

Who's Bugging You?

Understanding the Gift of Mirroring, and Healing Your Relationship With Yourself

by Susan Hansen, M.S.

One of the best things I've learned lately on this journey toward healing, health, and balance in my life is how important it is for me to heal my relationship with myself. Whatever issues or difficulties I may have with others, those relationships are probably not going to improve in any significant way until my relationship with myself improves.

Why would I need to improve my relationship with myself? Well, if I've grown up around people who didn't treat me well or didn't teach me how to value and love and respect myself, chances are good that without meaning to, I've learned to treat myself in those same disrespectful, unkind, less-than-loving ways, and I may not even realize it. And if I want to be healthy and balanced, and attract healthy and balanced relationships with other people into my life, I need to address and heal my relationship with myself first. I think I've known that for a long time, but I haven't really known how to get there. I haven't had a good tool to use.

Somewhere along the way I remember learning that whatever bothers or bugs me about someone else's behavior probably reflects something about me. That's the general concept of mirroring, and it's also Law of Attraction – when I'm putting some vibration out there but not seeing it, the Universe is happy to showcase it for me in another person and plant that person right in front of me. I understand that, and sometimes I've able to see it, but other times it hasn't seemed to make sense. It wasn't until I came across Byron Katie's "Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet" (which I can't duplicate here without her permission, but which you can access for yourself at <http://www.thework.org>), that I found the piece of information I'd been missing, and for me it's been huge. Here it is in a nutshell:

What bothers me in other people's attitude or behavior, whether it's directed toward me or not, is always a reflection of something I do, toward myself, on my worst day.

There are a three really important points here. One is that it doesn't matter whether the other person is directing the behavior toward me or not. If I see it and it bothers me, it's worth looking at and it will offer me some valuable information about myself. *Every single time*. The second is that if I see behavior or an attitude that bothers me, it doesn't mean that I necessarily direct that same behavior or attitude toward other people (although I might), just toward myself. The third is that this doesn't mean I *always* treat myself this way, just sometimes, in some situations – in other words, only on my worst days. Here are some examples to clarify this:

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Lack of Follow-Through / Not Keeping Promises

I was in a relationship a few years ago where my partner showed an ongoing lack of follow-through, not just with me, but everywhere in his life. While I think that would bother a lot of people, I repeatedly got extremely aggravated about it, or to put it another way, I had a lot of **emotional charge** on it. After awhile, every time he didn't do something he'd promised, whether with me or with someone else, I got incredibly irritated and frustrated with him. I didn't usually nag or pick fights with him about it, but I did speak up about it sometimes, and even when I didn't, it was on my mind a lot. It weighed on me, bothered me, and bugged me, every time I saw it.

Another clue that it was an issue for me (not just for him) is that I was often far more angry or upset about it than anyone else involved. Other people could let it go and move on, but I couldn't. And the final clue that something else was going on was that I got very judgmental about his behavior. I didn't usually speak my judgments out loud, but inside my head, I was complaining about how inconsiderate, inappropriate, and unfair it was of him (all polite words for saying he was wrong) to make commitments and promises, and not keep them. I spent a lot of unproductive time and energy being angry with him and judging him about not following through and not keeping promises.

So, when I became aware of the concept of mirroring, I tried to look at the issue of lack of follow-through and see how it applied to me. I can acknowledge that sometimes I take a very long time to respond to e-mails, and I often procrastinate when it comes to paperwork. So maybe that was it. But it just didn't feel right to me. I didn't do the things my former partner did. I didn't say I'd be somewhere and show up two hours late, or not at all. I didn't say I'd call and then not do it. I didn't say I'd clean up something I'd spilled and then leave it there to congeal on the carpeting for weeks. So I couldn't see how my frustration was really mirroring me. It felt to me like something was missing.

When I got ahold of the Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet (which wasn't until after that relationship ended), I wanted to see if I could make sense of all the emotional charge I still had around that issue whenever I thought of it. So I took the statement,

"I hate it when he makes promises and doesn't keep them,"

and changed it to,

"I hate it when I make promises and don't keep them."

