

Preface

My intention for writing this book grew out of my first book: *How Learning to Say Goodbye Taught Me How to Live (A Spiritual Memoir)*. In that book, I chronicled the inner work my best friend and I did during her battle with cancer to stay conscious and grow despite our pain.

When I wrote that book, I had just come out of an eight-year period of loss that had stripped me bare of everything that had come to define me outwardly as well as inwardly. I used that period of pain and emotional rawness to finish healing and integrating my remaining inner wounded parts—or orphans, as I call them. I worked daily, removing all the lies and negative beliefs my life had been built on thus far by replacing them with more loving and expanding beliefs.

While my intention for that book was to remind people of the spiritual lessons and gifts one may encounter during a crisis and offer reminders to stay focused on growth during dark times, the book did something very different for me. Because I was writing the book while my friend was dying, I didn't see the message till after she had passed.

When I went back and read it later, I saw with great clarity that underneath all the lessons and the gifts we moved through during that time was the recurring theme of self-love. You are either moving through the world in self-love or you are not. Once I had some distance from that painful period, I saw clearly that what I had actually done through my inner exploration, healing, and integration process was reclaim my self-love.

With this new perspective, I had to acknowledge that while the memoir could be very helpful to those on the path of personal and spiritual growth—especially for those helping someone with a terminal diagnosis—it did not address how one gets to a place of self-awareness and self-love. It had been written for those already well on their way.

In all fairness, I was not in a place to share how I had returned to self-

love at that time. I was still recovering from all the previous losses, with one more death still looming over me. My sole purpose for that book was to help people stay awake and choose love over fear during a crisis, with a side benefit of giving me a wider perspective during that sad time. Little did I know then that the universe had another agenda.

With some time between me and all the death and losses I had experienced, I began to wonder, “What about those who are just starting out or those who are hitting a wall in their growth? How can anyone expect people to stay self-aware and rooted in love during a crisis when they are moving through their daily lives unaware that they have little or no self-love? Without self-awareness and self-love, I could not have handled my friend’s critical situation and stayed focused on choosing love over fear.

That is when I understood that my first book was actually a sequel to a book I had not even written yet! The universe indeed had an agenda, even though it seemed a bit backwards to me.

Of course I now know I could not have written this book until I had written *How Learning to say Goodbye Taught Me How to Live*. I am by nature a fairly private person—especially when it comes to something so intimate as a personal spiritual journey. I am one of those people who prefer to walk it rather than talk it. I could not have shared what is in this book without having gone through the process of writing that first book. I guess you could say the universe knew in its infinite wisdom that backward was the way to go with me. I needed to get my feet wet before I would be willing to jump in all the way.

Although I had kept my inner work fairly private, I had shared my journey and process back to self-love with a few close friends. When I saw them use this information in their homework with great results, I knew it was time to jump in all the way. I figured that if it helped one person move forward in reclaiming self-love, then it would be worth sharing my inner process.

The processes and techniques in this book came out of my thirty years on the path of spiritual personal growth. They are simply what finally worked to free me from my past and allow me to reclaim my self-love. My hope is that the information in this book will do the same for you and you won’t have to spend years working to get there, as I did.

Introduction

*I cannot teach anybody anything.
I can only make them think.*
—Socrates

Self-love or the lack of self-love not only determines how we see ourselves but also governs how we experience the world around us. It is the prism through which we see and define all things. So why do so few of us see self-love as the starting point to our inner and outer health? Oh, we tell children to like themselves, but how do we teach them to do that when we don't practice it ourselves? When you ask people if they love themselves and how they do that, they often will say, "Yes, I love myself," and then they will likely provide an example of an action, such as, "I take a spa day," "I buy myself something I have wanted," or "I eat only healthy foods." I have rarely heard someone respond with "Yes, I am compassionate with myself," "I value myself at all times," or "I am kind and forgiving with myself." While taking a spa day or eating what gives you pleasure can be helpful and loving, these things are in no way indicative of someone who is necessarily rooted in self-love.

While self-love can propel us to take loving actions, self-love is not an action but a state of being. When you reside in that loving state, it is with you at all times wherever you go, and it can never be diminished or taken away by outside influences. Just as negativity or darkness can permeate every nook and cranny of your existence if you allow them to, self-love can and will permeate your entire existence if you will heal and transform what has separated you from the truth of self-love.

