

THE
SELF-
LOVE

Journey
Workbook

7 Actionable Steps
With Journal Prompts

* Restore Your Heart

* Build Confidence * Get Unstuck

* & Unlock Your Greatest Potential



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Introduction

What is self-love to you?

I have asked many people this question, and I can often spot a lack of self-love when I hear discomfort in their answer. When someone has placed self-love in the category of “things we don’t talk about,” it becomes a mystical concept, out there, as if everyone else can achieve it, but we can’t seem to grasp it fully. Or worse, it becomes something we tell ourselves not to worry about because there are more pressing matters to invest time in. That list is endless, ranging from busy schedules between kids’ sports practices and recitals, grocery lists, work deadlines, the latest war and social injustices, to news headlines that paralyze anyone with half a heart.

What is self love to you?

I see self-love as drinking water when you are thirsty. When we are thirsty, we cannot quench that thirst by asking someone else to pour water on us. We cannot get in line at a store and expect to be hosed down with water and believe our thirst will go away.

“*We must seek the nearest source of water and drink it. That is self-love.*”

No one else can do it for you, and no one else ever will. If you keep searching for relief in others, expecting them to satisfy the thirst only you can quench, you will continue drowning in the pools and hoses of life, not understanding why you are still thirsty.

There is no special date or holiday on the calendar marked “self-love.” It doesn’t arrive with cake, flowers, or gifts. It usually shows up when life whispers —or shouts —“Stop! This isn’t working anymore.” But let’s be honest, self-love probably wasn’t what brought you here. Not exactly.

Sometimes it takes a breakup, a breakdown, loss, grief, or a quiet realization that, despite giving so much to others, you still feel empty inside. Perhaps you’re tired of repeating the same patterns in relationships, at work, and in your own thoughts. Or maybe you’ve simply had enough of being at war with yourself.

Whatever brought you here, welcome!

After having gone on my own hero’s journey through the valleys of self-loathing and doubt and up the hills of struggle, I found the way back to myself, where the answers had always been. Simple keys were shown to me that helped unlock a flow of love, and that’s the map I am excited to share with you.

You can adapt it and make it your own. My goal is to shorten your learning curve, even just a little, so you can enjoy the flow of abundance longer and gift the world the kind of love that only comes from an overflowing, steamy cup of self-love.

As much as warmth and comfort can soothe the heart, pain is often a catalyst for growth, and despite how much we resist it, it frequently teaches us what comfort cannot. In my own life, divorce, heartbreak, falling face down, getting back up, dusting off, and stumbling again have all been threads in the tapestry of my story. In hindsight, those threads added depth, dimension, and color, though I could not see it at the time.

We all have moments that bring us to our knees, times of loss, heartbreak, and transition. They may look different for each of us, but they carry the same message: something has to change. However, it's not really about changing so much as about returning within, because self-love is our built-in default setting.

Think of a baby, perfect, worthy, loved just as they are. Somewhere along the way, that baby grows up and forgets their inherent worth, partially because forgetting sells.

If you believed fully in your worth, how many products would you need to buy? Not many.



That's why marketing thrives on self-doubt; it convinces us we are broken when, in reality, we never were. There is no need for the next pill, the product, or the miracle cure. You don't need anything outside yourself to make you worthy of love. You are already whole and deserving of love exactly as you are, and if these words make you cringe or stir up resistance, that's just the programming ringing its alarm, telling old stories of lack and worthlessness.

If you stick around, by the end of this short book, you will feel the spark of self-love ignite from within.

You will have begun to embody your worthiness, reconnect with your core, remember the gifts that have always been inside you, and your relationship with yourself will start to feel lighter and more joyful, thus reflecting its light onto the other areas of your life.

Let these 7 steps be a reminder of the power and beauty you carry.

Think of them as guideposts, simple practices to help you return to yourself, one step at a time.

“*Self-love isn't about becoming someone new; it's about coming home to who you already are.*”

Like a traveler who has been away from home for a long time and returns only to realize how much beauty and how many reasons to be grateful there are right where they began.

You are one of a kind, with your unique experiences, voice, and perspective. There has never been another you, and there never will be. That makes you priceless. You are a gift from the Universe to all of us.

As a disclaimer of tone, throughout this book, you'll see me use words like God, Life, Universe, All There Is, Source, or Singularity. To me, they all point to the same energy. I invite you to read it through a wide lens rather than through the lens of dogma or religion.

