

Being Okay With Yourself

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Can You Get Okay with It?

“Never apologize for being yourself.”
- Paul Coelho

This is such a fun question, isn't it? Can you get okay with it? Can I get okay with what? Well, everything! Think about anything and everything in your life, and see what you are NOT okay with in this moment. Then ask yourself if you CAN get okay with it.

This is about getting okay with the parts of your story that you can't change right now. Only you can answer this question, and only you can get okay with whatever it is that you think is bothering you or that you wish would change.

I had to find a way to get okay with a body and physical appearance that I had never really been okay with since I was ten years old. When I was younger than that I don't recall being concerned with how I looked in the eyes of others. I was a free spirit then. I played, I expressed myself.

And then it all changed when I started allowing the thoughts and beliefs of others about my own self to affect the way I acted and how I thought. I became a very shy and introverted person. I didn't go outside to play anymore. I didn't make new friends because my old friends said all these horrible things to me. And now it was time to get okay with my past and get okay with who I was in the moment as I was working towards becoming the best version of me possible.

So, can you get okay with your appearance? How about your life? We all have our own struggles. Decades of body shaming isn't going to correct itself overnight. It takes time and effort to change thoughts and habits regarding ourselves.

Change doesn't have to be hard, just pick one thing you can do differently right here, right now, that moves you in the direction you want to go. No matter what happened in the past, can you get okay with it now so you can move on? If not, that is okay too. When you are ready, your problems will still be there for you to face.

Asking yourself if you can get okay with it works on many levels. Start with the things you see in your life right now. Then you can explore your past and see what you can get okay with what happened in your life. No matter what happens in life, can you, or can't you, get okay with it? Truly explore the answer and remember that you can always make a new choice at any time, in any moment.

Someone called you fat and ugly once; can you get okay with it? Your date canceled without a reason; can you get okay with it? Your body is a little misshapen, can you get okay with it? Yes or no.

Then, what are you going to do about it? If you can get okay with it, great, what's next? If you can't get okay with it, why not? Keep asking yourself this question, and continue asking why or why not.

With practice you will get to the point where the outside shell we call a human body and the experiences you've had don't define you are a person. You'll find inner peace as you sort through the stories you've created in your mind about life and how you think you should look, be, act, speak... the more you realize, the more power you have over your life and less control your shell and experiences will have over who you are, truly, as a person.

Discovering the Power of Words

“You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water my friend.”

- Bruce Lee

A Theory on Water:

I invite you to learn more about Dr. Masaru Emoto and his research regarding water and the affects a particular word or piece of music has on water. Feel free to search the internet for his findings and actually look at the photographs he has taken to see the difference for yourself between telling someone you love them, versus telling someone you hate them. These two little words have very different outcomes in terms of how they affect water crystals, and ultimately a human being.

Dr. Masaru Emoto was born in Yokohama in July 1943. In October of 1992 he received certification from the Open International University as a Doctor of Alternative Medicine. He undertook an extensive research project into the various sources of water around the planet.

He photographed water samples at a microscopic level. He discovered that in crystal form, water showed us its true nature. He went from studying water in its natural form, in various lakes and oceans around the world, to studying samples of water that had been blessed intentionally by groups of people or water that had been exposed to certain words or particular photographs.

He exposed water to different words, phrases, music and even photographs of different objects, then froze the water sample and photographed the ice crystals that formed. Dr. Emoto's experiments showed that beautiful words and music formed beautiful ice crystals and that negative or mean-spirited words produced malformed or misshapen crystals.

Water crystals formed differently to phrases such as “I love you, thank you, and peace” and from phrases such as “I hate you, you disgust me, and evil.” Beautiful ice crystals even formed to photographs of elephants and dolphins.

But what is most fascinating are the photographs of the before and after water had been blessed with love. At first no crystals formed and the water looked similar to those samples who had received negative energy. But after a blessing of love, perfect ice crystals formed similar to that of water exposed to various positive energies.

So, what is the significance of this study? The adult human body is made of approximately 70% water and infant bodies are composed of about 90% water. Every human being can be hurt on an emotional level, and as the water can be changed, that human being can change for better or worse physically by the words we hear and take into our being.

Our very cells can become exposed to love and beauty when we surround ourselves with positive words, thoughts, intentions, and ultimately the energy of pure self-love.

What are the words you tell yourself every day? What are the words you use with others in your life?

Words have power, and once we understand that we have the power to change our words, our world naturally changes for us in response, as everything living thing on this planet is composed of water to some degree.

The Power of the Mind:

So if words were affecting water and objects on a microscopic level, then what were the words I was using every day doing to my own body, mind, and soul? I was so concerned with other people's thoughts that I didn't realize I was really taking in a series of negative words about my own self. They probably weren't even thinking about what I thought they were thinking.

Actually, that's it, isn't it? I was assuming what others thought of me but really those were just my own thoughts about myself. I was so worried about looking like an ugly freak to other people and yet I was the one who thought I was an ugly freak.

Thoughts are our own. When you have a thought, only you can hear it. No one else hears it, until you share it with them of course. Listen to the words you tell yourself. Listen to the thoughts you have. Our human imagination likes to run rampant and wild of its own free will, spinning glorious and grand stories.

You can allow your thoughts to bully, demean, and lower your self-worth, or you can choose to align your thoughts and words with love, respect, beauty, and worthiness. If you don't like the thoughts you are having about yourself, then change them. You are allowed to do so.

You can change how you see yourself in any moment. It takes practice, yes. But you can change from feeling ugly, worthless and unwanted, to feeling loved, appreciated and beautiful. The human mind is a powerful thing. It can believe anything it wants. And the beauty of it is that it can be re-trained. The mind isn't set in stone. It changes its beliefs all the time based on external stimuli and new information. We are constantly learning, constantly gathering information from our surroundings. Most of the time, we form new thoughts and beliefs unconsciously, or are conditioned over time to believe a certain way.

Why do you believe the things you do? Often people don't realize or recognize that they believe a certain way that is not in alignment with what they would actually like to believe.

Now, it is a challenge to change your thoughts and believe in a new reality that you haven't seen yet, or can't see yet. But I didn't say it was impossible. Everything is possible, including changing your mind.

Beliefs are not really who you are. Beliefs can possess you. But beliefs are hackable. They can be replaced with more powerful beliefs of love, compassion, understanding, and acceptance. Opening yourself up to something you can't see yet is scary, believe me I know. And yes, it takes time to change a belief, but not as much time as you would expect. As long as you want to change, you can change. Wanting is the key.

The muck is always thickest when you first walk through it. But it gets easier and easier the closer you get to clearer waters. Keep telling yourself that things would change, and they will.

Reprogramming Your Mind with Words:

So yes, the mind is a powerful thing. And honestly, it likes to keep thinking the way it has always been thinking. Remember that the known is safe.

The mind finds a happy, safe box and sticks to it. What we want to do is to get out of that box by expanding our minds to places outside that box. Expansion is the key to reprogramming your mind. Another way to look at expansion is brainstorming. All you're doing when you are expanding are thinking of all the possibilities to a particular question or problem.

Now, words are the basic unit of thought. What you believe creates your world, so we must go back to the basics and find the words that can create that different reality you would rather be in than the one you have now. You can do anything with your mind that you want, including thinking something new. The problem we run into is that we don't know all the options in order to choose something new that we would actually want. And this is where expansion comes in.

Words are just energy, energy that affects how we see ourselves and how we view our world. It is helpful to write down all the words you use on a daily basis.

What are your themes? Are you expressing love, joy, respect, beauty? Or are you expressing anger, disgust, shame, blame, guilt, fear, hate?

Go ahead, write down all the words that come to mind when you think of yourself, your body, the life you are living. Are you happy?

Write down all the words that come to mind when you think of your job, your career, your hobbies, the activities you do for fun. Are you doing what makes you happy?

Write down all the words that come to mind when you think of your family, your friends, your pets, your children. Are you saying happy, inspiring and empowering things to them or quite the opposite?

Only you can change your beliefs, your thoughts, and it starts by changing your words. Once you know what the words you are currently using, you can start to make new choices in new directions or choose to stay the same if your life is working for you as is.

After discovering your current theme, think about where you would like to go from here. Imagine all the possibilities. Expand. Write down everything you wish you were, or wish you could do.

What would you do for a living if money was no object? Where would you like to live, or travel to? What is your ideal relationship? Just writing down options gives your brain new material to work with.

Write down the words you wish other people would tell you, such as “I love you,” “you are beautiful,” “you are perfect,” and so on and so forth. Write down whatever comes to mind. This will give you a starting base on your journey to self-love and self-discovery.

How to use an Expansion Grid:

I love expansion grids. They are helpful brainstorming tools when you are trying to think of, well pretty much anything. Use this to expand on your options in your career, or your love life, and all manners of experience.

So here is what you do: take a piece of paper, preferably without lines although lined paper will work as well, and draw a circle in the middle. In that circle, write down what you want to expand on. My favorite things to expand my mind on are:

“What I love doing”
“Things I like about my body”
“What I love about my life”
“What am I grateful for?”
“Things I like about my job”

Once you have something you want to expand on, start by drawing smaller circles all around the circle you drew in the middle with your main question or theme you are working on. And in each of those circles fill in an answer that fits with your theme.