My mission with this book is to get you to look at self-love with new eyes in order to understand that it is your right to reclaim your self-love. Also, I want to help you connect the dots to what has separated you from your own love so you can be empowered to rediscover it.

This book is not a big book for a reason. I wanted it to be less about me and more about you. After all, it is your personal journey toward the truth, not mine. That is why it is written in a workbook format. I know some may want a step-by-step, two-week process that they can complete and be done with it so they can move on, but that is not how it works.

Personal growth takes time, diligence, and patience. It cannot be achieved by doing one meditation or a couple of exercises. You have had years to reinforce your lack of self-love and the negative beliefs that grew out of it. So, understandably, it is going to take some time and focus for you to untangle yourself from the lies you have believed for so long and move back into self-love.

My experience with inner healing has shown me that it must be done in layers so you can absorb the understanding before you move onto the next layer needing healing and transformation. This is not to make it drawn out for the universe's amusement but rather to allow you to grow in your wisdom, thus empowering you along the path toward wholeness.

It is your job on the path back to self-love to become intimate with yourself and to learn what makes you tick. I know that can sound silly, and I can hear some shouting, "Are you crazy? Of course I know myself!" But I would counter, "Do you know why you react as you do to certain emotional triggers? Do you know why you feel powerless? Do you know why you make decisions that never seem to be in your best interest? Do you know why you put off your own happiness for another's happiness? Do you know why you keep experiencing the same negative energy over and over again, just in new clothes?"

As spiritual beings, it is our job to investigate, interrogate and eventually integrate everything going on inside of us. While that can seem daunting, just know you have everything you need inside of you to do this sacred work. Much like a detective on a case, you will become adept at investigating what is happening inside of you. You will be amazed at how much information will be revealed simply by consciously observing and taking notes on what is going on inside of you throughout your day. You will teach yourself how to interrogate the various parts of yourself and push past the first response to the truth that lies underneath. You will discover the power that is inherent in the simple word *why*.

Through the process of investigating and interrogating, you will begin to integrate those parts of yourself that have been orphaned and lost, bringing them back to the whole through understanding and love. While it can seem difficult, just know that it is the most fulfilling work you can do.

Some of you may now be wondering what my job in this relationship will be if you are going to do all the work. After all, I wrote the book; I must have some responsibilities. And I do. As the Socrates quote said, my job is to make you think. And that includes not only helping you to discover what you truly *think* about yourself and the world around you but also helping you redefine what self-love means.

I would also add one caveat to the Socrates quote. My job is not only to make you *think* but, even more importantly, to make you *feel*. Self-love, as is all love, is anchored in your heart. So besides guiding you to investigate through the use of questions—the big whys—I will do my best to aid you in understanding the importance of your emotions and how to become comfortable with your emotions and even befriend them for your detective work. It is only through becoming emotionally adept that you can make lasting changes within and return to your natural state of self-love.

I have divided the book into three parts. The first part introduces you to the tools you will be using on your journey back to self-love.

Think of it as being like the warm-up you do before you hit the gym floor or go for a long run. Just as skipping a warm-up can make your workout more difficult, not working with the tools will make your work in the second and third parts more difficult and lead to less favorable results. The work you will be doing in the first part is actually laying down the foundation for which all the work to follow will be built upon. So even if you are familiar with the various tools, go ahead and reacquaint yourself with them again. You never know what you might learn.

The second part is where we begin the workout. It focuses on describing and working with the three components of self-love. It begins the process of self-discovery and becoming aware of what you believe, as well as what you feel inside. It is also where you will begin to redefine love for yourself.

The third part leads you deeper within the exploration to the healing and integration processes. It is where you will use your emotions to explore your inner landscape and meet those orphaned parts of

yourself. It is also where you will begin to integrate those parts back into the whole through compassionate understanding, forgiveness, and love.

All the chapters in the three parts include questions that you will ask yourself to get a better understanding of why you think and feel the way you do. I have left space for you to journal your thoughts and feelings to each question, but feel free to work with them as you deem fit.

No matter how you work through the questions, be as detailed as you possibly can in your answers. The more you know about what you are thinking and feeling, the better. Some of the questions appear to require only one-word responses, but I want you to go deeper. After you write down your answer of yes or no, I want you describe why you answered the way you did. For example, if you answer yes to “Is working toward reclaiming your self-love selfish?” you should include all the reasons you believe that to be true. It is not good enough to say, “Because it *is* true.” Look within to find out why you believe it to be true. For example, “It is wrong to put myself before others” or “because self-love can cause me to become narcissistic.”

