginning four stages have now set the critical groundwork to open up a deepening and broadening sense of inner wisdom and heart sense than usually arises from the typical protocol of Byron Katie’s “The Work”, initiated by asking a slightly modified version of this question. This query is not directed to the rational or reasonable ego-mind, but rather invites another form of deeper intuitive and holistic knowing with one’s whole body, being and spirit. Spiritual teacher Adyashanti asks this question a little differently: “Is your conclusion really accurate?” Science fiction writer Philip K. Dick offers a most helpful litmus paper test for what counts as reality by stating: “Reality is that which, when you stop believing it, doesn’t go away.”

There is no specific answer being sought, but rather welcoming a natural, authentic curiosity. While most clients see that any conceptualization cannot be true, nor could it ever be true under any set of circumstances, some remain believers in their negative judgment. Without argument or argument, you can simply acknowledge, “That’s fine” and move onto the next stage.

If appropriate, and only when the client is genuinely hesitant or confused, the participant can be invited to look out an office window and state what s/he sees. Once stated, you can then request them to believe it. It usually strikes the client as odd, evoking something like, “I see what I see and have no need to believe it,” upon which I heartily agree and then redirect s/he to the query, “Then is it (restate the self-judgment) true as a belief (or role, false identity or story)?” Oftentimes this extra step helps free the client up to realize for themselves in their direct experience that concepts, any concepts, cannot ever be true. The follow-up question may seal the understanding that the belief or any concept can never be true.

6) Ask, “What is the effect, outcome or result on you and others when you think or hold on to this belief (restate it)?” and ask global questions to help clarify.

This is a key inquiry into reality to linger over since it helps reveal the “true costs” and impact of the non-adaptive self-judgment in the client’s life and others’ lives. After encouraging a full and fairly rigorous list of consequences when the client thinks or holds on to the self-judgment, it is usually helpful to ask some further questions to help summarize these results. Three critical questions to help summarize the outcomes of thinking and holding non-adaptive self-judgments are: (1) “So overall does holding and thinking about this belief/ role/ false identity / story (restate it) raise the energy up in a scintillating sense of being vitality alive, or does it lower the energy and you feel drained, spent and find it exhausting?”; (2) So on the whole does this self-judgment evoke a powerful sense of being cared for, appreciated and loved for who you truly are, or does it seem to bring forward a lack of caring, love and appreciation, and a disregard for who you truly are?”; and (3) Seeing the whole picture now, do the results of holding and thinking about this concept bring you closer in a beautiful sense of connection, unity and oneness with your environment, others and the world, or does it seem to evoke a sense of disconnection and estrangement, division and separation, from your immediate surroundings, loved ones and the world?” Often clients are genuinely surprised and chagrined at their own unwanted answers.

The power of asking these overarching questions is to bring attention in a laser-like fashion to the global or true costs of continuing to think and hold on to concepts. In this specific context, Adyashanti finds value in asking the client to repeat the story, that is, the non-adaptive self-judgment, several times to aid their body and mind to start to associate that this conclusion in the mind was maintaining this powerful experience of all these difficult feelings and emotions. It is key to ever

remember that it is the attachment, identification and clinging to concepts of any sort that is problematic and a source of unhappiness, not the concept itself. Concepts, other than sometimes offering helpful descriptions of how things function, can do nothing and, in fact, do not even exist in reality.

7) Ask, “Well, let’s play with this belief. What would the exact opposite of it be? Putting this also on the board (or tablet), is it true either?” Then pendulate or oscillate between the two beliefs a few times. After doing this, ask “Now hold them both at exactly the same moment, and see what happens.”

Byron Katie calls asking for the opposite of a concept, such as a belief, the “reversal” or the “turnaround.” For example, the belief, “I am unworthy of love” becomes “I am worthy of love,” and “I am not good enough at anything” becomes “I am good enough at everything.” Flexibility is the watchword in designing an opposite that resonates with the client. For illustration, the opposite of “I do mean things to people I love” may not be “I do loving actions to people I love,” but rather find “I show love to people I’m close with” to have greater impact. Similarly, the opposite of “I do mean nasty things” may not be “I do not do mean nasty things,” and a client might really prefer, “I do kind things.”