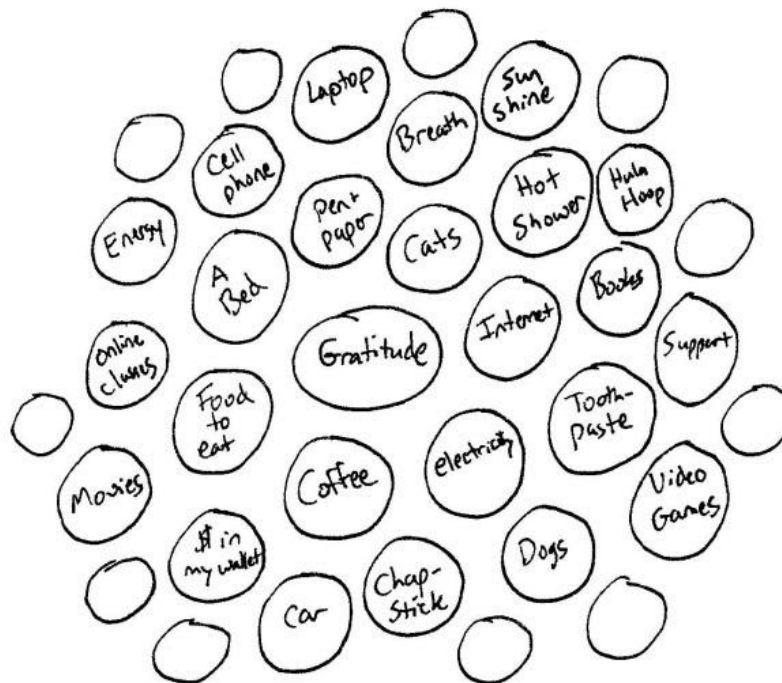
If you are trying to think of all the things you are grateful for in your life, you could write down things such as: my bed, my pillow, running water, hot water, cold water to drink, my car that allows me to drive anywhere I want, the newspaper to read on a Sunday morning, the tree outside my window... brainstorm every possible thing you are grateful for and keep drawing new circles around existing circles until you have a massive grid of ideas you may not have recognized before doing this exercise.

Do this expansion grid exercise for the thoughts you wish you would have about your body. Start seeing the good things you like about your body and it will give you more good reasons over time.

If you can only think of a couple things right now, that is okay. Come back to your expansion grids after many brain-breaks and see if you can continue to think of new, positive things about yourself and your life. Over time, you will be amazed at what you can think up, and then you can

see what you would like to change, what you would like more of in your life, what you would like less of, and so on. Just keep expanding. An expanded life is full of possibilities.

Here is a sample of my gratitude expansion grid. I would continue to draw layers of circles and fill them in with everything I am grateful for in my life:



There are no limits in the universe. The point of this exercise is to realize that you have the answers; you just have to recognize them. Asking ourselves to write down what we think shows us where our gaps are, it shows us what we are missing on the surface. This gratitude grid was what I could come up with on my initial try. Since then I've expanded upon it after some quiet reflection time. What am I truly grateful for in life? The list keeps going on and on.

Practice expansion and it will become more natural to see many different answers to a question you may be asking, as well as many different perspectives on a project you are working on.

The Power of Self-Love

“We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.”

- Buddha

People tell you to embrace who you are. Embrace your curves. Embrace your flaws. Love yourself. Well that's nice. It doesn't work so well if you hate yourself.

If you are not happy with yourself, having someone tell you to just be happy is usually more upsetting than encouraging, and it can often fall on deaf ears. Those with issues don't want their issues pointed out to them, and they don't want others to insinuate that their beliefs are wrong in some fashion, because if our beliefs are “wrong,” then we must be wrong as a whole.

So the first thing to remember is that there is no right or wrong, there is just what works for us on an individual level. Self-love is about believing in one's self. Self-love is about loving ourselves unconditionally, or without conditions.

Our family, our friends, our romantic partners, everyone can tell you that you're beautiful and amazing until they are blue in the face, but if you don't believe it yourself then you'll dismiss their words as lies.

So, how do you cultivate self-love? You reclaim your power. Most people have given away their power through unconscious choices. We like to go with the flow, not rock any boats or make any waves. We want to be accepted and loved because we are social creatures.

It is not just about survival; we genuinely feel this longing to connect and be heard as we are with those around us. Standing in our power can be scary. And it usually won't look pretty to those around us who have been used to our lack of power in the past.

Standing in your power means being stronger than the thoughts of others around you, and being stronger than the thoughts in your own head. It is about reclaiming your power over yourself and self-worth.

Reclaiming Your Power:

You have to be just as important. Stand up for yourself as you stand up for others. Reclaiming your power is about noticing the words you use in everyday situations and figuring out which ones are disempowering you in that moment.

What are you allowing in your life? It is not what they do (and I mean anyone and everyone here), it is what I allow in my life that affects me. If I am basing my self-worth on the words and thoughts of another, I have given my power away to that person by allowing their words to affect me and alter my own perception of self.

We forget we have power. We forget we are powerful beings. We can change our entire reality with just a thought for crying out loud! Why is it so hard to remember this?

We've been on auto-pilot; we've been conditioned to switch off since we were children. We've agreed to the self-running programs and put ourselves on auto-pilot so we didn't have to focus on our journey too much.

We didn't want to think. We just wanted to be. And that is okay. But at some point just being isn't enough. Simply going through the motions isn't enough. We want more. We want different. We just don't know how to get there or we are too scared to make the leap.

So how do we start? We take our power back. Do one thing to reclaim that power and then do one more small thing, and one more and so on and so forth until you've switched off the "just being" auto-pilot program and switched on the "power creation mode" auto-pilot program.

The easiest place to start is to say these things to yourself:

I am good enough
I am loved
I am worthy
I deserve the best
I am perfect as I am

So, why is reclaiming your power important? Once you get a taste of your own inner power and beauty, you won't want to go back to easy. You won't want to go back to just being.

Once you realize you have given away your power, maybe even for your entire life, you might get a little angry with yourself. Anger is totally normal; it is a human emotion that just wants to be expressed. But the trick with anger is realizing that our anger is never at another, we only get angry with ourselves. Let that sink in a moment.

All anger is never at another. It comes out when we feel stupid or we get embarrassed, when we feel less than something and we know that just isn't right. And then we project our anger outwards onto other people or things as an excuse, but ultimately that anger is our own. Allow your anger to be expressed; it just wants to be heard. Say thank you and move on.

Many people dwell on anger, hold onto it for years or entire lifetimes, and never let it go. Just let it go. See anger as just another tool to show you where you are out of alignment with yourself and your power. If you're getting angry for someone not listening to you, you probably just never allowed them to hear the real you before.

It takes time to reclaim your power. Start with an exercise in self-love and, as your confidence increases, grow to love yourself in more and more ways from there.

An Exercise in Self-Love:

I learned this from a good friend and one of my spiritual leaders, Lisa Transcendence Brown. The first time I did this was about four months into my experiment and I felt pretty weird and a little silly. And I admit I got a little angry at first. Here was someone telling me that all I needed to do was love myself and my whole world would fall into place and I was like, “of course I love myself! Why the heck do I need to do this?”

We think we love ourselves, but we usually don't feel it. Had I looked inside, truly looked at my thoughts and underlying emotions, I would have noticed that I really didn't love myself and I still had many months to go to get to the point where I could feel like I did love myself.

The Hand-on-Heart Meditation:

This meditation is as simple as the name suggests. You put your hand, or hands, over your heart and you repeat to yourself, “I Am Love.” Or you can do a variation of that like, “I love myself,” and “I am loved.” As long as it is love, you are all good!

Again, I felt pretty silly doing this at first. Like what was the point of this? Well you are connecting in to the energy of your heart. Some would call it the heart chakra, but ultimately the heart is the seat of the soul and houses pure love for us and every other being on the planet. By placing your hand on your heart you are connecting to your power center, your love center, your confidence center...all the good things we use the energy of love for in our lives.

Repeat this exercise as often as you are called to. Allow the tears to flow once you've made a breakthrough into your heart center, or core being. And if you don't cry, don't worry, you didn't do it wrong. We all have different experiences. Connecting and truly allowing yourself to feel the love within you is the goal of the exercise. However it turns out is an individual experience.

Another spiritual teacher I found at this time was Matt Kahn, and he had a similar exercise for cultivating self-love. He repeats the words, “I love you,” to himself in the mirror and as he connects with other people by looking into their eyes.

I like to combine these exercise and place my hand on my heart and tell myself “I love you,” while looking in my bathroom mirror. Find what works for you and start the process of reclaiming your power and bringing your self-love to the surface of your very being.

I Have a Choice?

“Waking up to who you are requires letting go of who you imagine yourself to be.”
- Alan Watts

Everyone is responsible for their own lives and their own choices. These choices affect how we see ourselves and the world around us. Choice is personal. I choose to think a certain way, to say something about myself, to love myself or to hate myself...it is all my choice.

How I choose to react to others is a choice I make every time I interact with another person. How I choose to react to my own thoughts is all on me as well. No one else can decide for me. No one else can choose how I see myself.

