

## CHAPTER TWO



# STEP 1:

## TOTAL SELF-ACCEPTANCE

### Part One

#### A Brief Introduction to Step 1

#### **TOTAL SELF-ACCEPTANCE (UNCONDITIONAL LOVE)**

Without self-acceptance we cannot heal or grow. At first we think that our emotional pain is caused by not being accepted by others, until we come to realise that our pain is pointing to the many ways in which we don't accept ourselves. A lack of self-acceptance on a fundamental level is the root cause of emotional vulnerability and suffering.

Every human being has fears and insecurities and gets confused. Every human being also has a direct connection to the Universal Life-Force of Love and Wisdom that is our Higher-Self. This direct connection to the Life-Force is found within one's own heart, or center of being. We are therefore a human being learning to be our Higher-Self. When we are truly committed to learning what it takes to be our Higher-Self, the doorway to our true potential is revealed. We learn to be the

Higher-Self by being the compassionate carer of our own human-self as best we can each day. We can heal our own wounded and confused mind even as we are learning and growing. With this growing ability to care for our own human-self, we are in a better position to care for others. We are also in a better position to accept and work with any challenges that we may face in life.

## **BARBARA AND BRYAN'S STORY**

Let us start by having a look into the lives of a couple named Barbara and Bryan. Barbara and Bryan are an average sort of couple who are trying to get ahead in the world with a sense of meaning, purpose and connectedness. They are fictional characters but they could be any one of us. They have been created from my own experiences as well as the experiences of my many clients over the years of my professional work as a psychotherapist and group leader.

Their story is not only about their relationship, but more importantly about their own personal journeys. The story begins with Barbara...

*Bryan and I had an argument last night. For some reason he forgot about our dinner date and came home late from work after having had too much to drink. Bryan has been going to counselling and participating in a personal development program for a few years now. His lapse in progress took me by surprise and I reacted badly.*

*I was looking forward to our special night out. We make a point of spending quality time alone together now that we are doing our best to look after ourselves and our relationship. When Bryan didn't arrive home on time I began to worry. I tried to phone but he was not in the office and his mobile was switched off. By the time two hours had gone by I was convinced he had been in a car accident or something. I was about to start calling hospitals or the police when he finally*

arrived home. It was obvious he had been out drinking. My concern instantly turned to anger.

I launched into him with a barrage of "how could you?; you should know better; is this how much you care about us?!..." and so on. In my anger I didn't think to ask what was going on for him. Bryan reacted with the "get off my back" routine and we just went around and round getting nowhere constructive. We eventually retreated to opposite ends of the house without resolving anything.

This morning I felt raw and betrayed and my old feelings of depression were tugging at me. The feelings of betrayal and the emerging depression were like allied forces doing battle for the control of my head. Fortunately there was a third force vying for control, and that was my conscious-awareness.

I started on my own personal development journey about a year or so before Bryan got on his own path. I have become very aware of my old self-destructive ways. I knew that there must be a reason for Bryan's slip-up, but my old issues around drunkenness were doing their best to drag me back to the ways I used to think and react.

When I was a child my dad abused alcohol and frequently stayed out to all hours. He and mum would frequently argue about it. I remember hiding in my bedroom when things got too heated. I would put my pillow over my head sometimes so I couldn't hear. At other times I would listen while praying that it would stop. Eventually they had had enough of each other and at the age of fourteen, I watched my family fall apart.

Until recently, depression had been my long-term companion. Through counselling I came to realise, that due to all the ongoing negativity and blaming that went on in my home as a child, I developed a sense of self-condemnation whenever I supposedly failed at

something. The way I treated Bryan last night and behaved in front of the children, was triggering that same sense of failure. Not only was I beating Bryan up, I was doing a good job of beating myself up.

By the time we were up and getting ourselves off to work, there was still a three way battle in my head. I did my best to keep to myself and responded minimally to Bryan in fear of blurting out the wrong thing. I could see Bryan was doing his best to get a grip also. He made a point of apologising and facing up to his part of last night's debacle. Even though I didn't really acknowledge him that well, his honesty helped me to feel a lot better. It gave me some reassurance that we can sort things out tonight.

Fortunately I work part-time and so had a few hours this afternoon to get my head straight.

At these times, what pops into my head is "back to basics." The first step to straightening my head out is self-acceptance. I am human. Like Bryan, I am going to make mistakes now and then. Neither of us had the greatest start to life. We both have our fair share of baggage.

The moment I arrived back home from work I picked up my self-help books. I chose the book that I use as a quick reference to the principles of self-care and self-healing. The book really helped to remind me that I am the guardian of my own life and as that guardian I must be responsible for the way I treat myself. I could feel my heart slowly open again as I worked through an exercise on accepting and forgiving myself. With the help of the exercise I poured out my confusion and pain in my journal. As I explored my emotions, old memories, that were connected to the pain, began to surface and I found myself back in my childhood where all my self-defeating mind-programs started. The way I see it now is that this

child that I once was, who is still alive in my memories, belongs to me. I am my own parent. I am now the adult and my memories are my domain. They are in my control. My mind belongs to me.

I stop writing while I imagine myself going back in time to my childhood, as the adult I am now, in order to take care of the child I was then. I use the hurts of last night to find where the pain is still alive in my memories. Waves of emotion well up in me as I consciously connect to that pain—sadness, helplessness and anger. I do my best to stay open and compassionate to it, which is not easy because the pain is triggering a lot of negative thinking. I struggle to stay above the negative self-talk that is coming from the pain. These self-attacking thoughts used to be what dragged me down. I get a better perspective on it by writing it down while reminding myself that I am worthy no matter what. Through this process I am able to have a good hard look at the unreality of the negativity. I am able to strengthen my clarity and see it for the confusion that it is. I recognise that what it says about me is not true. The self-attacking thoughts soon dissipate, allowing me to drop into a softer, more self-nurturing space. My growing compassion for myself deepens now and I feel the loving warmth of my self-acceptance, my Higher-Self, flowing into me. More tears come but they are tears of healing. I am back in my heart now, wrapped up in my inner-sanctuary.

This process works really well for me because the feelings are so real. I can literally feel the love I am giving to my child-self, which is now my vulnerable humanness. All I needed when I was a child was someone who could accept me as I was—someone who could give me lots of hugs and acknowledgment and have compassion for how I was feeling. I can now be that for myself. When I do, it is much easier to face my issues because I can feel okay about myself even when I make

a mistake. Self-condemnation and pride then doesn't get in the way so much.