Self-love is universal to humanity and should always unite us, not divide us. So take what resonates, set aside what doesn't, and let this journey meet you exactly where you are.

You've got this.

01 You Will Encounter Resistance

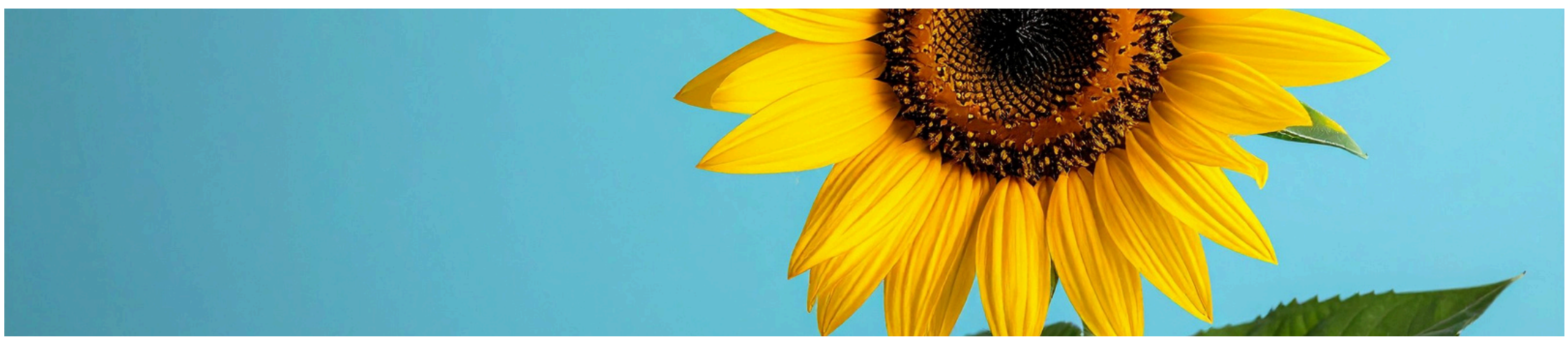
As you begin your journey toward self-love, one thing is sure: you will encounter resistance.

Whether it is from the people around you or even from within yourself, the discomfort that comes with change is inevitable. This resistance does not mean you are on the wrong path. In fact, it often means the opposite. Growth and transformation unsettle those who are attached to familiarity, whether it be people in your life, or yourself. So, if you encounter internal or external resistance, it means you are on the right path, the path of growth.

I am currently in Iceland, a gorgeous country full of natural beauty that offers explorers, photographers, and nature lovers an array of visually abundant landscapes. Today is day 10 of 15, and I have learned that despite not knowing exactly where I am going, I have to pack my backpack with supplies: water, a salty snack, and layers of clothing. The weather here is predictably unpredictable, and all four seasons can occur within 24 hours. Thus, I prepare.

This step is about preparing for the journey.

We are preparing for what lies ahead as you set out on your self-love remembrance path. You will need an understanding of your process, a clear set of boundaries for the outside world that does not yet operate in a self-love prioritization mode, and patience, especially with yourself. You will learn how to recognize what resistance feels like, understand its source, and navigate through it as you go on your journey back to self.



One of the challenges you may face on your way to self-love is outside resistance, as in the crab-in-the-net effect. It is known that when crabs are caught in a fishing net, if one tries to escape, the others instinctively pull it back down.

As a result, none of the crabs manage to free themselves. In life, this can show up when people around you unconsciously try to hold you back as you begin to rise. Perhaps they see you becoming more confident and stepping into your self-worth, which makes them uncomfortable. They may fear change or struggle with their own sense of inadequacy. So they project their insecurities onto you, trying to pull you back to a more familiar place.

Sometimes this comes from well-meaning loved ones who, despite their best intentions, are still struggling with their own self-love.

You may have experienced this in the form of subtle comments, such as “you have changed,” or “I don’t recognize you anymore.” It is not malice, but it is still a pull toward self-doubt, back into the net of comfort and predictability.

It takes discipline and clarity of heart to resist being pulled back. You have to recognize when others are holding you back and understand that their discomfort is about them, not you.

You deserve to rise into your full potential, no matter how unsettling it might be for those who are not yet ready for change. However, sometimes the resistance comes from within.

