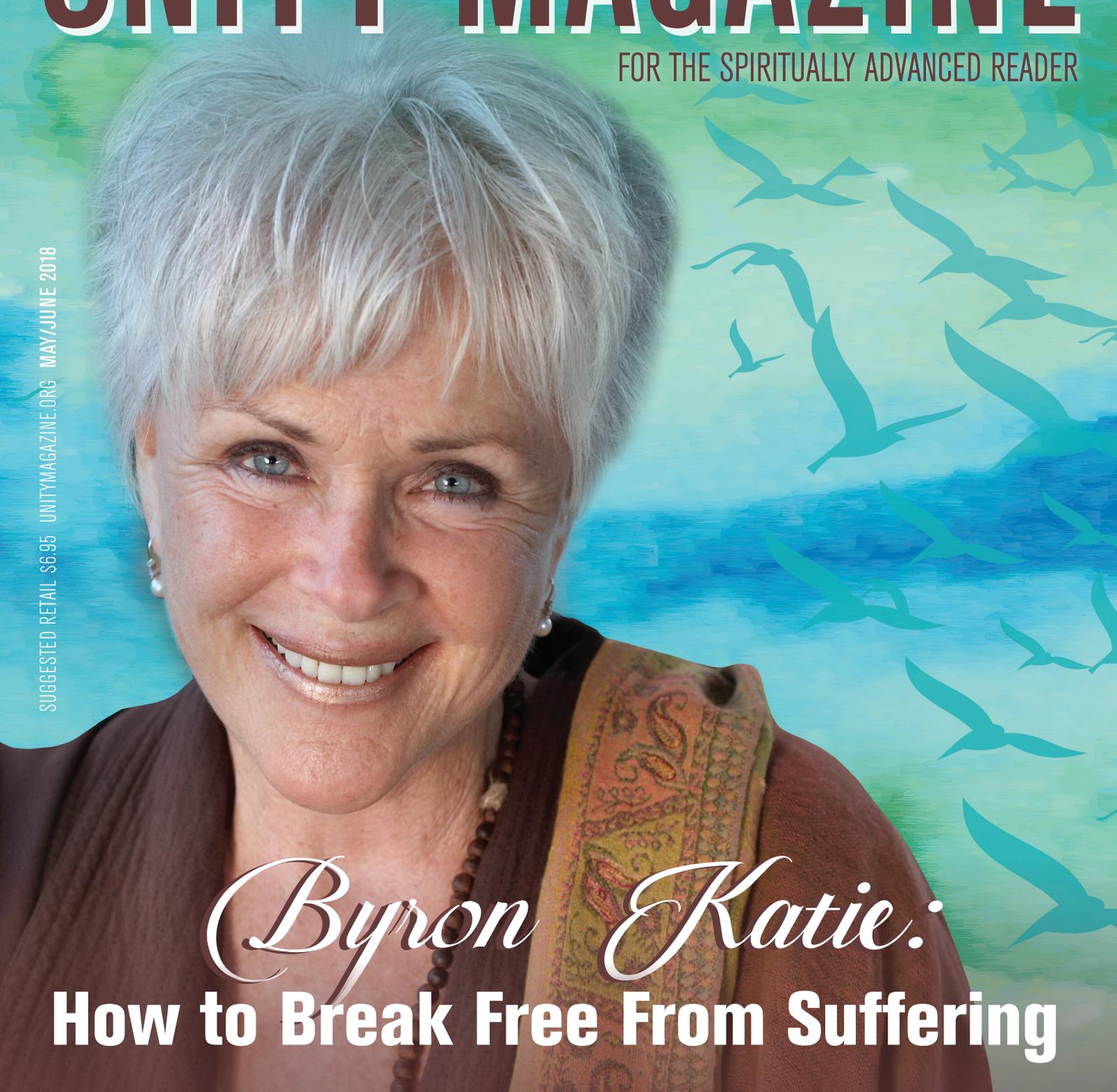


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Byron Katie:

How to Break Free From Suffering

FREEDOM ISSUE

JAMES VAN PRAAGH ON RAISING OUR VIBRATION

LISTENING IN WITH ...

Byron Katie

FORGING *Freedom*



In 1986, at age 43, **Byron Katie** hit bottom in Barstow, California. She was in her second bad marriage, filled with rage, wracked with addictions, and suicidal. She moved into a halfway house, where she slept in the attic on the floor because

she didn't feel deserving of a bed. Waking up one morning as a cockroach crawled over her foot, she discovered that somehow her identity had entirely fallen away overnight, leaving only pure consciousness. She saw how we create our suffering—

and have the power to end it by giving up our false beliefs through a method of self-inquiry based on four simple questions. The Work was born. Here, she and *Unity Magazine* editor **Katy Koontz** discuss the workings of The Work.

Katy Koontz: I love how The Work is so simple yet so powerful. I particularly appreciate how it doesn't see pain and emotional distress as negative but as allies that can get us to a higher level.

