

Key Principles

In order to further lay the groundwork for “The Healing Project,” I would like to highlight some of the key principles which Louise Hay outlines in “You Can Heal Your Life.” I will list each principle as stated by Louise Hay, and then I will explain this principle in my own words and relate a bit about what it means to me personally.

“We are each responsible for our own experiences.”

Louise Hay advocates personal responsibility. Although she asks people to explore their childhoods and past experiences through the exercises in her book, she cautions her readers against laying blame upon anyone else for his or her current life condition. While it is true that our past experiences and interactions with others have shaped who we are, we are the only ones who are truly responsible for where we are in our lives today.

There is both good and bad news to this principle. The bad news is that we don’t get to blame anyone else or hold anyone else responsible for what’s happening in our lives. The good news is that it is completely in our power to transform our lives wholly and completely. This is, of course, a double-edged sword. It is in our power to change, we are free to change our lives in both small and great ways, but it is US who must make those changes.

I am completely willing to own that I am responsible for my experiences. This means that if I fall into “victim mode,” which happens to all of us at times, it is up to me to pull myself out of that abyss and step back into ownership mode. I am responsible for what I think and what I do. I am responsible for doing what I say I’m going to do and for honoring my commitments to myself and others. This is a tall order, but it affords us great freedom to be and to create.

“Every thought we think is creating our future.”

We each think thousands of thoughts each day. We are unaware of the majority of these thoughts and many of us have more negative thoughts than positive ones. Our thoughts have both energy and creative power. Like attracts like and through the powerful Law of Attraction (see [“The Secret”](#) by Rhonda Byrne for more information), our thoughts are basically bringing about our experiences.

We all have a negative inner voice which exerts power over us. This is the voice that tells us we’re not good enough, that we’re foolish to want what we want, and that we’ll never accomplish the goals which we’ve set for ourselves. This voice is sometimes referred to as the “Gremlin” (see [“Taming Your Gremlin”](#) by Rick Carson) and it’s amazing how miserable this gremlin can make us! I once did an exercise in which I recorded all of my negative thoughts over the course of an eight hour time period. I literally had hundreds of negative thoughts and many of them were repetitive! This simple exercise

helped me to understand how I was limiting my energy, my creativity and my happiness by my limiting and destructive thoughts.

The good news is that positive thoughts are **MUCH** more powerful than negative thoughts. If we consciously replace some of our negative thoughts with positive ones, or if we deliberately think positive thoughts throughout the day, we will notice a big difference in our sense of well-being. One example of an easy positive thought to think is the declaration “I approve of myself” which I mentioned in my last post. If you find yourself thinking something negative, either replace it with its opposite, say “cancel cancel” to clear the negative energy, or use a mantra like “I approve of myself” to turn your thoughts and your energy around.

“The point of power is always in the present moment.”

We cannot change the past and we have no control over the future. The only time which is under our control is this moment, right now. So often, we spend so much time and energy lamenting what we did or didn't do in the past and worrying about what we might do and what might happen in the future.

These thoughts and worries are really a big waste of time and usually serve to make us *less* happy instead of more happy.

If you want to be happy and joyous, focus on the **NOW**. Not only is this one of Louise Hay's key principles, but it is also set forward as a precept among many thought leaders, including [Eckhart Tolle](#), who published the best-selling book, *“The Power of Now.”*

This is a simple but not easy concept. When one is first starting to live in the present moment, he or she will often find the mind drifting backwards or forward. This is the time to gently nudge yourself back to the now, just as one might clear their mind or return to a mantra during meditation. If you find yourself worrying about the future, it can be helpful to ask yourself the following two questions (from [“The Big Leap”](#) by Gay Hendricks):

1. Is this worry realistic?
2. If so, is there anything I can do about it right now?

If the answer to the first question is no, then bring your attention back to the present moment; likewise if the answer to the second questions is no. If the answer to the second question is yes, then do something to remedy your worry. Even something minor can be helpful. Then bring your attention back to the here and now, the point of your power.

“Everyone suffers from self-hatred and guilt.”

I believe this principle is important for several reasons. First, it's always helpful and comforting to know that we are not alone in our struggles and pain. Knowing that other people are experiencing the same

difficulties as we are can help us to feel more normal and less dysfunctional. Although I feel that some people struggle with self-hatred and guilt to a larger degree than others, I agree that this is an issue for everyone at some point in their lives. I believe that Louise Hay states this principle as a type of precursor to some of her later principles which work on transforming the painful feelings of self-hatred and guilt, as well as other harmful emotions and habits.

