

TRUST

Also by Iyanla Vanzant

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TRUST

MASTERING THE FOUR
ESSENTIAL TRUSTS

IYANLA Vanzant



SMILEYBOOKS

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This book is dedicated to:

Every child whose inherent trusting nature has been knowingly or unknowingly violated by someone he/she loved and trusted

Every woman whose heart has been betrayed by people who simply didn't value the trust she placed in them

Every man whose confidence, self-worth, and agency has been diminished because of his race or stature, because society has deemed him to be untrustworthy

Every person who may believe that trust is something you give and receive because he/she does not understand it is a state of mind and being

To us all I say, *Lean not on your own understanding because we really do not know what anything is for.*

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A RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT TRUST
IS LIKE A CAR WITHOUT GAS,
YOU CAN STAY IN IT ALL YOU WANT,
BUT IT WON'T GO ANYWHERE.

—*Unknown*

This was not the first time; Max had violated Cece's trust and then denied having done so on several occasions. He had stolen money from her and tearfully protested her accusations at least three times. And he had failed to honor her boundaries or to respect the rules of the house more times than she cared to remember.

Each time Cece made excuses for her brother. She told herself that Max was young, that he was still learning, and that he needed repeated instructions to get the gist of what was being offered to him. Each time she wanted to believe him, but doing so meant that she had to diminish, deny, or dismiss her gut feelings. In order to trust him, she had to distrust herself and disown her intuition. Because the truth about Max was simply too difficult to accept, she chose to violate herself instead.

This time, Cece told herself that things would be different, that Max would be different. He had been out of her home and partially out of her life for over a year. When he contacted her, asking if he

could stay for a few days, until he could get in touch with a friend, he sounded different and it felt different. This time he had a plan. He wanted to save some money, make a final break from his co-dependent girlfriend, and get his own place. He talked about some of the things he had learned since his last departure and finally acknowledged his previous wrongdoings by asking for forgiveness.

Cece wanted so desperately to believe that Max had changed that she failed to consult with her own internal guidance system. His words had warmed her heart, and the truth was, she missed him. This time, in an attempt to take a hard line, Cece gave Max clear boundaries and a time limit. He had three weeks to figure everything out; during those three weeks he would have to work to earn his place; and he was not to have any guests in the home. Three weeks turned into three months because he really toed the line. He was supportive and helpful in everything she asked of him.

Well . . . there were a few slips here and there, but nothing major. The slips were caused more by mindlessness than intentional bad behavior. Things got a little rocky when Max reengaged with his girlfriend, Meagan; however, after their temporary separation, even she seemed different. Meagan was more polite and attempted to be helpful when she did come around. When the two of them got into an argument, they would both back down and correct themselves as soon as they were challenged or questioned. Shortly thereafter, one or both of them would apologize, and things would return to a peaceful norm fairly quickly.

In Cece's mind, all of this was concrete evidence that things had changed and that she could trust that Max was doing better. It was this process, the signs of humility and his willingness to make corrections, that allowed her to believe that he could be trusted.

Cece stopped challenging the little things Max said and did that felt off. She relaxed her defenses. She ignored her concerns. She placed her trust in what she wanted to believe about Max rather than checking in with herself and holding fast to her boundaries.

The surprise birthday party that her family organized shocked her. Without warning, what had started out as a quiet Saturday evening morphed into people everywhere—dancing, eating, and celebrating her on this special day. No one ever knew what to give Cece as a gift, so they all gave her money. Each person came to her and offered words of love and gratitude as they stuffed some amount of money somewhere on her body. When it was all said and done, she had money glued, pinned, or taped everywhere on her body and on her clothing, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Like a stripper, she peeled the bills off and threw them into a basket. It was hilarious, the highlight of the party.

After Cece said good-bye to the last guest, she took the basket and placed it in the most sacred place in her home, her prayer room. Believing that it would be safe there, she closed the door and went to bed. After the party, Max left the house to spend a few days with his cousin. The next morning, as scheduled, Cece left her home for a three-day business trip. As she buckled her seat belt, she had a brief inclination to go back in and move the money, to hide it. But being too lazy to walk back and thinking that no one was home anyway, she ignored her gut feeling and took off as planned.

On the morning Cece was scheduled to return, she got a telephone call from her sister, who had forgotten she was away. Her sister had gone by the house looking for Cece to join her on a brief shopping trip. Her sister said that when she got to the house, she found Max in the kitchen counting money. At first, she didn't think anything about it, but then something just didn't feel right.