Facilitating people seeing through the opposite pole of a polarity being no more true than the original is enough to recognize that the ego-mind cannot take you further than this, and to release and surrender. It is important to add that to become attached to the opposite of a polarity only creates the same tyranny since all polarities are mind created. Thus, it is irrelevant who I am in regard to polarities, since who I am is beyond all judgments and concepts. With the ego-mind being non-existent and unable to release anything, seeing the limits of the rational mind allows us to release it and its grip on our life.

The ancient tantric practice of Yoga Nidra offers an opportunity to heal the ongoing suffering rooted in being psychologically stuck, particularly when the ego-mind becomes fixated and positional at one end of a polarity. Psychologist and yoga teacher, Richard C. Miller, explores the ability to

experience both ends of a polarity, or pairs of opposites across life's spectrum of opposites, as opening space for honest transcendence. Without an appreciation of opposites, to hold fault blocks taking responsibility, to hold shame blocks living empowerment, and to hold animosity blocks loving-kindness.

For Miller, an authentic welcoming of all that has been unwelcome seems very threatening to the ego, which anticipates its immanent demise. To sensitively experience and witness without judgment the two ends of a polarity by oscillating or pendulating between them can usher in a resolution that, in turn, points to impersonal Presence from which both polarities arise. As polarities reconcile in Yoga Nidra, each impulse is perceived as complimentary on a continuum of wholeness. This process is akin to Carl G. Jung's transcendent function, that is, the synthesizing of polarities into a transcendental awareness. Through a reconciliation or synthesis of ego-mind created conceptual polarities, disidentification with the ego allows what was separate to be One again and invites the end of self-inflicted suffering.

8) Ask, "Who created or made up this belief in the first place?"

This inquiry is at the core of this deconstructive process since it highlights the origin and source of the non-adaptive self-judgment—the ego-mind. Often responding to this query is a revealing and humbling moment of recognition that our very minds, in aiming to protect our survival, dreamed up or made up the very self-judgmental conceptualizations that continually and unrelentingly defeat us at every turn. Sometimes one might ask, "Is the ego-mind protecting us or itself in continuing to run the show of our life?" Again, the so-called answer is inherent in the question being asked. Remarkably, clients equally find this awareness a genuine relief, since it's wonderful to discover that who you truly are cannot be your mind if you are able to see, observe and witness it in this deconstructive process.

9) Ask, “Do you see any reason, benefit, gain or service to you or anyone in continuing to hold onto this belief?”

So long as there is some benefit, gain or service afforded to you in continuing to hold the non-adaptive self-judgment, what would be the point of releasing and being free of it? This inquiry brings to the foreground the emptiness of all concepts such as beliefs and unveils the pointlessness of continuing to turn to the mind to get beyond the mind. Sage Ramana Maharshi offered the metaphor of hiring a thief to impersonate a policeman in order to catch a thief to highlight the sheer ludicrousness of engaging the mind to see through, deconstruct and outgrow the mind.

10) Ask, “Who are you and how are you without this belief?”

This present-tense question is a reframing of the age-old question, “Who am I?” which is at the heart of this process of inquiring into reality. To place this question in a specific situation or with a specific person without the belief or old story often creates a most helpful context. For instance, you can ask, “Who are you and how are you in your workplace without the belief that...” or “What is it like in this moment to be with Janice without the old story about her being...” or “Who or how are you right now in your family without the role of...” Since all concepts, including beliefs, roles, false identities and stories, are purely drawing upon memories of the past, another way this question can be asked is, “Who are you and how are you now if you weren’t your memories or your past?” Clients usually see for themselves that who they truly are remains the same, while their quality of living in the present is lighter, freer, calmer, more relaxed, and greatly enhanced with more of them available, up and running.