Begin to always push past the first response and reveal to yourself why you believe what you believe or why you feel the way you do. The questions are to aid you in self-discovery, so do yourself a favor and be as truthful and as detailed as you can.

Treat it as an investigation and investigate! Push for the truth. There are no right or wrong answers; there is only the truth. The questions will greatly aid you in beginning to understand how you got where you are and help reveal the lies you have been telling yourself.

Following the questions are meditation exercises. If meditation is new or foreign to you, don’t worry. I will go over what I mean by meditation in the first part on the tools. By the time you finish the first exercise, some of the mystery should dissipate. Meditation is simply a technique you will use to engage the essential tool of imagination.

While the questions are meant to get you thinking, the exercises are meant to get you *feeling*. You cannot just think your way into self-love. You must also *feel* your way there. Although it is important to use your mind to garner understanding, it is only through transforming the wounds and barriers around your heart that you will find your way back to self-love.

Please know you have the freedom to do the meditations in a way that works for you. The details or images in the meditations are meant

as suggestions, just as are the affirmations in the “Your Homework” section. So don’t feel obligated to follow them to the letter. They are designed to stimulate and open up your imagination as well as to offer examples of how you might navigate certain issues and terrain.

Look at them as jumping-off points. Nothing would thrill me more than someone telling me that he or she read the meditation and, when he or she went within, the meditation took on a life of its own. That’s exactly as it should be. Wise people know they are not only the students but the teachers too. So allow the meditations and affirmations to become your own. All of the work in this book is to empower you, so you decide what works and is right for you.

I have no rules on how you do your inner work, with two exceptions. First, you must be truthful with yourself. That alone will take some practice. Most of us have gotten excellent at believing our lies about ourselves and the world around us. You will get better at knowing when you are lying to yourself as you work with your emotions. This brings us to the second exception: you must be willing to *feel*. Emotions are one of your best navigational tools. So use them! Also know you cannot change a belief if you are not prepared to release the feelings that implanted that belief in your heart to begin with; nor can you implant a new belief without also feeling it in your heart.

Following the meditation is the “Your Homework” section for the week. Let me be clear here: simply because I said it is for a week does not mean you will do it for a week and then be free to toss it aside. You are going to be returning to certain work or exercises over and over during your process of reclaiming your self-love. The suggestion of doing it for a week is to keep you focused on what you have begun to uncover in that particular chapter and to set a pattern of being diligent with your inner work. It is also a way to have you practice being self-aware throughout your daily life. I want you to become a spiritual detective of your life—and that means all facets of your life, not just the hour or so you set aside for your personal growth.

I have included a page for notes at the very end of each chapter. You can use the page for whatever you like. We are all different, and the way we work will be different. Some may like to keep notes on what new information they discover while moving through their day. Others may prefer to journal about their inner meditative excursions. Some may want to use it to summarize what the work in that chapter revealed. It can also be used to go into more detail with a particular answer in the

questions section. It doesn't matter how you use it or even if you chose not to use it. I have included it so those that like to write, list, or journal can do so and have it conveniently within the book so they can return to it at any time.

I also want to mention that I use the words *the universe*, *the divine*, and *God* interchangeably. Don't let my use of a certain word stop you from getting the overall message. If you don't like it when "the universe" is used instead of "god," or vice versa, just change it. However, do take note of your discomfort and investigate the reasons behind it.

Your ego will be activated through some, if not all, of the work. That is a good thing! You will begin to see how your ego works and how quickly you believe the first answer you receive to a question, how quickly you stop at the first image you see during meditation, or how quickly you stop doing the homework. Almost always, at least in the beginning of your detective work, the first answer or image is not the bottom line. However, that is okay if you use it as a way to differentiate between your ego voice and the truth within.

By becoming a spiritual detective, you will begin to not only challenge what your life was built on, but more importantly, you will discover that you have the power *to choose* what you will build your life on from this moment forward.

Returning to self-love is the ultimate self-empowering act. Once you realize that you can heal and transform yourself and that you *can* choose how you want to see the world and the universe, you are finally claiming your authentic power. And when you use that power to choose self-love, you will stop being an unconscious victim to your past and will become the conscious creator of your future that you were always meant to be.