


# LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF

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A Guide to Becoming Centered

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 **AY HENDRICKS, Ph.D.**

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*A Guide to Becoming  
Centered*

**GAY HENDRICKS**

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*For my daughter, Amanda Hendricks,  
and  
for Thaddeus Golas*

# PREFACE

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**One moment of loving myself changed everything in my life. Since then, the purpose of my life has been to continue expanding in love and to share the transforming power of love with those who are interested. In the years since I developed this purpose, I have felt thousands more such moments myself and have witnessed countless others in the lives of people with whom I have worked in therapy, workshops, and classes. To see people come to love themselves is still the most moving thing in my life.**

**Those readers who would like to know the details of my early moments in loving myself may turn to the final chapter of the book. Although my personal experience is woven throughout the book, it is in its most concentrated form in the last chapter. The first twelve chapters tell what I now know about learning to love ourselves; the final chapter describes how I felt in several life-changing moments of it.**

**I am grateful to so many people that to name them all would be difficult. However, I do wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions to me of David Hubbard, Krishnamurti, Dwight Webb, Norma Hendricks, Lynn Parker, Neil**

**Marinello, Maharishi, Leo Zeff, Jim Fadiman, and Linda Fry. I give a particularly deep bow to the loving support of Kathlyn. All of these people have taught me, often at times when I was hardly listening, that love is the path for me.**

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*chapter one*

# **WHAT ARE THE BLOCKS TO LOVING OURSELVES?**

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**It seems obvious to me now that I am a lovable and capable person, but not too long ago I felt unlovable and ineffective. I know nothing has changed except my own mind, my own opinion of myself. The rest of the world is the same as it was, but now I see myself differently in relationship to it. It seems so natural and easy now to love myself. How did I ever make it so hard?**

**Perhaps we begin life in a state of being able to give and receive limitless love. Then, in the growing-up process, we make decisions about ourselves and life that cause us to fall out of love with ourselves. A decision like "I'm unlovable," made when we are two or twenty-two can affect the quality of our lives when we are thirty or sixty. I made a decision a long time ago not to trust people. I felt abandoned by my mother and father. In actual fact, he died and she went to work. Of course, I did not understand about death, bereavement, and economic necessities. To my young eyes, it looked like I was being left by people I had been relying upon. So I thought,**

This world is a place where people leave you just when you're counting on them. I remember feeling angry and sad about not ever seeing my father and having to share my mother with a bunch of unseen strangers every day from eight until evening. Even then she would often be tired and irritable; it was so different from the warm and happy life of a short time before.

I pulled into myself and formed a protective shell around a small part of me inside. I made a place in the corner of my grandmother's front room where I could hide from everyone, and I made a place inside me where I decided no one was going to be able to hurt me. I really did not recognize that this was a problem until I was in my late twenties, after a ruined marriage and a chain of shallow relationships. One day I woke up and saw that the little protected place where no one could hurt me was also a place where no one could touch me. I knew that if I were to be free and easy to love I had to open up that place and let it breathe fresh air, no matter what the risk.

We make decisions like "Don't trust people" to simplify the world, to make it make sense. It is safer, somehow, if we make rules. It will keep us from getting in trouble. The trouble is, of course, that in the deepest realm of life there are no rules. To make rules there instills rigidity where utmost pliability is called for.

The beauty of the human mind is that any decision that is made can be unmade. Since decisions like "Don't trust" are made only of mind-stuff, and therefore do not exist in any real sense, they can be dissolved in a flash. It is reassuring to know that any limitation you have ever installed in your mind, for whatever purpose and regardless of how long ago, can be effortlessly shed.

## **HOW WE COME TO FEEL UNLOVABLE, PART ONE**

**Birth can be hazardous to your health.**

**There we are, in a warm and blissful environment, all our wants and needs fulfilled instantly, when suddenly the worst disaster film of all time begins to roll. The walls shudder and contract, we start down a long, dark tunnel toward an uncertain end, only to be yanked out, upended, snipped, spanked, and forced to breathe the cold air of an alien world. And that is if we have an easy birth. It is possible, for example, to spend all day stuck in the tunnel or to experience one of the dozens of other complications of the birth process.**

**While we cannot go back and get birthed again, we can look at any decision our minds made at the time to see if any of those decisions are affecting us now. An example of a birth decision is, "Just when things are going fine, the bottom will always drop out." Naturally, if we believe that this is the case, our lives will go precisely according to that formula. One of the central tasks of life is spotting the decisions and beliefs that are causing our lives to unfold in their particular ways. Once spotted, these beliefs and decisions can evaporate or be replaced by healthier beliefs.**

## **HOW WE COME TO FEEL UNLOVABLE, PART TWO**

**Somewhere along the line many of us reach a conclusion about ourselves: something is wrong with me. I remember looking around me one day as a child and thinking, Either these people are crazy or I am. Fortunately for me, I decided it**



was them. But there was always the nagging suspicion that it might be me.

So many things in the growing up process can trigger an “I’m unlovable” decision that it is difficult to know where to begin. Let’s consider the worst first.

All too many of us are born into an environment where we are not loved. This might not apply to you, but even if it doesn’t I would like you to consider the problem for a moment. It is still common for children to be born into situations where they are unwanted. Mother Teresa of Calcutta speaks of children that she and her associates pick off garbage dumps where they have been left. For every child that is abandoned because it is unloved, there are doubtlessly hundreds that are kept by their parents to be raised in a hostile environment. If these impressionable minds are exposed to unloving words, deeds, and gestures on the part of those around them, they are likely to conclude that they are unlovable.

## **TAKING IT PERSONALLY**

One awesome yet understandable error that growing humans make is to take personally the events that befall them. In my own case, I grew to feel that I was a burden upon my mother, because I always saw her rushing around in a harried manner in an attempt to get to work on time, get dinner ready, straighten up the house. It looked to me like I was the cause of all this bustle, that if I had not been there things would go more smoothly. I checked this out with my older brother, who for his own reasons assured me that this was indeed the case.

My big mistake, though, was taking this situation *personally* instead of seeing that the same would have been true no matter who the child was. So too it goes with children who are born into unloving environments. For good reason they