In the context of having a “complete experience” of painful emotions to feel closure with them, Adyashanti offers a variation at this stage by asking the person to experience the event wordlessly several times, without the overlay of any conclusions or story (or other self-judgment). By separating the

cognitive conclusion or story from the event itself, the person has the opportunity to experience the same memory without the interpretation, story and conclusion the mind has made up, and without judging oneself for coming to this interpretation. This can allow people to see the event as a memory without it triggering any feelings and notice how the feeling and thought combine to create suffering. He sees people developing the capacity to feel whatever feelings arise without making up thoughts about them.

11) Ask the client to scan their accomplishments while they have been carrying this belief, asking, “Was it that you accomplished all of these *because of* holding this belief or *in spite of* holding this belief?”

As the dénouement to the entire deconstructive process, this question is a bit of a revelation for most people since it has been anything but clear how hard it has been to drag the belief or other conceptualization around while simultaneously moving forward in accomplishing life tasks. By reviewing their accomplishments and asking whether they were able to complete them “because” or “in spite of” holding the belief in question provides an incisive laser beam of attention to the impact of the belief or other conceptualization on their achievements throughout life. Almost everyone quickly understands the question and almost just as quickly answers that it was in spite of holding their belief, not because of holding it. Some find it truly shocking how it was not seen beforehand, while others are rather amazed and equally pleased to no longer need to carry it any further now. Uncommonly a client may say it is because of holding the belief. At such moments the therapist might reply that it is perfectly understandable to see it in this way since the belief was surely there during their journey of accomplishment, and to sit inside this query a bit longer and see if anything further is revealed.

Sometimes it seems appropriate to share a short teaching story that likens the person to a strong locomotive and the chief engineer who is working very hard in running the train that is tearing up tracks

while still making headway. One consultant type makes his or her way from one passenger car to the next until finally arriving at the locomotive and insists on speaking with the chief engineer for just a moment. The chief engineer is far too busy to engage in idyll conversation and continues managing all the responsibilities in the noisy small compartment. The consultant type seems determined to speak with the chief engineer and since s/he is not going away, the chief engineer relents and in an off-putting, hurry-up manner asks, “So what can I do for you? You can see how busy I am.”

It’s so noisy that the consultant type seems compelled to bellow to be heard. “I wonder if you’ve noticed the 100,000-ton magnet way in the back holding back the entire train?” s/he bellows. The chief engineer cannot believe his ears, and so requests the consultant type repeat what was said. Upon it being repeated and the message not changing, the chief engineer leans out the little window of the locomotive farther than ever before without falling out and, lo and behold, there is what appears to be a 100,000-ton magnet way at the very back of the train holding back the entire train. In fact, it has “EGO” and “MIND” written in bold capital letters right on it.

The consultant type apparently has one more message to deliver before departing, and again bellows, “You might want to find some way to release that 100,000-ton magnet, so I can get where I want to go sooner!” With that the consultant type vanishes as quickly as s/he appeared. While it’s for another time just what happened next, a short time later the engineer was able to release the 100,000-ton magnet and the train simply whistled down the tracks. This little gem of a story seems self-evident to all I’ve shared it with.

12) Ask, “Now notice how your body feels having gone through all of this. What is your experience in this very moment?”

After a brief interlude to have everyone catch their breath, asking this question is a lovely

moment of recognition and summation. There is something about entering into this inquiry that gently calls the participant into the spacious “suchness” of Being and a relaxed unity of Consciousness, who every one of us truly are. Responses range from quiet calmness to a relaxed presence to feeling wonderfully alive in the here-and-now and being oneself. As the ego-mind is seen through, released and gladly surrendered as only getting in the way, at least as an imaginary sense of self ever dreaming up endless mental phenomena and conceptual dreams, all that remains is our authentic true lives.