Cece's heart dropped. She asked her sister to go into her prayer room and see if there was any money in the basket next to the vase of flowers. Her sister wanted to know where her birthday money was. "Just go," she instructed her again. As Cece waited, her stomach went sour, and her head began to ache. Her sister reported that there was \$77 in the basket. "Is that your birthday money?" she asked.

Cece wanted to hang up and throw up. Instead, she asked her sister to check the guest room to see if Max was there. He was not in the guest room but outside with the dog. Heartbroken, Cece told her sister to call all of the men in the family and ask them to come and deal with the all-too-familiar situation. Cece's brother, Max, whom she had trusted enough to allow to stay in her home again, after too many betrayals, had stolen all but \$77 of her birthday money. Because she didn't trust herself not to cause him severe bodily harm, Cece had to turn the situation over to the men in the family, who had vowed the last time that if Max betrayed her again, they would set him straight.

How had this happened? Why had this happened? Cece lamented. In truth, it was painfully simple. Max had violated his sister again because she had wanted to believe that he had actually changed. The first time she had discovered him smoking in his room after she had asked him not to smoke in her home *was a sign* that he could not be trusted to honor his word. Cece had been violated again because she put more stock in Max's smooth talk than she did in her own gut feelings.

She remembered that once when she had returned home after a shopping trip, she had felt that something was not quite right, but she ignored it. Max had been just a tad too friendly, and he seemed restless. Later, when she heard him talking on the phone, she decided to pursue what she had first ignored. In their conversation, she discovered that he had invited his friend into the house to use the restroom after she had specifically asked him not to have anyone in the house in her absence. Cece let her annoyance go after he swore the guy had been in the house for only five minutes to pee.

If Cece's antennae had been up then, she could have prepared herself for the even deeper desecration now. She was violated because she couldn't accept the unpleasant thoughts she had about her brother and the unsettling feelings that keep surfacing. She beat them down when they came up, because Max's behavior seemed so different this time and his words sounded so sincere. In reality, though, there had been warning signs that she had refused to listen

to. These signs—plus the small, seemingly insignificant violations—were mounting evidence that her trust had been misplaced.

Cece knew that Max was impulsive, that he often acted without thinking or considering the consequences. She knew that he had no sense of self-worth and therefore could not value their relationship—or any relationship. Max said what he needed to say and did what he needed to do to get what he needed in the moment. The fact that this was the result of his childhood and life experiences was none of her business. She knew that he had been abandoned and rejected by both of his parents, and as a result he had no self-esteem. She knew who he was and what he was capable of, and yet she expected him to behave differently.

Max had spent the better part of his adult life sleeping on other people's sofas and living out of black plastic bags. For all intents and purposes, he was homeless. Every place he stayed was temporary because he knew that it would be only a matter of time before he did or said something that would get him put out. Max would try for as long as he could to toe the line and live up to the expectations. Now Cece realized that Max didn't have the understanding or capacity or perhaps even the desire to do better. She accepted that he was okay knowing that sooner or later he would need to hustle up another temporary sofa or corner in a back room.

Cece was betrayed because she did not trust what she knew about the mismatch between her expectations and her brother's capacity. She expected Max to do what she knew he could not do and to be who she knew he was not . . . and finally the bill came due.

TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST

It is impossible for people who are untrustworthy to become trustworthy simply because you want them to be that way. Trust is a matter of character. Some folks are untrustworthy because of the belief patterns that are tied to their past experiences. They may have learned or come to believe that trustworthiness is not important. Others are untrustworthy as a matter of conscious

or unconscious choice. People show you who they are in what they do. This is not to say that people cannot change. They can. Nevertheless, you must trust what you see people do and build your self-trust muscles until you have the capacity to say no to their inappropriate or unacceptable behavior the first time you encounter it.

While it is possible to love untrustworthy people, continuing to place your trust in them is not wise. Trust grows from and deepens with intimacy. Trusting others requires that you first and foremost learn to be intimate with yourself. The more intimate you are with yourself, the more truth you can tell yourself about yourself. The more time you spend in contemplation of what makes you tick, the more you know who you are, and the more you will learn about whom you can trust. When you are not intimate with yourself, your attempts to trust others will always fall short because you will overlook key elements and important signs revealed in their behavior.

