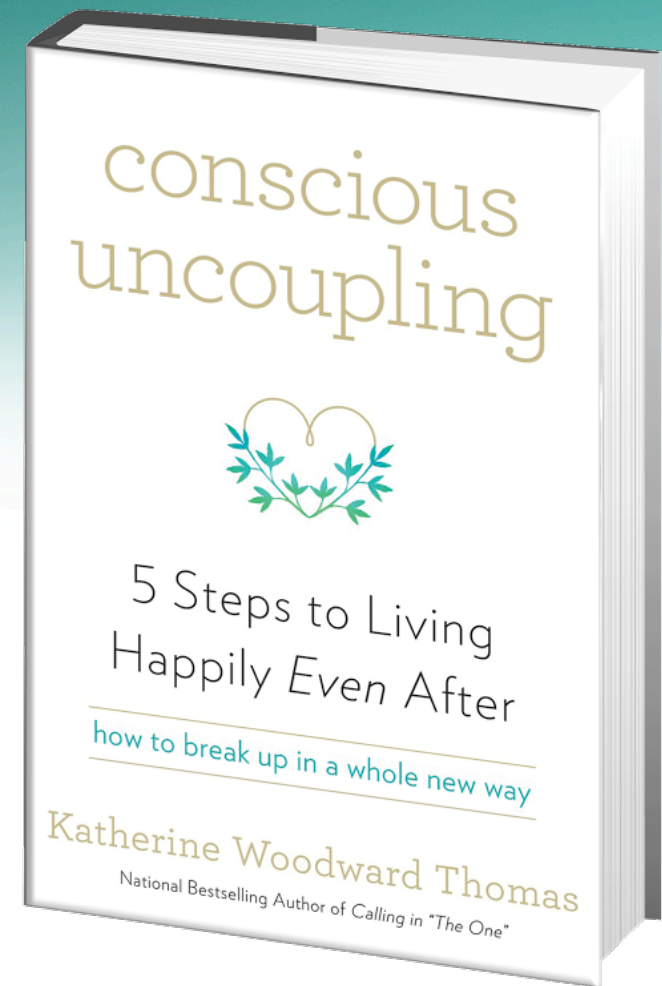


Introduction to
Conscious Uncoupling:
5 Steps to Living Happily *Even* After

Landing on the Wrong Side of Love

by *New York Times* Bestselling Author
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Landing on the Wrong Side of Love

*“Every intimacy
carries, secreted
somewhere below its
initial lovely surfaces,
the ever-coiled
making of complete
catastrophe.”*

—Elizabeth Gilbert

None of us think, when walking down the aisle to stand open-hearted before our one true love, that we will one day wind up on the wrong side of that tenacious 50 percent divorce divide. Nor do we assume impending heartache when basking in a newly forming union that is filled with hope and the promise of lifelong happiness. For we are the believers in love, resolute in our fervent stand for forever, and willing to risk it all in our pursuit of happily-ever-after.

As the author of the national bestseller *Calling in “The One”: 7 Weeks to Attract the Love of Your Life*, and teacher to hundreds of thousands of students throughout the world who’ve used my principles to clear away their inner obstacles to love and create happy, loving relationships, I would be lying if I told you I wanted to write this book as the sequel to my last. I did not want to be writing this book any more than you want to be reading it.

In fact, when I realized that my husband of nearly ten years and I were going to end our marriage, my prayer was a little less than pious. Lying flat on my back in the grass at a nearby park, and looking up at the vast blue sky, searching for meaning in this unwelcomed twist of events, I murmured out loud the only prayer that made sense to me at the time. “You’ve *got* to be kidding me,” I said, seething. I was beyond irritated at the unseen forces of life and love that seemed hell-bent on entertaining themselves at my expense—forces that seemed determined to create unwanted mischief with my happily-ever-after ending to a rather tumultuous childhood. A happy ending that was documented so beautifully, and *publicly*, in my first book.

It was awkward, at best.



*“You may not control
all the events that
happen to you, but
you can decide not to
be reduced by them.”*

—Maya Angelou

Yet, once past the shocking realization that this was indeed happening, I turned my attention to making sure it happened well. For I, like many thousands of my peers, had been the product of a nasty and terribly *unconscious* uncoupling when I was a young girl. So nasty, in fact, that there were two rather brutal custody fights that led to my eventual alienation from my father, at the age of ten, when he finally threw in the towel and surrendered his parental rights altogether due to his inability to get on at all with my infuriated mother. While I did not know a lot of things as my marriage unraveled before my eyes, the one thing I did know was this: I was not going to do that to our daughter.

