

Love Should Never Require You to Lose Yourself

One of the deepest forms of personal transformation is learning to recognize the difference between loving someone and abandoning yourself.

By Cathy Levin

There are relationships where losing yourself does not happen all at once.

It happens one compromise at a time.

One silence.

One boundary you decide not to enforce.

One moment when something hurts but you convince yourself you are being too sensitive.

One time you prioritize peace over truth.

One decision to make yourself smaller because you are afraid the relationship will not survive the full version of you.

Eventually, you may look in the mirror and realize you have become very skilled at understanding another person while becoming increasingly disconnected from yourself.

Love and self-abandonment can look similar from the outside

Both can involve patience.

Compromise.

Forgiveness.

Empathy.

Commitment.

The difference is what those qualities are costing you.

Healthy love allows two people to make room for one another.

Self-abandonment repeatedly asks one person to disappear.

You begin questioning your instincts.

You explain away patterns you would immediately recognize if they were happening to someone you loved.

You become afraid of saying what you actually think.

Your entire emotional world starts revolving around the condition of the relationship.

That is not deeper love.

That is disconnection from yourself.

Self-trust often has to be rebuilt

After difficult, controlling, unhealthy, or abusive relationship experiences, people sometimes ask:

"How did I let this happen?"

I believe a more useful question is:

"How do I build enough self-trust that I listen to myself sooner next time?"

Shame keeps you looking backward.

Self-trust helps you move forward.

Start noticing the moment your body tightens around something you are pretending is fine.

Notice when your internal answer is no but your external answer is yes.

Notice when you automatically defend someone's behavior before allowing yourself to acknowledge its effect on you.

These observations are not verdicts.

They are information.

Boundaries reveal more than they destroy

People sometimes fear boundaries because they worry boundaries will damage a relationship.

But healthy boundaries often reveal the true condition of a relationship.

Someone who values you may not love every boundary you set, but they can respect your right to have one.

A relationship that can function only when you have no boundaries has already given you important information.

A boundary is not:

"You must behave exactly as I want."

A boundary is:

"This is what I will and will not participate in."

That clarity is one of the foundations of self-respect.

You do not have to earn safety through perfection

People who have experienced unstable relationships can become highly focused on performing correctly.

Say the right thing.

Choose the right time.

Stay calm enough.

Be understanding enough.

Avoid triggering conflict.

Prove your loyalty.

Prove your value.

Prove your intentions.

But a healthy relationship should not require a permanent audition.

You are allowed to be human.

You are allowed to misunderstand something and repair it.

You are allowed to express hurt.

You are allowed to ask a question.

You are allowed to have a difficult day without believing love will be withdrawn.

Emotional safety is not the absence of disagreement.

It is knowing that disagreement does not automatically threaten your dignity.

Choosing yourself does not always mean leaving

"Choose yourself" is sometimes interpreted as a command to end every difficult relationship.

That is too simplistic.

Sometimes choosing yourself means speaking more honestly within the relationship.

Sometimes it means asking for counseling.

Sometimes it means changing a pattern.

Sometimes it means refusing to carry responsibility that belongs to another adult.

And sometimes it does mean leaving.

The point is not a predetermined outcome.

The point is making the decision from clarity rather than fear.

Ask who you are becoming

One of the most useful questions in any relationship is:

Who am I becoming here?

More confident?

More peaceful?

More expressive?

More curious?

More supported?

Or increasingly afraid, confused, apologetic, diminished, or disconnected from my own judgment?

No relationship is perfect.

Every meaningful relationship includes discomfort.

But the overall direction matters.

Love should challenge us to grow.

It should not require us to vanish.

Coming home to yourself is a beginning

Rebuilding yourself after a painful relationship is not simply about becoming independent again.

It is about becoming internally trustworthy.

Knowing what you value.

Knowing what you need.

Knowing what behavior you will no longer rationalize.

Knowing that loneliness is survivable.

Knowing that your worth does not rise and fall according to someone's ability to recognize it.

And eventually understanding that love can be beautiful without becoming the place where you go to disappear.

ABOUT CATHY LEVIN

Cathy Levin is a life transformation coach, speaker, entrepreneur, author, and autism advocate. Her work explores personal transformation, self-worth, relationships, women's empowerment, resilience, boundaries, and rebuilding self-trust after difficult life experiences.

CALL TO ACTION

To explore Cathy's work in one-on-one transformation coaching and speaking on self-worth, relationships, resilience, and women's empowerment, visit CathyLevin.com.