Self-intimacy fosters understanding. An understanding of yourself supports you in learning to see and understand other people. Understanding people is essential to your ability to trust them. This level of understanding is the result of the many small interactions and connections that occur over time. In the process, you learn to trust people's way of being: how they show up in the room, in the community, and in the world.

SELF-PROTECTION

There is always an element of risk involved with trust, so you must be willing to risk being wrong about what you feel and sense. That means you must take precautions. If protecting yourself by trusting what you know means hurting other people's feelings—so be it. They can and will recover. However, when you trust yourself, your first thoughts will not be about anyone else, they will be about you and what feels right for you.

Remember, when you do not trust yourself, you cannot and will not trust anyone else. Instead, you will ignore your inner voice and

intuitive inklings and tell yourself that what you feel is wrong. Why? Because your suspicions will not hold the other person in a good light. When you cannot face the truth, you'll find yourself making excuses for the demonstrated bad behavior that provides a clear indication that the person cannot be trusted.

Often, you will ignore the warning signs because they are simply too stressful or too difficult to acknowledge. Or the circumstances go against what you want to believe, and accepting the truth would create a domino effect in your life. So you dismiss or deny the very clear intuitive and explicit messages you receive by expecting people to live up to a level or capacity of trustworthiness that they simply cannot or choose not to honor.

When you do not trust yourself, what you feel, and what you know, you will expect people to be who they are not. You will hope against hope that they will do things you already know they cannot do. You will expect them to be who you want them to be rather than trusting what you know about who they are and what they are capable of doing. *This is not trust.* This is magical thinking, and engaging in it will set you up for a big letdown. Trusting yourself is important when dealing with others because it protects you from repeated violations and devastating heartbreaks.

When you do trust yourself, you are able to read situations, environments, and people in a way that supports your personal boundaries and keeps you safe. Self-trust also equips you to communicate to others clearly regarding what is and is not acceptable. You know what feels right and what does not, and you do not question what you feel in response to what others may do or say.

Never measure your inner clarity in response to what someone else may say or do. When you trust yourself, people cannot talk you out of what you know from within. In fact, tell others what you know as a demonstration that they cannot and will not put one over on you. You then have the ability and willingness to alter your behavior in a way that protects you and promotes an environment in which you feel safe, an environment you can trust.

When you trust yourself, you know that it's okay to see people as they are without feeling bad when what you know does not put them in a good light. When you know certain people have a propensity for dishonesty, there is no need to feel bad about it. Trust yourself enough to take precautions about how you participate in their stories and activities and adjust what you expect from your interactions with them accordingly. When you trust yourself, you don't feel bad about knowing the truth about yourself or anyone else.

As human beings we want to think the best about everyone. But the truth is, not everyone can be trusted. Some people are at a place in their own growth and learning where they do not honor themselves enough for you to trust them. It is also true that some people, at their current level of development, do not deserve to be trusted. Yes, people can change. Yes, people do deserve a second chance. Yes, there will be those instances when you'll think everything seems fine, only to discover later that it was not. When you trust yourself, you will take clear, definitive action the moment you feel an inkling or see a sign that something is off. In learning to trust others, you must learn how to distinguish between your current inner knowing and your judgments about people's past or past behaviors.

Trusting others requires a level of intimacy, a depth of understanding, and clear evidence that the people being trusted have the capacity to honor and live up to your expectations.

PERFORMANCE DATA

Trusting others is both a logical and an emotional experience that requires that your head and heart come into agreement. Logically, you learn whether or not you can trust people by calculating the risk involved. You may have faith in human nature and potential; however, you must also trust what you know based on what you have seen and experienced. In business, this is called performance data.

Trusting others requires that you gather and assess the data being provided through communication and behavior *before* you

invest your trust. This logical assessment has nothing to do with expecting people to “earn your trust.” To do that is to ask others essentially to guarantee to you that they will not make any mistakes as they learn to live up to your expectations. That is not going to happen! People will make mistakes, and in doing so, they may hurt your feelings or sensibilities. This does not mean they cannot be trusted.

The logical assessment that is required in learning to trust others means that you must determine, through intimate contact and communication, whether or not *who they are and what they do* keeps you safe. And whether or not the way they are being with you feels honorable and honest. When people never show up when they say they will, or when they always have an excuse or reason for not doing what they say they will, you can draw the logical conclusion that they probably cannot be trusted with more important things, like your heart. This brings us to the emotional experience of trusting others.