That was true, but it didn't ring any particular bells. Then I took it a step further and changed it to,

*"I hate it when I make promises **to myself** and don't keep them."*

And that was when I saw it, the "aha" moment, or in this case, the "OH." I find a lot of those "OH" moments when I use this process. In this case, the fact is that I've spent much of my adult life making various promises to myself, whether they were about taking better care of myself, working less, getting

more sleep, answering e-mails or grading papers sooner, traveling, writing more, standing up for myself, or whatever. And not keeping them. So when I wrote down that statement about not keeping promises to myself, I had a physical reaction to it, felt it in my stomach and literally felt weak in the knees. Which doesn't sound like a good thing, but it is!

It's a good thing because if it's really my own behavior that's bothering me, I can do something about it. I can take action. I can do EFT to address the emotional charge. I can make changes and start keeping my promises to myself. I'm never going to be able to "make" anyone else change. I can't make a partner, colleague, client, family member, neighbor, or friend do anything. I can't make anyone else keep promises or follow through, but I can practice following through and keeping my promises, especially to myself. For this reason, what usually follows the "OH" moment for me is relief. No matter what I discover about myself, my usual response to it now is to laugh and feel relieved. And the same seems to be true when I work with clients and they learn to use this process. My 16-year-old daughter, who's been using it for the last two or three years now, will take a blank Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet down to her room when she's irritated with someone, work on it in silence for a few minutes, then open the door and shout "OH!" down the hallway. I love that!

The other magical thing that happens when I address my own behavior toward myself – in this case keeping promises to myself – is that when I see the old behavior in someone else, it just doesn't bother me anymore, or at least not nearly as much as it used to. When I see people not following through, or when someone breaks a promise to me, I'm still not thrilled by the behavior, but my reaction to it now is nothing like it used to be. I might be mildly annoyed and think something like, "I wish he would have called to let me know sooner," but I don't get nearly as amped up about it as I used to, because I'm busy practicing keeping promises to myself. My life has definitely become more peaceful.

Here's another example, one that took a little time and detective work for me to fully understand. I *knew* that the things I saw in this other person's behavior weren't things that I do toward other people, so I had a hard time at first figuring out how they had anything to do with me.

Why Doesn't He Just Shut Up?

I was at a discussion group one night, and one of the men caught my attention early in the evening because whenever a young woman in the group said anything, this man either interrupted her, laughed at her, or disagreed with what she was saying. I was enjoying listening to her viewpoint, so I was immediately annoyed with him for what he was doing, and the way he did it. I appreciated the way she handled it – she just waited each time until he was done speaking or laughing or arguing, and then went back to what she was saying. She seemed far less disturbed by his behavior than I was.

As the evening went on, I got more and more aggravated with him. My perception of his pattern – not just with the young woman, but in general – was that whenever he heard something he disagreed with or didn't understand, he drew attention to himself by either laughing, scoffing at what was said, or arguing the point until the other person stopped arguing back. Then he gave that person or the group in general a

smug look that said, “See? I rest my case.” There were six or seven people in the group, and I found myself wondering how everyone could sit there so calmly when he was being so incredibly rude. Every time he said something, I wanted to leap across the room, knock him on the floor, and shut his mouth myself. The thought that went through my head repeatedly was, “*Why doesn’t he just shut up?*”

I was well aware of the Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet by this time, and I knew he must be mirroring something for me, although I couldn’t imagine what, and the thought itself was horrifying. This was one of those times that I thought, “I know I would *never* do what he’s doing in a group like this, or in any other setting. So how can this possibly be about me?” But I also knew, from repeated experience, that there must be something to it, or I wouldn’t be so emotionally charged about it. I kept my mouth shut and sat through the rest of the meeting. I figured I’d go home and work it out later, and in the meantime, my job was not to give in to my impulse to find a blunt instrument and commit violent acts with it.

