

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK M. LOBSIGER, AUTHOR OF THE ART OF SELFLOVE

In this in depth interview, Frank M. Lobsiger shares how Selflove is defined, how the lack of Selflove manifests itself in all areas of our lives and how cultivating a conscious and loving attitude with ourselves can help us overcome self-criticism, negative self-talk, low self-esteem and other negative experiences that many men and women deal with on a day-to-day basis.

What is the definition of Selflove?

Selflove the way I use it has two meanings. First it means the process of cultivating a conscious and loving relationship with oneself, which is also the foundation to create conscious and loving relationships with others. Secondly, it expresses the essential nature of your very “self” which is love. For this reason Selflove is spelled as one word because it expresses the innate unity of “self” and “love”.

What are the most common ways in which a lack of Selflove is exhibited?

The number one “happiness killer” - as I call it - in the course of one’s life is one’s own self-attack, which is expressed through self-criticism, self-rejection and self-abandonment. Self-criticism is all of the negative self-talk that we have going on in our daily life. It is expressed in words such as, “I’m not good enough,” “I’m not attractive,” “Nobody loves me,” and “I will never succeed.” Self-rejection is expressed in words such as “You shouldn’t think that,” “You shouldn’t feel that,” or “You shouldn’t be that way.”

Self-abandonment manifests when we abandon our own truth, our own reality and our own experience. We don’t take ourselves seriously, we don’t honor our inner truth and we don’t take a clear stance for our needs. We give up our own stand or point of view, which is often accompanied by physical and emotional neglect. People often think that the greatest pain in our lives is caused by other people or by ill-fated incidents and painful experiences, but if we examine our whole course of life, we discover that it’s really our own self-attack that causes the most pain and cuts us off from our own self, the origin of real happiness.

Self-attack is a negative habit that we originally learn as a survival strategy. We wanted to please our parents so that they keep loving us and would continue taking care of us. Therefore any behavior, emotion, or expression that our parents firmly disapproved of we immediately attacked in ourselves. Then as we grow older, we internalize this negative habit of attacking ourselves and making ourselves wrong for the way we are. This habitual self-attack lies at the root of all of our internal suffering and misery. But the good news is, like any destructive and painful habit, you can “unlearn” it and replace self-attack with the positive habit of loving yourself.

What is the first step toward cultivating a conscious, loving relationship with oneself?

The first step in loving yourself is to become aware of your here and now experience, which strengthens the inner observer in you. As human beings we have a tendency to get completely identified with our own experience and thus to be fully absorbed in it. Once we are identified with our experience we are no longer in touch with the inner observer and begin to behave in a reactive manner. This means, unconsciously, we automatically evaluate our experience and judge it as positive or negative. If it's a positive experience, then we want more of it, and we become attached to it. If it's a negative experience, then we have an instant aversion against it and we try to get away from it, change it or attack it. Once you're aware of your experience, you can choose your attitude and how you want to relate to your experience or yourself, and that's where Selflove or the cultivation of Selflove comes in.

How does the lack of Selflove negatively impact our relationship with oneself?

Usually the lack of Selflove expresses itself as self-attack in the form of self-rejection, self-criticism and self-abandonment. If we have a tendency to attack ourselves by being very critical, we create a self destructive or vicious circle. We enter this vicious circle unconsciously through our negative self-talk, which in turn begins to decrease our self-worth and self-esteem. As our self-worth and self-esteem diminish, we start feeling low self-confidence. We say things like, "I can't," "I won't succeed," "I don't deserve," and "I'm not good enough." When we say these words, and begin to believe that they are true, then they start to undermine our ability to succeed in the world. Our actions will become ineffective, scattered, unfocused or we might feel compelled to give up taking action and pursuing our goals in life. And this will lead to failure, non-success, and frustration, which consequently triggers even more self-attack and self-criticism and that leads us back to the beginning of the vicious circle. Since we're not succeeding, we keep beating ourselves up even more which reinforces the self-attack and thus keeps perpetuating the vicious circle.

On the other hand, if we want to step out of that vicious and self-destructive circle, we can start to love ourselves, which automatically increases our self-esteem and self-worth. As we begin to cultivate the Art of Selflove we will feel more positive about ourselves and life in general. You might find yourself saying: "I love myself, I feel good about myself, I feel good about who I am. No matter what happens I just keep loving myself." As our self-esteem increases we naturally grow a strong self-confidence. Which means, "I can," "I'm capable," or "I know I will succeed." This leads us to clear, effective, and focused action, which is aligned with our values and our goals. And this in turn leads us to success and positive results. And, of course it makes us feel good and increases our motivation to continue cultivating more Selflove. So that's an example of the positive circle or dynamic that's being created through the cultivation of the Art of Selflove.

Stuck in the vicious circle we have a tendency to become ever more critical towards ourselves and others. We avoid challenges and taking risks or accepting new projects, because we think that we will fail anyway. Therefore we tend to isolate, give up and go into victim mode. On the other hand if we keep cultivating Selflove, we are open to new challenges, we like new projects, we take risks and are open to networking. We are reaching out, we love to create new things and we have a creator mentality.