We all have valid reasons not to trust people. People lie. People forget. People will do whatever they think they need to do to get what they want from someone else. People make mistakes. People are emotionally clumsy and negligent. People will consciously and unconsciously hurt our feelings and then deny or become defensive about what they have done.

When it comes to trusting others, it requires that we are willing to be vulnerable and risk being hurt. For average card-carrying human beings, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and then being taken advantage of is one of our greatest fears. This great fear, coupled with the fear of rejection, the fear of abandonment, the fear of failure, the fear of disappointment, the fear of being wrong, the fear of being ridiculed or of looking stupid, and the fear of losing love makes trusting others an almost impossible task.

Yet as humans, we crave companionship, connection, love, and intimacy with others. These cravings can and often do make us hypervigilant about managing and controlling what others do and how they do it. You will not grow emotionally and learn to trust

others if or when you are attempting to control them. Instead, you must be intimate with and understanding enough of yourself to know that, no matter what happens, no matter what other people do or don't do, you will be okay.

BLOOD TRUST

It made everyone cringe when Grandma said it, but Jess had proven time and time again that Grandma was right: "If you will lie, you will steal."

No one understood why she did it. Spending quality time with her, listening to her speak, or involving her in any project that required hard work or consistent support made the truth indisputable. Jess was a liar and a thief who had hit almost everyone in the Porter family. Her mother, her siblings, her cousins, and her aunts and uncles all had a horror story they could tell about something Jess had stolen or something she lied about that involved the resources of other members of the family.

No one could figure out how to convince Jess that her felonious behavior wasn't necessary. They all loved her. All she ever needed to do was ask for their help or support. They had each, over time, forgiven her and let her back into their homes and lives. Things would be fine for a little while, and then—BAM! The cash would disappear. The credit card would have charges. The jewelry would be gone, and Jess would actually help you look for the missing item. Then you would discover who had invaded your account, and Jess would deny, deny, deny that she had had anything to do with it, only to be caught in another lie.

Everyone in the family shared a jaw-dropping moment when they discovered that Jess had cleaned out her grandma's bank account. All the money that Granddaddy had left her was gone. This time, however, Jess had covered her tracks so well, it took them almost a year to discover what she had done and how she had done it.

Aunt Belle was the first to raise suspicions about whether or not Jess had reformed her thieving ways. After Jess had written a

string of checks on her mother's account and bought a computer with her brother's credit card, she had been all but banned from the family home. She was allowed to visit on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and that was it. At all other times, she could call and folks would speak to her, but she was not allowed into anyone's home. Those who let her in on holidays did everything in their power never to leave her unattended.

Jess's sister Candas was the hardest on her. She constantly reminded her of what she had done and attached a few choice names to those memories. Momma Porter would not allow bickering between siblings, so she would rarely tell Candas when she saw or spoke to Jess. She loved her daughter and actually felt guilty about her bad behavior, believing there was something she had done or not done that caused Jess to betray and violate her loved ones the way she did.

Jess was a teenager when her fingers first became sticky, which is when Momma Porter put her in therapy. From the age of 16 until she was about 22, Jess seemed to have been reformed. She made peace with her father and how strict he had been with her and her siblings. She came to understand how the experience of deprivation as a child gave her an insatiable thirst to have things that she did not need, could not afford, or was simply attracted to as an adult. The strange thing was that she didn't steal from stores or strangers; instead, she went to great lengths to steal from those who cared the most about her. But stealing from Grandma! Come on, Jess! *That just ain't right on any day of the week.*

Momma Porter had bought Grandma Porter a new computer for Christmas. They all wanted her to join the family's online page so she could keep up with family news and information. Jess was the geek in the family and agreed to help Grandma become familiar with all of the new technology so that she could always be in touch with the relatives who lived at a distance. Momma Porter helped Grandma set up all of her online bill-pay accounts, and, at a time when everyone thought Jess had reformed, she gave Jess the passwords.

Jess showed Grandma where to go and what to do to store her passwords and how to change them. When Candas discovered that Jess had Grandma's passwords, she went ballistic! She told Jess, Momma Porter, and everyone else who would listen that they were crazy if they thought Jess would not rip Grandma off the way she had done with everyone else. At the time, it had been well over a year since Jess had invaded or violated anyone in the family, and it even appeared that her tall tales about her life had come to an abrupt end. Candas didn't believe it, would not believe it, and she told them all: "Don't even call me when this S*&%\$ goes down! I don't want to hear it!"

