

# A Lesson In Unconditional Love

By Cheryl Canfield

What I have found in working with individuals is that most of us carry around an inner critical voice that is often called the critical parent. And most of us can benefit from some re-parenting of ourselves. An example that comes to my mind is a woman named Linda, who had been seeing me for some time. Linda had developed scars in her stomach from radiation treatment that made it difficult for her to digest food and her belly was bloated and uncomfortable. Her legs were swollen from her pelvis down because of blocked lymph nodes and she had to use a walker to get around. She had done a tremendous amount of healing work around the issues in her life and as she lay on her sofa talking to me softly, she said, "You know, there is only one kink in my existence right now, and that is my relationship with my cat." It was a remarkable statement in itself, considering her physical condition.

She told me she felt bad because the cat, a very large male, so wanted to be with her and she was always pushing him off the bed or the couch because his weight hurt her. "I start to feel all this explosive energy and I blast poor Arnold with it. Then I feel terrible afterwards."

She went on to say that she often felt frustrated by all the little things that had become so difficult but she would hold the feelings in, and then when Arnold got in her way or wanted to lean on her she would let her frustration burst loose. "Arnold is so accepting and he loves me so unconditionally that he still comes back and wants to be with me."

We talked about the nature of unconditionally loving relationships and how even a cat, in some part of its being, recognizes that the love between them is undisturbed by her condition or outbursts. She loved his soothing presence and resonating purr, and if he was to stay in her environment, he needed firm but loving discipline in being taught that he couldn't lay on her like he used to or get in the way of her walker. He also needed her love and soothing voice, when it was a good time for her to be with him in that way. "I know that it's my attitude toward myself that needs to change," Linda reflected, "and then I just know that Arnold won't be so needy."

I suspected that Linda had a tough critical parent inside and I asked her in hypnosis to imagine herself as a little girl in the same condition as she was now, weak and unable to get around very well. Next I asked her to imagine that Arnold was getting in her way and to see the little girl explode in the same way that she as an adult had done. Then I asked her adult self to say something to the little girl who was having such a hard time and who had just screamed at the cat. "You shouldn't be so mean to the cat!" her critical adult scolded.

I knew that Linda was close to her grown daughter and I asked her to imagine that her daughter was a little girl with this condition. "She's so weak and her stomach is swollen and uncomfortable and Arnold is getting in her way. See her in your mind's eye and watch as she explodes at Arnold. What do you want to say to her?"

In a very loving voice she said, "I'm so sorry that you're having such a difficult time. I understand how hard it is for you and I wish there was something I could do to help you." I asked her to switch and imagine that she was the daughter, and feel what it was like to have that kind of understanding and acceptance. The tears rolled down Linda's cheeks. "It feels so good that someone cares about me and knows how hard it is for me."

I asked her to imagine herself again as a little girl and go through the visualization of screaming at Arnold. This time she gave herself the love and support she had needed all along. "It feels so good to know I can have an inner parent who loves me just the way I am and who understands what I feel." It was a powerful demonstration of the need for unconditional self-love and her ability to receive that when it was presented in a way that she could really grasp.

An interesting thing about learning to give ourselves unconditional love is that it creates an opening that lets others in more fully. When I saw Linda again her physical body had rapidly deteriorated but what was most striking was the radiance that emanated from her face and eyes. She glowed as she spoke about the special moments she was experiencing with loved ones and friends. It was apparent that she had found acceptance and peace with herself and subsequently with all those around her. The energy she was projecting was like a blessing that reached out and drew others into a very special intimacy.

The last time I saw Linda I held her hand as she told me about a dream she had the night before. "I was having a very difficult night with a lot of discomfort. Then I drifted into the most wonderful dream. I never felt more free or more well. I was able to move so effortlessly. But I knew my body wasn't cured." Dreams have been called the language of the subconscious and Linda seemed to understand the message here. Her face was accepting and radiant. Before I could say anything she said, "I know I'm dying, but what I want to focus on is life."

As I looked at Linda, who was suffering from the same type of cancer that I had once had, I remembered my determination to learn and to teach how to die well. Now here was Linda, demonstrating the peace and joyfulness I had wanted to express if I went in this direction. "You've become my teacher," I told her, and her appreciative gaze blessed me. She left her body a week later, surrounded by people she loved.

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