Yet, as our separation unfurled, I discovered that I had worried in vain. For not only was ours a very civil uncoupling, it was also deeply kind, respectful, humane, and characterized by an unexpected spirit of generosity and goodwill, with gestures of friendship and mutual support woven throughout. My former husband, Mark, and I did everything in our power to minimize the damage done to one another and, of course, to our young daughter, whose primary concern was that she not lose contact with her father, as she'd seen happen to two of her friends. United in our stand to create cohesion and well-being for our daughter during and after our transition out of the marriage, we readily reassured her she would not.

It was a far cry from the horrible breakups I'd had in the past—those months on end when I'd be unable to eat or sleep, and when I was so consumed with rage that I could barely get through the day without snapping the head off some poor, innocent stranger who was unfortunate enough to get in my way. Or the time when I was so distraught that I started smoking again after nearly a decade, and when half the hair on my head fell out from the stress of it all.



Or the mother of all my bad breakups, the heart-wrenching and terribly dramatic, and traumatic, severing I'd had from my high school boyfriend, Frank, which held me captive with an unresolved and prolonged grief that haunted me for years. For nearly two decades he continued to show up in my dreams, frequently shaking me out of a restless sleep to relive the horrible realization that he was indeed gone forever, and was living happily ever after with his intimidatingly beautiful wife and their three perfect children thousands of miles away from me.

I, like you, am well acquainted with the shadow side of love. Which is why, once I had dealt with my own shock and pain, I immediately began to look back to see if I could decipher the process of the rather unique way in which Mark and I had managed to transition out of our union with such goodwill and grace. Because I recognized that we had fallen upon something incredibly valuable, my awareness made more acute by those in our inner circle who would shake their heads in dismay, to declare that they had never seen any couple let go of their marriage with as much thoughtfulness and care.

As much as I had yearned for a happy ending to my less than happy childhood, in an odd twist of fate I seemed to have stumbled upon a new *kind* of happy ending. A way to end a romantic union with dignity, goodness, and honor, and where no one was left shattered or destroyed by the experience. And, being the gourmet lemonade maker that I am, I realized that I could even make something beautiful of this. For we'd actually undergone what I eventually was able to identify as a five-step process for leaving each other, and all those impacted by our separation, whole, healthy, and complete rather than wounded, walled off, and significantly broken by the experience.



As a believer in love, and an ardent supporter of marriage and long-term committed relationships, breakups are probably one of my least favorite things. Right up there with global warming, elder abuse, and high child-poverty rates. Given my disdain for breakups and divorce, why then would I choose it as my own life path? How horrible was it between Mark and me that I would venture into the swampland of dividing hearth and home, and the dismantling of long-held hopes and dreams?

There are a million little ways that a marriage grows apart, most too mundane to mention. Yet what happened to Mark and me, in a nutshell, is that I changed. And I mean, I radically and in many ways quite unfairly, changed. It's kind of an occupational hazard—the downside of being a teacher of growth and transformation. My husband didn't cheat on me, he didn't abuse me, and he was not an alcoholic or a chronic gambler.

Yet, as the years went by, the core values by which we lived grew further and further apart. Where I am a change junkie, ever pushing the edge of my own and others' evolution in pursuit of fulfilling the potential we hold in all areas of life and love, Mark, gentle-hearted man that he is, aspires to the spiritual ideal of total acceptance and appreciation of things as they are, without the need to change anyone or anything. Where I am ever fascinated to dig into the darker recesses of our psyches to discover and purify our inner motives, he believes in minimizing the focus on flaws to simply value the goodness and beauty of all living beings. It's not like someone is right and someone is wrong here. They are both perfectly gorgeous paths to be on. And often when couples are polarized like this, they find a way to balance each other out, complementing one another and filling in the blank spots for each other in the most lovely of ways.



Yet, with Mark and me, conversations about those things that mattered most and that we each held sacred in our hearts just kind of fell flat, in a way that left us little room to grow together toward a shared vision or goal, something we both admitted to needing deeply in our lives. As much as we cared for one another, it became apparent that the place where we were most aligned was in the love we shared for our daughter.