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This twelve-stage clinical protocol can specifically address a broad range of mental phenomena beyond beliefs, roles, false identities and stories, including false comparisons between people or situations, attachments, animosities and closed mindedness, attributions of unfairness or injustice, jealousy and possessiveness, as well as self-righteousness and entitlement to name a few. It is intriguing to muse whether it can also be slightly adapted to effectively address other clinical matters. Can it also be reframed to look at unworkable behavior and so-called vicious cycles or patterns of behavior? Could it be transformed to examine reactive, defeating and destructive attitudes? The possibilities are only limited by our imagination. As with the entire twelve-stage clinical protocol, the feedback after inquiring into reality is purely a return to the everyday reality that was timelessly already here all along.

## Appendix I

A summary of the twelve-stage clinical protocol to deconstruct non-adaptive self-judgments

- 1) Ask, “What is wanting to happen today?” or “What is coming up inside of you that wants to be addressed today?”;
- 2) Ask the person, “Notice a defensive or distressing judgment, feeling or sensation on yourself”;

3) Now say, “Since this judgment, feeling or sensation is within you and may get tangled up inside, let’s have you step back and see it as an object outside of you, perhaps written on a blackboard or white board, or written on a paper tablet”;

4) Next state, “Notice there is the *content* of Awareness and then there is *Awareness itself*. In turning the board/screen/tablet around without paying any attention to what is on the other side, see for yourself that something is aware of this blank back of the board/ screen/ tablet. What does this Awareness itself feel like, the felt sense of Awareness itself? So as you put aside the words, symbols, concepts and contents of the mind or head, experience the feeling that remains of Awareness itself” and perhaps, “What is already here?”;

5) Ask, “Now from this sense of (give client’s own description of their felt sense of Awareness itself), casually, lightly and innocently ask yourself, “Is this true?” and patiently wait for a reply. Afterwards, follow it up with asking, “Could it ever be true, under any conditions, as a belief?”;

6) Ask, “What is the effect, outcome or result on you and others when you think or hold on to this belief (restate it)?” and ask global questions to help clarify;

7) Ask, “Well, let’s play with this belief. What would the exact opposite of it be? Putting this also on the board (or tablet), is it true either?” Then pendulate or oscillate between the two beliefs a few times. After doing this, ask “Now hold them both at exactly the same moment, and see what happens.”

8) Ask, “Who created or made up this belief in the first place?”;

9) Ask, “Do you see any reason, benefit, gain or service to you or anyone in continuing to hold onto this belief?”;

10) Ask, “Who are you and how are you without this belief?”;

11) Ask the client to scan their accomplishments while they have been carrying this belief,

asking, “Was it that you accomplished all of these *because of* holding this belief or *in spite of* holding this belief?”; and

12) Ask, “Now notice how your body feels having gone through all of this. What is your experience in this very moment?”

## Appendix II

### Deconstructive Inquiry Into Negative Self Judgments (Revised 2011)

John J. Prendergast, Ph.D.

#### Introduction

The following method is an adaptation of Byron Katie's "The Work". Please see her book, *Loving What Is* (Harmony Books, 2002) and her website at [www.thework.org](http://www.thework.org) for a complete description. Katie's method arose directly out of her spontaneous and tumultuous awakening and took several years to fully develop. The heart of her approach is to question the reality of our thoughts, particularly our judgments of others. She encourages people to write down their judgments according to a structured protocol, ask four questions about these judgments and then reverse them and see how they apply to oneself. She composed a little saying to describe the process, which she admits, "isn't Rumi": "Judge your neighbor, write it down, ask four questions and turn it around."

Over the years, I have attended several long workshops with Katie, witnessed her lead hundreds of people through "The Work", and done the written work many times myself. I find it quite useful and profound, particularly in the field of relationship. In trying to apply it to my private practice with clients,

however, I have found that it works better with some important modifications. Since it can be a lengthy and complex written process, I have also significantly shortened it.