I do some more writing about the new relationship I am creating with the child me that is in my memories. I imagine my adult-self hanging out with my child-self. We are doing projects together while also just being silly and having fun.

I then move on to sorting out what I actually know about last night from what my fear-based imagination was inventing. I get myself in a better head-space to work through things with Bryan tonight.

It hasn't always been that easy. At first I needed my counsellor to help me get through my anger and self-condemnation so that I could release my pent-up emotions and allow myself to be nurtured. Over time I have learned to work through this process for myself. I can really feel how I have created new programs in my mind that are self-caring rather than self-destructive. Because I really do care about myself now, I still see my counsellor for "maintenance" sessions once in a while and regularly go to groups. I want to keep growing because I have experienced the benefits.

There is one other motivation that really keeps me on track and that is wanting my children to have my good programs and not be struggling later in life with their version of the baggage that I have had to deal with. They will still have their issues. We are not perfect parents and we can't always shield them from life. I know, though, that they have had a better start than I had. Every good thing I do for my mind benefits all those around me. I know I have to do it for myself first though. That is where it starts and finishes—my journey.



## WHERE OUR CONFUSION BEGINS

Self-acceptance is the doorway to healing our emotional pain and destructive thoughts. Self-acceptance awakens our potential to take charge of our life. The opposite of self-acceptance is negative self-judgment or self-condemnation. Self-condemnation, more than anything else, blocks us in our efforts to heal and grow.

In my personal and professional experience, I have found that all destructive thoughts stem from one fundamental belief, or rather *misbelieve* (*mistaken belief*), that is forged in our mind when we were a vulnerable and defenseless child. This misbelief is:

** I am unworthy because I am human.**

Beliefs are thought-patterns that have become habit and often slip below our awareness. As a child, in particular, we are unaware that we are forming such beliefs. We are simply trying to survive as we instinctively seek love and happiness. By the time we grow into adulthood, these deeply ingrained beliefs determine the way we perceive everything that happens to us.

By the term *human* I am meaning “not perfect”. For a child in particular, the standard of perfect behaviour is measured by others. To further create confusion in the child’s mind, there are invariably many different versions of what this perfect standard is, depending on who is handing out the discipline. This standard can even change from moment to moment with one individual disciplinarian, depending on his or her changing moods and parenting skills.

These multifarious and often irrational standards that a child is supposed to somehow live up to, are laced with the fears, insecurities and resulting confusion of the disciplinarian. This confusion inevitably distorts the quality of love that is given to the child.

When we are children, this deep misbelief that we are unworthy for simply being human becomes embedded into our minds, because love is

repeatedly withdrawn from us for being childish. As children, we are placed in a profound dilemma. Being children means that we have little capacity to control our natural childish cravings and emotions. We simply can't help ourselves. We are doomed to fail when we are expected to be "good little adults" by well-meaning but confused carers, or carers who are plainly abusive. We may also have had a sensitive or intense character as a child, which can compound the situation and put more demands on the skill of the parent.

Clarity Box 2:1

**REPEATED CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES**



**DEVELOP INTO SUBCONSCIOUS BELIEFS**



**THAT CONTROL MY EVERYDAY PERCEPTIONS**

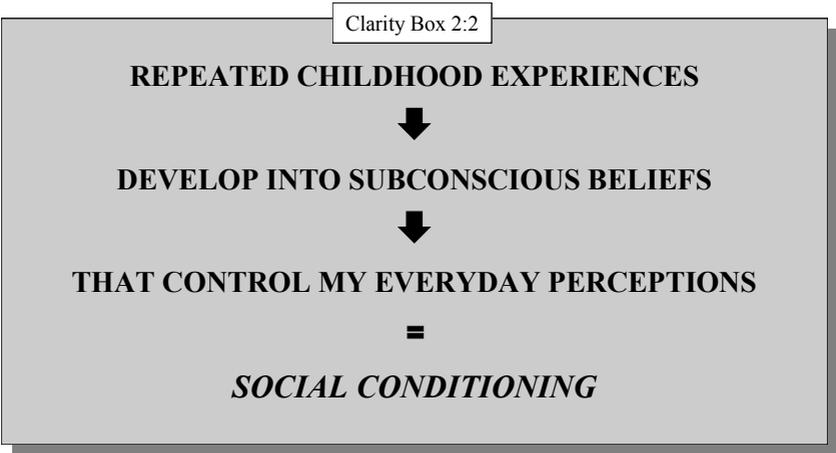
As powerless, vulnerable children we are so dependent on our carers that we are compelled to conform to their confusion no matter how impossible this may be to achieve. In the face of this dilemma we feel so powerless and unworthy. The more often a particular statement is repeated to us when we are children, the more likely we are to be influenced by it. As a result, we are inclined to believe negative judgments about ourself, even though in our hearts it doesn't feel right. Even a rebellious or strongly spirited child is still going to be deeply effected by such an experience.

Of course all children need guidance and discipline. This is how they learn to take control of their own emotions and needs. All discipline, however, must be patient, loving and compassionate, otherwise it contains elements of destructiveness.

For most of us, this is where the confusion starts, and we then pass it

down the line from generation to generation.

When we were children, we may not have had any other example of care to relate to, so we grew to regard this confusion as a normal way to think. It becomes our standard. Due of this “normalizing”, as well as the vulnerability of a child’s mind, these self-destructive judgments become imbedded into our subconscious minds. This repeated information then creates negative belief-systems that control the way we think and react to life. The result is our *negative social conditioning*.



Negative conditioning can be evident as early as two years old and it keeps on being created all through childhood if the child’s environment and standard of care doesn’t significantly improve. These distorted beliefs then create programmed, or habitual, ways of reacting to life’s circumstances that can be very self-defeating. These programmed self-defeating reactions then create ongoing difficulties throughout our life, such as conflict in our relationships, when conflict wouldn’t be present otherwise.

An example of this distortion of perception is when we take offense at an innocent remark made to us by someone who had no intention of causing harm. We think we are being attacked. We think we are being condemned, but all that has occurred is an old belief-system, created by

repeated experiences of being condemned in the past, has been triggered. The trigger can be as simple as a familiar phrase or gesture. In reality, without being aware of it, our own mind is thrown into a time-warp. We unconsciously think the present situation is the same as the past and react in a way that is inappropriate for that present situation.