How do you know when you can trust people again after they have violated your trust? The short answer is, you may never know. People can and do change; however, it is only if and when they violate you again that you can know for sure whether they have been reformed. Trusting people who have a history of being untrustworthy is a risky business, because you just never know for sure what they will or will not do.

THE MISTRUST-GO-ROUND

People, in general, will use their past experiences to determine whom they can or cannot trust. In this sense we all have some reason or another not to trust people. In fact, being mistrustful is more often than not a default setting in the mind of those who have experienced any level of betrayal or abuse in their lives. If people are too nice, we don't trust their motives or intentions. If people seem cagey or guarded, we believe they are up to no good.

It doesn't take much to push a person from being open, vulnerable, and trusting into a pit of fear, where their defenses are high and their guard is always up. Mistrust takes little or no effort. With enough internal or external evidence to support the plausible theory that this will protect you from future or abuse or betrayal, you will have a valid reason not to trust anyone. The questions are: Does that really work? Does it really keep you safe? My experience has been that it does not.

I once heard that trust is about believing and seeing yourself and others as worthy, while mistrust is about seeing the opposite. When you do not see yourself as worthy of peace, joy, love, and all sorts of other good things, you will see others in the same light and, in doing so, will believe they are capable of all manner of wrongdoing. Following this line of thought and reasoning, we forget that life is like a mirror or an echo chamber, where what you send out comes back. When you see, hold, or believe yourself to be unworthy, you will attract people who believe the same about themselves and you. They will undoubtedly treat themselves and you with dishonor and disrespect. A violation of trust is as much a sign that people do not respect themselves as it is a sign that they are out to get you. People who honor themselves will more often than not honor you, too.

The key to trust is to remember that in this life we do not get all that we ask for, but we always get what we expect. This does not in any way excuse people for their bad behavior. Nor does it make you responsible for the misdeeds of others. However, if and when you find that you are repeatedly attracting folks who seem to abuse your trust, violate you in some way, and prove themselves to be untrustworthy, it may be time to scrutinize your thoughts and belief system.

The other possibility that can lead to an unsuspected betrayal or violation of trust is refusing to see what you see and know what you know. Life is filled with people who can be trusted and people whom you should never trust. The trick is learning which club you belong to. If you are a member of the trustworthy-people club, this does not mean you throw all caution to the wind and throw open the doors of your life to everyone who passes by. You must live life with a healthy sense of caution and awareness. You must do your due diligence to make sure that the people you are associated with are carrying the same club card that you carry. Folks who move from one club to the other, depending on the circumstances and situations in which they find themselves, may not be members in good standing of your group.

Watch! Listen! Learn! Do not be fooled by appearances but rather be educated by experiences. Do not act like you do not know that people are capable of crossing lines. Do not hope against hope that your club is so attractive to them that they will remain a loyal and dues-paying member. Remember that liars lie, cheaters cheat, and thieves have a bad habit of stealing. This does not mean that you don't trust them or believe they can never change for the better. It means that until you have clear evidence that the shift has occurred, you should not trust them with your wallet or purse or believe that they are working late every night.

Back to our story:

No one, including Jess, understood why she lied and stole, but more important, everyone had a difficult time accepting that she did, except her sister Candas. Candas, who had been sexually abused as a young girl, married a man who cheated on her and lied about it. She didn't trust anyone and was totally self-righteous about her suspicions. Momma Porter never told her children that Daddy Porter had been an alley cat, because learning how to forgive him after he left her had saved her life and opened her heart.

Jess, who had been Daddy's little princess, had never quite recovered from her father's departure. She loved her mother and sister dearly but also revealed in therapy that her father's absence, which she secretly blamed on her mother, left her with a void that she could never quite fill. She was 16 when he passed away. After many discussions, family members determined that it was about then that the spirit of dishonesty seemed to take hold of her. Although Jess came across to everyone as a kind and thoughtful person on her good days, Candas believed it wasn't safe to leave her alone in a room with goldfish. Then there was that time when Momma Porter couldn't find her ring, and everyone blamed Jess. Three months later when Momma found the ring under the washing machine, no one could apologize enough to make it up to Jess for the months of ridicule and isolation she had experienced as punishment for the missing ring. Instead, they all began to act as if they didn't know what they knew about her past behavior.

The first time the bank called to inform Grandma Porter of irregular activity on her bankcard, Jess was the one who took her to the bank to get a new card and then back home to change her passwords. The second time it happened was around Christmas, so no one became suspicious. By the fifth time it happened, though, even the bank and Candas believed that Grandma Porter was a target because of her online purchases and bill paying.

