

A photograph of a white lighthouse perched on a dark, grassy cliff overlooking the ocean. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# THE LOVE, LOSS, AND FORGIVENESS PROJECT

*If we forgive ourselves and others  
for past transgressions  
and so shed the burdensome stories,  
we become able to experience  
love in the present moment,  
for love is always available  
to those who are  
light enough to carry it.*

– N. Michael Murphy  
*The Secrets of Love,  
Loss, and Forgiveness*

# Welcome

## THE LOVE, LOSS, AND FORGIVENESS PROJECT

This booklet will introduce the practices of *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness* and help answer questions you may have about how the practices can be helpful to you in your life. Most of us wish for loving relationships with our family, partner, children, and friends. But we often carry deeply held grievances and hurts that inhibit our ability to live and love fully. The practices of *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness* help us shed these burdens and move towards more fruitful, satisfying, and healthy relationships. Moreover, they prepare us for living a more loving life by teaching us how to unconditionally love ourselves.

**L**earning to love ourselves with compassion is vital to all relationships, both personal and professional. The work is, perhaps, especially important for caregivers—parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, therapists, and others—for caregivers can only give care to the extent that they know how to love and care for themselves. The practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness are also vital for men and women in the business world, where the bottom line receives far more attention than soul and spirit.

People choose to participate in the practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness for many reasons. Participants have come to the program with questions and thoughts like these:

“I never had the words nor took the opportunity to say what I wanted to say to my alcoholic mother before she died. I’ve been in therapy but continue to grieve and blame myself—how do I make peace with her, and myself, now that she’s gone?”

“When I was young, I was always told to put others first. I don’t seem to have any time for myself because of all I have to do. I’ve read that the greatest gift my husband and I could give our children is to love ourselves and each other, but how do we start?”

“I have never been close to my siblings. In fact, I was glad to get away from our miserable family when I left for college. Now I’m really struggling with my teenage children, and I don’t know how to make our family life different.”

“My parents are getting old. I feel responsible for their care now, and I’m really worried about the future, when they become unable to manage for themselves. We’ve never talked about dying, or much of anything else that’s personal. I don’t know if I should get into it, or how to begin.”

The practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness are as simple, practical, and down-to-earth as they are life-changing, for when we learn to love, the answers to the questions above become apparent to us. Through this work, it is possible to discover opportunities for positive transformations that are available to us when we attend to and let go of painful experiences.



N. Michael Murphy

## THE STORY BEHIND LOVE, LOSS, AND FORGIVENESS

In the hospice, over almost two decades, I witnessed many stories and guided families and their loved ones in their heart-wrenching efforts to connect with one another and say goodbye. In helping them to become lighter through the expression of love and forgiveness, I saw that most were able to die more peacefully, and the families were better prepared to let go...

The practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness result from a lifetime of work by Dr. N. Michael Murphy. An early leader in the hospice movement in the United States, Michael founded St. Peter's Hospice in Albany, New York, in 1978 and served as its medical director for 17 years. During that time, he witnessed the deaths of hundreds of people and guided family meetings that preceded those deaths.

Through that work, Michael saw that the time around death contains profound opportunities for change and healing—the last chance to open ourselves to the experience of unconditional love. His hospice work inspired him to create a training program on Death and Dying and to write his first book, *The Wisdom of Dying: Practices for Living*, published in 1999.

In Michael's early workshops, participants learned that if they faced what was happening when a loved one was dying and said what needed to be said, miracles of healing often took place. For Michael, the extraordinary healing that regularly occurred in these workshops begged a crucial question: why wait until we are dying to experience the profound healing of unconditional love? Since that time, he has guided international workshops in Love, Loss, and Forgiveness, and has written his second book, *The Secrets of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness: A Drug-free Prescription for the Loving Life*.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRACTICES OF LOVE, LOSS, AND FORGIVENESS

### *How does the process work?*

The practices of *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness* offer simple tools to help individuals shed emotional burdens and bring about their own healing. Each participant joins with eight others in their community—friends, co-workers, and/or family members. Because several of the exercises take place in groups of three, the group size of nine is important. Each participant receives a guidebook and DVD series that will guide the *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness* process.

The initial program consists of a nine-month training that has been refined over many years with community participants in Belgium and the Netherlands. The first meeting takes place in the evening followed by a full day, and after that, participants meet once a month, and gatherings last about four hours. For each of the first six monthly sessions, participants view a DVD and utilize a guidebook that

prepares them for that month's work. The guidebook expands on the ideas presented in the DVD and offers suggestions for preparatory or follow-up work for each month's gathering, including visualizations, recording of observations and dreams, and so on. The guidebook also provides guidelines for the process of each monthly group gathering.