Now, if we had been born fifty years earlier, we would have easily stayed together for the sake of our child, without thinking much about it. Although yet again, if we'd been born fifty years before, we probably wouldn't have ever gotten married in the first place, as interracial marriages were illegal throughout much of America, until the Supreme Court declared otherwise in 1967. As I am Caucasian and Mark African American, we would have had to risk everything, our very lives included, to choose one another back then—further evidence of the ever-evolving nature of culture. However, this little detail aside, I, like many millions of others in the Western world, have come to expect more of my primary partnership than staying together for the sake of the children. As author and marriage historian Stephanie Coontz points out, relationships have changed more in the past thirty years than in the three thousand years before. And I, like so many of us, aspired to a union that was far beyond the ones my mother, and my grandmother before her, expected to have. It's not that Mark and I weren't wholeheartedly and doggedly devoted to raising a well-adjusted, healthy, happy daughter. Of course we were; our lives revolved around this shared commitment. But did that really mean that we had to be bound together with the bonds of matrimony and morally required to have sex with each other for the rest of our lives in order to do so?

I mean, Mark's a sexy guy but . . . *seriously?*



As someone who is an evolutionary at heart, meaning that I believe in the noble pursuit of consciously making the effort to become a wiser, more enlightened, and more evolved human being in service to helping build wiser, more enlightened, and more evolved human societies, I am ever-fascinated with new and emergent possibilities for loving connections that are a little left of center— and perhaps even a whole lot outside of the box. I’m quirky that way. As a “cultural creative,” and there are millions more like me throughout the world, I’m prone to pioneering new possibilities on the vast frontier of human relationships. My orientation as a licensed marriage and family therapist is strongly rooted in humanistic psychology with a particular devotion to the human potential movement, which is about the purposeful striving toward the realization of our highest potentials, on both individual and societal levels.

So, it’s not really my nature to stay married simply because of current cultural assumptions about what’s best for the kids. Assumptions that, while certainly well informed by research that is worthy of deep discussion and reflective thought, seems to fundamentally lack the creative effort toward solving the problem of how we can form a balanced, stable, and loving family life in the aftermath of divorce. When I thought of it this way, my curiosity got the best of me, and I became deeply interested in discovering how we might collectively begin to do this better.

*“I have woven a
parachute out of
everything broken.”*

—William Stafford

The Journey Ahead

I will be sharing with you, in the pages ahead, the results of that curiosity. You are invited to join me on what became a profound inner journey of healing, transformation, expansion, and re-invention. To begin, I will challenge you to rethink our collective long-held assumptions about breakups and divorce, and ask you to reconsider the very common knee-jerk conclusion that a relationship has failed if it ends for any other reason than that one or both people have died. I will also attempt to raise our awareness about how, inside of this collective assumption of failure, we have never really evolved beyond primitive and destructive ways of separating, yet at great cost to well-being and wholeheartedness—and in many incidences, severely handicapping ourselves, our children, and each other from successfully moving forward in life. And finally, I will offer a new possibility between us, that of Conscious Uncoupling, which allows for a healthy and humane way of ending a romantic union.

At that point, Part Two will move you into your own, personal Conscious Uncoupling process, offering intimate guidance and support for each of the five steps along the way. Starting with the first step, Find Emotional Freedom, and leading you through to the final one, Create Your Happily-*Even*-After Life, you will find the practical tools and skills you'll need to navigate the tender transition you're in, all the way home to wholeness.

If you are in a tremendous amount of pain right now, you may prefer to go straight to Part Two of this book, coming back to read Part One later, once your oxygen mask is firmly in place and you're able to breathe again.

My Own Moral Dilemma

*“Life’s not always
fair. Sometimes you
can get a splinter
even sliding down
a rainbow.”*

—Cherralea Morgen

Now, I have to confess that I hesitated a long time before writing this book, dragging my feet to put this all down on paper. This was largely because I didn’t want to encourage anyone to be casual about the critical decision to dissolve a long-term committed partnership. What happens when you take away the social shame associated with a “failed” relationship, or the terror that you will absolutely mess your kids up for life, coming as they now do from a “broken” home? I certainly don’t want to be even partly responsible for tipping the scales further in the direction of marriages that end before one or both people die.

