



Ilse Sand

**Say
a Proper
Goodbye!**

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Introduction

Many problems arise because of broken relationships where no one said a proper goodbye. It could be a former partner, family member, friend or colleague that has passed away, or that you have parted ways with over a disagreement. You might not be fully aware of how much former relationships fill your mind.

It is hard to say goodbye to a person that has made you feel loved and that you have loved in return. It can be even harder to part with a relation where there were many ambivalent emotions involved. The same way you can find it hard to leave a meal before you are completely full, it can prove particularly difficult to say goodbye to a relationship, where you were never completely satisfied. Many people suffer from low self-esteem for years following a divorce or break up that they are not completely over.

When you have been very close to someone, you risk being connected to the one you have lost in a symbiotic sense, which means you can neither see yourself nor each other clearly. On the contrary, you see each other through eyes that are coloured by what should have been, instead of what it really was or is.

A parting ritual, combined with working on yourself, can be a helpful way to part and say a proper goodbye. This way you can see yourself and the lost relation in a more realistic light and without symbiotic distortion.

When you have said a proper goodbye to each other as spouses, lovers, colleagues or whatever relationship you had, you may feel like greeting each other as friends, in a new way or as co-parenting partners, if you have kids. In this case the ritual can also be used to inspire visions of this new joint life, which will make the ritual more an act of passage than an ending.

I hope this little guide will inspire you to do the necessary work, so you can reconcile with your relations and yourself and make time to mourn the past in order to be free to enter new relations.

Aarhus, June 2013. Ilse Sand.

Are you emotionally over the loss of a relation?

If you doubt whether it is necessary to work on a relation from your past, you can investigate it by doing the following exercise:

Find a picture of the person and maybe put a piece of music on that you connect to him or her.

Look at the picture and say: "Goodbye – and thank you for everything."

It is fine if tears are rolling down your cheeks, but if you feel great resistance towards doing this exercise, or if you cry uncontrollably, get anxious or angry and find it difficult to contain your emotions, it can be a sign that it would be good for you to work on your relation. Maybe you need to see a therapist or a support group. Maybe you have friends that can help you. You can begin by doing some of the work yourself.

Write a farewell letter

First, write a letter that is written entirely for your own sake. Use this opportunity to express all your feelings. Write what you would like to say thank you for, what you are going to miss, what you are happy to be rid of, and how you wished it would have been. It is important that you read the letter aloud to yourself first then to another person that is not the recipient. It can be a friend or a therapist with duty of confidentiality. The act of reading aloud to a witness enhances the experience and emotions you feel. You can see examples of farewell letters in my book *The*

Emotional Compass: How to Think Better about Your Feelings.

It is rarely a good idea to give this letter to your ex. Usually it is better to write another letter for this purpose. There is a big difference between the letter you wrote straight from the heart to learn more about yourself and to express your feelings – and a letter that either should open a dialogue with another person, or help this person to leave in peace. Try to imagine what it would be like to be the one to receive the letter. Maybe it does not even come close to what he or she needs to hear. The new and carefully considered farewell letter can be a part of the parting ritual.

Conciliation

Before you can carry out a parting ritual you must reach conciliation with the other person and yourself. If the other person does not wish to be part of it, you can work on conciliation with him or her, yourself and the entire situation. It might be good for you to carry out the ritual alone.

In case your ex does not want to meet with you or is silent or inaccessible, you may be able to make him or her feel safe enough to speak out by making it easier for them to express their anger and resentment or sadness. You can help by for example saying: "I was probably not that easy to be with. I can understand if you felt angry or hurt sometimes."

It is even better if his or her wishes can be said out loud. This way they can turn the anger into

sorrow more easily. You could ask:” What would you have liked me to give you?”

If this will make your ex to talk, it is very important that you do not start to defend yourself. You could just say:” I hope it made you feel good to get these things out,” or “I wish I could have given you that.”

There might be cases where forgiveness is not possible. We know that forgiveness is a process that takes time. In some cases, a more realistic goal would be the ability to say:” I cannot forgive you for what you did back then, but from now on I will try to stop bothering you with it.”

You could end up saying this to the other person when you meet at the parting ritual at the end.

If you find it hard to let go

If you are still angry at your ex, there is probably something you still dearly want from him or her, and you do not want to let go of. It can be helpful to uncover what it is you want from the other person. You can explore this by writing a letter to yourself from this person. The letter should

contain everything you long to hear from him or her. An example of this could be the following.

Dear Maria

I am very sorry for the decisions I made that hurt you. I wish I could make things right again. It was not your fault that something came between us. I think you are a lovely person, and I am thankful for the time we had together and for everything you taught me. Thank you for your great help when I lost my job and I was completely out of it. You have had a profound impact on my life, and you will always matter to me.

Love Jack

The letter does not have to be realistic at all. Just let your imagination go and let your ex say exactly what you wish to hear. It does not matter if the person would ever say these things to you. When you have written this letter, you can read it out loud to yourself, or even better, make someone else do it. A letter like this can sometimes redeem the past even though it is written by you. It can help you understand what it is you are looking for. Maybe you will find it with someone new.

If you find it hard to feel anything, there might be no strong emotions left for the person you wish to say goodbye to. On the other hand, it might be because you use strategies to protect yourself

without being aware of it. You can read more about how unfortunate strategies to protect yourself can be dissolved in my book *Come closer – on love and self-protection*.

You have not let go of your partner completely until you can wish for good things for them. Find a gift and think of something you would like to thank them for. Bring the happy wish to the ritual. The gift can be for example a rock you found on the beach and carried in your hand, while you were thinking of that person. It is the symbolic value that is important.

The ritual

The ritual can be carried out anywhere, for instance, under a tree or in a church with high ceilings and room to think big. Many churches are open throughout the day where you can go in and perhaps light a candle. If you are a member of the National Church in Denmark, you can ask the pastor or the church counsel if you can borrow the church. You can also ask your pastor if they would say a prayer or pronounce the benediction.

You can carry out the ritual alone or together with your ex. For some it can work well if close family and friends are invited to the event.

If you have chosen to carry out the ritual without your relation, you can choose to read your letter out loud or say a prayer for you and the other person and light a candle.

The ritual could contain acts from the following list:

- Listen to a piece of music
- Read aloud or hand over letters
- Sing a song
- Pledge a promise such as: "From now on I will do my best to avoid bothering you," and shake hands on it
- Give each other a present
- Light a candle for the ones you both care about that are affected by your break up
- Say a common prayer
- Read a poem aloud
- Drink a glass of wine
- Do communion together

Books by the same author

The Emotional Compass – How to think better about your feelings

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

Come closer – on love and self-protection

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017.

Highly Sensitive People in an Insensitive World: How to Create a Happy Life. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

Tools for Helpful Souls – especially for highly sensitive people who provide help either on a professional or private level. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017.

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Ilse Sand has a Master's Degree in Theology from Aarhus University, where her Master's thesis was

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For many years Ilse Sand has been engaged in counselling highly sensitive people both as a pastor and as a psychotherapist. This inspired her to write her first book "Highly Sensitive People in an Insensitive World: How to Create a Happy Life" that has been translated into 18 languages.

Read more about Ilse Sand and her books here:

highlysensitive-hsp.com