Clarity Box 2:3

**INCIDENT OCCURS IN MY PRESENT EXPERIENCE**



**TRIGGERS SUBCONSCIOUS MISBELIEFS**



**THAT WERE CREATED BY PAST EXPERIENCES**



**THAT NOW DISTORT MY PERCEPTIONS**



**WHICH CAUSE AN INAPPROPRIATE REACTION**

At times people do treat us badly and we do need to take some sort of action to protect our wellbeing. Due to these distorted perceptions, however, we may feel powerless to act or we may over-react.

This means that our very perceptions of reality become distorted early in childhood. Due to these misbeliefs, we then continue to create a distorted reality for ourself throughout our life until we become aware of these self-defeating beliefs and change them.

As adults we often think that the words and actions of others are causing our emotional pain, as it did in childhood. This is not the case however. To be an adult means we have the capacity to be self-responsible - to take command of our own thoughts and emotions, whereas a child only has limit access to this ability. Unlike children, adults are predominantly at the mercy of there own ingrained

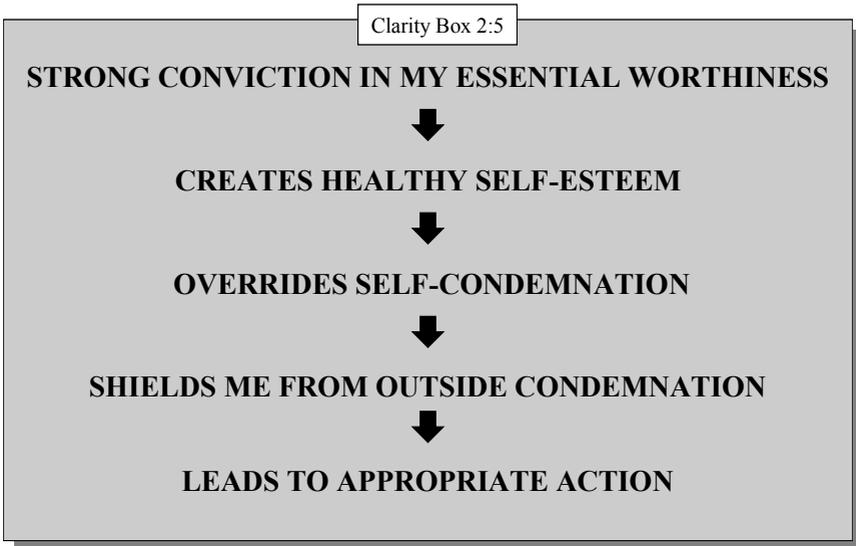
conditioning. As adults, it is our own self-condemnation, emerging out of our negative conditioning, that makes us vulnerable to the judgments of others. From this position of vulnerability and confusion, our survival instincts may then be inclined to judge and attack as a form of defense, oblivious of the fact that the perceived danger may be an imaginary one. The words or actions of another person may be perfectly innocent. Even if the other acted unkindly, we tend to react in a way that makes the situation worse.



What is really driving our pain is our own mind telling us we are unworthy of Love. As children, we were dependent on getting love/acceptance/approval from other people in order to feel loved. When we didn't get it, we felt abandoned. As an adult, when we react, our unconscious childhood belief that we have not measured up enough to get love has been triggered. We may only feel this as anger towards the

other person, but underneath this anger is the wounded and confused child within us believing he/she is unworthy of Love. When we blindly react without knowing it, we are attacking our own self with our own misbelief.

When we have a healthy self-esteem, however, we can shield ourself from the unfair judgments of others, as well as our own negative self-talk. This inner-strength is created by choosing to accept and believe we are worthy even when we make human mistakes.



This is the crux of Unconditional Love where our own mind's foundation of self-esteem is concerned. Our worthiness must be regarded as absolute, because it is! Our belief in it must become an unshakable conviction. Our worthiness is *not* in the hands of another human being, regardless of what anyone has, or may, think, say or do. Not even our parents ultimately define our worthiness. The only qualification we need for this fundamental worthiness is to *exist*. **That's it!** As adults, we have the ultimate authority over our own self-esteem. Other human beings have the power over our worthiness only when we

give it to them, because we are confused about the truth of ourself. Unconditional Love is UNCONDITIONAL. There are no shades of grey. The only doubts that exist are to be found in our own human confusion. We are all on a journey towards a full conscious-awareness of this essential fact.

Love is a Universal Life-Force that is the core of our being. Nothing can take that away from us. This is not some mystical belief. This is a scientific fact that is at the core of real healing and awakening.

Even if there is initial confusion caused by negative conditioning, we have the power of reasoning and the capacity of consciousness to know what *feels* right, and to trust that feeling. This Universal Life-Force of Unconditional Love is the very core of our being. It *is* our Higher-Self. It is also the bench mark that our feelings are set to. If our thoughts are out of alignment with Unconditional Love, we feel pain in the form of human emotion. If our thoughts are in tune with Unconditional Love, we feel joy, the Unconditional Love that is our Higher-Self.

Clarity Box 2:6

**UNIVERSAL LIFE-FORCE OF LOVE AND WISDOM IS THE  
CORE OF MY BEING**



**THIS IS THE BENCH MARK MY FEELINGS ARE SET TO**



**IF MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT LOVE, THERE IS PAIN**



**IF MY THOUGHTS ARE LOVE, THERE IS JOY**



**THIS IS MY INTERNAL GUIDANCE SYSTEM**

Considering how simple and beautiful this internal guidance system is, it is amazing how we manage to get so confused. But we do, due to our vulnerability as a child and the confusion this experience sets up in our mind. Self-condemnation cuts us off from Love because it closes our heart off from our own self, and ultimately our Higher-Self.

If it wasn't for self-condemnation, the acute vulnerabilities we feel in adulthood would not be there in the first place. Without this prior self-condemnation, the unfair judgment of another would have little impact. We would simply know that the person speaking harshly to us is perhaps having a bad day and is obviously confused. We would know that we don't deserve to be spoken to that way, no matter what mistake we may have made. We would decide for ourselves who we are and what we are worth and that would be in accordance to the truth that we are one with the Universal Live-Force, Unconditional Love in other words. This is what it means to know yourself as a "child of God". As a result, we would easily let the other's confusion go.



***My ultimate worthiness is beyond question,  
no matter how human I am; no matter what  
other people may do or say.***

## **PRIDE AND DENIAL**

What is called false-pride is another symptom of self-condemnation. For example, this is what causes us to deny our part in a conflict and to use blame and similar strategies to cover our vulnerability. False-pride creates in us the need to be right and to see the other as wrong in an unrealistic black and white way of perceiving. We need to feel bigger and better because, deep down, we actually feel less than those around us.