Byron Katie: I see all my thoughts as my children, and when we start giving them their space to speak to us and invite the ego to be what it is so that we can question it, then the ego begins to trust and get quiet. The mind questioning itself is the end of war—both in ourselves and in our world. It's not a small thing we step into when we do this—it's a state of divine grace.

KK: I love your analogy that your thoughts are like your children. That really puts a different spin on them, doesn't it?

BK: It does. It's as though they're all saying, "Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!" You can be at war with them or you can just say, "Okay, everyone settle down. We're going to hear from this one now." If you give the ego an opportunity to tell its story, then that thought—that child—is taken care of, and then the next one says, "I'm next!" All the other children begin to get quiet and trust that they'll have their turn to speak. Once the mind begins to trust itself, everything starts to move very quickly and sanely. The saner we are, the happier and kinder and wiser we are.

KK: So fostering that trust is key in making The Work work?

BK: Yes, because you can't fool the children. You can't fool the ego. You have to be true for it to trust and get quiet. When we do The Work, we come to see that this really is a friendly universe, and to be at war with it is to lose.

KK: You teach that feeling upset or uncomfortable always indicates that we're believing something that isn't true. To me, that says that even in an egregious situation, you're really only a victim of your own reaction.

BK: Yes. If you get fired, for example, that's not a problem. What you're thinking and believing about getting fired is the problem.

KK: Can you walk us through how you'd approach that using The Work?

BK: Let's say I'm upset because I'm thinking it's not fair that I was fired. First, I ask myself, *Is it true that it's not fair that I was fired?* The answer might be yes, I'm very angry, and I really believe firing me wasn't fair.

Then I ask myself, *Can I absolutely know that it's true that the firing was unfair?* This provides a chance to go deeper. Now my answer might be no, however angry I may still be, because I've slowed down enough to see another possibility.

Then I ask myself, *How do I react when I believe the thought?* When I look at my reactions, I see that I feel resentful. I see pictures in my mind of how I worked so hard and how they don't appreciate me. I get very angry. I mentally attack my boss, who fired me. I also attack him verbally when I'm talking to others about it. I feel depressed. I blame myself for not doing better. I blame the company for putting such a terrible manager in charge. Sometimes I blame God.

Then comes the fourth question: *Who would I be without that thought?* I see that I'd be relaxed, not blaming anyone, and maybe even grateful because my mind would be open to another job. I'd realize that what I've learned on this job will carry me forward. I might even have respect and gratitude for my former boss. I'd become humble as I clearly see some of the reasons my boss fired me and that he could have been right. I'd see how freed up I am now from a job that might have been too stressful or even over my head.

Then I find turnarounds, opposites to what I believed. There are often three, but here I find only one: *It's fair that I was fired.* I identify at least three genuine, specific examples of how that opposite is as true as, or truer than, my original statement.

KK: So in four questions, you go from the angst of painful tragedy to the joy of a fabulous opportunity.

I DON'T LET GO OF MY STRESSFUL THOUGHTS. I QUESTION THEM, AND THEN THEY LET GO OF ME.

BK: We see that there's an amazing world when we take the opportunity to ask these four questions. It's the education that the world could use right now. Anything less is war. We want our leaders to end war in the world, but we can't even end war in ourselves. We should always look to ourselves first. That's freedom.

If we do The Work long enough, eventually we find ourselves in a kinder, gentler world—a world of peace where everyone is connected. Here's the short version of that: I understand that every human being loves me. I just don't expect them to realize it yet.

KK: I love that, especially because as your teachings so often point out, we are all more alike than we are different.

BK: Absolutely. There's no room to judge. Judgment brings stress into my life and until I get it squared away I haven't looked to myself. That is a lack of compassion. How can we be in touch with compassion if we can't clearly see our own innocence? How can I forgive if I'm still judging? The key to forgiveness is to question the thoughts that block it and then to understand that forgiveness is realizing that what we thought happened didn't.

KK: I would say The Work both requires and engenders a tremendous amount of compassion, for yourself as well as others.

BK: Oh, it does. When we see how we treat ourselves and others when we

believe our stressful thoughts, we just get still. This is a meditative process, a practice. When we question who we would be without those thoughts, we see we're not guilty of anything other than believing our thoughts. That's innocence. We think we need to stop the kind of behavior that hurts other people, but how can we when we're believing our thoughts?

KK: Do you think that as a society we are addicted to emotional pain? Why else would we obsess so much about things that hurt us?

BK: We're just lost. We don't know what to do. We grab what we think we need, and we have a few moments of reprieve. Then we feel guilt—and guilt is where we're at our worst. These are all tricks of the mind. My job is to break it down so people can use inquiry to follow the breadcrumbs back to their true selves.

KK: I have to comment on the turnaround—what an amazing *aha* moment that provides.

BK: The four questions open the mind, and then we turn the stressful thought around and find the opposite. For example, if you're upset because you think, *He betrayed me*, after you've gone through the four questions, you look at opposites, such as *I betrayed him*, or *I betrayed myself*, or even *He didn't betray me*. You're not looking for right answers. You're in a meditative process, so you just try these turnarounds on, respectfully

and gently, like trying on a new pair of boots in the store to see if they fit.