When I got home, I was more than ready to figure it out. I wrote out the worksheet responses (six questions or statements about the person and the situation), and then turned it around by changing all the pronouns from “he” and “him” to “I” and “me.” The process starts with listing what you feel toward the other person and why. The instructions also say to go ahead and be rude and judgmental, rather than diplomatic or assertive. Here’s what I wrote:

“I am disgusted with ____ at group tonight for being arrogant, negative, and attention seeking. He kept interrupting everyone, especially the women, bringing the attention to himself, making jokes out of what people were saying and then laughing loudly at his own humor, and making all kind of negative, judgmental, and controlling comments throughout the meeting. He got in the way of the progress of the meeting with all of his self-serving, pompous, idiotic behavior.”

I started out just changing all the pronouns, to see where it led.

“I am disgusted with myself for being arrogant and negative toward myself, and attention seeking. I keep interrupting myself, especially the feminine/intuitive part of myself, bringing attention to myself, making jokes out of what I was saying to myself...”

And that’s where I got the first “OH.” I understood that what this was about was the way I sometimes argue with myself in my head when I don’t feel clear about something. It was about how this loud, know-it-all, fear-based part of my thinking tries to interrupt and dispute and overrun the more balanced and intuitive part of me, and I can’t make those thoughts shut up. OH. So with that in mind, I kept going:

“...making jokes out of what I was saying to myself, and then laughing at or mocking my intuitive self, and making all kinds of negative, self-judgmental, and controlling comments toward myself when I’m trying to figure something out. I get in the way of my own progress with all of that self-serving, pompous, idiotic (but really fear-based) thinking and internal behavior toward myself.”

The next part of the worksheet is to describe what you want from the other person. I’d originally written:

“I want _____ to shut his mouth! I want him to let people finish their thoughts. I want him to be respectful to everyone, to LISTEN, to quit answering everything with “Yeah But,” and quit making assumptions and presumptions about what other people are saying and trying to fit them into his own limited, fear based, arrogant thinking. I want him to listen more than he talks. I want him to gentle down his energy and stop being so aggressive and pushy and controlling. I want him to take a chill pill and shut up!”

So I changed pronouns again, and came up with this:

“I want that part of my thinking to be quiet! I want that part of me to let my softer and more intuitive self finish my thoughts. I want to be respectful to myself, to LISTEN to myself, to quit saying “Yeah But” to myself, to quit making fear-based assumptions and presumptions about myself and trying to fit them into that limited, fear based, arrogant part of my thinking. I want to listen to myself more than I “talk at” myself. I want to gentle down that harsh part of my energy and stop being so aggressive and pushy and controlling with myself. I want to relax and be internally quiet more often.”

And that pretty much says it. I definitely get frustrated with that old part of my thinking that’s negative, loud, intrusive, and fear-based, especially when I let it drown out the intuitive part of me. The old thinking came from things I was taught growing up, traumas I experienced, and just the more negative world view I was brought up with. I’ve healed a lot and evolved a lot, but sometimes those old thought patterns are still there, yakking away inside my head. I went ahead and finished the worksheet, because every time I complete one, every statement holds more clues and cues about what’s going on for me in any given situation. The bottom line that night was that the guy I was so aggravated with in group was illuminating something in me that I needed to see, so I could heal it and let it go.

Once I gleaned every possible piece of information and insight from the worksheet, I did two or three rounds of EFT to clear the emotional charge, both about the other person’s behavior and about my own. By the time I was done with that, I felt better and more peaceful about myself, as well as about the guy from group. What went through my head about him was the very calm and mellow thought, “He’s just afraid, and he doesn’t want anyone to know, so he covers it up with rude, disruptive behavior.” And I could honestly see that. And I knew it was just as true for me, or for that rude and disruptive part of my thinking – it’s based in my old fears. I haven’t seen that guy since – probably because I got the message I needed to get – but if I did, I’d be willing to bet that my reaction to him would be different now. The charge on that whole incident for me is honestly gone. I feel neutral about the whole thing, and I just see it as a funny story with a great gift in it for me.

Everyday Mirroring

Not every mirroring experience is that complex. Some are basic and obvious. If you think about people you get annoyed with, or people you don’t like being around, and you briefly state what they do that you don’t like, chances are good that you’ll begin to see the mirrors.