First, I have noticed that my clients tend to get more stuck on their self-judgments than their judgments of others. While Katie recommends first focusing on the judgment of others, I focus on self-judgments since all judgments of others are ultimately rooted in self-judgment and all relationships with others start with our relationship to our self.

Secondly, I include body sensations and feelings, something that Katie does not focus on. While nearly all disturbing feelings and sensations originate in our conscious and subconscious thinking, I have found it important to include all dimensions of our experience when doing inquiry. The body has a way of keeping us on track with our deepest truth.

Thirdly, I introduce several preliminary steps that invite clients to witness a thought as an object and then turn their attention to awareness itself before they question the validity of their beliefs. There is a stepping back from a belief before there is a stepping into a belief. There is an inquiry into the storyteller as well as the story. This tends to invoke a wider and deeper kind of knowing - a spacious heart wisdom.

Finally, I encourage an attitude of innocent curiosity so that there is no sense of pressure to come up with the right answer. "The Work" can sometimes get very pushy ("Can you really know that it is true?"). Power dynamics can interfere with the innocent inquiry into the truth by engendering resistance or compliance. I rarely follow all of the following steps sequentially when I work with clients.

Sometimes it is enough to ask one question, or just uncover a core negative belief. It is important to be

creative and flexible and to make this inquiry process your own. Having said this, it is also quite useful to go through this entire protocol more or less intact and get a sense of its full transformative power. So be creative, spontaneous and enjoy yourself!

### The Invitation

#### 1. **“Notice a distressing self-judgment, feeling or sensation.”**

Comment #1:

- a. If the client is aware of only the belief, invite him/her to also be aware of the feeling and the sensation that go with it.
- b. If the client is aware of only a feeling, invite him/her to be aware of the belief and the sensation.
- c. If the client is aware of only a sensation, invite him/her to be aware of the belief and the feeling.

Comment #2:

We are inviting clients to gather the basic elements of their experience - thoughts, feelings and sensations - with an emphasis on the thoughts. It is not necessary to have all of the elements, however, in this case we need at least the self-judgment in order to proceed. It is very helpful to sense the body while identifying a disturbing thought. We will return to the body sensing at the end of the protocol (step #8).

#### 2. **“Focus on the self-judgment. Just notice it as a thought as if you are watching it written on a movie screen.”**

Comment: Here we invite clients to step back from their self judgments and to see them as objects.

Some people call this stage the "observing ego". This can be a novel investigation for some clients,

particularly non-meditators. Thoughts are not generally considered to be "things". You can coach clients by suggesting that they see the thought as a sentence projected on a screen or written on a blackboard in front of them or by hearing it spoken as a phrase. It is a good idea for you, the therapist, to write down the self-judgment so that you can refer to it precisely at a later point.

### 3. **“Notice that something is aware of this thought. What is your sense of this awareness?”**

Comment: This "pointing out" instruction, inspired by Nisargadatta Maharaj's injunction to focus on the "I-sense" and Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry ("Who am I?"), is designed to directly invoke that background awareness or openness that is the source of thought. This is a powerful, delicate, surprising, and sometimes disorienting question for clients who have never turned their attention to the apparent "experiencer". More contemplative clients will quickly drop into a bigger sense of space. Others may not understand the question or report another image, thought, feeling or sensation. Example: "I see a little girl." If this happens, explain that this is an experiential rather than a mental inquiry. It is about their felt-sense, not some idea about their experience. Point out that something is aware of this particular thought (or image, feeling or sensation) and ask again, "What is your felt sense of this awareness?" Take your time and go slowly. If clients become stuck or frustrated, let go, normalize that it can be a confusing question, and move to the next step (#4).

If clients say, "me" or "I am". Say, "Yes, and what is your sense of this me or this I am?"

If they say, "I don't know." Say, "Exactly - there is a sense of not knowing. Tell me more about that sense."

Sometimes the whole sense of there being a problem falls away at this point as the thought is seen to be what is it - a mental construct without any inherent validity. What is left is a sense of spacious openness. If there is a big opening; take your time and encourage your clients to relax into it before you go on. The rest of the inquiry process may become irrelevant at this point.

