

Introduction

It should be so easy to feel at home in ourselves shouldn't it? It seems like something that would be as natural and inevitable as breathing or falling off a bike while learning to ride. Yet for so many of us this is a goal we have to work towards and a huge part of our life journey. It requires not only that we become self-aware, but that we actually like and love the person we find ourselves to be.

The title for this book stems from a long-held belief of mine; that although pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone to move beyond our old limitations can feel scary and unfamiliar, if it is authentic to us then through growing and changing we are actually *coming home* to ourselves. And just like a home, our centre should be somewhere that we feel safe, loved, understood and accepted for who we are. So although the journey may be tough at times, striving too hard and being self-critical will not get us there. Our way home is paved with self-kindness, patience and a sense of our intrinsic worth. And above all it is guided by our own inner most truth and self.

Over the years I have had the privilege of supporting many different people on their unique journeys; sometimes with bodywork, sometimes with energy work and at other times through teaching new tools for introspection or healing. Working in this way with myself and with others has given my life a depth and meaning that I doubt I could have found in any other way. Many of my clients have courageously moved beyond their comfort zones to explore more of who they are and their potential in this world, which has often paid dividends I could never have predicted. Certain benefits are quite universal, however, such as; an increased ability to laugh, have fun, think outside the box, love deeply, access creativity and intuition, be flexible, be original, stand up for their beliefs, make a difference and find their true north. It is also wonderful when we realise how our own growth can touch others, often starting a chain reaction of increased positivity, love and expansion across the world that we cannot track.

Although I believe that the potential for an amazing experience of life is everyone's birthright, I have noticed that this generally only happens for those who live consciously and grow intentionally; whatever that looks like for them and self-development is one great way of doing that. On the other hand, if we stay guarded and static out of fear (of the unknown, perhaps, or even of our own potential) then over time we will become rigid, dissatisfied and disconnected from our true self and our authentic power. There are many strengths and talents within us we can only access when we have an open heart and mind and this is important because there is a big difference between authentic personal power and the pretence of it. Fearful people with the latter may become bullies, try to stop the growth and joy of people around them, be controlling or create toxic environments. Conversely, people who stand in their power often see the potential and beauty in others, lift people up and empower them, stay open to love, dig deep within themselves and create collaborative and supportive environments. Isn't it devastating/ wonderful to think that this all comes down to our own choice?

In a world increasingly paralysed by fear and controlled by division and inflamed suspicions, we need people with the courage to find the baseline of their true self, feel with their whole heart, think clearly, listen to their intuition and work through their feelings instead of projecting them onto others (especially when those others are vulnerable and need our help rather than

hate). When we find our truth and our talents, and bring these into the world, it becomes a kinder, more evolved and enlightened place. And when we choose to play it safe and stay half in the shadows, our spirit and our communities are diminished. Your unique self and talents are needed and I know that you will bring with them your own brand of power and truth; I can't wait to see what you do.

What is Self-Development Work Actually?

Before diving head-first into our self-development work, let's quickly look at the meaning of this slightly vague term and how we use it in this book. The actual self-improvement movement as we recognise it probably started in 1859 with a book called "*Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*" by Samuel Smiles (randomly he is also Bear Grylls' great-great grandfather)¹, but it was also big at various points throughout history such as the Renaissance, for example. We could also think of all of the main spiritual texts as the original self-help manuals, so although self-development may sometimes be seen as a modern fad, it is actually a trend nearly as old as society. It makes me wonder how many advances in technology, science and culture have been supported by self-development of some kind and I think it is telling that many of the greatest thinkers of all time have been introspective, sensitive and of a growth mindset.

The term "self-development" is often used as a catch-all category for many different subjects including; business skills, mindfulness, self-awareness, thought, relationships, spirituality, punctuality, emotional intelligence and many others. However, the self-development work that I present in this book focuses mostly on your inner experience and giving you tools to access more of yourself. This is intentional because I am a big believer in getting in touch with your own inner truth and power and letting the benefits of that ripple out, rather than focusing on making lifestyle changes and hoping that will change how you feel inside. We cover most aspects of the self because they are all irrevocably interdependent and if we want to make a deep and lasting change or get in touch with who we are in a real and 360° way, we need to consider all of ourselves, not just the bits we enjoy working on.

