

From Age-ing to Sage-ing by Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi--Excerpts from 11 Exercises

Prepare to write in your journal by sitting in a comfortable chair, closing your eyes, and relaxing your body. Take several deep breaths and remain in a meditative state as you become quiet and centered. Journal your experience as the last step in each exercise.

Exercise 1: "Thanksgiving Reunion of Benevolent Teachers"--Letters of Appreciation--Make a list of people whom you would like to invite to a "Thanksgiving Reunion of Benevolent Teachers." Write individual letters of appreciation to each of them. In each letter communicate the essential qualities that make the person unique and the ways in which you have grown because of your association--don't hold back. If they are still alive, you may decide to send the letter (or an edited version) or not send it.

Exercise 2: Giving Yourself the Gift of Forgiveness --a) Visualize being in the presence of someone toward whom you have unresolved anger or resentment, someone who has wronged you and toward whom you harbor a grudge. As you contemplate this person's actions, consider how your lack of forgiveness keeps you chained to this relationship, drains your energy, and disturbs your equilibrium.

b) Place yourself in your adversary's shoes for a moment and investigate whether your own unacknowledged needs and expectations or a misunderstanding in communication contributed to the upset or rupture of your relationship.

c) Allow your awareness to move back and forth between yourself and the other person, giving you an enlarged perspective and an objectivity with which to view the relationship.

d) Imagine that the two of you are bathed in a ray of golden sunlight that melts your resentment and allows forgiveness to take root within your heart. Rest in the warmth of this sunlight for a while. With a sincere desire to mend the relationship, say, "I forgive you with all my heart and wish you nothing but goodness. And I forgive myself for my complicity in creating this misunderstanding. May neither of us have to suffer any further painful consequences for our past encounters."

e) Now visualize being in the presence of your former antagonist and mending your relationship with kind words and gestures. As you contemplate this auspicious encounter, feel how a great weight is being lifted from you and how a sense of inner peace is replacing it.

Exercise 3: A Testimonial Dinner for the "Severe Teachers"--a) Divide a piece of paper into three columns. In the first column, list the guests whom you are inviting to this testimonial dinner, those who have wronged you in some significant way ("Severe Teachers"). In the second column, describe the apparent injustice that was inflicted on you. In the third column, describe the unforeseen benefits, the unexpected good that resulted from their actions.

b) Using the broad perspective of time, say to each of the offending parties, "I understand that you did me a great deal of good by your actions when you did _____ for which I want to thank you. I understand now that it was difficult for you, and it was difficult for me. But now that I forgive you, I am grateful for your contributions to my life."

c) As you consider how each of the offending parties treated you, ask yourself, "What part did I play in being victimized? Did I have an unconscious program that made me an unwitting collaborator in this scenario?" Forgive yourself.