Often we know when we are indulging in a game of denying reality, but our fear of being judged as unworthy gets the better of us. Our fight-or-flight instincts take over in reaction to our fear and our heart becomes

closed. We often feel utterly powerless to change this self-defeating way of coping, and we are often reluctant to change, due to the false sense of security and power pride gives us. Usually we are not aware of the underlying dynamic of self-condemnation that creates pride. This lack of awareness only adds to the seemingly endless confusion.

Clarity Box 2:7

**PAIN CAUSED BY SELF-CONDEMNATION**



**SHIELDED BY SURVIVAL INSTINCTS**



**BY USING PRIDE AS THE COPING MECHANISM**



**RESULTS IN DENIAL AND BLAME**

## **UNHEALTHY DEPENDENCY ON OTHERS**

It is quite normal to assume that our only hope of escape from this nexus of self-condemnation is to find someone who is willing to Love us unconditionally, even when we are unable or unwilling to return that same quality of Love. This of course is an unrealistic expectation that leads to inevitable conflict and disillusionment. There is no “perfect” someone out there for us. We can only ever end up with an imperfect human being like ourself. As a result, in desperation we try to “renovate” our loved one in order to get what we want. We become locked in a struggle to control and change other people, places and things in order to feel loved.

The other side of this dynamic is compromising our values and wellbeing in order to hang onto a relationship at all cost. This is driven by the same lack of self-worth, but through a personality that looks for

love by pleasing others at one's own expense.

In reality, relationships succeed, and personal fulfillment is achieved, not so much because other people love us, but because we possess a healthy form of self-Love. This healthy self-Love provides us with an inner-peace and openness that makes forming loving and healthy relationships with others a natural outcome. It is a self-Love that respects and protects our core values and personal wellbeing.



***When I give myself Unconditional Love, I naturally open my heart to the Life-Force of Love. I can then overflow this real Love on to others.***

## **SELF-ACCEPTANCE IS SELF-CARE**

After recognising that there is a problem with the way we treat ourself and others and approach life in general, acceptance is the first step in taking action to do something about it. This first step of acceptance is applied on many levels. Accepting our right to be human in the form of self-acceptance is an essential part of Step 1. Self-acceptance opens the door to Love and Healing



***I accept my right to be human.***

The following contemplation exercise may help you better comprehend the nature of self-acceptance / Unconditional Love. (Fill in the blanks with the right gender for you to make it more personal.)

*Exercise 2***Awakening to Love**

Imagine yourself as a newborn baby lying on a bed with you as your adult self looking down at this delicate, vulnerable and precious being. Now as you are looking down at this beautiful little being, can you say in your heart that there is anything about this baby that is unworthy of Love? Can this baby do anything that makes it truly unworthy of Love? For instance, ..... may frequently wake you up during the night by crying. .... may also dirty its nappy a number of times per day. Neither of these experiences are very pleasant to have to deal with as the carer of this baby. Is the baby still worthy of Unconditional Love even when ..... acts this way? Some people actually get angry at this unconscious behaviour of a new born baby. Is the problem with the baby or the carer?

Now your child is one-year-old and crawling around, getting into whatever ..... can reach. Sometimes this little toddler is difficult at meal times, and can still keep you up at night. Your toddler is just doing what a toddler does. Is there anything about ..... that is unworthy of Unconditional Love?

Now your toddler is a delightful two-year-old and becoming a real handful. .... is now walking and therefore getting into more things. There is a lot of boundary testing going on as your toddler exercises ..... awakening self-will in fits of defiance. This little one is also starting to talk in the cute way that toddlers do. Is there anything about this child that is undeserving of Unconditional Love? Would anyone be justified in getting angry at and judging this toddler if ..... accidentally knocked over and broke that prized porcelain jug that you got for your wedding? Again, this child is just doing what a two-year-old does. If the carer gets angry at the child, where does the problem

lie—the carer or the child?

Now your child is five, very active and talking fluently. Even though ..... is still quite the bundle of love, there is already some negative conditioning evident in this child's mind. You are already having a tussle with your child's newly forming ego. And yet even now this five-year-old is just doing what a five-year-old does. Where does the responsibility for the child's social conditioning lie—with the child or the child's carers? Has the child conditioned his or herself? Again, is there anything unworthy about this five-year-old child? Is the child still worthy of Unconditional Love, a child who is still so vulnerable and dependent on the quality of care that ..... receives?

And now you are watching yourself as a ten-year-old, playing with friends and going to school. Your child freely interacts with the rest of the family, a unique personality clearly emerging. .... is full of hopes and dreams for the future and yet still vulnerable and dependent. There is often conflict with brothers and sisters as your ten-year-old competes for love and approval. Negative conditioning is clearly visible. Deep behaviour patterns have been well established. Still this ten-year-old is just doing what a ten-year-old does. Is this growing child still worthy of Unconditional Love? If a carer withdraws their love from this child, where does the problem lie?

Now you are watching yourself as a fifteen-year-old, well into puberty and the new social scene. Your adolescent self is spending less time with family and instead seeking peer approval in ..... own social group, sometimes in defiance of parental guidance. This leads to frequent conflict. .... is now experiencing the first forays into dating and relationships with its inevitable excitement and at times crushing disappointment. Your adolescent self is often moody and even behaves a bit oddly as ..... searches for an independent identity. Childhood conditioning is now deeply entrenched and overlaid onto this youth's

natural character. Again, your adolescent self is just doing the best that ..... can. Should your adolescent self be judged for that? Should guidance come with condemnation or Unconditional Love?

How would it have been if you were given Unconditional Love all through your childhood? How would it have been if you felt safe to share your deepest fears, emotions, joys and dreams with your parents all through your childhood and received nothing but loving guidance, caring, wise discipline and encouragement that never made you wrong as a person? Isn't this what we deserve as children, no matter how many mistakes we made or how confused we may have become at times? How can a child be held responsible for ..... own upbringing? Surely the responsibility lies with the carer.

Even as an adult this same rule applies. Even having to firmly say no to a person's confused and misguided behaviour can be done without withdrawing Unconditional Love.

When you look inside yourself now, you are looking at and feeling this child, a child that is still looking for, longing for that unconditional loving acceptance. You can find this child in your most vulnerable emotions. You are now the adult and this "inner-child" now belongs to you. Your carers did the best they could. Their job is now over. Now it is up to you. How have you been treating your child-self? How would it be if you lovingly accepted yourself unconditionally in a real heartfelt responsible way, instead of judging yourself and mistreating yourself whenever you make a human mistake, or don't supposedly measure up?

