

Healing a Relationship by Completing Unfinished Business

Introduction

Most of us accumulate one or more unhappy or unsatisfactory relationships during our life. Then, as death approaches, they prey on our mind, and can make us very unsettled. But we can't bring ourselves to meet the persons concerned and try to heal the hurts. Or maybe they live far away, and there is no chance of a face-to-face meeting.

Christine Longaker, in her book *Facing Death and Finding Hope*, gives a method of healing a relationship and completing such 'unfinished business', that does not require you to meet with or talk with the person with who has hurt you or whom you have hurt. I have tried it on three people and for two it worked easily, the third took a few attempts, but I got there. So I can recommend it to you.

Reasons We Have "Unfinished Business" With People

Here are some of the common reasons we have unfinished business with people:

- We're afraid of being hurt again or of being rejected.
- The other person has already refused to forgive us.
- We feel that what we've done is unforgivable.
- We want to punish the other person with our anger.
- We don't want to let go of our attachment to the person or the past.
- We're afraid to have our part of the problem revealed.
- The other person has gone from our life or has already died.

These are natural fears or obstacles to speaking directly with the person about clearing up an old emotional problem, yet our unfinished business is our responsibility to resolve, and we can finish it *whether or not the other person is present or willing to communicate and forgive us*. The purpose of the method for completing unfinished business which follows is to release us from our own heavy baggage of anger, attachment or guilt, and free us from our painful memories. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to meet with the other person to finish our emotional burden and let go.

The Power of Forgiveness: The Story of Joe's Fight With his Brother

Healing a relationship is healing your own heart, thus it is your task – whether the person is living or has already died.

Joe's children and grandchildren were so warm and so loving and their communication was so open that Mark, the hospice volunteer, wondered if he should have himself assigned to another family. Before asking for another assignment, Mark privately approached the dying man and asked, "Is there anything you can think of, anything at all, that I can help you with before you die?"

"I'm so glad you asked," said Joe, "I've been troubled by one thing that I really want to clear up before I die, but I need help to do it, and I don't know who to ask."

"Forty years ago my brother and I had a terrible fight, and we haven't met or spoken to each other since that day. I realize now that I was just too stubborn to give in, and I'm sorry all these years have passed without any contact. I wish I could see him before I die and to let him know I'm sorry, and to ask his forgiveness. Could you help me find my brother?"

Mark was grateful there was something he could do, something which would help Joe face death peacefully. After some research, Mark finally located Joe's brother and explained why he was calling. "I'm a hospice volunteer assigned to Joe and his family. Joe asked me to contact you, because he is close to dying now, and he would really like to see and to extend his apologies to you before he dies."

The brother's answer was stark: "I don't want to see Joe or to have anything to do with him."

After the call, Mark wondered what to do. But soon he realized that the most important thing had already happened. Joe was really sorry for his part in the fight, and through Mark had communicated that to his brother. When he next went to see Joe, Mark said, "I've contacted your brother, and although he will not be able to come and see you, he got your message."

On Joe's side the unfinished business had been healed. Perhaps his brother was not yet ready to let go of his own bad feelings. Yet later, nearing the end of his own life, Joe's brother might also want to release this old burden, and if or when he does, he will know he has already received Joe's conciliatory message.

The Method for Completing Unfinished Business

First sit quietly and find in your heart the willingness to communicate your problem one last time and *let go of it*. Also establish your willingness to really feel heard and to listen to and hear the other person's perspective on this problem.

Now visualize the person with whom you have unfinished business. Imagine this person is sitting in front of you sitting exactly the way you remember her; but now with one very important difference: *consider that she is more open and receptive than ever before, and this person can really hear everything you have to say*.

Reflect on what has been the main difficulty for you, without rekindling the emotions attached to it. Imagine that you are now telling this problem to the person in front of you, remembering that she is very receptive and genuinely able to hear you. Once again reflect, and see if you have any other unexpressed problems, and imagine telling them to the other person.

Next, take a pen and paper and write down what you have just considered saying. Write out the problem, as responsibly as possible, without attacking or defending. Remember that you are speaking to the other person's open heart and that she is receptive and can truly hear you.

Now, allow the other person to express her side of the problem. Just begin writing and see what happens. Since you have been speaking to her "best side" and your feelings have been heard, her response probably won't be what you expect. Next, write down any other problems – old angers, regrets, attachments or fears – you may have had with the person. Again, allow her to respond to you with her perspective.

Continue writing both parts of this dialogue and expressing all the layers of your difficulties with this person, until you feel you are no longer harbouring anything negative in your heart. If the other person had previously hurt you, see if you can now extend forgiveness to her. If you realize that you have hurt the other person, ask her forgiveness. You might reflect that the best part of the other person would understand your regret, and would not hesitate to extend her forgiveness to you. Allow yourself to receive the healing love of this forgiveness, and let go of any feelings of guilt or self-condemnation.

Finally, look into your heart once again and see if there is any appreciation and love for the other person – any positive feelings you have been holding back. Communicate your love in writing and, thanking the other person, say good-bye. You can even envision the other person turning and leaving. As she leaves, ask yourself truthfully: Are you really letting go now and wishing her well?

You can dedicate your efforts and their merit with the strong wish that the other person and yourself may be healed of all emotional pain or past traumas, that your relationship, now and in the future, may be one of mutual benefit, and that all others you have contact with in your life may share in the healing power which comes from this resolution.

Later, try reading your dialogue aloud in front of a photo of the person or to a friend. This may yield an even deeper sense of completion, as though you had actually said it to the person. If you like, you can also write “I would like to hear from you.” Many people have told me that if the person is still living, they do hear from her within days or weeks of concluding their unfinished business, and she often communicates a sense of resolution on her side as well.

Although we can complete our unfinished business by using the above method, once we have healed our own pain we may find we now possess the confidence and clarity to communicate directly with the other person.

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