



*Section One, Lesson Two:
Exercises to Help You
Embrace this Work and
Bring Acceptance to Who You Are*

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Exploring Your Fear of Doing the Work

The number reason why people don't do this work of becoming curious about what's encased inside the anxiety is that they're afraid that they'll discover that their deep-down hidden truth is that they have to leave their relationship. And they don't want to leave. You don't want to leave. That's why you're here.

If you're with a loving partner, if something is keeping you in, if you're here instead of on the hundreds of sites that espouse "doubt means don't", there's no reason why you'll discover that your truth is that you'll have to leave. The truth is that doing this work softens your fear walls and allows you to share *more* love, not less. When you break through the anxiety and say yes to love, you move toward your partner, not away. It's fear that tells you to leave, not love. It's fear that tries every line in the book to convince you not to take the risk of loving. When you do this work you discover how powerful fear can be and you find that you can make a choice regarding whether or not you listen.

Here's your lifeline: In all my years of doing this work and the thousands of people I've come into contact with, I've never seen someone who's in a loving relationship discover that their truth is that they have to leave. Of course, it's entirely possible that someone thought that their truth was to leave but it was actually a cleverly disguised fear-voice masquerading as truth. And it's possible that I haven't heard from the ones who decided to leave. But my E-Course forum and counseling practice are full of people who have found the courage to choose to learn, dive into the gritty and dark elements of their inner world, and emerge with the greatest rune we can discover: an open heart that says yes to struggle, yes to learning, yes to pain, and yes to love.

In the end, it's an act of courage to leap into yourself no matter what the

outcome. It's a tremendous act of self-love to give yourself permission to cry, to feel all of your difficult feelings, to trust that you'll be okay no matter what, and to ask yourself, "Is it more important to remain stuck in my anxiety (control) or to learn about what this anxiety is here to teach me?" That's really the central question. We will be exploring all of this in depth as we progress through the course material. For now, I want to encourage you to practice a simple exercise.

Exercise: Meditate on this question: "Is it more important to be remain stuck in my anxiety or to choose to learn about what this anxiety is here to teach me?" Sit with this question. Write about it. Truly listen for the answer. Remind yourself that choosing to learn is a daily choice; one day you may feel open and willing and the next day you may feel closed and protected. That's okay. Bring compassion to the openings and closings. When you're open, that's the time to do the work. If you're closed, see if you can bring compassion to the closed feeling (a form of resistance, which we will explore later in this lesson) and trust that there is wisdom in the fear as well.

Seeing Yourself Through Eyes of Love and Acceptance

If fear can distort your perception of your partner, do you think it can pull the same stunts when it comes to how you view yourself? Absolutely! When you're seeing yourself through the lens of "I'm not good enough" or "I'm not worthy or deserving" you're seeing yourself through fear eyes.

The problem has its roots in the way that most kids are parented and educated. When a baby is born, the parents don't look at the baby and say, "We'll only love you if you're pretty enough and get good grades in school." The parents love their baby simply because the baby exists. Her being is enough. His essence is worthy and deserving of their love. The baby doesn't have to prove herself in any way. She's loved because she's loved. (<http://conscious-transitions.com/i-love-you-because-i-love-you/>)

But as soon as the child begins to move, the praise begins. Suddenly the child learns that her parents' faces light up not just because she smile or coos but because she pulls herself up onto her arms. And then her parents take pictures when she rolls over and sits up. Then the pediatrician asks about developmental milestones and she receives the message that everyone's smiles are contingent on her achievements. She doesn't register any of this consciously, of course, but these early messages travel down the invisible lines of psyche and roots deep in to her bones: *I'm loved for what I do, not for who I am.*

The pressure only escalates, of course, when she enters school. Now she's been praised or chastised for how she performs: how well she reads, writes, and does math. Sometimes she receives gold stars and sometimes she doesn't. Her

parents are more pleased with her when she does. The message is reinforced: *I'm loved for what I do, not for who I am.*

These early messages are like tenacious weeds running deep into psyche and are difficult to uproot. Perhaps the work isn't so much about uprooting the "not enough" mindset as it is connecting to your place of wholeness. For it's important to keep in mind that while they may be intertwined with the outer layers of self - the self that developed as a response to win approval - your inner self remains untouched. There is a well of wholeness inside of you, and you have the choice about whether or not you want to connect to your wholeness or remain attached to your belief that you're not enough. As Rachel Naomi Remen writes in *Kitchen Table Wisdom*:

"The Buddhists talk about samsara, the world of illusion. It is the place that most of us live. Mistaking illusion for reality is said to be the root of our suffering. Yet is some immensely elegant way suffering itself can release us from illusion. Often in times of crisis when we reach for what we have considered our strength we stumble on our wholeness and our real power. How we were before we fixed ourselves to win approval. What has been fixed is always less strong than what is whole. In a time of real need we may remember and free ourselves."

As you're contemplating your false and limiting beliefs about yourself, it's essential to ask yourself what you're gaining by believing that you're not enough. When I ask this question to clients the common response is, "If I'm not enough then I don't have to risk my heart and be vulnerable." So before you do today's loving action, ask yourself if you *want* to see yourself accurately or it's more important to remain safely behind the walls of fear.

Exercise: See Yourself Through the Eyes of Love

Close your eyes and imagine the most loving person in the world sitting next to you. Perhaps this is a grandmother, living or deceased, who delights in the sight of you, whose smile reflects her unconditional love. Perhaps it's an animal, a creature that knows you so well and loves you simply because you exist. Perhaps it's a friend or your partner who gets you completely and has no trouble reflecting back why he or she loves you. This person can be real or imagined, but the energy that they resonate at is pure love and unconditional acceptance. Now imagine that this person is looking into your eyes and can see directly into your soul. She or he wants to tell you what they see: what qualities describe you; the strands of your being; who you are in your essence. There may or may not be words attached to this description, but through this communication you receive a direct transmission of who you are and a clear awareness that you are loved because you exist. That you are worthy without having to prove anything. That you are good, enough, and good enough.

