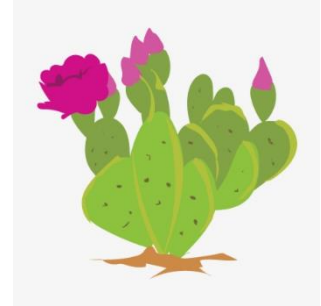


## Hug Your Cactus: Embracing the Ugly Parts of Your Soul

The metaphor of “hugging the cactus” comes from a speech that the actor Robert Downey gave as he was introducing his friend Mel Gibson during an award presentation. During this time Gibson was going through some public struggles of his own and was a somewhat unexpected choice for the honor. “To some surprise, Downey gave the gift of public acceptance to the embattled actor [Gibson]; ...the defense was a return of kindness for Downey. Gibson gave ‘The Avengers’ actor a job in 2003’s ‘The Singing Detective’ after his drug arrests made him uninsurable.”<sup>1</sup> With this time in mind, Downey reflected on the following advice his friend had once offered him:



Actually I asked Mel to present me with this reward for a reason. When I couldn’t get sober, he told me not to give up hope, and he urged me to find my faith. It didn’t have to be his faith or anyone else’s, as long as it was rooted in forgiveness. And I couldn’t get hired, so he cast me as the lead in a movie that was actually developed for him. He kept a roof over my head, and he kept food on the table. And most importantly, he said if I accepted responsibility for my wrongdoings and if I embraced that part of my soul that was ugly — “hugging the cactus,” he calls it — he said that if I “hugged the cactus” long enough, I’d become a man of some humility and that my life would take on a new meaning. And I did, and it worked. All he asked in return was that someday I help the next guy in some small way. It’s reasonable to assume that at the time he didn’t imagine that the next guy would be him or that someday was tonight.<sup>2</sup>

In this short, yet powerful speech several concepts form around this idea of cactus hugging. Looking at it more closely one can see the outline of a cactus hugging journey being mapped out; a journey from shame, brokenness and false or shadow self towards humility, healing, and ultimately a life of new meaning. This cactus hugging journey is laid out in several parts that are best seen more fluidly than as rigid sequential steps. In reading through these parts, on the back of this page consider and reflect on how they relate to caring both for your own soul and providing soul care to others as you hug the cactus and embrace the ugly parts of your soul.

*Crisis – life not working.*

*Don’t give up hope.*

*Find a faith rooted in forgiveness.*

*Take personal responsibility for wrong doings.*

*Embrace the ugly parts of your soul.*

*Do this long enough and gain some humility.*

*Life will then take on a new meaning.*

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, Sarah Anne, "Robert Downey Jr. asks world to forgive Mel Gibson." The Washington Post, October 7, 2011, accessed August 10, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/celebritology/post/robert-downey-jr-asks-world-to-forgive-mel-gibson/2011/10/17/gIQANRnCrL\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/celebritology/post/robert-downey-jr-asks-world-to-forgive-mel-gibson/2011/10/17/gIQANRnCrL_blog.html).

<sup>2</sup> The Telegraph, “Robert Downey Jr asks forgiveness for Mel Gibson,” October 18, 2011, accessed August 10, 2020, video, 2:03, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_AAJuyxnTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AAJuyxnTQ).

## ***CRISIS***

Is my life, or a significant part of my life not working to the point of creating a personal crisis?

Is this crisis self-imposed, are my own behaviors and patterns behavior the source of the crisis?

## ***HOPE***

Do I have genuine hope that things can get better, that I can move on from this crisis?

Am I willing to do the difficult, personal work required to realize this hope?

Do I need to lean into the transformative power of hopelessness and despair for a season?

## ***FAITH & FORGIVENESS***

Does my faith at its core promote, encourage, offer, and even create the space for forgiveness?

Am I able to both give and receive forgiveness for all things, especially towards myself?

## ***RESPONSABILITY***

Am I admitting and seeking forgiveness for my behaviors that have caused harm to others?

Do I want to change these harmful behaviors and patterns of behavior?

## ***EMBRACE the UGLY***

Am I aware of the underlying brokenness, ego, and false sense of self that is the source of these harmful behaviors?

Am I willing to “die to” this part of ego/self, reining it in to limit the damage it causes?

Can I accept and even love this part of self, as it is not going away; instead learn to integrate it into a more holistic sense of self?

## ***LONG ENOUGH***

Am I willing to commit to the amount of time needed for true humility, (life not about me)?

Will I seek the appropriate help needed: counseling, 12 Steps, spiritual direction, personally reflection, support groups, etc.?

Will I engage in the hard soul work of spiritual disciplines like prayer, meditation, solitude and contemplation as part of this process?

## ***NEW MEANING***

Do I really want my life to be different, to have a new and different sense of meaning?

Am I willing to use what I learn through this journey to help others?