The self-development work in this book mainly includes learning tools for; becoming more self-aware, finding out how we really feel about things deep down, self-healing, developing a healthy and loving relationship with our self, developing an inner resource, or reflecting on certain aspects of our experience. Of course any one of the topics in this book (even subsections of topics) could have their own volume of books written about them, but I feel that I have set out most of what you will need to do this work all in one place.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

You can either read this book cover-to-cover or you can go right to the section or exercise you feel you need right now. If you do this I recommend you still read the first four chapters to start with, because they have important guidance on how to do this work (including Chapter 3, which helps us to get an overview of

¹ Online Library of Liberty 2019

how we are doing at the moment), plus Chapter 14 which will help you to apply what you have learned. Almost every chapter has specific exercises to help you to understand yourself better, gain perspective or to heal in some way. They can take a little bit of practice so do be patient with yourself as you work through them. Also, note that if you skip straight to an exercise there may be some text right above it that will give you some helpful insights, so you may want to read that also. There are no specific instructions for how often to do the exercises because people's needs differ so much, but generally speaking, you will want to limit yourself to a maximum of 3 different exercises in a day, or you may end up doing more than is useful.

The tools themselves are eclectic and include; creative exercises, movement, self-reflection, visualisation, thinking and self-expression, amongst others. If you are wondering if they fit into one specific discipline they do not; for the most part I created them from my experience of working on myself and with clients and this is simply a collection of the exercises that I think will be most useful to you. They tend to work well for people from different walks of life, with different attitudes, ages, genders, political leanings and peanut butter consistency preferences (although we all know there is only one correct choice there, right?) but if some part of an exercise does not work for you, you can change it.

I do not think there is only one way of doing self-development that is the best, or any teacher who can tell you more about yourself than you, other than teaching you how to connect to your own truth. For this reason, I recommend considering whether what I have said on a subject feels true for you and only do the exercises that feel right. This book is not meant to be prescriptive, but a resource for you to use as you see fit, so it is good to follow your own instincts and take what you need, using this book in the way that works best for you and your worldview.

"Absorb what is useful, discard what is useless and add what is specifically your own."

— Bruce Lee, *Wisdom for the Way*²

A Note Before You Start

I am not a doctor, psychotherapist or psychologist, but I highly recommend that if you need support you do seek out a doctor or mental health professional. This book cannot replace medication, medical advice or appropriate one-to-one care. In addition, it is important that you do not rush through, push through a lot of emotional pain or try to work out the entirety of your issues in a weekend. It is not possible and you will probably end up feeling overwhelmed, so be kind to yourself and go at your own pace.

Many of the exercises we are going to do require closed eyes and a state of relaxation, which cannot be done when driving, operating heavy machinery or anywhere else this would be unsafe. Therefore, find somewhere quiet, comfortable and safe to do them.

² Lee 2009

I also want to note that as well as being (what is commonly defined as) a rational person, I am also interested in a lot of areas that are considered to be alternative; although I think of everything as connected and rational, if it works. In terms of this book this means every now and then I will mention concepts such as energy or spirit. If you do not believe in these, you can still get a lot out of this book. Feel free to translate it variously as; intention, force, effort, being, awareness – whatever is suitable in the context and makes sense to you. I did not believe in energy before I did and although energy work and spirituality has added a very valuable dimension to my life, naturally it is completely up to each individual to figure out how they feel about these and other topics.

Also, although I was raised religious, I am not now a member of a religion, and I have no vested interest in having people conform to a particular ideology. Of course there are values that I believe are universally important such as; respect for ourselves and others, fairness, equality etc., but I am mostly interested in supporting others to find out what is true for them. I know that we can never completely get away from our social and cultural conditioning, but as far as possible I have tried to make this book accessible to people of different cultures and ways of life, underneath which we are all pretty much the same. A fact that seems to be frequently forgotten in our turbulent world, but very easy to remember as we journey deeper within ourselves, getting closer to the thing that connects us all; our spirit, our hearts; our fundamental humanity.

I hope that you enjoy my book and find some useful tools to use on your own journey. I have watched so many unhelpful, heavy and sad things move out of the shadows into transformation, and so many gifts, dreams and adventures find the space and light they need to unfold out into the world. Facilitating this is one of my gifts and one that never fails to give back to me as I am inspired by the success of my clients. Success, you understand, as in being the person you want to be – not simply gaining money or influence, which can come and go, but a powerful *becoming* that no one can take away from you, bringing with it your own freedom, power and truth. And which, in some large or small way, will mean the world is never the same again.