During each monthly session, participants learn a practice described in the *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness* guidebook and illustrated in the accompanying DVD. Participants work in groups of three (*trios*) to complete the practices. In each trio, participants take turns in the roles of **storyteller**, **witness**, and **guide**. The storyteller tells a story suggested in that month's practice (for example, telling about an important loss in his or her life) to a second member of the trio who acts as witness. The third member of the trio acts as guide for the storyteller. Embodying each of these three roles—storyteller, witness, and guide—is essential to living a loving life.

**Storytelling:** When we are able to tell our more difficult and troubling stories, uninterrupted and lovingly witnessed, and hear our own stories with compassion and love, we are then able to let them go. This does not mean we forget them, but that the stories lose their burdensome weight, allowing us to carry them lightly.

**Witnessing:** Non-judgmental witnessing differs from listening, for the witness simply listens with compassion and unconditional love, and does not analyze or judge. The witness does not “do” anything—no nodding, sympathetic words, or helpful suggestions. Through this silent witnessing of ourselves and others, we become human “beings” rather than humans “doing.”

**Guiding:** In the trio, the guide sits near the storyteller and gives reassurance and courage through his quiet presence. The guide keeps track of time in the exercise and may gently encourage the storyteller if he or she is at a loss for words. Learning the art of guiding ourselves and others with hopefulness and enthusiasm is a crucial part of living a loving life.

Participants usually continue with the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness practices after the initial nine-month training to reinforce and deepen their experience, as is essential with any practice. Many participants who have completed the nine-month training choose to serve as Group Conveners for other groups of nine.

### ***Are the community-based groups of nine necessary? Can't I do this work on my own?***

The peer-facilitated community-based group serves as a safe place for individuals to experience themselves in a more loving light. Group members learn to tell their stories about loss, bereavement, and grief, and experience the transformative power of forgiveness and “letting go.” In this safe setting, participants can lay down the

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*We leave no one behind us. Dead or alive, they travel with us on our life journey. The only question is whether we carry them as a heavy burden, or whether we carry their images as lightly as a homeopathic potion that becomes a remedy.*

—N. Michael Murphy,  
*The Secrets of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness*

burden and suffering caused by painful stories, sometimes carried for a lifetime. This process empowers individuals to orchestrate their own transformations.

### ***Who leads the groups of nine?***

Within each group of nine, one or more members are Group Conveners. A Group Convener has already attended a Love, Loss, and Forgiveness workshop or has completed the nine-month practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness. We believe that the convener role for the community-based groups of nine is best when shared, so we encourage convener trios. This trio of Group Conveners then finds six others to form a community-based group. The Group Conveners are responsible for organizing and facilitating the group's monthly gatherings.

The structure of the monthly gatherings fosters equal participation in the process. A **Group Convener** starts each monthly gathering and is available for any questions that arise. By and large, however, the structure of the Love, Loss and Forgiveness program, as laid out in the DVD and Guidebook, provides the necessary instruction and guidance for carrying out the practices.

### ***What if a situation arises that the group can't handle? Don't we need a professional on hand?***

This is a common early fear for participants. Letting go of painful stories can bring out strong emotions. At these times, it's important to remember that tears aren't a problem, they're a solution—a salt-and-water solution that dissolves the calcified old stories and washes them away. Other responses may arise as well, and group members offer loving witness to the storyteller, whatever his or her experience. By being in the presence of loving witnesses, the storyteller is able to mobilize her own inner witness and guide and feel safe once again.

But group members aren't on their own in the training process—the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness Project grows from a sturdy grassroots support system that empowers individuals to engage more fully in their lives and communities.

### ***Can you tell me about the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness support system?***

The Love, Loss, and Forgiveness Project has a Board of Directors in the United States and will have a similar board in Europe. Each board will hire an Executive Director who will oversee the activities in the US and Europe and will work closely with the Regional Guides to help support Group Conveners.

### ***What is my time commitment?***

As mentioned above, the initial training process takes place over a nine-month period. Before each monthly group gathering, you will watch a short DVD at home and work with the accompanying guidebook. Most group sessions last

approximately four hours, with the exception of the first and eighth sessions. In the first gathering, participants meet on a Friday evening and for a full day on Saturday. In the eighth month, the gathering involves a weekend retreat (Friday evening to Sunday afternoon). The final gathering includes an evening feast that the participants create together.

In between monthly gatherings, trios of participants meet once to discuss the previous gathering and prepare for the next. The guidebook offers suggestions for deepening your practice, through meditations, visualizations, journal writing, and other activities.

### ***Is the Project a form of therapy?***

The Project teaches practices that prepare us for the fluctuations of feelings and the uncertainties associated with love, loss and forgiveness. All of us need this basic education since loss is an inevitable part of life, and we pay little attention to fostering compassionate love especially towards ourselves and to understanding the healing power of forgiveness. For some people, difficult life circumstances may require additional help in the form of therapy that may be a useful addition to the Project's educational program.