If I wanted to keep feeling sorry for myself, to deprecate myself and my self-worth, to lower my expectations of myself on behalf of others, or to hate myself and my body, then that is my choice. But now I know I have that choice and I am able to make a new one in any moment that I feel suits me better.

Learning how to choose in your own best interest is a skill best practiced over time. I never really looked at who I was before, or who I wanted to become. I was too focused on being someone I thought everyone else wanted to see in me. Who was I?

Only you know what you need. Only you know what you really want out of life. And sometimes it takes a little time to figure it all out. But as long as you are making the choice to stick with it, the answers you are searching for will come.

No one can force us into a decision, we only think they do. Then we get to blame whatever happens on them or any other outside force so we don't have to take responsibility for ourselves. Loving yourself is a personal responsibility. What is right? What is wrong? Do you feel others are treating you the way you should be treated? The way you want to be treated? If you want others to love you for who you are, it helps to start by loving yourself for who you are.

Everything becomes a conscious choice in the moment. You always have a choice. “From this moment forward...” the past doesn't exist anymore. You get to make a new choice. If the choice feels right for you, then go for it.

If you start to feel uneasy about it, re-adjust your choices and continue along the path. Whatever someone says, or does in the moment, see how you feel and adjust your own course. We all have the power to do this, through our choices. We get to make a new choice and we can get to the point where all we do is live in love, magic, and bliss in every moment.

Choose to love yourself, or not. Choose to change, or remain the same. Choose to love others as they deserve to be loved, even if they don't love themselves yet.

Some people think wearing comfy sweatpants out in public means that person has no respect for themselves, and yet that person could be feeling really crappy or have a million things going on. I chose to wear certain clothes as a conscious decision to see my reactions and the reactions of others around me.

So, why do you do the things you do? Only you can answer that. We choose our actions and reactions in every moment.

My life has continued to snowball from the moment I choose to actively confront my fears and work on my own thoughts. Choose amazing if you can, I know I try to whenever I can.

My Own Worst Bully

Body shaming is an acquired skill. Children are born naturally loving themselves. They wouldn't know the difference between a perfect body and an imperfect one if no one ever showed them the duality of everything.

Our first encounter with body shaming or self-doubt comes from an outside influence, whether that is an individual person or a source like the media or entertainment industry. After that initial encounter we start to see more and more of it and start to incorporate more of those ideas as our own because we all want to fit in, or at least try and feel like we do.

And this first encounter doesn't have to be so obvious like telling a child they are fat and worthless. Often it is the subtle opinions of others like you are wearing the wrong color shoes or you don't have the right backpack or hat when you show up to school.

I finally realized that I was my own worst bully. I could probably count ten things the bully that followed me around school said or did to me, but none of those things compare to what I have said about myself or done to myself that has shattered my own self confidence and respect.

Sure, I had a few bullies throughout my entire education. I just continued their work on my own after school. And if I am my own worst bully, certainly I can stop treating myself that way, right?

It is my choice to continue allowing my negative thoughts about myself to permeate my reality, my existence. And it is my choice to love myself instead. Someone else can call me a hairy Sasquatch or a dirty hippie for not shaving my legs, but I've already thought of those things, and more, to call myself on my own.

I have allowed my thoughts regarding my body to be negative and unsupportive. Every time I looked at someone younger than me, or skinnier than me, or prettier than me...all I was doing was judging myself and reinforcing the negative thought patterns. Realizing that I was my own worst bully was life-altering.

Awareness leads to more choices, and now I choose to love myself exactly as I am. I am the only one who can change how I think. I am the only one who can truly love me in every way possible.

Forgive Yourself:

There is no such thing as "fixing" something. Nothing needs to be "fixed" when it comes to our appearances and our thoughts. Fixing implies something is broken. Fixing implies something is wrong. Our bodies are exactly as they need to be. If you think something is wrong about your body then that is the only thing you need to be working on; the thought.

There is no right or wrong way to be human. If there was only one way to be, we would all look the same. The human experience is ripe with uniqueness, individuality, and infinite expressions of self. The human mind puts the body into a box of imperfection because there are too many definitions and expectations of perfection that it can't handle sorting through them all. The truth is: everything is perfect. You are perfect, because you are unique.

Forgive yourself first, and then forgive anyone and everyone who you perceived did something wrong to you. Forgiving yourself first allows you to take responsibility for your actions and inactions in regards to your own life, your thoughts, and your treatment of yourself and others.

We give ourselves such a hard time and usually all the time. Why? Why do we lower our self-worth? Why do we not value ourselves? Why are we so concerned with the physical?

Sure, we may have been conditioned to think and behave this way. Maybe no one ever taught us how to love ourselves because they didn't know how to either.

Forgiving yourself and others is a choice. You don't have to forgive, but can you forgive. We are all our own worst bullies. We live we our mind 24/7, 365 days a year. It is there and it does its job very well.

Allow your mind to keep telling you the same old story and say "thank you for sharing" and move on to a new one. Forgiveness turns the page to the next blank page in your book of life. What are you going to write on it?

Judgment

“Don’t be overly concerned about how you look in the eyes of others. People will pretty much see you as they will. Play your part in the cosmic drama, but never forget, that you choose the way you see yourself. Don’t let others do the casting.”

- Annie Kagan

Here is a simple way to look at it: Opinion = Judgment. If you have an opinion about something, you are actually judging it. Some judgment is obvious, but most of the time it is subtle. Our subtle judgments shine a light on the underlying thoughts about ourselves and our stories we believe in.

Opinions show us where our expectations are. Being normal versus being crazy are two different perceptions of expectations, of how things “should” be.

Why am I worried about what someone else thinks of me? We all have our own ideas of how the world works and how we fit into that world. I was living my life trying to impress other people, strangers mostly. I was doing things for the sake of other people. I lost the ability to do things just for myself somewhere along the journey of life.

Some days I am really good at not worrying about other people’s opinions of me. And other days I don’t say what I want to say, or eat what I want to eat, because of the people I happen to be around. Just being true to ourselves is one of the hardest things we have to learn.

We want to fit in and yet we want to stand out. It can feel like we’re in a constant state of finding balance. All we can do is work with our thoughts, really hear what we are saying, and then decide if we want to continue thinking that way in the next moment.

When I discovered that judgment of others was really judgment of myself, my whole life shifted. I didn’t like the way I looked or felt, so everyone I saw in my reality I found something I didn’t like about them. What we see in others is what we see in ourselves. When I was thinking there was something wrong with every little thing around me, I was really thinking there was something wrong with me.

What were the words I was telling myself? Did I believe I was loved? Sure, I told myself I was loved. But I’ve caught myself on many occasions (and still do) where I sigh or groan when I pass a mirror. It’s the little things that truly show us where our beliefs are at.

We spend so much time focusing on other people, places, and things that we forget to focus on what we are actually thinking. Everything is just a projection of self. If I’m judging someone else’s body walking around the grocery store, I’m really just uncomfortable with how my own body looks.

All the time spent on thoughts of something or someone else...who really cares what your friends think of you? Your parents? Your neighbors? The strangers you pass once in a lifetime? Are you neglecting your own thoughts about yourself?

What does it take to feel accepted and loved by those around you? It starts by accepting yourself, your judgments of self, and acknowledging your own thoughts and then making a decision to change or not.

There is no such thing as a cookie cutter image. No one fits into the proverbial box. That is the point. Although we are a collective group called humanity, our journeys are an individual one. Our experiences are unique. No one else can walk our path, as others walk their own paths too.

People are going to see you as they see themselves. The proof is in your own judgments about another person. Everyone does it. Everyone has an issue with their bodies or self-image in some way, shape, or form.

I realized that after this year of self-reflection I was still holding onto the past thoughts and judgments I had about myself. I learned so many things, and gained so much knowledge and insight into the nature of thoughts and how we can change the way we think and thus change our world, and yet I was still judging everything.

Maybe I just got tired of hating myself. Maybe I just got “done” with feeling like crap all the time. What was the point to this experiment? Why was I going through all this effort just to stay angry with how I looked in a mirror, or eating something horrible to make myself feel better in a moment, or not truly appreciating what I had right in front of me? What really matters?

What I think of myself is what matters. I was doing everything I thought I should be doing to look better in the eyes of another, but I really just needed to work on me. And I mean truly work on me, my judgments, and my opinions of myself. Where did all these opinions come from? Were they even mine to begin with, or did I pick up these opinions from other people?

Expectations and Attachment:

You don't always see the finished product when a piece of art is in progress. And until it is completed, it may look quite messy or disjointed in some fashion. Perceived reality (or actual reality) never lives up to our expected reality.

We expect the coffee shop on the way to work to have our favorite blueberry muffins available and when we get there they don't have one on the day you really needed one. We expect the guy (or girl) we meet online to be just as confident, funny, and attractive as they seem but in reality you get a normal human being who is nervous and shy and wore an outfit you don't like because they're nervous and you have judgments.

Comparing actual reality to expected reality creates an emotional response. When the two match up, the emotion is often positive (unless you were dreading something negative happening,

which happened, but still this is “positive” in the sense that what you thought would happen actually happened). And when the two don’t match up, our emotions are often negative.