I have experienced a great deal of self-hatred and guilt over the course of my life. To say that I am hard on myself is putting it mildly, so to speak. I have a tendency to blame myself for anything that goes wrong and to hold myself to inordinately high standards which are virtually impossible to meet. I feel guilty for the things which I have done wrong, as well for my poor judgments and missed opportunities. Although I feel that I've improved greatly in terms of being less critical and mean toward myself, I still struggle with this issue. I look forward to using Louise Hay's principles to heal my self-critical tendencies.

“The bottom line for everyone is, ‘I’m not good enough’.”

This principle is directly related to the principle above. We all struggle with feelings of inadequacy and set standards for ourselves which can be unreachable. It's common to look at what's wrong in our lives and in ourselves instead of noticing what's right. It's the proverbial “glass half empty” approach to life which is so prevalent in our society. What we don't realize, however, is how this approach to life impacts us.

Many of us are merely carrying on a legacy of thought patterns which were instilled in us from a young age. We may have been raised by parents who criticized us more than they complimented us. The tendency to look first for what's wrong becomes a pattern which follows us throughout our lives. It is likely that our critical parents were also raised by judgmental mothers and fathers, and the pattern continues from generation to generation.

It is difficult to thrive in the face of intense criticism and judgment. It's like going through life with a dark cloud over our heads, only we're the ones who put the cloud there by our contention that we're not good enough. We need to learn that we don't need to be perfect in order to be good enough; we can make mistakes and still be lovable and “okay.”

“It's only a thought, and a thought can be changed.”

The feelings of self-hatred, guilt, and “not good enough” all spring from corresponding thoughts. It isn't true that we are bad or unworthy; we merely have beliefs that state such things as if they were grounded in fact. As stated in the previous principle, “every thought we think is creating our future,” our thoughts create our reality. Yet the wonderful thing is that **WE** are in control of our thoughts! With a little practice, we can learn to notice our limiting thoughts and to replace them with empowering thoughts.

I have become a lot more adept at noticing when I am thinking negative thoughts, particularly about myself. One key is to pay attention to your emotions. If you are feeling bad, it's a good sign that you are thinking negative thoughts. If you notice yourself feeling sad or angry, pause for a moment and ask yourself, "What was I just thinking?" There's a good chance that you were thinking something negative and maladaptive. If you get into the habit of noticing your emotions and questioning your thoughts, you will become more and more aware of what you're thinking. Consequently, you'll be able to replace your negative thoughts with more positive and affirming ones. It just takes some practice!

"We create every so-called illness in our body."

This can be a difficult principle for many to take on. It is uncomfortable to feel bad physically and think that you are to blame for your discomfort. This is especially difficult in the case of severe and life-threatening illnesses. Yet it is helpful to remember that such illnesses do not come upon a person overnight. The more severe the disease, the more long-standing the pattern of negative thinking which has preceded its genesis.

I rebelled against this concept when I first read "You Can Heal Your Life." I didn't want to believe that I had created the horrendous migraines which had plagued me since the age of eighteen. However, when I read the probable thought pattern for migraines, as postulated by Louise Hay, it made sense: dislike of being driven, resisting the flow of life. I am what one would call a "control freak" and I hate it when things don't go my way or when others try to control my actions or experiences. It makes sense that perhaps my ongoing thought patterns had at least **contributed** to my migraines. And although migraines run in my family, it's likely that controlling and perfectionist tendencies have also been passed down through the generations.

If the word "create" in terms of thoughts and illnesses feels too strong for you to swallow, I suggest that you try on the word "contribute." It's easier to accept that one's negative thought patterns can contribute to the illnesses which he or she experiences. Either way, the "remedy" is the same – adopt new thought patterns which better serve you. Positive thoughts have the power to heal us. Although I am riddled with a number of physical complaints as I write this, I believe that I have the power to heal my ailments. Accepting that I have the power to create **BOTH** illness and health is a cornerstone of my healing project!

"Resentment, criticism, and guilt are the most damaging patterns."

There are many thought patterns that can be harmful to us, especially if we engage in them on a regular basis. However, some patterns are more harmful than others, and Louise Hay contends that resentment, criticism, and guilt are the most damaging patterns of all. Upon reflection, I would have to agree with her. Let's look at these patterns one by one, along with some examples of each, to drive the point home.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines **resentment** as follows:

a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury

It is normal to notice when we are wronged and to be upset by it. But when we continue to rehash a bad situation and ruminate upon how unfair or wrong it was, it can be harmful to our sense of well-being, as well as our health. There is a man I know who felt he was treated unfairly at work and had filed a grievance against his employer. Even several years later, one could not have a conversation with him without the topic of his grievance coming up. Not only did this repel others from desiring to be in his company, I'm sure it also destroyed his inner peace and happiness. This is just one example of the harmful effects of resentment.