### ***How do I begin?***

We are in the pilot or start-up phase of the Project and have nine-member groups active or about to start in the states of New York and Michigan in the US as well as in Belgium, the Netherlands and Romania. During this pilot phase, Dr. Michael Murphy will be the acting Regional Guide for all of these community-based groups.

Here are the options for you:

1. If you have taken a workshop with Michael before or have completed the nine-month practice curriculum, and you wish to be a Group Convener for a new community-based group of nine, Michael will help get you started. Email him at [info@lovelossforgiveness.org](mailto:info@lovelossforgiveness.org).
2. Michael periodically offers two-day Love, Loss, and Forgiveness start-up workshops (see description below). If you complete one of these workshops you can serve as a Group Convener for a new group in your area.
3. For any other enquiries, email [info@lovelossforgiveness.org](mailto:info@lovelossforgiveness.org)

### ***What are Start-up workshops?***

Start-up workshops are available in various locations in the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Romania. Dr. Michael Murphy currently leads these workshops, and as other Regional Guides emerge from the LLF process, they, too, will offer the start-up workshops.





These workshops are 2-day samplers of the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness practices. They introduce participants to some of the central concepts found in the guidebook including: working in Trios, the Talking Stick, the Gaze practice, and the Scream practice.

This workshop does not take the place of any of the 9-month session activities, but it gives participants a feel for how it will be in the 9-person community-based groups.

Start-up workshop participants may become Group Conveners for a new 9-person group. They may ask two others from the start-up workshop or any other persons to be co-conveners to help start a new group by then each inviting three others. At least one person should have had the experience of a start-up workshop or a longer workshop offered in the past by Michael. Ideally, all three conveners will have had such an experience.

***How much does it cost?***

The grassroots nature of the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness project helps keep participant expenses to a minimum. There is a charge for the two-day “start-up” workshops that provide an opportunity to experience some of the practices, but you do not need to attend a start-up workshop to participate in a community-based group of nine.

There will be a small fee for group membership that will help to support the Regional Guide activities. In addition you will need to purchase both the Practices of Love, Loss, and Forgiveness Interpretive Guidebook which is currently available through Group Conveners in pdf form, and the DVD when it becomes available.

*At these times, it's  
important to remember  
that tears aren't a  
problem, they're a  
solution—  
a salt-and-water solution  
that dissolves the  
calcified old  
stories and washes  
them away.*

## WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT THE PROGRAM

One has to be able to love oneself before one can love somebody else— that was news to me! I used a lot of time and power to get seen and recognized; work, career, house, cars, etcetera, yet it sucks all the energy out of me. By loving, caring and treating with respect, I get the same back from others and that feels so good! What started with skepticism became one of the most valuable and precious gifts I ever gave myself and my partner Dian. The biggest revelation was that we all have it within us... Why did I wait for 52 years?

—*Bart van der Weiden, Holland*

I've been coming to LLF workshops since the mid-1990s. As a therapist specializing in grief and loss work, I've kept coming back, because the work speaks to the most central issues in psychotherapy: how to love, how to grieve, and how to let go.

The workshops teach any one who's willing to look deeply into their most painful relationships that there is a way to heal: not through resolving conflicts, because some can never be resolved, but by gazing with great love and compassion at the Self and the Other, who both are crying out to be loved and to be seen. Amazingly, the simple acts of gazing, acknowledging pain, and intending to forgive/let go are powerful catalysts that allow healing to begin.

As someone in one of the healing professions, I've learned that it is crucial to know how to love and care for myself, in order to be able to continue doing the important work of caring for others. Attending the workshop multiple times serves to remind me of the importance of caring for myself and my relationships, even as I attend to my clients and supervisees.

—*Cindy Morgan, Michigan, USA*

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# LOVE LOSS<sup>AND</sup> FORGIVENESS



For general information about the Love, Loss, and Forgiveness Project, and to find out about start-up workshops for your area, please contact Dr. Michael Murphy at: [mmurphy103@eircom.net](mailto:mmurphy103@eircom.net)

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Dear Fellow-Searchers,

I have been fortunate and privileged to be involved with the workshops that were the forerunners of this project. As both participant and facilitator, I have learned about witnessing and loving by taking the risk of diving into my feelings and my pain. The exchange of a life that was inhibited by guilt, disappointment, and loneliness for one that is lighter and more loving is a constant source of amazement to me. I am a work in progress, for this practice is life-long.

It took me a very long time to let go of long-carried burdens that I also imposed on those close to me, and it took me decades to love myself so that I could become better able to love others. I hope you will not wait so long! May we re-discover the love in ourselves for ourselves, for it will ripple outwards and help to change the world.

Join us in the *Love, Loss, and Forgiveness Project*. The Practice is so helpful, and we have nothing to lose but our suffering!

With love and gratitude,  
Michael Murphy