



Guilt & Shame the Robbers of Your Mind

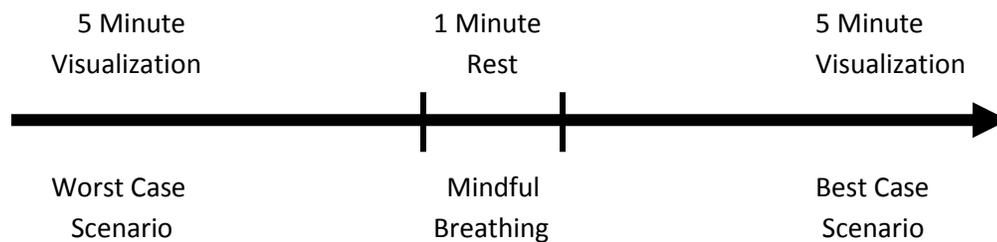
By Shelley Roy

Have you long held onto regrets from your past? Perhaps words or actions spewed out of you in the heat of a moment, and now you wish you could take them back. As you think about a past event do you realize the full impact of something you did or said and acknowledge the unexpected consequences. Are you clinging to the memory of an old regret, hoping it will serve as a reminder to “never again?”

These thoughts of your unforgiven past steal your joy and pleasure in the present and almost all of your ability to create the future of your dreams. Learning to forgive yourself rids your mind of wasted energy and clears the way for imagineering.

If you find yourself mired in the muck of your past here are five tips that you can take to free yourself and move forward more easily. To begin this journey you will need awareness, desire and a strong commitment to forgive yourself.

1. Ask yourself “Could I have done worse in a past situation?” If the answer is “yes,” then ask yourself “What would have been worse?” I first heard this question from Diane Gossen, author of **RESTITUTION: RESTRUCTURING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**. I’ve learned that this question opens the door to the good/bad box. The good/bad box is the labeling that you embrace when you think, “This was good—that was bad.” When you think that an action is a *mistake* you place yourself in the bad box. The bad box holds shame, regret and guilt. Looking at the possibility that you could have done something worse opens the box’s door so that you can take the first step to letting go.
2. Make a list of any negative thinking you engage in when you think about this past event. You might want to do this on several occasions. Then review your list and see if a pattern emerges. Take two of the stickier thoughts and find a replacement thought. Here’s an example: “Why did I ever trust him?” “Why didn’t I listen to my own gut?” Replace with “I’ve learned to listen to my inner voice and have learned to discern whom I can trust.” The next time the sticky thought pops in quickly grab the replacement thought.
3. Take a few minutes (3-5) and visualize the worst thing you can imagine you could have done or said. Then take deep cleansing breaths for about a minute, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Next, visualize the best you that you could have been in the situation (3-5 minutes).



During each of the next few days, make time to take 3-5 minutes imagining the best-case scenario. This can also work well for laying a foundation for a future event.

4. Make a list of the ten lessons you learned from the event(s). Some of these lessons can become part of the new story you tell about your past. The take-away from every *mistake* is the knowledge and skills you gain to become more the person you want to be. Mistakes are nothing more than learning opportunities in disguise.
5. Retell the story. Learn to retell the story from a position of neutrality. You are not the victim or the persecutor. It might help to think of it as a movie script that ends with the main character (you) learning an important life lesson that changes everything. One of my favorite examples comes from Louise Hay in the video **YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE**. She talks about the end of her eighteen-year marriage and says, "It was a rather lovely eighteen years, and then the divorce came."

Any or all of these have helped individuals begin the process of healing. Part of forgiving self is recognizing that you wouldn't be who you are today if you hadn't have lived your past. Your regrets and your triumphs are all part of who you are. After all, it is only in your mind that you categorize past actions as good or bad. History is full of examples of oopses that have lead to great things. George Crum, a chef at the Carey Moon Lake House in Saratoga Springs, lost his temper one day when a customer kept sending a plate of fried potatoes back. The customer wanted them more fried and thinner. So George in his irritated state sliced them insanely thin and fried them until they were hard as a rock. Voila—the potato chip!

Release the energy of your mind! Let go of the past, live fully in the present and keep moving forward.