There are a variety of responses when our thoughts don’t match up with what is actually happening right in front of us. How we react to a situation or person is entirely up to us. If we change the story in our head, or we don’t allow that story to affect us, then we can see things as they are and go with the flow of life. Take a moment to truly look at your own expectations in life and see where things are not matching up for you.

Likewise, we get attached to certain outcomes. So your favorite coffee shop didn’t have that blueberry muffin, well you went down to the street to the next coffee place and they didn’t have blueberry muffins available either, so you continue to go from coffee shop to coffee shop looking for this blueberry muffin and you get really sad because life has taken all the blueberry muffins away from you for some reason on this day.

And no, I am not eating a blueberry muffin while writing this chapter. I just like saying blueberry muffin. I hope this didn’t make you hungry.

But seriously, we get attached to outcomes based on our expectations. We expect to have a parking space at the mall, we expect our spouse to have dinner ready when we get home, we expect our cats to poop in the litter box... and when these things don’t happen, we get upset, because the outcome we expect didn’t happen.

Human beings like routine. Routine is easy. Routine is safe. We get attached to things happening one way and when they happen another way it creates discord in our lives. We get attached to believing in a particular future and believing in *the* one thing that will make us happy, successful, or loved, and when that future never happens emotions are created and we weave elaborate stories of how much life sucks and how worthless we are.

There is expecting something to happen, and then there is getting disappointed or upset when things don’t happen the way you expected it to. My life certainly turned out different than I expected it to. The trick is to not get stuck in the details.

We do this all the time though: “I’m not going to write a novel because it will never make a billion dollar,” or “I’m not going to paint because not everyone will like it.” We place conditions on the way our lives should be, and when these conditions are not met we feel like we failed in life.

Are you expecting to achieve a certain outcome in a certain way (attachment)? Or are you allowing all the possibilities to happen around you? I wanted to allow more possibilities. I wanted to expand. Because things were not working like I planned them to.

Becoming aware of your own expectations, attachments, and judgments will shed light on everything that is happening around you. Our minds are meaning-making machines. We need to see the reason in everything, and we can create our own meanings if we need to. But what is *actually* happening around us?

We have to take a step back and go inward to find the answers. What meaning has been put into this situation? What judgments do I have right now? What am I expecting to happen? What would I like to have happen? And can I get okay with something else happening right now?

Definitions of Self

“The world is what you believe it to be, and it changes as you change.”
- Byron Katie

How do we define ourselves? What sets us apart from everybody else? What makes us the same? Definitions of ‘self’ change over time as we accumulate new information and alter our perceptions each and every moment.

And yet, are we limiting ourselves by defining ourselves? Are we limiting the way we see ourselves and each other by putting everyone into categories? By putting everything into boxes? How do you define yourself? How do other people see you? Who are we and who do we want to become?

We are often happier when we are undefined. When we are just allowed to be who we are, we’re happy. Definitions put us into boxes of prescribed notions of how we should act, who we should be, and how we should think and feel. Integrity is defined as being honest or being whole, depending on how you use it.

Are you being who you say you are, truly? No matter how you define yourself, are you true to yourself? Or are you constantly changing yourself depending on the company around you or the situation you are in? Are you a chameleon or do you put the real you out there?

We all struggle with integrity. We all struggle with being who we are. We want to fit in and we want to be loved for who we are. We’ve set expectations on how we should be loved and so we’ve defined the love we wish to receive in a particular way in return.

Once we realize our definitions on what it means to love, what it means to be loved, and what it means to be happy, we can see what is working for us and what is not working for us. Is that the way you want to continue to live your life?

I knew I had to change certain things about the way I perceived myself. All of my definitions of self were based on what I thought other people thought and believed. I thought I had to shave my legs and dress up all the time to be accepted and loved by the opposite sex. I put all my limiting definitions of self into a box and I couldn’t see outside that box, even though I was still loved for having fuzzy legs and just being open and honest with myself.

Definitions are the stories we’ve made up. Are they your definitions or are they someone else’s? Did you know that there was a time before the dictionary and thesaurus were created in which people spelled things the way they wanted to, and people talked the way they were brought up to talk like, and yet society still functioned?

We’ve put all these labels on what is the right thing to do: the right way to spell a word, the right way to dress, the right way to act in public, the right way to talk. No one fits perfectly into that box.

Who are you? And I mean the real you, behind the mask, beneath the facade of the human shell we call a body, beyond all the labels you and society have given yourself and your body? Only you can answer that. I can't tell you who you are or who you should be. Just like no one else can tell me who I am.

So What? Who Cares?

So, who are you beyond all the ideas, beliefs, and stories you have created around your body? We get to work backwards, and continue to work backwards, until we have the answer. Where did you get this idea about yourself?

It's difficult to pinpoint an exact answer, but answers will still come to mind. Maybe you remembered an ad you saw on T.V. as a kid watching cartoons, or maybe it was something your parents said. Who are you? Why do you think the way you do? Why do you do the things you do?

And yet, the answers don't really matter. Okay, so your mom told you that you were stupid and you would never amount to anything in your life. So what? Who cares?

Maybe your teacher said you should never speak in public because you have no idea what you are talking about. So what? Who cares? Maybe your ex-partner broke up with you to be with someone younger than you. So what? Who cares?

Do you care? Are you allowing yourself to be defined by someone else's thought? By someone else's opinion of themselves that they have projected upon you? Are you allowing someone else's story to be the story you tell about yourself?

We've been conditioned to care what people think. We've been conditioned to believe that there is only one right way to be and that we have to work hard to be that one thing. The human body is not "wrong." What we believe is not "wrong."

We shame ourselves more than other people shame us. We keep ourselves in a line we've defined and stick to walking that line as our entire life. Can you change your definition of self? Can you not care what other people think of you? Can you not care what happens to you? Yes, you can, but do you want to.

That person has hairy legs. So what? Who cares? That person is wearing pajamas in the store. So what? Who cares? That woman isn't wearing makeup. So what? Who cares?

You can choose to change your beliefs. You can choose to not be affected by what other people think of you, or what you think of yourself. You can say "I don't believe that anymore." You are free to believe something new, especially about yourself.

So what? Who cares? Use these questions as another tool when your mind starts to run amok thinking of all the elaborate definitions and stories you created about a person, place, or thing.

Ok, so John doesn't like me because I like turtles and he is more of a dolphin fan. So what? Who cares? Katherine won't go out with me because she wants to date someone taller. So what? Who cares? Keep asking, keep wondering, keep figuring out who you are and who you want to be, and just be that.

Don't worry about what is going on around you. You have to be okay with yourself; because that is *the* one person you are stuck with your entire life. It is your head, those are your thoughts, so choose which ones you want to believe from this moment on and get okay with the rest.

What does it mean to Be Happy?

What is happiness? According to the dictionary, happiness is literally defined as “the state of being happy”... like that is really helpful. But if you take a moment and think about it, happiness literally means something different to everyone. Being happy is achieved in different ways for everybody.

Happiness is relative, and it is subjective. What makes one person happy will be different than what makes the next person happy. It is a process to figure out your personal happiness if you haven't been happy in a while.

Do you remember a time that you were truly happy? Are you happy now? Do you even want to be happy? If so, you can do something about that.

Although I thought I was a happy person, after years of self-reflection and many epiphanies, I realized that I wasn't really happy. I was going to school getting the degree my mom wanted me to get. I was working jobs I didn't like just to pay the bills. I ignored my passions and pushed aside doing fun things because “I didn't have time” or “I didn't have the money.”

So what does happiness really mean? After much consideration, I discovered my happiness came from freedom and the state of feeling free; free to do what I wanted, when I wanted to do it, without caring what people thought of me. I remember when I was a little girl, in the time before I moved and my life changed on many levels.

I remember the kids I grew up with at daycare and my first school. I was active. I played pretend. I was a circus performer with a stage name and everything (‘Princess Sparkles’) when I was on the jungle gym jumping off swings and swinging across the monkey bars. My best friend had her own stage name and act too and we performed in front of invisible crowds together.

That was fun. That was happy. And it was because I could just be who I wanted to be. I had no idea what judgment was. I had no idea what shame was. I was free to be me. And I needed to find that happy place again, over twenty years later.

My childhood stage name is quite funny because, as an adult, I hate glitter. I know hate is a strong word, so I will just say instead that I really, really don't like it. It is something I am working on though. I bought a pack of glitter in 48 different colors recently and I have high hopes to put it to use and get over my anti-glitter beliefs one day.

The Smile Technique:

This technique is very simple. Once I realized that I wasn't really happy, I also realized that I wasn't smiling often enough. My face was actually giving off a constant frown vibe. The corners

of my mouth had not been stretched in the upward position for quite a long time and it felt like I forgot how to smile. So, I told myself to just smile.

Happy people smile, right? And if you want your actions to be a reflection of your thoughts, and vice versa, if you can't change the thoughts right away then maybe you can change the actions right away.

So, I started to consciously smile throughout the day. I had to remember to do so, otherwise I went back to naturally not-smiling. If you are also the kind of person who hasn't smiled in a while and you try this exercise, you may feel a little deranged like I did. Like why am I smiling, I'm not happy!