Even as an adult we are just doing the best we can. Mistakes are a natural part of being human. This deep form of self-acceptance enables our ego to wake up from its blind judging and blaming and instead consciously embrace and care for this human-self of ours. With self-care, healing and growth are inevitable, along with maturity and

wisdom. It is through self-acceptance that we can increasingly awaken our consciousness into higher states where it unites with Unconditional Love and therefore the power to heal the deepest fears and confusions.



As hard as it may at first seem, it is easier, more effective and more empowering to change ourself rather than try to change someone else. We have no real power to control the hearts of others, but we can learn to skillfully manage ourself. This self-change must come in the form of self-care. It is a conscious loving and caring relationship with our own humanness. We are not changing ourself to please others or just to conform. We are learning to make positive and empowered decisions on our own behalf, decisions that lead to self-respect and therefore respect from others.

As was stated in Chapter One, there is a strong tendency in many societies to feel ashamed when we cannot psychologically function according to the "norms" of a particular society. Everybody suffers emotional crises from time to time, but when this crisis becomes prolonged for one reason or another, there is a perception that we are unworthy because of it. We think we have somehow failed. We cannot control another's misguided perceptions, but we can do something about our own.

We are like a priceless one-of-a-kind car that has broken down. It would not make sense to regard this car as not worthy of fixing or that the car is wrong or stupid for breaking down. When this priceless car breaks down, it is then a matter of objectively and carefully taking it apart in order to find and correct the problem. It would be only logical to want to give this car ongoing maintenance, care and attention. We human beings tend to resist taking care of ourself, as though we shouldn't need it. We think such maintenance is an imposition on our lifestyle. It is little

wonder we end up emotionally breaking down. Our body/mind is our vehicle for our entire life. Human beings are like highly complex and delicate machines that need constant care and attention.

Often we *do* try to care for ourselves but we have not learned how to do this effectively. In particular I am talking about taking care of our emotional life. For too many of us, appreciating and looking after our human emotions is a mystery. The usual way we seem to treat our emotions is to shut them down, or shove them onto somebody else. When we are not doing that, we often use our emotions as an excuse to beat our own selves up.

You are hardly going to be motivated to tend the garden of our mind if you are ashamed of what is growing there. This garden may be full of weeds. It may not reflect what you prefer to see about yourself. Nevertheless, this garden is yours to tend. This garden is waiting for someone to come along and nurture it, to sort the good plants from the ones that don't belong there. It does not matter if you are not a very good gardener to begin with. What is important is that you care and that you keep doing the work. The rest flows naturally from this.

Rather than being a liability, when understood and effectively integrated into our conscious-awareness, our emotional life is a source of great wisdom and inner-strength. Before we can take advantage of this potential inner-strength however, because of long-term self-neglect as well as the difficulties we experienced in childhood, we usually need to do some serious healing work first.



***I have what it takes to heal my confusion and truly care for my own wellbeing.***

## **OPENING THE DOOR TO LOVE AND HEALING**

There is often a backlog of emotional pain waiting to be cleared once we are willing to open our heart to our own humanness. The build-up of this pain results in emotions such as depression, anger, fear, guilt, shame, anxiety and stress etc. This emotional build-up, if allowed to continue unchecked, can lead to various physical health issues, substance abuse, addictions, relationship conflict or breakdown, child abuse, thoughts of suicide and other such serious consequences. In my experience, help is initially needed to safely release this emotional pressure and to learn how to take effective care of our emotional self on an ongoing basis.

Be aware also that this pain can take time to reach the surface, and it usually comes through in stages. Post-traumatic stress is an example of this delayed emotional release. Actively seeking to heal and grow on an ongoing basis can greatly reduce the time this healing takes and can also reduce the impact on your life and relationships.

Deep emotional wounds take time to heal, so don't be fooled into thinking that you should be over it in a few weeks or even months. Concentrate on learning how to care for your emotional pain with self-acceptance, patience and increasing clarity, rather than wanting to just "get rid of it". Wanting to just get rid of the pain usually leads to ineffective healing and further crises later on. Your emotions are an essential part of who you are. Caring for your emotions properly ensures that they will work for you and not against you.

For example, when you feel anger, your mind is calling your attention to something that it perceives is violating your boundaries. What the mind does not know at first is whether this violation is something real from a present situation or an emotion-charged memory that has been triggered from the past. Anger is simply a call to your conscious-awareness to pay attention and check out the situation. Having learned about self-care and self-awareness, you can then tune into this emotion without jumping to conclusions. You can then ask yourself; "is there something that needs to be dealt with around me now, or has some old

pain been triggered from the past?”

Emotions are designed to enable your adult conscious-awareness to stay in touch with your human-self and also with the world around you. It is a form of “energy touch” or “energy in motion” - emotion.

Self-care is therefore essential to our well-being. It is the very foundation of our entire life. Truly accepting our humanness - accepting that we are still worthy even while we are being human, is essential for being motivated toward self-care. We are unlikely to be motivated toward this healthy self-care while we are busy condemning ourselves. We can hardly have a healthy relationship with someone we resent. We won't have a chance to know them and appreciate them unless we accept them as they are. This is what facilitates genuine intimacy. We must grow to know ourselves intimately if we expect to be able to look after ourselves.

Self-care is about having an active loving relationship with ourselves, particularly if we need to change some deeply ingrained self-defeating habits. On the following page, Table 3: “Caring for Your Human-Self Check List”, will help you to contemplate on what you need to do to take care of yourself as you read this book and do your best to apply it to your life each day.



***I accept myself as I am and I am dedicated to the principles of Love and Wisdom. With this powerful guidance I can effectively take care of my own life.***

**Table 3: Caring for Your Human-Self Check List**

- ✓ Am I accepting my right to be human and do I see my confusion and mistakes as an opportunity to know myself better and to take better care of myself?
- ✓ Do I provide plenty of space in my life to take care of my vulnerable emotional human-self?
- ✓ Am I taking responsibility to care for my own needs?
- ✓ Do I really have compassion for my human-self?
- ✓ Do I impose unrealistic standards or expectations on myself and/or others, causing me to experience stress and conflict?
- ✓ In what ways can I reorganise my life so I have the time and space to heal my emotions and confusions and strengthen my consciousness-awareness?
- ✓ Am I willing to make this commitment to care for myself an ongoing and essential part of my lifestyle for the sake of my happiness and wellbeing?
- ✓ Can I see that adjusting my lifestyle in this way will help me achieve what I want rather than be a waste of time?
- ✓ Am I judging and blaming others for not fulfilling my needs instead of standing on my own two feet?
- ✓ Am I aware of my genuine needs? Do I truly listen to what my emotions/feelings are telling me? Am I indulging my *neediness* (fears, insecurities, self-pity, addictions) rather than facing them and overcoming them?
- ✓ Do I have a healthy support network? Am I willing to make the effort to establish one? Am I expecting one person to meet all my needs?
- ✓ Am I actively learning what it takes to constructively communicate with others?
- ✓ Am I actively learning what it takes to conduct a healthy relationship?
- ✓ Do I have joy, play, recreation in my life?
- ✓ Do I appreciate the beautiful, simple things around me like nature, for example?