When one is either the target or the source of criticism, it is damaging. Yet the most detrimental form of criticism is when it is self-directed. I can speak of this from extensive personal experience. I used to be extremely critical toward myself. I had a running tape inside my head of all of the ways in which I was deficient and didn't measure up to my expectations. At times my self-criticism would be voiced, but the verbal complaints paled in comparison to the negative voice which lived inside of my head. I am convinced that the many health complaints which I have today were created by means of my intense criticism of all facets of my being – my appearance, my career pursuits, my interactions with others, you name it... I am gradually turning this around and the negative tape is no longer the constant presence it once was. As I emerge from the chasm that was my self-criticism, I gain an ever increasing amount of joy, peace, and happiness. And interestingly enough, as I criticize myself less often, others are less prone to denigrate me as well. I am also less prone to deriding others. Win, win!

As the old saying goes, guilt is a wasted emotion. It doesn't make anyone feel better, and it cannot do anything to change a given situation. It is also often misplaced and experienced by people who have nothing to feel guilty about in the first place! The famous radio talk show host, Dr. Laura, says that guilt is only merited if one has truly done something wrong. Even then, the guilt should only serve to motivate the individual to do whatever he or she can do to make amends to those they have wronged. If you have done all you can to make things right, then let the guilt go. I once had a seminar leader who stated, "Let it go; it's killing you!" He was referring to the ongoing guilt and regret which we experience about things that are past and cannot be changed.

If you have done something wrong, apologize, make amends, do what you can to make up for your infractions. Don't ruminate in wasted feelings of guilt. If you have not done anything wrong, do whatever you need to do to release your guilt. As Louise Hay says, "Your sentence is now over, so let yourself out of prison."

"Releasing resentment will dissolve even cancer."

It is Louise Hay's contention that cancer is caused by deep resentment held for a long time until it literally eats away at the body. As she states on page 169 of "You Can Heal Your Life," those who

develop cancer often experienced something in childhood which destroyed their sense of trust and led them to find it difficult to develop and maintain long-term, meaningful relationships. These individuals also have a tendency to feel hopeless and helpless and to be highly self-critical. A big key toward healing cancer is for the person to release their resentment toward the past and those who hurt them and to learn to love and accept themselves.

I realize that the above paragraph may be difficult to take in and accept. I am reminded of the 12-step group maxim, "Take what you like and leave the rest." If the idea that cancer is caused by resentment seems implausible to you, perhaps this is a concept from Louise Hay that you will choose to leave. However, as I wrote about under the previous key, resentment can and does cause a lot of damage in those who harbor it, and we would all benefit tremendously from releasing any resentment we hold, particularly resentment of a deep and long-standing nature. So instead of thinking about dissolving cancer by releasing resentment, why not consider the increased sense of well-being or lightheartedness which you could gain by letting go of a grudge that you hold.

"We must release the past and forgive everyone."

When we are angry at others and hold grudges, it hurts us more than it hurts the other person. Think about it... They are off living their lives while we are stewing and seething over how they have wronged us. Often the person we choose not to forgive is not even in our lives any longer; they may even be deceased. Yet we hold on to our anger and resentment because we feel justified in doing so.

You may have heard of the expression, "He would rather be right than happy." So many people are what might be called "right fighters." They are indignant about their position and swear that they are right in their assertions. They may even **BE** right, yet that's not what's most important. What's most important is, are they happy? Do they have peace of mind? Are they enjoying their lives, or are they so wrapped up in their being right and someone else being wrong that all of the enjoyment has slipped out of living?

Forgiving someone for what they have done does not mean that you are saying what they did was okay. Forgiveness is more about **YOU** than it is about the other person. When you forgive someone, you are giving yourself permission to release the past and move on with your life. If all or most of your energy is wrapped up in being angry at someone who hurt you, where is the energy for creating a life you love?

I remember reading a story about a woman who was raped. Of course, rape is one of the most horrific atrocities which a human being can endure. There is a temptation to want to crawl up and retreat from life, to go into a sort of cocoon and hide from life. Yet this particular woman was extremely strong. I don't remember her exact words, but her sentiment has stuck with me. She expressed that although the monster who raped her subjected her to pain and indignity for an hour, she wasn't going to give him the power to take any more from her than he had already taken. She decided to let go of the experience (I would imagine this wasn't immediate and took some time) and embrace the rest of her life with strength, joy and conviction. Her story was truly empowering to read!

One of the best ways to release the past is to look for lessons from your experiences. It is a good practice to always ask yourself, “What can I learn from this experience?” or “How has this experience shaped me as a person? How am I a better person as a result of this challenge?” We all go through difficult times, some of us more than others. There are many times when life doesn’t feel fair, but once something has happened, we can’t turn back the clock and change it.

I will end this entry with a wonderful quote from Louise Hay – some food for thought...

