

The Power of a Peaceful Mind: Let Go of Judgment and Let In Joy

As a transformational life coach who has supported clients in all aspects of creating lives they love, and as someone deeply committed to living an awake and inspired life myself, I have seen time and again how we hold ourselves apart from life's inherent joy through the judgment of ourselves and others. Our habitual tendencies to find fault and place blame run counter to the flow of life, love and joy that is our birthright.

I often say that the process of creating a life we love is simple, if not always easy. Basically it has four components:

- Know who you are, what your soul wants to create or experience and why you want what you want...and give yourself full permission to want it!
- Listen to your inner guidance to lead you step by step through the creative process
- Commit to staying focused on what your soul wants, and let yourself be supported and inspired in maintaining that commitment
- Be willing to acknowledge and challenge the beliefs and thoughts that do not align with the life you are creating

This guide focuses on the last component, and in particular highlights a distinct kind of thought or belief that is always defeating, deflating and constricting: thoughts of judgment and their unruly cousins we know as doubt, criticism, fear and blame.

Although I've listed it last in my summary of the key components of creating a life we love, in many ways it is the most important because, until we free ourselves from the crippling energy of judgment, we are unable to fully embrace the other three components. **Judgment distorts our self-perception, muffles the voice of our inner guidance and weakens our commitment to staying focused and inspired.** And so learning to let go of judgment is absolutely essential to connecting with our true selves and unleashing the joy within us.

Self-Judgment is Self-Sabotage

It would be difficult to overstate the number of times I have heard some version of, "But I'm just not (*something*) enough!" as clients convincingly talk themselves out of pursuing their dreams. It's clear to see this is a joy-killer right from the start! Yet its directness actually makes it easier for us to challenge it, and that's a good thing. It is obvious that claiming I am not good enough, or talented enough, or persistent enough - or whatever thought of "not-enough-ness" I'm holding - is a form self-judgment; the word "enough" gives it away, since it connotes falling short of some standard. Other forms of self-judgment are far more insidious and difficult to recognize, but we'll get to those in a moment.

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If you find yourself standing squarely in the way of your own dreams with a declaration of not-enough-ness, it's time to do something about it. Give yourself the gift of some uninterrupted time and space to really inquire into this belief. Write down your answers to any or all of the following:

- Is this really true?
- How do I know it's true?
- Do I even know what "enough" is in this situation?
- If I'm basing this sense of "not-enough-ness" on experiences from my past, what might be different now? How am I different now?
- Isn't it possible I am already _____ enough, at least to get started?
- What might I choose or try next if I didn't believe this thought?
- What are all the reasons I can think of to remind myself I am _____ enough?

Get in the habit of earnestly challenging your judgments of not-enough-ness, and let yourself really sit with the feeling you get when you allow yourself to imagine that you are, in fact, enough.

I want to be clear about one thing. I'm not encouraging you to lie to yourself, or to pretend something is true when it is not. I'm not suggesting you try to convince yourself you're a master when you're still a student. But **if you truly want something from the depths of your soul, I want you to believe and feel that you have whatever it takes to create or experience it.** Even if you need more of *something* to create what you want - for example, additional coursework that is a prerequisite for a teaching certificate - know that *you* have the inner motivation, focus and commitment to get it done. (And if you think you don't - time to go back to answering those questions!)

So whenever you hear yourself claiming you're not *something* enough to pursue your dreams, let that self-judgment be your cue to pause, slow down and challenge your thinking. Where it gets tricky is that, often, we're holding judgmental thoughts that we simply don't recognize as judgments; we think they are true, and so we don't take the time to challenge them.

If we continue with the example of needing additional education to get a teaching certificate, you might refuse to move forward because of thoughts such as, "I don't have the time," or "I don't have the energy," or "I can't afford this right now." These seem like statements of fact, but if they're standing between you and your dream, then in all likelihood they are false beliefs that need to be challenged. And they are judgments in that you are judging a situation as being less than ideal, and judging your ability to navigate it successfully.

So once again it's time to pull out the pen and paper and start challenging these judgments. You can use some of the same questions you used to challenge your "not-enough-ness":

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- Is this really true?
- How do I know it's true?
- What possible solutions might there be?
- What am I willing to do differently to free up my (time, money, energy)?
- What might I choose or try next if I didn't believe this thought?
- What are all the reasons I can think of to remind myself I have what it takes to get through this?

