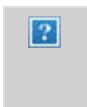


US



Jordan Fiorillo Scotti Ph.D.
Buddhist Psychology: East Meets West

SELF-HELP

Mastering the Art of Letting Go

Letting go is one of the most powerful moves we can make for peace.

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Reviewed by Davia Sills



KEY POINTS

- Holding on is a survival instinct. Sometimes, people cling to things even when they aren't working for them.
- Attachment creates suffering because everything changes. Letting go alleviates suffering and creates peace.
- Letting go creates space for bigger and better things. It also helps build self-confidence and trust.
- Over time, as people begin to let go more readily, they experience more ease and flow and

less suffering.

“If you let go a little, you will find a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will find a lot of peace. If you let go absolutely, you will find absolute peace and tranquility.”

—Ajahn Chah

Letting go can be one of the most powerful skills we can master. Letting go means releasing aspects of our lives—such as a relationship, job, living situation, thought pattern, habit, etc.—that aren’t working for us.

Letting go can be difficult. But it’s worth the work! Letting go creates space for better opportunities. It also generates self-confidence. Over time, with practice letting go, we increase our comfort with change and our optimism that better things lie ahead.

Why Letting Go Is Hard

As a species, our brains evolved to prioritize survival. We do this by trying to predict the future. And, although we intellectually accept that things change, we predict the future based on the present. An unchanging present helps us feel more secure. This desire for certainty can cause us to cling tightly to things, even when they aren’t working well for us.

Another reason we hold onto things is that we like how they make us feel. Our brains are wired to repeat experiences that we find pleasurable. That is another survival mechanism. Therefore, it’s only natural that we get attached to the people, places, and things that offer pleasurable, happy feelings.

Attachment and Suffering

While this habit of attachment is natural, it leads to suffering. This is because, for better or worse, everything changes. When we are attached to things—people, situations, material possessions, etc.—we suffer when those things change.

We also suffer in anticipation of loss or change. In fact, we often spend a good deal of time and

energy worrying about losing the things we are attached to. We often feel the need to be vigilant, to guard our possessions defensively. This creates stress and rigidity that stops us from living in the flow of life. We get stuck, rather than moving forward. This is suffering.

When to Let Go

We know it's time to let go when we find ourselves experiencing a lot of suffering. Perhaps "suffering" is too strong a word: It can simply be a sense of discomfort or unease. Maybe something in our gut feels that a person or situation doesn't fit. Or it isn't aligned with the person we are becoming. Or we notice that something takes a lot of time and energy, but doesn't make us feel healthy and radiant.

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Knowing it's time to let go is only the first step. The next step is to prepare to let go. Focusing on the benefits of letting go can be a helpful starting place:

Why Let Go?: Making Space

When we let go of things, we create space for new experiences and growth. We free up time, mental space, and energy for new things.

This doesn't always have to mean walking away from a relationship or quitting a job. It can be more subtle. For example, letting go can mean releasing expectations in order to make space for surprise and wonder. Releasing expectations about how a social event (e.g., a work event you would normally dread) will go allows you the potential to see the event with fresh eyes, and perhaps even enjoy yourself!

THE BASICS

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Why Let Go?: Building Confidence

Letting go and watching life get better is an incredible way to build confidence in ourselves and the universe. While there are certainly endings we regret (think: “the one that got away”), most stories of letting go have happy endings. Yet, we simply can’t know what happy ending may be in store for us until we take the leap. We have to be willing to let go of “good enough” in favor of “great.”

Pausing to notice the positive outcomes of past experiences of letting go can help us see that there are no wrong decisions, only redirections. The countless potential paths available to us aren’t visible yet. All we can see is what we know. We must be willing to open the door to the unknown. When we do so, we learn that there are always bigger and better things waiting for us, and our confidence grows.

SELF-HELP ESSENTIAL READS



[Stop Demanding That You Know What's Next](#)



[7 Strategies to Embrace Criticism as a Gift](#)

How to Let Go

- Begin by clarifying what in your life needs to be let go. Be honest about what people,

situations, and patterns aren't working for you anymore.

- Envision your ideal future self. What are the qualities you want to embody? What do you wish to feel? What do you hope to accomplish? Let this guide you in deciding how to utilize the new time and energy you will enjoy once you've released them.
- Make an intention statement to let go, such as "I choose to let go of this relationship, which makes me feel unloved, in order to make space for real love," or "I choose to let go of eating habits that don't help me achieve my future goals." Speak it out loud.
- Write down your reasons for letting go. What feels bad about this situation? What will feel better without this new situation? Refer to your document each night or whenever you feel your motivation waning.
- Act kindly and fearlessly. Let go with kindness. Others don't need to fully understand your decision. You don't need permission. Be kind and be clear. And then act. Only you can make the changes that need to be made.
- Try morning affirmations and visualizations to maintain focus on your future goals. Really picture the life you want and feel it in your body. Speak affirmations that support your future vision.
- Use nightly gratitude and journaling to document the changes you are experiencing. Practicing gratitude is a critical aspect of noticing the positive effects of our choices. Journaling helps us clarify and process our feelings.
- Have compassion for yourself. It is difficult for all of us to let go of things that are familiar. Expect setbacks and difficult moments. Approach these moments with curiosity, rather than judgment. Brush yourself off, give yourself a hug, and try again.

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