I am a strong supporter of committed, long-term unions, and I do my best to empower couples to stay together whenever possible. In fact, when clients come into my office saying they want to have a Conscious Uncoupling, I’m apt to spar with them a bit, trying to poke holes in their certainty and reveal it to be a bit premature. Because I’m such an ardent advocate of committed love, I’m thrilled with the recent twists and turns on the marital landscape of America, as we now invite our gay and lesbian friends to join us in forming lifelong, stable, *and legal* partnerships that can further contribute to the strengthening of American society. So, it’s important to understand that I did not create this process to make light of the choice to separate. In fact, a bit later on, in the “How and When to Do This Program” chapter, we are going to have a serious discussion about why staying together might actually be the better path to take.

Here’s what I really want us to understand, however. In a world where more people divorce in any given year than buy new cars or eat grapefruit for breakfast, I think it’s time that we learned how to do this better. And that is the heart and soul of what the book is all about.

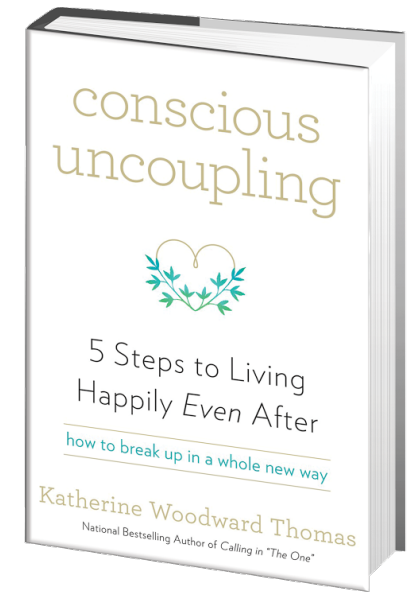
Who This Book Is For

The Conscious Uncoupling process is not just for those who made it all the way to the altar. It's for anyone whose heart is heavy with the unspeakable grief of lost love. All breakups, in addition to being crazy painful, are also a critical crossroads. The loss of love is a definitive moment in life that will demand a grave decision of you. From the dung heap of your despair, you are either going to throw in the towel and contract from life in order to protect your heart from this kind of hurt again, dooming yourself in the process to living a lesser life, or you are going to find a way to use this tragic experience as the opportunity to cultivate greater wisdom, depth, maturity, and a deeper capacity to love and be loved. In a nutshell, a breakup is nothing short of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have a complete spiritual awakening. One that catapults you to a whole new level of authenticity, compassion, wisdom, depth, and—dare I say it?—even joy. The only way the searing agony of your breakup is going to become the latter, though, is if you set your heart and mind in that direction, and make a conscious and determined effort to get there.

If you have the courage to rise and take on heartache for all it's worth, then this book is for you. If you're willing to use the pain you're in to flush out the falsehoods you've been tolerating for far too long, and emancipate yourself from the painful patterns you've been unable to face until now, it's for you. If you will use this setback as the opportunity to liberate yourself and others from the many ways you've been dimming down, and showing up

as less than who you are in life, it's for you. If you're ready to use this shocking loss to break your heart open, expanding and enlarging your capacity to authentically love yourself and others in the process, it is for you. If you have the fortitude to make something beautiful of this, for yourself and all those you love, then this book is for you.

I wish I could promise that if you engage in a Conscious Uncoupling process you will have a pain-free breakup, but I can't. For we human beings are biologically predisposed to bonding, and there is simply no way not to bleed at least a little (and maybe a whole lot) when the ties that bind us are cut, even if we do it ever so gently. Yet, having taken thousands of students successfully through the process, I'll be sharing with you over our next few days, weeks, or months together what I can promise you is a safe passageway to wholeness for yourself and those you love. I can promise you that your life will not just be tolerable on the other side of this dark night of the soul, but it will actually be even better and more beautiful for all you have been through. I can promise you the hope of loving again, with a wide open, happy, and trusting heart that is confident you will not make the same mistakes again. And finally, I can promise that you will one day look back on this disastrously difficult moment in your life and speak a prayer of gratitude, having turned the worst thing that ever happened to you into the absolute best.



*"If life gives us rocks,
it's our choice
whether to build a
bridge or a wall."*

—Anonymous