

Introduction

How do we EMBRACE detachment? Why should we even want to? Those are questions that prompted my desire to write this book. Detachment, according to the dictionary, means “separation.” Embrace means “to come together.” How can we do both in the same moment?

It’s my intention to make this conundrum clear as you move through this book. In the meditations you will come to understand not only the necessity for “loving” detachment within our many relationships—those that are dear to us as well as those that cause us concern—but also the importance of embracing this concept if you want a peaceful journey through life.

To begin with, I think we have to cultivate our willingness to let go, that is, to detach from the trials and tribulations of our contemporaries if we want to find the quiet peace we long for, a peace that will allow us to truly love, to truly embrace, and to appreciate those who journey with us. In this process, we also give those companions the freedom to grow and to find their own way, thus their own eventual peace too. I don’t think we can come together as loving equals without embracing the willingness to detach.

We live very codependent lives, from my perspective. By this I mean that too many of us let even the whims of others—in our families, our communities, our workplaces, even in other parts of the world—define us, determine how we feel, and then decide what we will do next in many instances. Learning to detach allows us to live the life we were meant to live. By allowing other people’s behavior, good, bad, or disinterested, control us, we miss many opportunities for movement and expression in new directions. The converse is also true: if we attempt to control the other persons on our path, wherever they may reside, keeping them “attached” to us through any means (and most of us are very practiced at this), we immobilize them, thus preventing the growth they deserve and have been prepared for already.

Detachment isn’t easy. If it were, there would be no need for a book offering to help you develop the skills to do it. And it may not have appeared on your radar screen as something you wanted to cultivate prior to picking up this book. As was already noted, we are accustomed to being enmeshed with others, letting our lives be constantly influenced by their behavior. I am not suggesting that this influence is always bad; there are good influences too, probably everyday. We can and do observe healthy “detached” behavior in some of our friends, and perhaps they showed up on our path to serve as our teachers. It’s not always easy to discern the “good” from the “bad,” however. It’s my intent for the meditations here to illustrate those behaviors we want to mimic and those we don’t.

It is my hope that this book, *Let Go Now: Embracing Detachment*, will clarify many of your questions about detachment: what it is, how to do it, and how to practice it with others. It’s also my hope that you will give yourself all the time you need to fully absorb the concepts and to develop the skills as outlined. I didn’t come to appreciate the value of detachment easily, and the idea of embracing it came even later. But the peaceful tenor of my journey today is surely the result of my commitment to practicing and “embracing” detachment at every opportunity.

I believe that every moment of our lives is offering us just such an opportunity. And wherever we are, others are on hand to observe, to reap the benefit of our “practice,” and to carry what they have seen into their own lives.

How to Use this Book

After reading my story about detachment, about how and why I came to realize I needed help and about the transformation that has happened in my life, turn to the meditations. Don’t read them quickly or all at once.

Savor them. Meditate on them. Read one a day or spread one of them over a two- or three-day period. There really is no hurry. It's a practice that actually has no ending point. Or use the subject index at the back of the book if you feel the need to zero in on a specific topic for your well-being on a particular day. What I am suggesting is this: there is no one way, no right way, to use this book. It's yours to use in whatever way makes the most sense for you. Only you and your Higher Power know what's best for you.

As you move through the book, you will note that following every ten meditations is a page for pausing and reflecting. At these points I suggest you get a journal and share your thoughts, as triggered by my comments, for your own growing success with this ever-so-important skill, a skill that, if mastered, I promise will change every moment of the rest of your life.

You will also note that I have repeated myriad times many of the specific ideas from various perspectives. That's very intentional. If you are like me, it takes more than one explanation, more than one reading, to grasp a new idea. I think these ideas are important enough that they bear repeating. Good luck with this book. You, and those you travel with, will benefit by all that you accomplish. Blessings to you on your journey.

Pause and Reflect

Let Go of the opinions of others.

Let go of the effect of your behavior on others.

Let go of the outcome of your actions and the many situations concerning you and your loved ones.

Do you currently practice any trait that empowers you? If you do, recount in your journal how that came about. If you don't, consider the benefits of detachment. You will feel like a new, quite powerful person, one who has taken charge of herself.

Take a moment every morning to envision yourself as a self-directed person. Being self-directed does not mean being selfish, nor does it mean ignoring others. Write in your journal what it does mean to you.

How does letting go feel to you? Share in your journal or with a friend. Is it a trait you cherish?

Detachment is practiced moment by moment.

It has not been my experience to perfect detachment after only one try. For me, detachment has been similar to seeking God's will: I have needed to do it every day, many times a day. It's akin to practicing any new exercise. It's not mysterious, really; it just feels unnatural at first. We are inclined to interfere in the business of others, but detachment closes that door. It follows on the heels of a decision, and one that empowers us a tiny bit more every time we make it. We must be willing to make it, however.

If we want to change how life feels, we have to be willing to change an aspect of our behavior because if we continue to do what we have always done, we will most likely continue to experience what we have always experienced. Detaching from those people who get under our skin, or from those situations we feel compelled to try to control, is committing to a specific change in behavior. But how do we do it? That's the niggling question for most of us. But I have some reasonable suggestions.