After outer resistance shows up at your door, you will notice something else emerging alongside it: the inner voice. This voice can feel like a constant companion, sometimes protective, sometimes discouraging, sometimes quietly wise.



It is not a single voice, though; inside everyone are two forces: the ego and the higher self.

The ego is shaped by past experiences, conditioning, survival strategies, and the need to stay safe. It speaks in fear, caution, comparison, and hesitation, keeping you close to what is familiar. The higher self is the voice of your inner knowing, your intuition, the God particle part of you that remembers who you truly are. It speaks in warmth, clarity, quiet confidence, and possibility.

66 The ego speaks loudly because it is afraid. The higher self speaks softly because it is sure.

Both voices are present within you, but the one you choose to listen to will determine the direction and speed of your journey.

There is a story often attributed to Cherokee tradition that expresses this inner dynamic. A grandfather tells his grandson that inside every person there are two wolves. One wolf is rooted in fear, anger, doubt, and the instinct to protect. The other wolf is rooted in love, compassion, peace, and the desire to grow. The grandson thinks for a moment before asking, “Which wolf wins?” The grandfather replies, “The one you feed.” The patterns we reinforce, the thoughts we return to, and the beliefs we nurture become the ones that guide our lives.



I have let my ego speak louder than it should many times. Let's go back to 2007, when I opened my first business, a dance school. Needless to say, 2008 was a rough year for small businesses, and it bled into 2009 and 2010. For a tiny dance studio in a town of just 1,200 people, the fact that we survived at all feels like nothing short of a miracle. But the story I want to share is not about survival. It is about my own resistance, and how it nearly cost me everything.

I was at a dance teacher convention in 2010, exhausted, discouraged, and desperately searching for answers. My business felt like it had stalled at the launchpad for three years without a proper liftoff, and so had my spirit. We sat in a circle, many dance studio owners around a table, sharing ideas, and I remember feeling like I did not belong, like I had somehow failed by not already knowing the solutions I was looking for.

Then the universe did something wild. It placed a jazz-hands-happy, sparkly, magnetic woman next to me. She lit up the room as she spoke, sharing her vision for an organization of dance studio owners that would revolutionize the industry. Her energy was contagious. Her clarity was inspiring. And deep down, I knew this was the answer I had been praying for.

But what did I do? I left.

I did not introduce myself. I did not lean in. I did not follow up. I walked away, bitter, sad, and consumed by my own frustration. I had been asking God for help, and when she sat right next to me, I was too blinded by my own self-pity to see it.

That is what resistance does. It keeps us locked in the familiar, even when the familiar is painful. It makes us doubt the very answers we have been seeking.

Fast forward five years, one divorce later, many tears, and hard-knuckling it through life, the version of me that was finally willing to say yes to discomfort spoke louder than the doubt. I joined her organization, and I never looked back.

For my business, it was the best investment I had ever made. But more importantly, the personal development that came from years surrounded by high-achieving, heart-centered individuals changed everything.

That same group got me through 2020 without having to shut my doors. They reminded me of what was possible. They inspired me to rise. They held space for my expansion. And all of it began the moment I stopped resisting and said yes to growth.

You will never regret investing in yourself.

You can lose money, time, or relationships, but no one can ever take your growth away from you.



So if you are standing on the edge of something that feels new, uncomfortable, or uncertain, lean in; the answers you have been waiting for are already within you. Keep going.

Keep Going.

Journal Prompts:

1.

What is one situation in my life right now that feels uncomfortable or difficult to move forward in?

Write about what feels hard, who is involved, and what you are afraid might happen if you take the next step.