When Momma Porter asked Grandma for a short-term loan of \$2,500, they discovered that the trust account had been almost cleaned out. Over the course of seven months, the balance, little by little, had been depleted from \$42,000 to \$5,800. At first, no one suspected Jess. It was only after the bank did a thorough investigation that they determined that most of the withdrawals had gone into another bank account that was linked to Jess's social security number.

When you know people are prone to be dishonest and they have not demonstrated that they have reformed their behavior, this does not mean they should not be trusted with *anything*. It does, however, mean it would not be wise to trust them to tell the truth. Jess had previously demonstrated that she was capable of jumping from the trustworthy club to the untrustworthy club. The challenge was not only her repeated violations of trust, it was also the difficulty everyone, except Candas, had in accepting and acknowledging the truth.

In the end, the family determined that no one had ever really trusted Jess. It was that they felt bad for her and about acknowledging that she was, in fact, someone who lied, stole, and had repeatedly harmed them. They felt guilty about the times they accused her only to learn over time that there were wrongs she was accused of that she did not commit.

Grandma realized that she never wanted to come across like Candas, who was very vocal and very committed to her total distrust of Jess. It was not attractive nor did it feel loving. The bottom line was, after Jess's first major infraction, everyone expected and suspected her of being exactly who she had

demonstrated herself to be; but because they loved her, they didn't want to talk about it.

As human beings it is our nature to want to be connected to our loved ones, to live in peace rather than pain, and to seek safety rather than fear. We have a difficult time accepting that the things we believe should be good for us are not and that the people who should be good to us are not. For this reason, mistrust is almost as painful as having our trust betrayed, because it goes against our natural inclination. We have to work hard to maintain the line of mistrust, to be suspicious, to hold on to the past as the evidence that keeps us alert to the possibilities of violation by someone we love. Because we want to trust, we find ways to ignore the signs, to excuse behaviors, and to deny our internal alarms and warning signals.

We want people to be who we believe they are, and in doing so we open ourselves to opportunities for them to prove they are not full-time members of the trustworthy-people club. Learning to trust others means paying attention internally and externally without guilt or shame in knowing what you know. It means telling yourself the truth about yourself and others to the degree that you are willing to protect yourself without injuring or insulting them. It means having boundaries that are solid and consistent. It means choosing how to be in relationship with others in a way that honors them and honors what you feel and know. There are times when drawing a hard line in the sand will not only protect you, it will also protect people from themselves and their untrustworthy behavior that they cannot seem to control.

When it comes to trusting family members, we walk a tightrope that many of us struggle with. For some reason, logical or not, we believe that because we are related to someone by blood, they will not or should not have the same human frailties as the rest of the human race. We want to believe that parents will not betray or disappoint us; that uncles, cousins, or grandparents will not violate us; and that our siblings, whether older or younger, will keep us in a special place in their hearts.

Millions of us have learned from experience that nothing could be further from the truth. Fathers and mothers can lie. Aunts and uncles will sexually molest. Siblings do abandon and disappoint. Knowing this, it's important to recognize and understand that although we share a bloodline with people, we also share in the human condition. We all have lessons to learn, weaknesses to overcome, strengths to develop, and temptations to avoid.

Overcoming a family betrayal or violation is a very bitter pill to swallow—so bitter, in fact, it sometimes comes back up on us. My suggestion is that you gain some additional perspective by neutralizing the blood relationship ASAP. Start by removing the “relative” label from the offense and deal with it as if it were just another person. In doing so, you can expect the negative ego to fight back, giving you every plausible reason to be extra outraged or damaged and to hold on to the hurt because . . . *they should have known better.*

Here I would offer you what Byron Katie says in her work, “When you argue against reality, you will suffer.” The reality is that whatever was done was not done because the person was related to you. The reality is you experienced it and they did it . . . because somewhere in your shared humanness, there was something each of you needed to learn or heal.

Family betrayals are the result of opportunity converging with human weakness to produce a human condition that requires healing and forgiveness. They are no more or no less devastating than any other violation or betrayal of trust. It all boils down to this: You have a choice. You can use the trust violations within your family as a reason not to trust anyone, or you can look for the lesson, employ forgiveness, heal, and grow. In making the choice, consider this self-supportive and self-honoring questions. *Do I want to be right about how wrong they were? Or do I want to find and claim peace?*