(I find that pointing attention to the sense of awareness is much more accessible than asking, "Who or what is aware?" which tends to invoke a more mental response.)

**4. "From this sense of (use client's description, i.e.: space, openness, not knowing) bring your attention to the original thought and innocently ask yourself, 'What is the truth?' Let the question go, wait quietly, and notice what comes to you."**

Comment: Here, the normal protocol of Byron Katie's "The Work" begins (in a modified form), yet usually from a bigger sense of space and a more attuned heart wisdom than ordinarily practiced. We are inviting a different kind of knowing to emerge with this question, something other than the ordinary (conflicted, judging) rational mind. We are not looking for a particular answer. We are inviting genuine curiosity. Accept whatever comes. Once clients answer in a way that feels true to them encourage them to be with their answer and let it in. If clients answer that they believe their negative judgment, don't challenge or argue with them. Just say, "okay, fine" and go to the next step (#5).

**5. "What is the effect on yourself and others when you hold onto the belief that ...(restate their original belief)?"**

Comment: We are investigating the impact of the negative self judgment. Take your time to explore each facet of the question - the impact first on oneself and then on others. Very surprising insights can arise at

this point. The effect of judgment will always be separation within one self and between one self and others. It is important to note that it is our attachment to beliefs, not the beliefs themselves, that is problematic. Once we no longer believe our story, it loses its power and eventually falls away. It is enough to see the false as false. The truth takes care of itself. It does not need to be asserted and it cannot be ultimately denied, although the conditioned mind will try its best to do both!

#### 6. **“Who or how are you without this belief?”**

Comment: This is a variation of the classic question, "Who am I?" Take plenty of time here and allow the experience to sink in. Notice that this question is posed in the present tense, a change from Katie's "who would you be without this belief?"

You can make this question more specific by asking your clients to imagine themselves in a specific situation or with a specific person without their old story. For instance, "What is it like right now as you imagine yourself with David without holding the belief that..."

7. a) **“What is the exact opposite of this belief? (pause) Is it less, as, or more true?”** (pause and wait for response)

b) **“What happens when you allow both beliefs to be there at the same time? Imagine holding each in a different hand.”**

Comment: Part “a” of this inquiry is what Byron Katie calls the "turnaround" or "reversal". Feel free to use those terms, if you prefer. I find that the above formulation ("exact opposite") works nicely. Keep it very simple. For example, "I am unlovable" becomes "I am lovable", or "I am ugly" becomes, "I am not

ugly". But be flexible. "I am beautiful" may have more impact. If clients find that the opposite of their negative belief seems less true, don't argue. It usually means that there is an underlying belief at work (often around safety) that has yet to be examined.

Since this inquiry assumes that no concept is ultimately true, we don't need to become attached to the opposite of a negative self-judgment. Affirmations may arise, but they are not emphasized. It is enough to see that a polarity of our cherished belief may well be as true as the original. This helps the mind to see its limits and to let go.

Part "b" is an additional interesting question to pose that can help catapult fixated attention into a background openness that is free of any polarized position. The ancient tantric practice of Yoga Nidra works with this principle as do Zen koans.

#### **8. "Notice how your body feels. What do you experience?"**

Comment: We come back to the body at the end of this process and offer clients a chance to compare their current felt-sense of themselves with their original feeling. It also helps them to feel the impact of their thinking. If there is continuing distress and time permits, you may begin another round of inquiry which will often focus on a related or even deeper negative self-judgment. Sometimes an original self-judgment will give way to a deeper one mid-way through a cycle. I continue with the new one when this happens.

Once you get the hang of this process, you can guide a client through these steps within 15-20 minutes. It is good to leave some time at the end of the session to debrief and get feedback. This inquiry usually is

a gradual process of seeing through layers of the self-world view. Clients begin to internalize the various steps and spontaneously apply them to their experience as it arises in the moment.

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