



Why Write an Ethical Will?

In his book *Healthy Aging, A Lifelong Guide to Your Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*, Dr. Weil promotes preparing an ethical will as a gift of spiritual health to leave to your family at the end of your life, but he also asserts "its main importance is what it can give you in the midst of life." What does Dr. Weil mean when he says that preserving our history, wisdom, and love for future generations gives us something in our lives today? I think I can answer this question by sharing my observations and experience as I've guided women to write an ethical will.

But first, what is it? The ethical will is a modern incarnation of an ancient patriarchal tradition that men first transmitted orally and later wrote as letters to their sons to pass on their values to the next generation. "Well," I thought, entranced when I first learned about the ethical will, "I, too - mother and ancient hippie feminist - have wisdom, values and love to express to my children and grandchildren." What I wrote that day is the most important message I have ever written.

From that powerful personal experience I began sharing my discovery with other women. The themes have remained intact even as the format evolved over time. First was to empower women to believe that the urgency to free ourselves from the silence that has long held us hostage: to reverse our mistaken ideas that we can't write or that we have nothing worthwhile to communicate.

Second was to realize that we are each unique and sacred beings. We all have both ordinary and extraordinary gifts, and we each have valuable experience and life-lessons to transmit to others. We can, together in what I call "legacy circles," find the courage and the language to tell our loved ones and the world who we really are and what matters most deeply to us.

Another theme that differentiates the traditional ethical will from what I call the "spiritual-ethical will" involves reclaiming our foremothers' legacies. Most of our memories are limited to their roles as mothers, wives, workers. Few of them shared their identity beyond or behind those roles. Fewer still articulated or wrote their hopes and dreams for us.

How then do we prepare ourselves for the sacred responsibility of writing our spiritual-ethical wills? We gather our personal and feminine family history and with that as context, harvest the experience and learning of our own lives. Once captured, we communicate who we are and what we value in the format of "legacy letters." Workshops, writing retreats, and my books, *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies: Passing Your Beliefs and Blessings to Future Generations* and *The Women's Legacies Workbook for the Busy Woman: A Step-by-Step Guide for Writing a Spiritual-Ethical Will* guide a process that integrates our past and present with the intention of communicating and preserving both for future generations.

The gift to our loved ones is inestimable. Your words will fill the holes in their hearts and the gaps in their histories. Your courage, honesty, and generosity will guide them in difficult times and sad situations. Your values will encourage and inspire them. Your blessings will teach them love.

What does the ethical will give us in the midst of life? While writing an ethical will links you to your history and future generations, clarifies your values, and communicates a legacy to those you love, it simultaneously addresses deep universal needs that we are rarely aware of. I have observed these needs being nourished in women everywhere from prison to hospitals; in work and retirement; with

professionals, homemakers and corporate managers; with new mothers, grandmothers, seniors and the aged; with feminists and lesbians; with single, committed, married, divorced and the widowed; with women ill and abused; with women of every age, of various ethnicities, faith traditions, economic and educational levels.

Legacy writing clarifies our identity and focuses our life purpose. These are the unexpected gifts received in the midst of life. Beyond them, six additional needs are addressed as we write our spiritual-ethical wills. They include our need to belong, to be known, to be remembered, to have our lives make a difference, to bless and be blessed, and to celebrate Life. No matter a woman's situation or circumstances, the gifts arrive invariably accompanied by hearty laughter and the sweet tears of amazement, gratitude, release, fullness, and a sense of peace.

Many of us feel a sense of urgency to document our legacies to help shape this unfolding new world. We realize that life is fragile, that we do not control the number of our days. As we fulfill the individual responsibility to preserve our values and love, we simultaneously participate in strengthening the fabric of our communities and culture.

May your spiritual-ethical will be an eternal link connecting you to generations past and yet unborn, and may all your legacies be blessings,

Rachael Freed
Women's Legacies
www.Life-Legacies.com