It feels weird to smile when you haven't done it in a while. I felt like a crazy person. I smiled when no one was looking. I only did it at home at first. I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror while I smiled because I just didn't feel right doing it. That was how bad I felt about myself and my life. I couldn't even smile about anything and feel okay about it.

Now, over time, the smiling became more natural. It even happened on its own. I thought about tattooing the word "smile" on my left arm to remind myself but then I just trained myself to smile every time I looked at the tattoo of my cat on my right arm that I already had. Use what you have. Carry a picture around in your wallet that reminds you to smile. Hang up reminders around your bedroom or car to smile.

Practice smiling and it will naturally come to you. This is about re-training your brain. There is an actual science to smiling. The simple act of smiling, whether authentic or not, tricks your brain into thinking that you are actually happy. When the corners of our mouths turn upwards into a smile, it sends signals to our brains that there is something around us making us happy. So if you haven't practiced smiling recently, give it a try.

The Happy Habit:

Happiness is ultimately a habit, an acquired one at that. We have to continue to practice being happy until it is our natural state. If you want to be happy later, start practicing happiness right now. Do what makes you happy right now. Later you will be habitually miserable if you allow yourself to remain miserable.

Find something to be happy for, like you would find something to be grateful for. Often what we are grateful for and appreciate in our lives make us happy on some level. Look back on your lists of what you are grateful for in your life to remind yourself why you are really a happy person.

Some of us have to re-learn happiness. What makes you happy? How do you prefer to be happy? What is your personal definition of happiness? Mine was freedom, what is yours?

Happiness opens our hearts. When your heart is open, you express love. And when you express love everyone and everything around you lives in happiness, joy, and bliss. Some people like to start off their day practicing happiness. Smile as the first thing you do after you wake up. If you

are out and about and something makes you angry, get that energy out first (stomp around, bitch and moan, let your anger be heard and let it go) and then come back to happiness when you can.

Another trick about happiness, and the human experience overall, is that we don't have to be happy all the time. It is great if you are, but most of us have fluctuating moods. We're happy one moment and sad the next. That is perfectly okay.

But when you have a choice to be happy or sad, which one are you going to choose? Choose happiness and the universe will show you more ways to be happy in return.

We are creatures of habit. And we can change that habit. Why do we wait to do things? Now is the only moment we have access to. Make happiness a priority right now, not later. If you are not happy now, what makes you think you will be happy later if nothing changes?

You have to initiate the change to switch from being non-happy to being happy. I know I had to put in the effort to change. Smiling was very hard for me at first. And yes, it got easier over time, but I had to stick with it. I went long periods of time forgetting to consciously practice smiling.

It is okay to forget, but it feels amazing when we remember. Likewise, you can love your body the way it is right now. Love what you have in your life right now. If this moment is all we have access to in our life, then what are you doing right now to have the life you want?

Sanity is Subjective:

If I had to pick one gem of advice that I have received in my life to share with you, this would be it: "Embrace your Crazy." We are all unique. There is no such thing as normal or normality.

Normal is a social construct; it is made-up concept by someone who wanted to be the poster child for normal. We all have our definitions of what it means to be normal, and what it means to be crazy.

We judge our craziness. We judge our uniqueness. We appear crazy to other people because we don't fit into their box they've defined as "sanity." What is normal for you is not normal for someone else.

I believe it is healthy to question your own sanity at times. In fact, I believe it is entirely healthy to question your sanity *all* the time. When we think someone is crazy, we are actually thinking they are wrong in some way.

When we think we're doing something crazy, why do we think it is crazy? Is it not normal? By whose definition is it not normal? Happiness is subjective. Sanity is subjective. Life is subjective. Figure out your own definition of what it means to be normal and what it means to fall outside the definition of normal.

If humans were meant to have the same experience, we would all look the same, we would all act the same, and we would all think the same. But we don't, and we are not the same. So, embrace your crazy, or not. Find your happy place, or not.

Can you get okay with it? So what? Who cares? There is no one way to be happy, just like there is no one way to be normal. Find what works for you and do it that way.

Here is a quote to expand your mind on the concept of happiness:

“Sadness gives depth. Happiness gives height. Sadness gives roots. Happiness gives branches. Happiness is like a tree going into the sky, and sadness is like the roots going down into the womb of the earth. Both are needed, and the higher a tree goes, the deeper it goes, simultaneously. The bigger the tree, the bigger will be its roots. In fact, it is always in proportion. That's its balance.”

- Osho

Overcoming Fear

“Not all those who wander are lost.”

- J.R.R. Tolkien

There are only two forces in the world, the duality of experience: love and fear. Simply put, if you are not coming from love then you are coming from fear; and if you are not coming from fear then you are coming from love.

While the universe contains these two forces, which are polar opposites of each other, all experiences are on a sliding scale between the two. We experience fear *and* we experience love (and sometimes at the same time). This isn't about judging our experiences as good or bad, love or fear. Life is about both. And the act of overcoming fear is an experience in and of itself.

So, what are you afraid of? Our fears expose our automatic programming; the thoughts, beliefs and stories we believe at an unconscious or subconscious level. Fear exposes our auto-responses when we feel threatened in some way.

When someone cuts you off in traffic, how do you react? My first response is something along the lines of that person is an asshole. But what makes him an asshole though? Do I know that guy and do I know the reason why he cut me off? No. So then why did I care so much? Because my ego felt threatened.

All of my fears of being in an accident surfaced in that moment, and my first response was to call some random person names and get angry. See what kind of automatic responses you have when your fears are exposed.

What fears do you have about your body? Your life? What kind of situation makes you feel the most uncomfortable? Fears also pop up in the little inconveniences in life. Fears are our blocks. Is there something you need to know and you don't know it?

New situations throw us off our game. We can practice overcoming fears and overcome our thoughts in many ways, but then a new fear pops up that we never thought of before, in a different way. I shaved my legs at the one-year mark and it brought up old fears in a new way. I shaved my head and new fears and thoughts surfaced that I didn't know were in my head either.

I find that exercises in discomfort are beneficial to figuring yourself out. You don't have to actively work through your fears like I have. There are a variety of mental exercises that will get you to similar conclusions about your own self. I needed to do my journey my way. Mental exercises work for me on most things, but then there are things I need an extra little push in my life to get me to understand and overcome my own issues.

If there is one exercise in discomfort I am now fond of, it is walking around naked in the comfort of your own home or room. I really didn't like my body, so why would I walk around naked? Exactly: I needed to get over it.

I needed to get okay with it. I vacuumed naked, which my boyfriend at the time really didn't mind. But the entire time I was a little concerned about what if someone saw me through the curtains of my second-story apartment. I can't see through other people's windows around me with all the screens, shades, and the angle of the place, but I was convinced someone would magically see me naked and like stare at me the entire time I was doing this little experiment. So what? Who cares?

Do things to make yourself get over your fears, within your comfort zone of course. It could be something silly like walking around your living room naked for ten seconds. Praise yourself for accomplishing any and every task you do consciously to either get over your stuff or to better understand yourself. Love yourself.

This can be hard. It was for me. I took a moment to just *be* naked. I allowed myself to be vulnerable. And I was proud of myself for it because I was thankful for the body I did have in that moment, however it may look.

Overcoming Fear:

So, how do you overcome your fears by not having to walk around naked or to shave all your hair off or to jump out of a plane with, hopefully, a parachute attached? Sometimes we have to do the things we fear the most, and sometimes we can just work through our fears from the comfort of our own mind.

Our fears could be more psychological. If you are afraid to go to the movies or out to dinner by yourself because of what people might think of you, then maybe you need to actually do that. I'm afraid of spiders but I'm not ready to go hold a tarantula yet. I'm afraid of heights and falling but I'm not prepared to go scale a mountain or something like that.

Do what is in your comfort zone. I can't bring myself to hold a spider in this moment, but I was comfortable enough to get a tattoo on my forearm where the entire world could see it. I was comfortable enough to shave all the hair off my head. I overcome my fear of failure by accomplishing something, anything, each and every day. See what thoughts and fears are triggered within you in a new situation.

Question your fears. Figure out how valid or true they are for you. Once you know what your fears are, you can work through them by asking: "what is the worst that can happen?"

Steps for Overcoming Fear:

1. Ask: What's the worst that can happen?
2. Think: How realistic is it?
3. Get okay with that thing happening

Now, this is the one exercise you want to allow your imagination to run wild. You get to think of all the things that can happen if your fears actually came true. Use the expansion grid technique from earlier if that helps. But simply writing down all the things you can think of is a big help.

Listen to all of the thoughts that come up for you. See all the possible outcomes for when your fear comes true. Make a list. Then, when the list is done, go over it and see if you can get okay with every single thing happening as if it would happen for real. When you can get okay with everything your mind can think of, you will no longer be afraid.

Okay, I shaved all the hair on my head off. What's the worst that can happen? Maybe it will never grow back. Is this realistic? Possible. Can I get okay with it? Do I have a choice to? Not really. How about no one ever loving me ever again because I was bald; was this realistic? I had a guy who still loved me after I just shaved my head so no, it is not realistic. And even if no one else loved me for me, I could get okay with loving myself without hair.

So, how realistic are your fears? Look at your list and see what sounds ridiculous (remember, no judgment and no shaming your own thoughts). See the stories you are making up. Scratch off the things on the list that are highly unlikely to ever happen. With what you have left, it is time to get okay with those things happening.