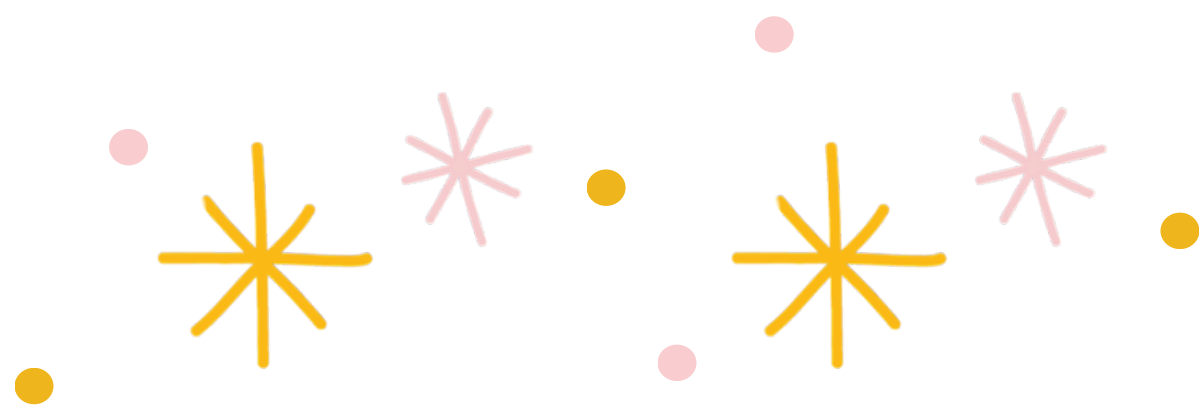
2.

What is one area of my life where I am listening to my ego and staying stuck because of fear and familiarity?

Describe what the ego is telling you in this area, what feels “safe” about staying where you are, and what your higher self might be quietly inviting you to consider instead.

3.

If I listened to my higher self today, what is one leap of faith it would ask me to take, and what is the smallest step I could take toward it?



Reflections:

02 Her “Stop” Was My Beginning

While motherhood was my turning point, you don't have to be a parent to experience the transformative power of love. Love in its truest form, whether for a child, a partner, a sibling, or a friend, has the power to deepen your understanding of what love truly is and what it means to be loved in return.

For me, holding my daughter for the first time revealed a love so pure and unconditional that it redefined everything I thought I knew about love. When I saw her on my chest after more than eighteen hours of labor, we were both exhausted, and yet I felt a love unlike anything I had ever known. I understand that mothers are flooded with bonding hormones that support connection, but what did not go unnoticed in that moment was something deeper: how we come into this world already worthy, perfect, and lovable.

The illusion that our mistakes strip us of that worth is what keeps us trapped in loops of striving and shame, which is why this journey of returning to self matters so deeply. As we locked eyes, her long fingers reaching for me, time seemed to stand still.

In that stillness, I understood how the Divine looks at us, and my own sense of self-worth shifted permanently. There was a version of me before that moment and one after, simply because I finally understood unconditional love.



The world had never shown it to me, but my daughter would feel it, and through her, I learned to offer the same love to myself. She didn't have to earn it or prove anything. She was loved simply because she existed. That realization cracked something open in me.

If my daughter deserved unconditional love just for being, why didn't I believe I did too?

Motherhood was not the only relationship that brought me face-to-face with my need for self-love. Other relationships did too, especially my marriage, each one acting as a mirror reflecting how I treated myself.

During the lowest points of my eight-year marriage, I often found myself asking, "What would I tell my best friend if she came to me with this same story?" The answer was always clear: I would tell her to leave. And yet, I stayed. I endured cycles I would not wish on anyone, much less on someone I loved.

Looking back, I can see that staying was not about love. It was about fear. Fear of failure, fear of judgment, fear of believing I could not create a better life, fear of being alone. The pattern became predictable, and though intolerable, it was familiar.

People around me sensed it. Friends would ask how things were going, their voices carrying an undertone of concern they never quite named. They saw what I could not yet admit: the relationship was eroding my spirit.



There were nights when fights were so volatile that my body would shake for hours afterward. My nervous system learned to live in survival mode, always bracing for the next outburst and constantly scanning for safety. And still, I tried to fix what could not be fixed.

At the time, leaving felt like failure. It felt like admitting I could not fix what was broken. I believed love was something you fought for at all costs and never let go of. What I could not yet see was that staying had nothing to do with love. It was about insecurity and the illusion of control. I did not believe I was worthy of a better reality, and that belief kept me stuck far longer than I want to admit.

Over time, a painful truth emerged. I spoke far more kindly to others than I did to myself. I could offer friends compassion and clarity in their hardest moments, but when it came to my own life, my inner voice was sharp and unrelenting.

I had mastered the language of encouragement for everyone except me.

This became even clearer when I opened my dance studio and began teaching young girls. As their teacher, I guided them through the awkward, messy, and beautiful process of learning. When they made mistakes, I reminded them that growth takes time and that mastery is built through patience and grace. But when I made mistakes as a new business owner, I was merciless. Every misstep felt like proof that I was not enough. I could extend grace to every child in the room, except the woman in the mirror.