“She’s always picking at me for every little mistake I make.” (I’m always picking at myself for every little mistake I make.)

“Nothing I do is ever good enough for him. He always expects more from me.” (Nothing I do is ever good enough for me. I always expect more from myself.)

“She talks down to me – why can’t she treat me better than that?” (I talk down to myself – why can’t I treat myself better than that?)

“My boss works me to death. He never gives me a break!” (I work myself to death. I never give myself a break!)

“They keep badgering me with all their ‘shoulds’ and their ridiculous rules and regulations, till I want to scream!” (I keep badgering myself with all my ‘shoulds’ and my ridiculous rules and regulations for myself, till I want to scream!)

“She’s so negative – she never sees the good things in life.” (I’m so negative about myself – I never see the good things in myself.)

“He doesn’t make enough time for me. He says he’ll spend quality time with me, but he’s always too busy.” (I don’t make time for myself. I say I’ll spend quality time with myself, but I’m always too busy.)

“She stays so superficial – she avoids any real emotional connection with people.” (I stay so superficial with myself – I avoid any real emotional connection with myself.)

“If they would just help me once in awhile, I wouldn’t be so tired all the time.” (If I would just help myself once in awhile – or ask for help once in awhile – I wouldn’t be so tired all the time.)

“How can she say she cares about me, and still treat me that way?” (How can I say I care about myself, and still treat myself that way?)

The most helpful thing I can say about this is not the most popular thing: Through my own experiences and those of my clients, I’ve come to believe that if you are upset by or emotionally charged on someone else’s behavior, it IS always reflecting something about you, most likely something about how you treat yourself on your worst day. If it wasn’t, you wouldn’t be upset about it – it just wouldn’t bother you. If it bothers you, it’s worth looking at, and it’s worth addressing and healing. Clearing the emotional charge allows your interactions with others to be easier, but more importantly, it helps you be more at peace with yourself in your day-to-day life. It helps you heal your relationship with yourself.

And one last point: Even if you see a behavior that bothers you in someone else, and you realize that it reflects something you do toward others, the most significant part of the charge still comes from the fact that you also do it toward yourself. Whether you’re going to use EFT, or you’re just going to practice not doing the specific behavior anymore, please remember to practice not doing the behavior toward yourself!

If keeping promises is the behavior you want to practice, practice keeping your promises to yourself more often, not just to others. If you're practicing being less critical, start by being less critical toward yourself, not just toward others. If you heal your relationship with yourself, the rest falls into place much more easily, and the whole journey is much more joyful.

Now What?

Here are the basic steps to using your irritation toward others to heal your relationship with yourself:

1. Notice when you are irritated, enraged, or otherwise charged on someone else's behavior.
2. Or, make a list of the top five people you get irritated with, or the top five behaviors in other people that bother you.
3. Choose one behavior to start with. Put your irritation into a simple statement about what the other person does that bothers you.

"She's always picking at me for every little mistake I make."

4. Turn the statement around by changing all the pronouns to "I," "me," "my," "mine," etc. Fine tune the statement until you find the "OH" response that says you've found something that's true for you.

"I'm always picking at myself for every little mistake I make."

5. Practice treating yourself differently. If it's an old habit or highly charged, do a round or two of EFT to clear the charge on your own behavior, and on the other person's if you want to. Get help with the phrasing from your coach or EFT practitioner if you need it.
6. If you know it's a major issue for you, or if you have difficulty figuring out how this statement applies to you, visit Byron Katie's website (www.thework.org) and print out the Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet. Fill it out in detail and turn all the statements around with I, me, my, etc. Chances are that you'll get the "OH" response somewhere along the way. Again, get help from your coach or a partner if you still can't see it.
7. Enjoy the response you have next time you see this person or this behavior in someone else. If your charge on it is noticeably lower, or if you feel neutral about it or find it funny now, you'll know you've cleared the issue. If not, try the process again and see what becomes clear to you this time.
8. Work your way down your list (or keep clearing things as you notice them), and enjoy how much lighter you feel as you release all this emotional charge. Others in your life will notice the difference too. And don't forget to celebrate every step of the journey of healing your relationship with you!