How does the lack of Selflove negatively impact our relationship with others?

Basically, what you have not learned to love in yourself, you cannot love in another person. What you love, fear or hate in yourself, you love, fear or hate in another. The way one relates to oneself, in the long run is the way you will relate to another person and their experiences. Let's say someone in your life has an experience that you usually judge, such as sadness. You really dislike sadness and have a tendency to run away from sadness. If the other person shows signs of sadness, you will likely judge her, make her wrong, try to take her out of her sadness or even try to withdraw from her so that you are no longer exposed to her sadness. And that's because you have not consciously learned to be with your own sadness in a conscious and loving way.

What's really important to remember is: the number one fear in relationships is to be attacked, to be judged, rejected, criticized, to be made wrong, to be blamed and essentially not to be wanted. If that happens then we don't feel safe and we don't feel loved. On the other hand the number one desire, wish or longing in relationships is to be *welcomed*, which means to be received, embraced, seen, heard, felt and understood, essentially to feel loved. So, if a human being learns just to be present, to welcome the other and allow her to be as she is with all of her experiences, then she will feel loved. And being and feeling loved fulfills the deepest longing that we all have in relationship.

We all have an unconscious expectation to be loved perfectly by another person; first by our parents, then by our friends and peers, and later by our life partner or spouse. But nobody loves us perfectly because we are all human beings. In the long run, this expectation leads to frustration and disappointment. So what do we do? We try to change the other person. But that's a threat for the other and automatically triggers his or her greatest fear: "I am not okay the way I am." "I am not loved as I am." And that puts the person into a defensive behavior pattern. All relational conflicts at their very root have to do with the fact that we cannot allow others to be as they are. We want to change them so that they will love us the way we want to be loved and behave the way we want them to. And that want creates constant struggle, tension and conflict in relationships. Rather than expecting the other to love you perfectly, begin with yourself. Take full self-responsibility for the fact that it your job to love yourself and to relate to yourself – particularly to your frustrated expectations, needs and desires - in a conscious and loving way. My book "The Art of Selflove" will show how to do that – step by step.

What areas of our lives does lack of Selflove commonly and negatively impact?

As I have mentioned before, a lack of Selflove is usually accompanied by habitual self-attack, in the form of self-criticism, self-rejection and self-abandonment which leads to a negative and self-destructive dynamic. This vicious circle essentially affects all areas of one's life negatively: first of all your relationship with yourself, since it undermines your self-esteem and self-worth and essentially your self-confidence; and secondly your relationship with others. Once a person's self-confidence is affected then he or she feels inferior in relation to other people, unworthy or even incapable to live a happy, fulfilling and successful life. Since everyone has a unique character and personality make-up everybody will cope with this lack of Selflove differently. Some have a tendency to become pleasers, others avoid contact and intimacy all together, and some try to dominate and control others in order to feel important and powerful.

There are innumerable strategies and behavior modifications to try to compensate for the lack of Selflove. But no matter what strategy we choose, nothing in life can really compensate for the lack of Selflove. Nothing will really make us happy and will truly satisfy us until we begin to love ourselves and to relate to our various experiences in the here and now in a conscious and loving way. Instinctively we all can feel if someone likes oneself or if someone is at war with him or herself. If you don't like yourself and think you are not okay the way you are, then you have a tendency to find fault in others and to criticize them openly or secretly which affects your relationships negatively. I once asked Kathleen Hendricks, author of "Conscious Relationship," in a couple's seminar, "What is the number one relationship killer?" Her response was, "Criticism. Criticizing the other and making him or her wrong." On the other hand if you love yourself, you feel okay the way you are and for the most part also feel that others are okay the way they are. And such a positive attitude towards others is the foundation to build harmonious and loving relationships.

Who is your target reader and how do you anticipate your book "The Art of Selflove" will help them embark on the road to finding their inner source of love and happiness?

I think my book the Art of Selflove is essentially for everyone because we all are in need to be more loving with ourselves. Most of all it's for everybody who suffers from self-criticism and negative self-talk. The central technique of my book, called the Welcoming-Process™ is a simple three-step method that will enable you to cultivate a conscious and loving relationship with yourself. Using the Welcoming-Process™ will help you step out of your negative self-talk, and transform and harmonize your negative internal experience in the here and now. The more you use the process, the more you create a positive and self-loving dynamic in your life, which builds up your self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence.

It's also for people who suffer from a loss of a loved one, or go through separation or a divorce and are in need of their own loving support and want to learn to access their own

inner source of love and happiness. Through the Welcoming-Process™ you learn to give yourself the loving attention and care that you miss and so deeply long for. If a loved one is no longer in your life, then it is up to you to tend to yourself in a conscious and loving way. The Welcoming-Process™ will show you how to do that.

Everyone will greatly benefit from my book who wants to learn the *art of loving* in the form of a practical method, not just to learn to love oneself - but also to improve one's relationships with others. It's also for people who would like to learn to relate to themselves in a conscious and loving way, especially when they feel upset, moody, frustrated or stressed. This method, the Welcoming-Process™ is intended to be used mainly when you feel *off-center*, highly emotional, full of worries and are in need of your own attention and loving care.