We detach in steps. The first step is to observe but say nothing. The second step is to say a quiet prayer and then avert our eyes, placing our mind with God and some details of our own life. The third step is to get busy, to

Copyright ©2010 *Let Go Now* by Karen Casey

Reprinted with permission of Red Wheel Weiser/Conari Press

Available at any bookstore or through the publisher at orders@redwheelweiser.com or 1-800-423-7087.

move on, and to thank God for giving us the willingness to let others do what they need to do. All these steps will need repeated practice; at least I have found that to be the case. But each time I have walked myself through them, I have felt empowered and hopeful, and that has made me willing to take the walk the next time too.

One moment at a time is how we live. So it makes sense that we can only detach one moment at a time too. What's stopping you from trying?

Accountability, ours and others', is the hallmark of detachment.

Letting others be accountable for themselves means we are relinquishing our need to assume responsibility for those actions and situations that clearly are not ours to manage. The attraction to be overly responsible is so great, however, and what makes it even greater is our lack of trust in any outcome we aren't part of.

Our fear about our future seduces us into thinking that if we could only ensnare our partners in our own very special web, taking responsibility for their lives along with our own, we'd be secure. But, as I've said, we cannot be even moderately responsible and attentive to our own very specific work if we are focusing on the work someone else is here to do. We can work in tandem with others, and in many instances should, but crossing the boundary between us that needs to be honored will eventually imprison us.

Learning how to be accountable is like learning any trait. Most of us aren't born with a natural inclination for it, but modeling the behavior of those people among us who seem to be peaceful might be one way to learn it. What we will see, with careful observation, is that letting others be wholly responsible and accountable for themselves appears to make folks feel good. Deciding we want to feel good is one of the most sensible reasons for adopting this practice.

Being accountable builds self-worth. It helps others to be able to trust us. Letting the people around us become accountable is one of the best gifts we can give them. Our doing for others what needs to be done by them will stunt their growth. Let's not be guilty of that.

Detachment is the way to cultivate peace, one moment at a time.

I claim I want to be peaceful all the time, yet I generally spend some hours every day in a space that's not particularly peaceful. And it's always for the same reason: I have placed my attention where it doesn't belong, on situations that don't really concern me. I am drawn like a moth to a flame when my loved ones (sometimes even strangers) are fussing over matters that trouble them. I read the signs and assume I am needed to resolve their problem. Sound familiar?

Turning away seems impossible if the person being affected is someone truly significant to me. But that's the very time I most need to do so. My primary role in anyone's life is to witness what their experience is, to offer suggestions only when they are sought, and to pray that all will be well and that the lesson they need is forthcoming. Each time I can practice any one of these responses, I will discover peace. And as the waves of peace wash over me, I will know, for certain, that I am fulfilling God's will in that moment.

Peace, however it visits us, feels so good. Wanting to capture it for longer spells is natural, and knowing that we can do so, by making the decision to observe and then turn away from situations that are not ours to resolve, makes the peaceful wave more than a wish. It can become our reality.

*To cultivate peace requires us to make some decisions.
We need to give up our need to manage anyone else's life.
We decide, instead, to address only those situations that are obviously ours, and then we pray for the willingness to do both.*

Those who are hardest to detach from are our best teachers.

I don't need to remind you that we are serving as teachers and students, interchangeably, all the time. But when we are in the midst of a conflict with someone over how a situation should be managed, we so easily forget those things that have given us strength and peace in the past. A conflict always means that a teaching and learning opportunity is presenting itself. In most cases, both sides need to detach; both sides can learn as well as teach. And if detachment is explored by one side or the other, both people will gain some moments of peace. It takes at least two to have a conflict, remember.

It's been my experience that the people I care most about are hardest to detach from. Perhaps I am too invested emotionally to walk away when I should. But I have learned, with practice, that I can always remain quiet. I can't always avoid wanting to respond, wanting to continue the conflict; but I can back off, and that's more than half the battle. Backing off, or averting our attention, may be the closest thing to peace when first attempted.

It seems our best teachers are no doubt the ones we love the most and also the ones who get under our skin most often. Some would say our meeting was not accidental; our lessons aren't, either. Turning a great teacher into our most loved and intimate friend is what this journey is all about, perhaps. That seems sensible to me, anyway. How about to you?

Every day someone who crosses our path cries out to be controlled or argued with or judged. Consider them God-sent. They are our teachers, one and all.

Detaching from others is one of the most rewarding and revealing changes we can ever make.

The reason detachment is rewarding is that it gives us so much relief. It allows us to thoroughly relax our bodies and our minds. It makes us feel reborn. And it gives us extra time to play for a change, to plant flowers perhaps, or read books, reconnect with old or new friends, take up painting or weaving or birding. It's amazing how much free time we have when we remove our attention from the many people and situations that didn't cotton to having our attention anyway.

But what does detachment reveal to us? Possibly that is an even more interesting consideration. What I have discovered is that detachment reveals we can live in concert with others, but we don't have to be in charge of each other or beholden to each other or controlled by each others' actions, opinions, wishes, or judgments. Detachment has revealed to me that I am far stronger than I ever thought, more resilient, courageous, creative, independent, and focused. My sense of self has soared since beginning the practice of detachment, and I know that I have no special powers. What has been true for me will certainly be true for anyone who applies the same effort I have applied.

I don't want to suggest that making a change of any kind is simple. Committing to the practice of detachment is a big change for most of us. But making any change incrementally is a good beginning. This will work with detachment, one opportunity at a time.

To begin with, I detach in the little ways that matter. In that way we can see what's in store for us in the days ahead. We can begin today and notice how much better we feel.