- ✓ Do I allow my mind to be filled with negative thoughts that cause me pain, or do I concentrate on gratitude to ensure my mind is at peace even in the face of difficulty?
- ✓ Do I take time to appreciate those around me?
- ✓ Am I aware that my humanness is my total responsibility to compassionately care for? Am I truly committed to do whatever it takes to learn how to care for myself and therefore my future?
- ✓ Can I see that accepting full responsibility to care for my own mind, including reaching out for help, is my foundation for a successful life?

## CONTEMPLATING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Because of its absolute quality, the idea of living one's life based on the principle of Unconditional Love can be very confronting. We may scoff at such an idea, regarding it as just plain fantasy. We may feel that it would be wonderful to live that way but regard it as unrealistic. We may even feel guilty or sad for not living up to this ideal because we think we "should", but at the same time think we're not good enough.

**Unconditional Love becomes more reachable when we regard our commitment to loving unconditionally as a *sincere intention*.** In other words, we intend to Love ourself and others unconditionally, knowing full well that achieving such a high ideal is a journey that is unlikely to be completed in this life. Even so, we can honour the ultimate truth of the principle of Unconditional Love and make it our guiding Light, while also accepting our humanness. We can see that learning about life through each experience of this journey is perfectly okay and normal for gaining maturity. We can see that any step along the road toward Unconditional Love will bring more harmony into our lives and advance our conscious-awareness in the process. Our sincere intention, our willingness to never stop learning, pulls us forward through each of life's experiences toward literally *becoming* the ideal of Unconditional Love. In so doing, we call on Life itself to become our teacher.

This Master of all teachers, the Universal Life-Force of Unconditional Love, is at the very core of our heart and consciousness and is with us in our every step, our every thought and feeling. As we learn to face ourself with acceptance and open our heart to what we find and work with it, we are in fact accepting the role of being the representative of Unconditional Love to our own human-self and even to the world around us. Even in our faulting, uncertain steps towards self-awareness, we are invoking this Universal Life-Force of Love into our being. It is like plugging into an electricity supply. The force is unseen but always there ready to power us up. The effects of plugging into the Universal Life-Force may not be so obvious due to the initial inadequacy of our ability to open to it, but it has its ongoing effect on us none-the-less. The more we can open our heart to our own human-self from the standpoint of the two supreme Laws of Consciousness, Unconditional Love and Total Personal Responsibility, the more we can let the Universal power of Love be an active part of our conscious-awareness.



***Through my sincere intention to be Unconditional Love, I align my conscious-awareness to the Universal Life-Force of Love, and with this ultimate power I first heal and empower myself.***

On page 79, Exercise 3 is designed to help you explore a deeper understanding of Unconditional Love / healthy self-care.

On page 298, Exercise 10 is designed to help you process and heal your painful emotions and confusions.

## ACCEPTING LIFE IN GENERAL

There is an old truism that goes, **“what we resist will persist”**. This aligns to what Buddha taught when he gave the world his “Four Noble Truths” which are as follows:

- 1. The reality of suffering**
- 2. The nature of suffering**
- 3. The answer to overcoming suffering**
- 4. The path of overcoming suffering – The Noble Eightfold Path**

The first teaching, “The reality of suffering” refers to the fact that everything in the physical world that is dependent on physical properties is impermanent. For example, your body will grow old and die if it does not die before that through misadventure or disease. You will inevitably lose all your loved ones, whether they leave you or they die. Most of your material possessions that you may own throughout your life will wear out and have to be replaced. Those that don’t wear out, such as diamonds or gold, you will have to leave behind when you die anyway. That’s if they don’t get stolen before that. Even your identity - who you think you are - will change many times over the course of your life-time, sometimes quiet dramatically. There is nothing in this physical world that is not shifting, changing, dying or being born, and physical pain is an inevitable part of these experiences of physical life. Everything is in a state of flux, in other words, everything is impermanent.

The insecurity that impermanence causes in the human mind creates another factor that we must deal with while existing in this world, and that is human beings get confused and outright deluded. We place too many expectations on each other in a futile attempt to avoid the insecurity caused by impermanence. Conflict is the inevitable result. Unless you are Buddha or some other enlightened master, that means you too.

Due to this fear and confusion, we think we are being threatened or

attacked, when most of the time we are not. In reality we are thinking that we *might* be threatened or attacked and try to act first to protect ourselves from what we think other people are thinking, or what we think they might do. As a result, we threaten and attack others based on what we think they are thinking. If you think all this is very confusing, you are right!

All these misperceptions, however, are just our own fear-based imagination running off – our negative conditioning spinning out of control. The same goes for the meaning we place on events, big and small, that conclude that we are being threatened or attacked. At least ninety percent of all this drama is being played out in our imagination. The most tragic thing is that we then base our actions on these imaginary conclusions. This is the cause of all the injustice in the world today and in every preceding age. The world is over-run and literally run by our unrestrained egos, turbo charged with fear-based imaginations. These delusions continually trigger fight-or-flight instinctual reactions that pull us down into an “every man for himself” state of mind.

Sound depressing? It shouldn't be. These are just plain facts. These are simply the conditions of this world. The reason that Buddha pointed them out is because we spend a huge amount of effort in our life-time being frightened of, denying or getting angry over that which is impermanent and this is where the problem lies. Our resistance to the facts of life points to the second teaching, “The nature of suffering”. We feel frightened, powerless and angry.

Buddha began his life on the top of the social heap with abundant material wealth and princely status, largely shielded from the suffering that humanity generally experiences. When he was confronted with poverty, old age and death he was shaken to the core. This experience awoke in him deep compassion and a burning desire to solve this dilemma of life. He wasn't moved to solve the situation by building better roads and housing. He could see that this was just a band-aid. He wanted to get to the very core of the issue. He was intent on solving the

very mental nature of suffering – to not suffer regardless of the conditions of life.