How do you get okay? Well, that is up to you. Can you get okay with losing your job? Can you get okay being embarrassed in public? Can you get okay with losing a friend or family member? Can you get okay with your own death?

Another good question to ask is: why can't you get okay with it? What are you holding onto? None of us are getting out of this grand human experience alive. So how do you want to spend the time you have while you *are* alive? Do you want to hold onto a grudge for 90 years or do you just want to let it go? What matters to you? What are your priorities?

Get okay with it, or don't get okay with it. Both paths are perfect. Both paths ultimately lead to the same end, they just offer different experiences. How realistic are your fears? Break them down until they no longer make sense. See just how real they are.

So, what are you afraid of? What is holding you back from achieving your dreams? What is keeping you from being happy? I have found that I am my own worst source of fear. The stories I tell in my head are often filled with fear; the "what ifs," the "shoulds" and "should nots."

A friend of mine likes to say "I recognize the fear and move past it" when they have a new fear surface. Find what works best for you. Begin to break down your thoughts, your beliefs. Dissect the story you've created and choose whether or not you want to believe it anymore. Make a choice on whether or not you want to believe in your fears anymore.

Being Okay With You

“Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves.”
- Henry David Thoreau

The human body is the vehicle in which we experience our life. Just like a car, bicycle, train or any other form of transportation, the physical body allows us to get from point A (birth) to point B (death) and everywhere in between. And like a car, bus, train, etc. the human body needs maintenance in the form of love and attention to keep it operating effectively.

We put food into our bodies as fuel; we exercise our bodies to keep all the parts moving as they should. Some of us take better care of our vehicles than others. If my body is my one and only vehicle to experience everything life has to offer, then why was I not taking care of it? Why was I not loving my body properly?

I was content, I was settling, and I was just getting by. And I was getting tired of that life. I was getting tired of feeling like crap, physically and mentally. I was done. I wasn't done with life, but I was done with how my life was playing out at the time. I needed a change, and this experiment brought much needed change in my life.

The human body is just a shell, a vessel. Every vessel is unique. We can get okay with the shell we are born with, and we can get okay with how we've allowed it to develop until this point. If you don't like your body, you have the choice to do something about that.

Are you going to allow the shell to control your life, to define who you are, or are you going to take your power back and figure out how to feel your best and get comfortable with what you have?

Getting okay with a thought or an experience is one thing, but getting okay with yourself and your body is another. It is more than just getting okay, it is about feeling okay, and ultimately *being* okay. You can get okay with something but can you accept it? Think a new thought. Believe something new. Do something that makes a physical change.

Honoring Yourself:

I created a life where I gave my power away by allowing the thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and stories of others to run my life. Where was I this whole time? I started to become more and more mindful of the things I was saying about myself. I was becoming more mindful of the feelings I had towards myself.

What did I see when I looked in a mirror? Did I have respect for myself? Not entirely. I sighed. I groaned. I even snorted once. I wasn't honoring myself or my body.

Honoring is the opposite of compromising yourself. We all have compromised ourselves and our integrity by choosing to do something we didn't believe in for the sake of others. We don't like

rocking the boat. We are social creatures, and there are many things we have done, said, or even just thought that were out of alignment with who we truly are.

Everyone's favorite question: "how are you?" is often answered with something like "fine" or "okay," but do we really feel fine or okay?

Honoring yourself is being honest with you first and foremost. Where have you given your power away? What are you allowing to continue happening in your life that you don't want anymore? Do you stay in a relationship because you are afraid to be lonely, even though your needs are not being met?

It's okay if you do. I'm just asking you to think about your life.

I have always been a people-pleaser. I put the needs of others before myself. I'm the caretaker. I'm everyone's mom. And I've discovered that really pisses some people off. I wasn't allowing others to take responsibility for their own lives. I wasn't honoring my own needs.

My own self and body's priority was at the bottom of the list more often than not. It really is true that you can't do anything for other people if you have nothing left to give. Bring it back to you. What do you need right now? What do you want right now?

Listen to the little voice in your heart called intuition and see what you've been neglecting about yourself lately. Do something nice for yourself. Put yourself first once in a while.

The more you take some quality "me time," the more time you'll want to focus on you overall. And when we're alone with our thoughts, our feelings, we go to a place where we can explore what it means to be human and we figure out how we want to live our lives.

Honor yourself first and the rest will fall into place.

Reminders for Yourself

Why do we need reminders? I felt like a failure needing to remind myself to smile or to be thankful for what I had or to love myself. And yet, those reminders really helped. I had so much going on in my life that I forgot a lot of things.

Living moment to moment means you become less and less focused on the future or the past and the thoughts associated with those times. I've been on this conscious journey for over two years now, and I still need reminders. You are not a failure by using tools to mind-hack your life.

The mind is a powerful thing. It can think anything it wants, and it can believe anything it wants. So yeah, it is going to forget a new program you just downloaded once and then forgot about. It's going to write it off as a bug, a fluke. *"Oh, you want to love yourself? (says the mind) Well that contradicts years of programming and you just said it once so I'm going to delete that erroneous program and go back to what I know."*

If you want things to change, you have to keep updating your internal coding. If you lapse, so will your mind. Our minds are more than happy to go back to the old ways of thinking, to what is considered safe and familiar.

But are you happy with that happening? You can re-train your brain, and reminders are just one of many tools to use that will make it easier on yourself.

When you start practicing with reminders and thinking of new things you want to remind yourself of, you get closer and closer to de-coding your own programming from years of conditioning.

I had to remind myself I could wear nail polish again. I got yelled at as a child for spilling nail polish all over the carpet, even though it was my little brother who did that. I had to remind myself that it was okay to be a girl, to dress up once in a while, to dance, and to play. I forgot *how* to play. I was so focused on being the right kind of adult that I forgot a lot about what it meant to be a child.

Rituals for Success:

Forming a new habit takes time. Cultural conditioning happens in such unexpected ways that we can be surprised at what comes up when we're working on ourselves.

We could be practicing self-love and making all this progress on not caring what people think about who we are or what we do in one moment, and then BAM!, a thought pops into your head that makes you feel like an epic failure or that you've somehow gone backwards.

After saying “I am worthy” for months until I started feeling it, one day out of the blue I started getting a second voice after I said I was worthy that say “we’re not worthy, we’re not worthy”....and I realized that I was quoting the movie ‘Wayne’s World.’

I hadn’t thought about that movie in many years and yet here it was, trying to contradict my desire to feel worthy. And I told my mind that it was ridiculous. It took a few days for this to stop but it was quite entertaining. You know you’re on the right track when stuff like this happens.

So remember, there is no such thing as getting stuck. There is no such thing as going backwards. We can’t go backwards anymore. We only have growth ahead of us. Either we stop growing or we grow, but we can’t UN-grow. We can’t reverse the clock or the universal time table.

And failure is just a perception of the mind (i.e. a giant lie). We can only fail if we believe we do. And if you believe that everything is growth and everything ultimately leads to success, then you can never fail. Failure is just an experience. You can get okay with it, and you can move on from it.

Find a ritual, or new habit, that works for you. You can do writing exercises (like the expansion grid or writing lists of your fears, dreams, etc.). You can do practical applications (like actively working through your fears by shaving your hair off or holding a tarantula).

I also have quite the collection of inspirational quotes from various authors, artists, spiritual leaders, and whoever or whatever else calls to me. You’ll find a few quotes peppered throughout this book. There have been many quotes over the years that have spoken to me, inspired me, and pushed me to keep going along my journey.

I am also a fan of mantras, or a word/series of words that you repeat as a form of meditation. You don’t have to sit still and meditate for mantras to work. Some people prefer the term “positive affirmations” for the reminders they repeat to themselves. “I love myself” is a mantra and it is also an affirmation.

Repeat the words that you need to hear to yourself until you believe them. Find what works for you. Certain words will resonate with different people. So find the right combination of words that work for you.

Here are some ideas for reminders, or affirmations, to keep nearby. These worked for me, but feel free to tweak them for your own benefit. Just remember to keep your own affirmations positive. Try not to use the words “not” or “don’t.” It is better to say “I am intelligent” instead of “I am not stupid.” Remember that words are powerful, and the most powerful word in the previous statement is “stupid.” The “not” is overlooked.

Find the right word that works for you, and make sure that is uplifting and positive if you want to incorporate affirmations and mantras into your daily life.

Some of my favorite affirmations:

I love myself
I honor myself
I respect myself
I am awesome
I am worthy
I am good enough
I accept myself
I attract good things into my life

And some general reminders:

Smile
Focus on you
Breathe
Live
Be you to the fullest
You are beautiful
Thank You

I often switch up my reminders from time to time, but these are my staples. Pick a few reminders that you want to focus on. Start small and work up to longer repetitions. I have a short list memorized that I say a few times a day. Go with the flow of your own thoughts and emotions.

What do you need to hear in this moment? Tell yourself that. Don't wait for others to tell you. They can't read your mind. They don't know what you need. Only you know what you need. Re-train your brain to remember that you are loved, worthy and beautiful.