Worry and Anxiety

One of the first questions I ask a new client who's struggling with relationship anxiety is, "Did you have anxiety as a child?" It's no longer surprising to me when the client says no because I can almost guarantee that she'll answer affirmatively to my next question, "Did you worry a lot as a child?"

For some reason we don't correlate anxiety with worry. Perhaps it's because there's still some stigma attached to the word *anxiety*, so culturally we latch onto *worry* as a more palatable term. Yet it's essential to understand that worry is the mental manifestation of anxiety. Experiencing nameless dread or identifiable dread as well as being called "too sensitive" or "overly sensitive" as a child are other indicators that anxiety was likely present.

I ask this question because it's important to understand that if you're struggling with relationship anxiety it's easy to blame your relationship as the source of the problem, but when you can draw a line through your life and connect the dots at the junctures when you experienced anxiety it can help you remove the projection from your partner and begin to take ownership for the anxiety that has lived inside of you for a long time and is now presenting itself as an opportunity for healing.

Let's take a look at worry starting from the beginning.

If you worried as a child it's highly likely that at least one of your parents was a worrier. Anxiety is hereditary, so if you were exposed to worry growing up, even if it wasn't verbalized, you likely absorbed it. Take a moment to think about who in

your family is a worrier. My clients often know without a moment's hesitation which of their parents, if not both, handed down the tendency toward anxiety. I understand this inherited trait quite well as I come from a long line of worriers. I've inherited many wonderful qualities from the strong women from whom I'm descended, but I've also inherited a propensity toward worry. I've heard stories about my overbearing great-grandmother (after whom I was named) who would exert her control over her three daughters, and later, my mother. I can recall with specific detail the look in my grandmother's eyes and the pursed line of her lips when she was worrying about something, and I know that she suffered from panic attacks throughout her life. And my mother, who has worked her tail off to transform her worry into faith and serenity, spent much of my early years worrying about her kids. She's shared with me that when my brothers and I were young, every time she left the house she would get a mental picture of the house going up in flames. So I know that, while there was also tremendous love and safety, I was gestated in a pool of worry and grew up with that nagging, unnamable fear nipping at my heels until it erupted in my early twenties in the form of a panic attack.

So how do we effectively work with worry? Worry is the opposite of faith. It's a blockade that protects you from the powerlessness and vulnerability of being human. When you're spinning on the habitual hamster wheel of worry, it's your ego trying to protect you from the softness of your heart by trying to control an unpredictable outcome. Many people don't realize that worry is a form of control, that the small, fear-based self holds tenaciously and unconsciously to the false belief that if you persevere enough about a certain topic you can ensure the desired outcome. Conversely, the ego believes that if it lets go of the reins and stops thinking about it then the worst possible scenario will occur. In other words,

the ego believes that its state of high-alert hypervigilance circumvents negative outcomes.

When the ego lets go and you make a choice to stop worrying and instead hand over the reins to Life (since that's where they are anyway), you will probably feel like you're free falling. That's when it's essential to replace the negative habit of worry with a positive faith and prayer practice. For it's only when you let go of worry can you align yourself with the flow of life and open the space for something wiser and kinder to enter.

Here's my three step approach for replacing the negative habit of worry with faith and serenity:

1. Acknowledge the worry

Notice where it manifests in your body and place your hands on that part of you. Imagine the two most loving hands in the world covering your hands as you bring a moment of compassion to your fearful place. Also remind yourself that worry is not a character default but a consequence of your profound caring and love gone awry. Had you learned to channel your care toward faith early in life you wouldn't have developed the worry habit. Bring compassion to your worry, reminding yourself that it's a morphed manifestation love.

2. Gather it up

Together with the imaginary hands resting in your hands, see yourself gathering up the worry like a cloud and tossing it into the air. If you're in a place where you can literally throw your hands and arms into the sky, even better.

3. Release it

Say a prayer or words of release. The prayer that I like is, "Please help open to whatever is in my highest good." I may also pray for a desired outcome like, "Please keep my kids safe while they're playing on the icy creek," but I recognize that my prayer doesn't necessarily effect the outcome any more than worry does. Still, when we align ourselves with faith and spirit instead of fear and control we're raising our frequency and creating a healthier internal environment where serenity can breathe.

So next time you're feeling worried, give it a try. It can't hurt. If you do this enough times, eventually you will create a new habit and will start to anchor yourself in a practice of surrender.

Poetry and Creative Expression

I'm including one poem in this section (in Lesson 4) as an MP3 that I hope will serve as an inspiration, a beacon of hope as you begin this process. If listening to it brings you comfort, make a practice of listening. If not, leave it for now. There are other poems in later sections as well that may speak to you, and other forms of expression that may bring more comfort.

I also invite you and encourage you to open your own creative channels and allow your inner world to be transformed into expression. Anxiety, like all emotions, needs to be seen: not judged or squashed or avoided. Part of hearing the message embedded in anxiety is allowing the experience to be transposed into creativity. As you sit with yourself in the mornings, throughout the day, and before bed, invite your creative self to arrive. Your expressions don't need to be "good". Nobody will judge them or grade them. It's simply an opportunity for you meet yourself in a new way: with softness and kindness. And if it doesn't happen right now, if the voices of self-judgement are too strong and loud, that's okay, too. You can always come back and try again when you feel ready.