He first looked for the answers to suffering by becoming a renunciant, which meant that he left behind all his worldly possessions, even the clothes on his back, and joined a band of holy men who practiced strenuous forms of yoga in an attempt to reach enlightenment.

After a number of years he became a very high yogi, but he still hadn't reached his goal. This just made him even more determined, and while fasting and meditating for a long period he had a profound revelation. He realized that earlier in his life he was trapped by his attachments to his wealth and privilege. He also realized that he was equally trapped by his rejection of his worldly life. Everything suddenly made sense to him. He could see that the human mind suffers because it becomes trapped in a nexus of attachment/clinging/greed on the one hand and aversion/hate/rejection on the other. He saw that this dynamic covered all areas of human affairs. We try to possess and consume what brings us comfort and call this love, and run away from, or be in conflict with, what may cause pain and discomfort and call this bad. He realized that the human mind became lost in confusion as a result. He saw that the mind further caused its own suffering by projecting this confusion onto all that was experienced until the confusion appeared to be reality and reality itself seemed unreal. Buddha realized the “nature of suffering”.

The cause of our suffering that I gave at the beginning of this chapter, regarding ourself as unworthy because we are human, ties right in here. The self-condemning belief that we are unworthy because we are human creates within us a feeling of emptiness and a sense of separation from the Universal Live-Force of Unconditional Love. It is a belief that flows from a mind that does not know the true nature of itself. Perceiving itself to be separated from the Life-Force, our conscious-awareness becomes mere ego and tries to survive by seeking fulfillment from the impermanent physical world and the inevitable result is being trapped in

the nexus of attachment and aversion.

Buddha realized that the answer was to pull his conscious-awareness free of all this attachment and aversion and instead rest in the still silence in between as the detached observer of himself and life. In this still silence he found himself at one with the supreme consciousness of the Universal Life-Force that is behind and within all things. His awareness and spiritual training was so powerful at this stage of his journey that this revelation was enough to render his mind impervious to all suffering. In other words, he became enlightened, free. In the process, he realized the true nature of himself. He fully awakened to the fact that he was not his vulnerable mortal human-self but his indestructible Higher-Self. As this Higher-Self, he realized that he simply could not be threatened in any way by the physical world. This human mind and its attachment and aversion no longer had an effect on him. This led to the third teaching, “The answer to overcoming suffering”.

The fourth teaching is about how he went about teaching these truths all those years ago. The 5-Step Process is a simplified version of this type of teaching.

Jesus revealed that he understood the deeper meaning of impermanence as well when he said, “build your house on rock, not on shifting sand.” Your “house” meaning your mind that you live in. By “rock” he meant the permanent laws of consciousness, Unconditional Love and Total Personal Responsibility. By “shifting sand” he meant the impermanent physical world.

The beautiful statement in the Bible that says, “Be still and know that I am God,” speaks of this inner-stillness that Buddha, as well as Christ, literally became.

This brings us back to, “what you resist will persist”. You can expand this a little by saying that if you resist, get upset over and argue against the reality that appears in front of you, you will suffer. It is like arguing with the tide or the weather. It is ultimately futile. The tide is going to come in whether you agree with it or not. The sun will shine or it will

rain. You have no control over it. You just have to work with it. Suffering therefore, is regarded as a mental condition that is self-induced due to confusion about the nature of reality.

Physical pain is not suffering as such. A pain in the leg, for example, is just that, a pain in the leg. The suffering is caused by not accepting and working with the pain in the leg. Added to the pain in the leg therefore, is fear and anger, for example. The natural grief surrounding the loss of a loved one is not suffering. Not accepting that your loved one is gone and believing that you can't live without that person is the cause of the suffering. Even facing death is not suffering, because to the Higher-Self, death has no real meaning. The passing away of the physical body is just another experience on its journey of ever expanding consciousness.

Of course the ego is in conflict with this because it can't relate to itself beyond the physical body/mind and what it can possess with that physical body/mind. Peace cannot be found in the ego. It can only be found in the conscious-awareness of the Higher-Self through the practise of acceptance.

The various conditions in which we live simply make up our environment. It is what we think about our environment, the meanings we place on it and as a result, what we feel about it and do with it that determines our suffering or our peace of mind. It also determines whether we act destructively or constructively.

The answer is in understanding that on the level of the human fear-based mind, we know nothing about the reality of things. Our pain and fear confirms this. Only on the level of conscious-awareness can we hope to see true reality with any real clarity. Only when we let go of the aversions and attachments that blind us to the reality of what is around us, and even to the nature of our own mind-states, do we start to slip out of the nexus of or our confused habitual unconscious mental programs. Only then can we transcend into a state of conscious-awareness. Only at this level of consciousness does true insight come that leads to real solutions, such as working to improve the way we communicate with a

loved one, for example.

Your relationship with the world at large once again points to your relationship with your own mind. Are you *being* the mind that is lost in its confusions, or are you working towards *being* conscious-awareness that is endeavoring to rise above and take care of the mind using the tried and true principles of Unconditional Love and Total Personal Responsibility? Are you accepting full responsibility to Love yourself unconditionally and in so doing, setting yourself free from your futile struggle with the world, as well as those immediately around you? Are you recognising the true nature of your self?

The key that frees you from suffering is within YOU.



***I bring peace to my mind by accepting life as it is and working positively with it.***

See Table 4. on the following page for a break down on the cause of suffering and how to overcome it.

#### **Table 4: The Cause of Suffering and its Solution**

- ✓ We get confused because we start out as vulnerable children, who are emotionally and physically dependent on confused people and our physical environment. This dynamic is repeated over many lifetimes.
- ✓ This confusion blinds us to the reality of who we are, because we are led to mistakenly think that we are a mere mortal body/mind and that we can only get Love from other people and material things.
- ✓ Who we really are is consciousness that is eternal and one with the Universal Life-Force of Unconditional Love and Wisdom.
- ✓ Because of our confusion, we think that in order to be worthy and to experience Love, we must wait for, convince or forcefully make other people love us. Our potential of consciousness is reduced to mere ego.
- ✓ Because we think that Love is outside of us, we endlessly chase after and try to possess what makes us feel good and run away from or hate and fight what does not make us feel good.
- ✓ Trying to play out this ego game of aversion or attachment only leads to suffering and a denial of our true Self.
- ✓ True Love remains elusive because the ego is created out of confusion and can only create more confusion.
- ✓ Our ultimate worthiness is, in reality, without question.
- ✓ Other human beings do not have ultimate control of our worthiness.
- ✓ Our worthiness and our mind as a whole is totally within the control of ourself as eternal consciousness.
- ✓ We realize the true nature of suffering by stepping out of aversion and attachment and into the inner-stillness of a detached observer, where we gain conscious-awareness of the Universal Life-Force.
- ✓ As this detached observer, we overcome suffering by accepting total personal responsibility to Love ourself unconditionally and thus awaken within us the power of conscious-awareness, our first experience of the permanent true nature of ourself.