This is a good exercise to do with a trusted friend or coach, someone who is an advocate for your soul and believes in your many talents. Let him or her help you see yourself through the eyes of possibility rather than the harsh lens of self-judgment.

All Judgment is Self-Judgment

Interestingly, some people find themselves thwarted in creating what they want in spite of having an apparently strong sense of self-confidence. What is often true for these people is that, while they are not openly critical of themselves, they are critical of others. And that criticism may be the very thing that is defeating them, even though it is directed outward rather than inward.

This can be a difficult concept to grasp, so let's look at it a few different ways. First, consider that we are living in an energetic, vibrational universe wherein all parts are vitally connected to the Whole. If we are judging any part of the Whole, we are judging the Whole. And as an essential part of that Whole, we are judging – and hurting – ourselves.

Another way to consider this is from the standpoint of energy. The energy of judgment is always constricting and defeating, so whether I am directing it outward or inward, **if I am holding the energy of judgment, I am holding myself apart from the energy of joy.**

And finally, a fundamental reason why all judgment is, essentially, self-judgment, is that the impulse to judge others can only arise from our own sense of not being enough, or not being okay. It can only arise from our deepest, often unconscious level of self-judgment, which itself is born of fear: the fear of being alone, of not being part of the Whole, and therefore not being enough. That fear is almost too painful to bear, and so we busy ourselves trying to cover it up by “proving” that we are enough. And judging others as somehow “less than” seems to offer that proof that we are sane, smart, efficient and right.

In a related way, our fearful selves have another judgment-based strategy for avoiding the deeply held pain of believing we're not okay. This part of us endeavors to control things, to direct them in a particular way so that there are no unwanted surprises. In a predictable world we can more easily feel competent and confident. But

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it's a false confidence, built as it is on the faulty premise of a fixed and routine world – which this world most certainly is not.

So when the inevitable variations to our carefully laid plans show up, we blame whomever or whatever appears to be responsible for them. We blame the repair man for failing to show up on time, we blame the traffic for making us late, we blame the economy for a downturn in our business. If only everyone else had done what they were supposed to do, we'd be okay.

Don't get me wrong – of course we all encounter situations which are unexpected and challenging, and which may require that we change course a little...or a lot. Those situations demand our highest levels of awareness, patience and creativity. They call us to *respond*. And there is a big difference between responding and blaming: responding is clear, kind and proactive, while blaming is ineffective, unkind and reactive. Blaming may feel good in the moment – that's why we do it – but the energy of blame never vibrates on the frequency of joy.

And that is why I've come to understand that all judgment is, fundamentally, self-judgment: it is not compatible with joy, open-mindedness and creativity. I often say that **in the absence of judgment, we simply have situations and choices**. But when judgment creeps into the situation, it distorts our perceptions and clouds our thinking. Judgment has a particular charge to it that reflects the underlying fear we're trying to cover: "Because this happened, I'm not okay."

Think about it: if you *truly knew* that you were already and always whole, perfect and complete, that you were connected to the vast intelligence of the universe and that you were okay no matter what, there would be little reason to judge anyone or anything. There would be nothing to safeguard, justify or prove. It wouldn't matter that someone holds a different opinion than you about something and thinks you're "wrong," it wouldn't matter that the delivery didn't arrive on time, it wouldn't matter that a certain colleague never seems to listen to you.

Those things only matter when we think our peace of mind and well-being are dependent on someone or something outside of ourselves. But when we're centered, at peace and knowingly connected with the unlimited, creative Source that gives rise to all life, we know we are supported and that there is always a way to realize our dreams.

I'll be the first to admit that releasing judgment is incredibly challenging, given how conditioned we are to find fault and assign blame. But knowing that our conditioned responses arise from a place of tender vulnerability helps me to see them differently, and from that kinder vantage point I feel willing and able to challenge them. Every time I find myself judging someone else, I know that a part of me, somewhere deep inside, is frightened. And knowing that helps me turn my attention away from the object of my blame and toward my own deepest longings. It helps me identify where I'm still holding on to fear and self-judgment. It helps me come home to myself.

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Again, this is not always easy. In some ways it is the most challenging work we can do. But if we hold the intention to soften and release our judgment - of ourselves and others - with kindness, curiosity and gentle persistence, we open ourselves to experience a welcome sense of peace and aliveness. We open ourselves to creativity, insight and inspiration. We open ourselves to joy.

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