So for the turnaround "I betrayed him," you might ask yourself, *Where did I betray him in that situation?* Maybe it was with a look, a word, a groan, or an accusation. Then you can go further, asking, *Where have I betrayed him in other ways? And where have I betrayed other people in my life?* You get still and sit in that, and you allow that question to be answered through images that come to mind because all the wisdom is inside you. Then you can ask, *Where is it I betrayed myself, where I didn't speak up for myself?* Then you may see yet another turnaround: *He didn't betray me*. How could it be that when you were so sure that he betrayed you, he really didn't? This takes a lot of stillness. It's so profound to sit in this meditation, in these questions, and open our hearts and witness what arises to meet the questions in that silence.

KK: You can peel back so many layers with this process. The quick answer is not what you're looking for.

BK: Absolutely. If people would just sit in it for 20 minutes a day, or just take it into the practice they already have, they will go from riding in a horse and buggy to traveling at jet speed.

KK: Why do you think we so often deceive ourselves, and why is that deceptive thinking our default?

BK: It's like looking at a chair and saying, "That's a chair." That's



something we can all agree on. But what I believe about a chair and what you believe about a chair will give us two different chairs, even though we're looking at the same piece of furniture. No one is wrong here. This is true with everything we think, and we either eventually catch up with our beautiful selves or we don't. Until we do, it's a confusing world. Often, it's a world of hurt until we get a little inquiry under our belts and can see the real world instead of the world we believe it to be.

KK: Do you have a litmus test for deciding what's real as opposed to what's illusion?

BK: Ask yourself if you love what you see and if you love what you feel when you see it.

KK: The Work is about gaining a new perspective by opening your heart, not by trying to change your thinking. It's more about allowing. Can you comment on the difference?

BK: The Work allows what is there to surface. I can't figure out how to have a happy world. I have to ask, wait, be open to what I see, and be humble enough to accept it. The more we do The Work, the more our mind is open to it, and the stronger the invitation we make to ourselves. What is there to enlighten us is free to meet us where we are, until eventually we're just a living, walking meditation.

KK: A key part of this is being able to drop our stories, which isn't easy!

BK: People hear it that way, but it's not a question of dropping our stories. As I often say, "I don't let go of my stressful thoughts. I question them, and then *they* let go of *me*." For example, I do The Work on mother, father, sister, brother, and then

smoking quits me. Making clear decisions becomes so simple and effortless. The Work keeps you in this fearless and grateful state of mind.

KK: The Work is famous for healing emotional issues. Can it also address physical issues?

BK: I've had cancer, and I've also lost eyesight in both eyes. I'm cured of all that now, but it would be okay with me if I weren't. It was perfectly okay for me to be blind and perfectly okay for me to have cancer when those things happened. It wasn't okay with my doctors. So far I have had no physical condition that I can complain about, and if I did have a complaint, I would question it.

For example, when the doctor said I had cancer, I could see he believed it and I could hear he was very alarmed. He said, "I want you to get to my office as quickly as possible."

My thought was, *My doctor is having trouble. I'd better get there as soon as possible.* Someone had a problem with it, but it wasn't me.

So I went to his office. Out of the kindness of his heart he had already lined up a lot of radiation treatments. He didn't want me to have surgery because he said it could leave me disfigured—it would take several surgeries and may never look right. I could see he wasn't the doctor I wanted to attend me in any way because he was fearful, and so I thanked him and said I wanted another opinion.

Then my husband got on the phone and started interviewing doctors. One said he could remove the cancer and do cosmetic surgery all in one session—he was excited when he explained the procedure. Because of his excitement and his professionalism, he was my choice, for better or for worse. The surgery

took eight hours and then it was finished. Even though I had a huge bandage on my nose, the next morning I took one of my granddaughters to Disneyland for her birthday because I'd promised her we'd go. I haven't had another surgery since. And all is well.

KK: Are there any other spiritual practices you recommend?

BK: I often invite students to do at least three really nice things a day for someone else, without getting found out (in which case they have to start over). You could leave a flower in front of someone's door, maybe with a typed note saying, "Thank you for being you." Your ego will surface all over the place because you'll want to be found out. But if you keep doing it, eventually you'll continue giving as a natural way of life, wanting nothing in return. It becomes such a part of your life that it takes it over. 🌱

BYRON KATIE, FOUNDER OF THE WORK, HAS WRITTEN SEVERAL BOOKS, THE LATEST OF WHICH IS *A MIND AT HOME WITH ITSELF* (HARPERCOLLINS, 2017). SHE OFFERS TALKS, WEEKEND WORKSHOPS, A NINE-DAY PROGRAM CALLED THE SCHOOL FOR THE WORK, AND A 28-DAY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM CALLED TURNAROUND HOUSE IN OJAI, CALIFORNIA. VISIT THEWORK.COM FOR DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT HOW TO DO THE WORK, FREE VIDEOS, AND OTHER MATERIALS.