What inspired you to develop The Welcoming-Process™, and how have you seen it help transform the lives of the individuals that you've worked with?

Since I've been trained in body-centered psychotherapy, I have learned to guide and accompany my clients to go through the process of being present with their own experiences and then gradually to cultivate a loving attitude towards their experiences, independent of what the actual content is. This means through a practical method I was able to support and train people to develop a conscious and loving relationship with themselves. But the truth was that I did not sufficiently do that with myself.

And this fact really became obvious to me when I separated from my wife a few years ago; my now ex-wife. A few month into our separation I felt so desperate without her loving presence in my life that I intuitively knew either I look for another woman who fills my life with her love again or I better learn to love myself. Well, I decided for the latter. So, I embarked on a journey of finding out how to love myself and how to relate to myself in a conscious and loving way, especially when I would feel lonely, scared, angry, frustrated, stressed, or simply *off-center*. Well, my book *The Art of Selflove*, specifically the Welcoming-Process™ is my practical answer, how everybody can learn to love oneself and thus to cultivate a conscious and loving relationship with oneself, which is also the foundation to create loving and fulfilling relationship with others.

I have seen that the Welcoming-Process™ is an inherently self-transformative and self-harmonizing methodology based on the positive feedback that people have shared with me after having learned the process from me, either in one-on-one sessions or in a live Selflove training. In my book I also give some real life examples of people who have used the Welcoming-Process™ in moments when they were struggling and faced with very challenging life experiences. And most of all I know that the process works because I keep using it myself. Every time I have used the Welcoming-Process™ so far, I could witness how an initially highly stressful and intensely fear-based state of experience gradually transformed and harmonized. Everyone who uses the Welcoming-Process™ eventually reaches what I call a *plateau*, a balanced and calm state of being. But essentially, everybody has to verify for him-or herself if what I say is also true for him or her, simply by practicing this easy to learn process.

For many authors, writing a book can be likened to embarking on an exciting new journey. What was the journey like for you when you set out to write *The Art of Selflove*? Did you learn anything new about yourself or Selflove?

When starting to write the book, I asked myself a lot of questions. “How do you love?” “Is *love* and *falling in love* the same?” “How do you love yourself?” “How do you love another?” “When do you feel really loved?” and “Is the process of loving something we can learn?” The intention to find answers for these basic questions started the book writing process, and the process of answering the questions led me to the discovery of fundamental insights about human nature and human behavior. The search for tangible answers brought me to the point where I wanted to create a practical method that would enable me to cultivate a conscious and loving relationship with myself, especially in moments when I felt miserable, lonely, afraid, moody, stressed and in need of loving attention. My book, *The Art of Selflove* is the final result of this introspective journey and personal research. The Welcoming-Process™ which is the central technique of the Art of Selflove is a simple three-step method that anyone can learn and use who is interested in cultivating a conscious and loving relationship with oneself. The simple truth is: once you know how to love yourself, you also know how to love others.

What approach should readers take to reading the *Art of Selflove* in order to get the most from the content and manifest positive changes?

The book, *The Art of Selflove* is a practical self-help book that is divided into three parts. The first part is an overview of human nature and our relationship to our true *Self*, the true source of happiness. The second part deals with the importance of self-awareness and the cultivation of a loving attitude towards oneself. The third part represents the heart of the book and introduces the Welcoming-Process™ in a step-by-step manner to the reader. Ideally the reader would read the book in a sequential manner, but those readers who just want to learn the Welcoming-Process™ can go straight to part three of the book. The book is a practical manual that teaches the reader how to apply the Welcoming-Process™ in one’s own life. The book, *The Art of Selflove* contains memorable illustrations, easy to follow guidelines in the form of text boxes, *real life* Welcoming-Sessions and clear cut, practical exercises that teach the reader how to use the Welcoming-Process™ in daily life.

Once you have learned the Welcoming-Process™ you have an acquired a lifetime skill - like reading or driving a car – that you can use for all of you life. *The Art of Selflove* will take you by the hand and show you step by step how you can cultivate a conscious and loving relationship with yourself, especially in moments when you feel off-center and thus are in need of your own loving attention. And then, you will discover for yourself that loving yourself is truly the key to happiness.

What is the most important piece of advice you could give to someone who is struggling with self-criticism and self-attack and resistant to positive change?

If someone is aware that they are self-critical and have a tendency to attack themselves, they already have taken the first step, which is becoming aware of how they relate to themselves. Also, they have come to the place where they have a longing to change. That's a great place to start from. What's really important to remember is that self-criticism and negative self-talk is a habit that we acquired in our childhood. And since it is a habit it can also be unlearned and replaced by the positive habit of cultivating a conscious and loving attitude toward our own experiences. The Welcoming-Process™ can be easily used in daily life and is a powerful way to start replacing self-criticism and negative self-talk with a conscious and loving attitude towards yourself and others that you can use for all of your life.

Frank M. Lobsiger is available for interviews and speaking engagements. If you would like to reprint this interview in your publication or repost it on your website, please contact Frank Lobsiger at FrankLobsiger@TheArtofSelflove.com