The Story of Your Life

“Everything we hear is an opinion, not fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not truth.”
- Marcus Aurelius

I love the analogy that life is just a story, and not because I am a writer or anything, but because I truly believe in this now. Life has all aspects of a story: characters, themes, plot twists, foreshadowing futures, flashbacks to the past, separate chapters, and new editions written over time.

We continuously write and re-write the story of our life in every moment. Who am I now? The trick is to become a conscious writer of your story by taking back your power and control over what influences you and your subconscious mind in everything that you do.

I was more concerned about other people's stories for the longest time that I forgot about my own story. I focused on what I saw other people had that I didn't have. I focused on what kind of life they were having and neglected my own. I was judging my own story by comparing it to everyone else's story.

We each have our story, and sometimes those stories overlap, but we have control over what we write for ourselves. What makes one person happy can make another person sad. What makes one person angry can make another laugh.

What is the story you are creating for yourself? Why do you do the things you do? You can edit your story at any time, in the moment, as you are living it.

Everything I have shared with you can be used to re-write your story, re-program your mind and its thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Are you living the life you want? Why or why not?

If there is one thing I have learned that has truly showed me the power of self-love is that of honor and honoring yourself. I discovered I wasn't living the life I wanted, at least not entirely.

Sure I was happy. I was in love. I am still in love. I love my parents, I love my family, I love my ex-partner, I love my friends, and I love myself. But was I truly happy for me; my goals, my dreams, my aspirations. Was I happy with the lessons I was here to learn and grow from?

I allowed myself to stagnate. I allowed myself to stop growing. I never went backwards but I was afraid of going forwards. All of my leaps I have made over the years to overcome my fears, whether physically or mentally, have brought me to a place where I am more conscious of everything that I do. And the more conscious I am, the less I feel like hating myself or putting my energy towards things I don't want to do anymore.

Once you figure out the story you've been telling yourself all this time, you can choose to change it for the better. Awareness leads to conscious decisions. Make up a new story that serves you

better. Make up a new story that supports you. You are making up the story of your life in every moment.

Are you a good person? Do you feel amazing? There is no right or wrong except in the story you have created in your mind. Your worthiness or lack thereof, is a story. Your confidence or lack thereof, is a story.

We are the creators of our own realities. Really ask yourself: why do you do the things you do? What is the story I am making up about myself or another person? About a situation? Are you doing something for yourself or another person? What story are you creating?

Everyone is living their own story. My way is my reality. Respect everyone's reality as being the right one for them in that moment. Everybody is right, according to their own definitions, experiences and belief systems.

Everyone is getting the experience they chose, whether conscious or not. And either way that experience is perfect for them. There is no right or wrong. In order to say my reality is right, I have to believe that everyone else's is wrong. Respect comes with understanding that everyone has their own story to play out.

Expand your views of the world by just paying attention to the stories you see happening around you. What is that person showing you? What is that experience telling you?

There is no need to impose on another person's story, their reality. Share your story with them but don't impose. Everyone is on their own journey, and we all have our paths to walk.

Changing Your Story:

Begin by noticing your patterns. We all have patterns of behavior and thought that we've learned over time. Make a list, use an expansion grid or whatever tools you feel comfortable using.

Take a moment to notice where your thoughts are out of alignment with your feelings. Depression is often our minds telling us a series of stories (that we are not enough, that we are alone) and those stories don't match up to what we feel we want.

Take your power back and choose to stop the thought train that no longer serves you. That's ridiculous. Thank you for sharing. Just remember not to come from judgment, shame, blame, guilt or anger.

Thoughts are thoughts, can you get okay with the thoughts you've had throughout your life? Can you get okay with making a new thought?

Once you know what you're working with in regards to your thoughts, beliefs and the stories you've created, you can start throwing out the fluff: all the things that no longer serve your best interest. Expel the energy of your old life, your old story by getting okay and letting it go. Once

we shed some light on our thoughts, beliefs, programs, and stories, we can use that light to transform those thoughts, beliefs, programs, and stories.

You have to make a choice. Take the responsibility for your life back or not, it is up to you. It isn't an easy decision. It took me two years to fully understand it and to incorporate it into my own life.

Our patterns don't have to keep repeating. Recognize your patterns, your themes, the things you keep doing over and over again. These things keep happening because they just want to be noticed. They want you to understand they are there. Once you acknowledge the loops you have been stuck in, the loops naturally unwind for you.

You can say "no, I don't want that in my world anymore." You are allowed to change your mind. You are allowed to change your story.

We are the masters of our own reality. We are in charge of what we think, what we choose to believe, and how we live our lives. All skills take time to master. And the mind is no different. We all want easy. We have a lot going on in our lives at any given moment. We want change right now.

Figure out how your mind works first, and then incorporate little hacks to change your system and your programming faster. When you know how your brain works, how you operate, you can re-write the coding and you can upgrade or optimize the system.

The mind is just an elaborate computer. It is a complex and powerful computer, but it is malleable. It evolves as we grow and evolve along our journey. We stay the same or we grow, and the brain is no different.

What story do you have about the world around you? What story do you have about how life works? Listen to all the stories you tell yourself. When you know your story you can change the tone, the theme, the list of characters, the plot...everything. We are all authors. We are all writers. Our book is our life.

So what are you choosing to say about it?

Loving Yourself

So, how do you love yourself?

It is a process, in case you haven't figured that out yet. Loving yourself is a choice, plain and simple. I didn't say easy. But it is simple. And it is achievable. Figure out what you truly want. Be mindful of your overall focus, especially energetically.

Are you feeding your fears or are you feeding the love within? Self-love is just unconditional love. No matter what is going on, and no matter what definitions you have given yourself, you can love yourself unconditionally.

You don't owe anyone an explanation. Not for what you do, not for how you think, not for who you are, not for needing something. You don't owe an explanation for how you look, what you wear, how you style your hair, the clothes you choose, what you eat, what you enjoy doing. You don't owe an explanation for what you believe in or for your view points on any topic of conversation, for the choices you make and every new choice that contradicts a previous choice.

You are allowed to change your mind. Everything else changes on its own as it is so why wouldn't you? All life is change.

I believe everyone hates their body and their mind in some fashion. Why? Because we are meant to. We are meant to realize that we are not our bodies. We are meant to realize that we are not our minds. We have to grow to love them for what they are and what they do for us. Not what we *think* they should do, or for how we *think* they should look.

We are supposed to learn love, compassion, and understanding in this lifetime. And this includes loving and understanding our own bodies, the vehicle we have to experience life in.

Your thoughts are not going away. Embrace them or change them. We are human beings having a human experience and humans have thoughts. It is our journey to figure out how to find balance in our thoughts and make choices that come from love.

The physical world is simply a response to what we have going on within us. What we say, what we do, and how we act reflect who we are and permeate out into the world around us. Study other people and how they live their stories. This is how we learn. Expand your definitions of self and find what works for you.

Throughout this experience, I have learned that discomfort tells you where you have to go next on your journey. Discomfort brings up all the thoughts, beliefs, and stories we have avoided within ourselves. Discomfort shows us what we have to work on. And it will keep coming around until we deal with it.

Therefore, discomfort is ultimately a gift. Yes, it is uncomfortable to be human at times. We have human mentalities and we can get caught up in the human condition. If you don't like something, figure out why.

What is your head saying? What is your heart saying? Are they saying the same thing? Finding self-love takes a step back, a reflection on your life from an outside viewpoint.

And remember to give yourself a pat on the back for everything you have done from time to time. Being human is an accomplishment. Look at what you've learned. Look at where you are right now. Your reality is your own. It isn't going to be typical, because it isn't meant to.

If you can get okay with being human you have life set. I'm working on this myself. Always work on yourself. You don't have to make life-altering changes to your life in every moment. Just keep the momentum going by continuing to expand, continuing to delve deeper into your own self.

I still have thoughts pop up from time to time about my weight, or what I am wearing, or how unruly my hair is on a particular day. The thoughts will be there. But they come around less and less now and I can switch my focus a lot faster. Just keep practicing.

Start by committing yourself to the things you really want out of life. Where is your energy flowing? What are you focusing on? If you focus on the negative that is all you will see. If you focus on the positive the universe conspires to give you more positive things to notice and experience in your life.

To recognize something means to know something again. We are all on journeys of remembering; remembering self-love. When we break down the word "recognize" into "re-cognize," the word literally means to "bring back into consciousness."

We're remembering we are more than our human shells, our bodies. We are remembering we are more than the thoughts we have running around our minds. In this remembering we discover our truth. In this remembering we find the love for ourselves again.

Focus on You:

People are going to judge you no matter what. People are going to look at you funny no matter what. We are all different. We try to be the same but we just can't be. So what can you do about it?

Focus on you: love yourself, honor yourself, respect yourself, and support yourself. If you can't find love, respect, and support from those around you, then give those things to yourself. I have found what works for me. I am happy with my life. I am happy with myself. Somewhere along this journey I found what it means to love myself.

To everyone who is struggling with how they see themselves, and for those who are trying to find the beauty within themselves, keep going. You have all the answers. Don't stop until you find those answers. Trust in yourself. Take your power back from everyone and everything you've given it away to.

We each have our own experience, our own life. We have to find what is true for us. We have to get happy with what we have available. We have to love ourselves first.

