LETTING GO OF GRUDGES

or

Everything I Needed To Say And Didn’t

I. The following exercises (adapted from “Feelings First” by Dr. John Gray) can help you detect layers of feelings that are present with respect to some “hot” issues for you in a relationship. Through John Gray calls it “The Love Letter,” it may at first seem anything but that. It is a process of “unmasking,” of peeling away the hierarchy of negative feelings that so often prevent us from experiencing caring, love, understanding and compassion which may lie buried beneath.

Before proceeding, think of an issue in a relationship about which you have some strong, upsetting feelings, in which you are holding a grudge. For this first time, let it be about someone other than your partner, such as a parent, a child, a friend, a colleague, a boss, etc. Now start a fresh page in your journal and entitle it “Everything I Needed To Say And Didn’t.” You won’t actually be sending this letter although you may decide to share it with your partner by having your partner read it aloud to you. Write it now anyway. The purpose is to express whatever emotions are in the way of a better relationship. Following the format, start with “Anger and Blame” and, sticking with the same issue, complete as many of the sentence stems in each category as you can.

Don’t edit your feelings or try to be nice or reasonable or even rational. And don’t bother to defend or explain your point of view—that is, don’t intellectualize the issue; merely let all your emotions hang out. The purpose is to take the opportunity to release whatever pent-up anger, resentment, or wounded pride may be preventing the flow of more tender or forgiving emotions. Above all, do not leave the letter unfinished; carry it through to the fifth and final category.

If you are holding a grudge, you definitely won’t feel positive feelings at the beginning of the letter. In fact, the more upset you are the better—as long as you make an honest effort to get in touch with, examine, and express all of your feelings in each of the five categories.
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1. ANGER AND BLAME

   I resent ---

   I'm outraged by ---

   I'm fed up with ---

   I can't stand ---

   I can't forgive you for ---

   I needed ---

2. HURT AND SADNESS

   I feel hurt by ---

   I feel sad when ---

   I am disappointed because --- I feel awful because ---

   I want ---

3. FEAR AND INSECURITY

   I am anxious because ---

   I am afraid that ---

   What scares me is ---
I'm worried about ---

I want ---

4. GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY

I regret ---

I may be to blame for ---

I feel sympathy for ---

I didn't mean to ---

Please forgive me for ---

I wish ---

5. FORGIVENESS, UNDERSTANDING, DESIRE AND LOVE

I appreciate ---

I realize ---

I value ---

I love ---

I hope ---

Review your letter carefully, making sure that it truly does express all your emotions on this issue. Review it also for balance. If it gets skimpier as it progresses (plenty of expression at the beginning but very little at the end) it may mean that you're fixated on anger; if it's fat in the middle but lean at both ends you may be stuck on your own fear and guilt; if it's bottom heavy, you may be repressing your tougher emotions. Work at it until
you've been completely honest with yourself. By gauging the balance in each of the five sections, you alone can judge how well you've explored and how honestly you've acknowledged the entire range of your feelings!

REFLECTION

Having written this letter, see what you are feeling now towards the recipient as compared to when you began? Do you find that you are any less angry, any more able to forgive, to let go of grudges? Are you any more able to think of useful solutions? Are you in touch with any more positive feelings towards the person you wrote to? That is what writing this letter is about. It is an important part of getting in touch with the range of your emotions in behalf of being able to think more clearly, understand more deeply and to more constructively seek solutions to resolve your anger and conflict. Use this technique anytime you are upset to help you feel and think yourself through to a more useful solution. It can be done in a few minutes, if need be, by just writing one line for each of the above categories! Write what this felt like for you in your journal.