“The point of power is always in the present moment. The past is over and done and has no power over me. I can begin to be free in this moment. Today’s thoughts create my future. I am in charge. I now take my own power back. I am safe and I am free.”

“We must be willing to learn to love ourselves.”

Many years ago, I first heard the saying, *“You can’t love anyone else unless you love yourself first.”* At the time, I despised this saying and vehemently disagreed with its sentiments. Although I was clear that I didn’t love myself much back then, I believed that I was a loving person and fully capable of loving others. Now I am much more open to the message, except that I would qualify the saying by adding the word **fully**, as in *“one cannot love another **fully** unless he loves himself.”* If we are mired in self-criticism and self-hatred, there is much less of ourselves to give to others, which makes us less able to love others to full capacity.

Yet, the ability to love others fully is only one reason for us to love ourselves. When we treat ourselves with loving kindness, we experience a number of other benefits. These benefits include:

- Decreased anxiety
- Increased inner peace
- Improved relationships
- Enhanced health and well-being

Notice that this principle includes two key words, **willing** and **learn**. For those of us who have not loved ourselves for many, many years, it probably won’t be happy overnight. We need to learn to treat ourselves more kindly, much like we would need to learn a new language or the tasks for a new job. It’s a process and it takes time. However, the key is to be **willing** to learn, whether it’s learning a new language or a new way of reacting toward oneself. If we are open and willing to a new way of being, the learning process will flow much more smoothly.

Louise Hay is a big advocate of the use of affirmations. One affirmation which she uses often is, *“I am willing to change.”* A variant on this affirmation could be, *“I am willing to learn to love myself”* or simply, *“I am willing to love myself.”* Affirmations really do help! When I find myself engaging in

negativity, I often snap myself out of that mindset by repeating a simple affirmation several times inside my head. Give it a try... You might not notice a difference overnight, but I promise you, it **will** help!

Start with the willingness to love yourself and build from there. The first step is always the most difficult. Take that first step and see how you grow and blossom over time.

“Self-approval and self-acceptance in the now are the keys to positive change.”

We have all made mistakes in the past. None of us are perfect and I'm sure that if we could turn back the clock, knowing what we know now, we would make different decisions and act in alternate ways. This key asks us to stop looking back and stop berating ourselves for our past failings. It asks us to stand firmly in the now with an attitude of *“I approve of myself”* and *“I am okay.”* With this positive attitude, we are better prepared to move forward and to make the changes we want to make in our lives.

Would you feed yourself or your child a meal on one of last night's dirty dishes? Of course not! Well, working on creating a new future on top of the “muck” of berating yourself for your past wrongs is akin to eating a delicious meal from a dirty dish. It just wouldn't taste as good!

We need to let go of the past and focus on what we want to create in our lives. We cannot change the past, so it does virtually no good to ruminate upon it. The only time when past reflection is productive is when we are looking for lessons to apply moving forward. Otherwise, let the past go. Embrace yourself and your life today, set powerful goals for yourself, and work on accomplishing them from a space of self-acceptance and self-approval.

I know this can be easier said than done, but as with the previous key, it begins from an attitude of willingness. Be willing to approve of yourself and willing to accept yourself. Use affirmations to help you along the way. The exercises in *“You Can Heal Your Life”* and other related teachings will help tremendously. Being able to accept, approve of, and love ourselves is an ongoing process. I have definitely made a lot of progress in this regard, but I still have my days when I am highly self-critical. It is at those times that I recommit to being willing to change, and I move forward as best I can. I remember one of the powerful tenets from [“The Four Agreements,”](#) which is **Always Do Your Best**. Our best isn't always the same. Some days our best means simply that we get out of bed, whereas our best on other days leads to tremendous accomplishments. But if we commit to always doing our best and being willing to accept and love ourselves, all things are possible.

“When we really love ourselves, everything in our life works.”

Self-love is a critical facet of “the Healing Project.” As we move forward in healing our lives, we will work on learning to love ourselves more and on being more gentle and accepting toward ourselves. As we look at the probable thought patterns for a host of common health challenges, we'll notice that these patterns are highly negative and destructive. When we are able to turn these thought patterns

around and replace them with more empowering and positive thoughts, miracles will start to happen in our lives. We will start to feel better physically, we'll have a more genuinely cheerful disposition, we'll have more "good days," our relationships will improve, and we'll attract better outcomes for our life endeavors. Quite simply, our lives will work much better.

Don't you want to have a life that works better? I know I do. I used to try to climb an uphill battle to a better life, all the while driving myself with all the sensitivity of a drill sergeant. That approach didn't get me what I wanted, so I'm willing to try another avenue. I am willing to step into the belief that when I really love myself, everything in my life will work.

This concludes my outline of Louise Hay's Key Principles. It's a good idea to review the principles from time to time, as they are very powerful and are critical to "The Healing Project."