Through all the changes, it is our job to honor our process, to honor our stories. Honor yourself and continually re-focus your energy on what you want each and every moment and let the rest go. Allow others the space and support to honor their journeys as well.

I would like to share one of my favorite quotes that really stuck with me over the years and continues to strike me every time I read it:

“There are hundreds of paths up the mountain, all leading to the same place; so it doesn't matter which path you take. The only person wasting time is the one who runs around the mountain telling everyone that his or her path is wrong.”

- Hindu Proverb

Practice Makes Perfect

If you don't work on yourself, who will? This is your journey. This is your mind. Those are your thoughts and beliefs. Your story is unique. Rewrite your story if you have to. Practice self-love and it will become more natural in all aspects of your life.

One has to do the work in order to change their thoughts about their reality. If you don't like how you see yourself, remember you have the power to change it, and you just have to put in the conscious effort. And I say conscious because it's not just a casual thought here and there about wanting to love yourself for who you are. It doesn't work that way, unfortunately, for the human mind. You have to remember, and keep reinforcing, the positive truth: that all we are is perfection and love, until it becomes a habit, or second-nature.

Practice makes perfect so if you haven't started telling yourself you love yourself by now after reading this far into this book, take a moment to do so. Put down the book, find a mirror, and repeat "I love myself" or "I love you" while staring into your own eyes (it helps to focus on one eye and switch back and forth after a while) in the mirror. Or if you would prefer to kick back on the couch or lie down in bed for a moment and really connect with yourself that is great too. Whatever works best for you!

I set an alarm on my phone to go off at 6am, 12pm, and 6pm with the reminder "love yourself." I also have it written on my bathroom mirror so every time I brush my teeth I remember to say that I love myself.

We all forget to love ourselves, and that is okay. It is handy to have a reminder set up in advance like an alarm clock, or to place notes to yourself throughout your home, apartment, car, office area, etc. If you want to learn to love yourself, you have to practice it.

Unless you have been raised to love yourself since you were a child, most of us have had quite the opposite education and it needs to become a new habit by repeatedly telling yourself you are loved until you believe it and it becomes so natural that you don't need reminders anymore. Change is a process that can lead to transformation, if you allow yourself to do so that is.

The Power of Presence:

Keeping it present helps reinforce a new behavior, thought, program, way of life...however you want to it. Fears, doubts, and worry, among other emotions, all exist in another time, another moment, particularly the future moment. Past moments can influence our emotions as well and we often fear a certain experience repeating itself.

Why is being present so powerful? And why do we have to practice it? Again, if you haven't been raised in a household where meditation, self-reflection, open communication and

unconditional love were present all the time, you need to form a new habit through conscious reinforcement.

Operating from the present moment allows you to see what is happening, well, in the present moment. Bringing your thoughts back to the “now” allows you to create change and form a new habit. And this works for any habit, thought, or belief you want to change in your life.

Presence is a skill, and we all have the capacity to master it. Our fears and doubts can run amok and create elaborate stories that happen in future times we never actually arrive in. We have allowed our human minds to create these fantasy worlds where we plan for all the “bad” things that could happen, and thus we keep ourselves in a state of stasis because change is ultimately scary as an unknown variable.

So how do you become present? Well you can't stop yourself from having a thought (that is actually highly improbable). The goal of meditation is not stop a thought but to not allow that thought to affect you.

It is impossible to stop a thought, by the way, but we can actively change our thoughts by looking at where we have given our power away to them and where we have allowed thoughts to form that we don't agree with. We have human minds, and human minds think. The trick is to train our minds to think the way we want to, and we start by getting present.

I use two tricks for bringing my thoughts back into the present moment: “that's ridiculous,” and “thank you for sharing.” When I notice my mind weaving an elaborate story of something that hasn't happened yet and it sounds pretty ridiculous, I just mentally say “that's ridiculous.” Now, the trick with this one here is to not have any judgment or shame your mind. Do NOT call your mind crazy. That is counter-productive.

When your mind is telling tales that are so far out there that they would never actually happen, that is when you use “that's ridiculous” to tell your mind that “no, I'm not believing that anymore, that would never happen.” Remember, no judgment, no shame. We are brilliant story tellers. We can think up many seemingly impossible things.

But when your mind is going on and on about what you are going to wear to Susan's party next week (like over 7 days from now next week), and that you can't wear what you want because Susan doesn't like the color blue and whatever other ridiculous reason your mind makes up, feel free to tell your mind that it is being ridiculous.

Bring it back to the present moment. The more you practice it, the less your mind actually does this kind of thing. It is like re-training your brain to think a new thought, to tell a new story, and slowly but surely you're singing a new tune.

Now, the second trick works for any story or thought that you don't want to think anymore or don't want to hear anymore. “Thank you for sharing” acknowledges your mind and its needs to tell a good story and be heard, while simultaneously showing respect and gratitude, two powerful forces in the universe.

Even thinking about what you are going to have for dinner ten hours from now, just say “thank you for sharing, we’ll get there when we get there” to bring your thoughts back to the now. Your mind tells an elaborate story of the dress you were going to wear to Susan’s party and how furry it’s going to get from her two cats, and that you’ll probably spill wine on it because you are so clumsy.... “Thank you for sharing mind, that is an amazing story, but I’m gonna stop you right there” ...and then your mind stops for a moment.

If it picks the story back up, great, “thank you for sharing.” The story will get shorter and shorter as your mind tries to pull your attention back away from the present moment and starts to stick to the basic highlights of what it wants to share with you. Keep practicing, keep catching yourself when you’re thinking of a moment other than this one right now, and notice when your mind brings up thoughts, beliefs, past stories, and future fears that are contradicting to your new beliefs of self-love.

Remember, the mind likes its safe box and will do everything it can to keep you there with it. When your mind starts spinning stories about how ugly, worthless and un-loveable you are, say thank you for sharing, and think a new thought.

Finding Your Truth

The interesting thing about fear is that simple action can conquer it. Do something, anything, that pushes you in the direction you want to go; towards the direction of love. If you want magic, bliss, unicorns, and rainbows, you have to start asking for it. You have to do something that puts you in alignment with that reality you want. After two years I finally realized I had to do something in order for something to happen.

What action will you take to get you one step closer to your goals? What is the next step? Don't worry about what is at the top of the stairs. Just take the first step and see what happens.

None of us are getting out of the human experience alive. The point of life is to die after all of our lessons have been learned. So why am I treating myself like an afterthought? Why am I so concerned what other people say about me? Why do I groan and moan about the little inconveniences in life instead of taking a moment to see the beauty in the sun rays popping out through the spaces in between a tree branch?

If anything, the journey of life is about choice; choices present themselves in every moment. Where are your priorities? Are you going to choose to love yourself right now or continue to hate yourself for something that is over and done with?

Are you going to say a kind word to someone else or are you going to spread hate and disgust? Are you going to eat that piece of cake because you enjoy it or are you going to deny yourself the simple pleasures in life because of a negative thought about your body shape?

I choose to be the best version of myself in every moment. Not the ego's definition of best where I have to be better than everybody, just my personal best. I shaved my legs at the end of two years, why? I feel like I can now because I know how to ask myself why, why am I doing this? Am I coming from fear or judgment of self? Or do I just want the experience? Does this make me happy?

If I am doing it for someone else it doesn't work for me. But if I am doing it for me, because it makes me happy and there are no judgments about it, then great, I'll do it. I have found what works for me.

I hope this book inspired you to think and question your own reality in some fashion. I hope this book inspired you to figure things out for yourself. I honor your journey.

Be authentic with yourself. I can only help you find your own power. I can share my story, and then you get to choose what fits with you and your life. You get to choose what resonates with you.

Remember that you are you for a reason. You are what makes this world go round. You are under no obligation to be something you are not. You don't have to follow someone else and do what they say, or do something the way they do it. This is your journey.

Final Thoughts:

Question everything I tell you. Question everything out there. Find your truth and live it. I've offered tools for people to solve their own problems. I can't solve your problems for you, just like you can't solve my problems for me.

It took me years to take full responsibility for myself and my life. When you do that everything falls into place. Why do you do the things you do? Where are you coming from when you make a decision? When you have a thought? When you say something to someone? Just keep asking. You know the answers.

I can't tell you what to do. Only you can decide how you are going to live your life and how you want your life to feel. I've shared what I have come to understand about life and the experiences of human thought. This is your time to shine. This is your time to make a choice.

Love yourself, or don't. But remember that everyone has their struggles, everyone has their issues. So it is always better to be kind, encouraging, or even neutral in your interactions with others, instead of mean and discouraging.

I love you. Thank you.
Go find your truth and live it to the fullest.

And Remember, Always:

You are Beautiful
You are Loved
You are Worthy

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Crooks is a writer, author, and artist who shares her knowledge of consciousness and the human experience, emphasizing the art of mindfulness and living from the heart. She holds a Bachelors of Metaphysical Sciences degree (B.Msc.) from the University of Metaphysical Sciences, and is a certified Reiki Master with years of energy work experience. When she is not sharing her knowledge through writings and art, she spends her time reading, traveling, walking in nature and doodling in love. She is a published author on several personal growth books, as well as many conscious coloring books for both adults and children.

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