## Chapter Two Summary

1. The opposite of self-acceptance is self-condemnation, which says we are unworthy because we are human. This is the root of all destructive thought—suffering.
2. Repeated thoughts develop into subconscious beliefs that control our everyday perceptions.
3. A misbelief is any belief that contradicts Unconditional Love.
4. As children we are powerless, vulnerable and dependent on our carers.
5. As vulnerable children we are compelled to believe what our carers repeatedly tell us or demonstrate to us, even when it is not true.
6. What we learn to believe as children becomes our social conditioning.
7. Misbeliefs distort our perceptions of reality, which can cause us to act/react inappropriately throughout our life.
8. When we blindly act out our negative conditioning, without knowing it we are attacking our own self with our own misbeliefs.
9. Self-condemnation, whether conscious or unconscious, leaves us vulnerable to the negative judgments and actions of others.
10. Self-condemnation, whether conscious or unconscious, can lead us to mistake innocent actions of others for something malicious.
11. Self-condemnation, whether conscious or unconscious, leads to selfishness—an unhealthy dependency on others and material things.
12. Self-acceptance opens the door of our mind to Love and healing.
13. Self-acceptance is a healthy form of self-love.
14. We are worthy of Unconditional Love always. We always have been worthy of this Love and we always will be, no matter what mistakes we make, no matter what anyone else says to us or does to us or

thinks about us.

15. This Universal Life-Force of Unconditional Love is the very core of our being, our Higher-Self. It is the benchmark that our feelings are set to.
16. If our thoughts are out of alignment with Unconditional Love, we feel pain in the form of human emotion. If our thoughts are in tune with Unconditional Love, we feel joy, the Unconditional Love that is our Higher-Self—our higher feelings.
17. We can't control how others love us, but we can take charge of how we love and care for ourself.
18. This self-care then creates better relationships with others.
19. It is easier to face our fears and insecurities when we accept our right to be human.
20. Misbeliefs of self-condemnation can create a build-up of emotional pain that can lead to destructive behaviour.
21. This back-log of emotional pain needs to be released with care and skillful guidance.
22. Emotions and feelings exist to tell your adult conscious-awareness vital information about the state of your mind, and what is going on around you.
23. To effectively manage your life, you must learn to tune in to your emotions and feelings and understand what they are telling you.
24. Self-care is about having a genuinely loving relationship with yourself.
25. Start by setting a sincere intention to be that Loving Guardian to your own human-self and be willing to learn as you go.
26. Buddha taught us that we suffer because we are not accepting this impermanent world as it is, and that we don't know the true nature of

ourselves, which is pure conscious-awareness that is not threatened by anything.

27. Buddha taught that when we suffer we are caught in the nexus of chasing after and trying to consume what brings us comfort and call this love, and running away from, hating and fighting what does not bring us comfort.
28. Buddha taught that stepping out of this endless ego game of attachment and aversion and into the inner-stillness of acceptance of what is enables us to connect our consciousness directly to the Universal Life-Force of Unconditional Love.
29. By accepting the total personal responsibility to Love ourselves unconditionally we can awaken to our oneness with Love itself.

- ✓ **Your emotions/feelings are a vital source of information.**
- ✓ **Believe in your absolute worthiness of Unconditional Love.**
- ✓ **Be the Loving Guardian of your own human-self.**
- ✓ **If you want others to love you, love yourself.**
- ✓ ***NEVER GIVE UP!***

*Exercise 3*

## **Contemplating Self-Acceptance / Unconditional Love**

As you work with this exercise, be aware that there are no definitive answers here. This is simply an exercise designed to gain awareness of your attitudes regarding Unconditional Love and to get you started on the journey of expanding your awareness. Your thoughts on this subject are naturally going to evolve over time.

Read through the whole exercise first to get a feel for the purpose and process of the questions.

### **1. My thoughts on Unconditional Love**

- a) Spend some time exploring in your journal your attitudes concerning Unconditional Love.
- b) Perhaps you can start by jotting down random dot points as thoughts come to you.
- c) You can then return to some of these points that are more important to you and explore them more deeply.
- d) Some questions that may get you thinking are:
  - Do you believe Unconditional Love is real?
  - Do you believe it is possible to love unconditionally?
  - How would you describe Unconditional Love?

### **2. What sort of Love have I received?**

- a) Think back over your childhood and contemplate the type of Love

you received as a child.

- b) How unconditional was this love?
- c) If the love was conditional, what form did this take? What were the conditions? In other words, what did you have to do to earn that love? For what reasons was the love withdrawn?
- d) Also think about what you know of your parents' childhoods and how they were loved.
- e) Can you see some correlations between how they were loved and how they loved you?
- f) Think about the love that you have received from significant people in your life such as siblings, extended family members and past and present partners.
- g) Does it correlate to the type of love that you received as a child? What ways is it the same? In what ways is it different?
- h) Write down what comes to mind with each question.

### **3. How have I Loved others?**

- a) Doing your best to be honest while being forgiving of yourself, think about the ways in which you yourself have shown love to others. See this as an exercise in simply getting to know yourself so that you can begin to work with what you have. Every day is a new starting point on your journey of life. Remember the importance of self-acceptance. Remember that everyone else in your life is human like you. We are all struggling to comprehend what real Love is about. Now you have an opportunity to deepen your awareness of the dynamics around your experiences of love in preparation for making more appropriate choices for the sake of your own wellbeing. You have an opportunity to work toward breaking some

old negative family patterns. This is also an exercise in identifying what has worked well in your life and reinforce that. We can learn from the past in order to make the most of the future.

- b) It helps to choose specific people to focus on such as mother, father, siblings, extended family members and past and present partners.
- c) Write down your thoughts.

#### **4. How have I Loved myself?**

- a) Think about how you have treated yourself over the years, including the decisions you have made.
- b) Have these decisions honoured you?
- c) Have you allowed others to treat you unkindly?
- d) Have you been taking loving care of yourself—your body, your feelings, your mind, your spiritual life?
- e) What are some ways you can take better care of yourself now? Use Table 3 On page 66 as a guide.
- f) Write down your thoughts around this theme of self-care.