Motherhood magnified these truths. It brought my boundaries and blind spots into sharp focus. I began to see, with painful clarity, the behaviors I could no longer justify, not only for my sake but for my daughter's.

I did not want her to grow up believing that love looked like enduring pain or that silence was strength.

Volatile exchanges had become common in my marriage, and then one day, while driving, I had a clear vision. It was not a thought or a fear, but a clear internal download. In my mind's eye, I saw myself twenty years into the future, ill and being diagnosed with something incurable.

The message was immediate and unmistakable. My body was already keeping the score. Staying meant a slow erosion, a life lived in survival, denial dressed up as love and sacrifice. And still, I tried to convince myself that staying was the right thing to do.

Then the universe spoke through the smallest voice.



My daughter was 2.5 years old, strapped into her car seat in the back of our sedan. We were driving through another one of his anger spurts, his favorite time to fight, when I could not walk away. Insults were woven between gears, words turned into weapons, and the open road became a stage for rage. My hands gripped the passenger seat and door handle, my chest tight, my eyes fixed forward, waiting for it to end. I had learned how to dissociate just enough to survive moments like this. Later, I would never remember what the fight had been about, but my body always remembered the fear. Then I heard her.

“Stop!” she screamed.

Her tiny voice cut through the chaos and shattered something inside me. In that moment, I felt shame, heartbreak, anger, and something new: resolve. I saw myself through her eyes, and I knew that if I did not leave, she would one day believe this was the definition of love.

That day, a different kind of mother was born inside me. The protector. The warrior. The woman who would rather start over from nothing than stay in the name of something that was breaking her.

Within months, I found an apartment, saved enough for a deposit, and moved out. The next chapter of my life unfolded in a way that felt almost cinematic: a single mother juggling three part-time jobs, running a side business, eating picnic-style dinners on the floor of an empty apartment with her toddler. There was no furniture. Silence permeated each room.

And in the silence, there was peace.

The old mattress on the floor, a gift from a friend, felt safe. For the first time in years, I slept through the night, knowing no one would stumble in at four in the morning looking for a fight. Alcohol abuse, drugs, and pornography, from that moment on, would never again enter my home. It was not glamorous, but it was real. It was the beginning of my rebirth.

Through loving my daughter the way she deserved, I learned to love myself the way I always should have. The protector within me awakened, and from that moment forward, I knew that I, too, was worthy of love, respect, and peace.

Now I invite you to turn that mirror inward. Look at yourself the way you look at your child, your best friend, the youth you guide, or even your pet. Notice the patience, the tenderness, and the grace you offer so freely.

It is time to extend that same compassion inward. Love yourself as deeply as you love the people who matter most to you. Because when you learn to love yourself as fiercely as you love others, you do not just break a cycle.

You create a legacy.

Journal Prompts:

1. Identify one relationship or situation in your life where you consistently speak to yourself more harshly than you would speak to someone you love.

Write down the exact words you use internally, and then rewrite them as you would say them to a child, a close friend, or someone you are responsible for protecting.

2. Notice where your body does not feel at ease in your current environment.

Describe one place, routine, or interaction where your body feels tense, guarded, or alert. What specific changes would be required for that space or situation to feel safer or more peaceful?

3. Define your personal baseline for peace.

Describe what the ego is telling you in this area, what feels “safe” about staying where you are, and what your higher self might be quietly inviting you to consider instead.



Reflections:

03 The Three Layers of Relationships

Love, Agreements, and Presence

In 2023, I got engaged to the man I once believed was the love of my life. My understanding of love has shifted dramatically since then, a transformation that could fill an entire book on its own. What matters here is what came after that relationship ended.

That engagement ended nearly ten years after my divorce. By then, a great deal of healing had already taken place. And yet, I was still searching for love outside of myself. I was still looking for a missing key within relationships, believing that something or someone else would complete what felt unfinished inside me.

In the summer following that heartbreak, I felt called to attend an ayahuasca retreat. What unfolded there was deeply illuminating. The messages I received through that experience connected me profoundly to my highest self and offered clarity I had not accessed before.

One message in particular became foundational to this self-love journey, reshaping how I understand love, commitment, and presence.



In the midst of that journey, a vision crystallized before me, offering a clear insight into the nature of relationships and love. What was revealed was love as a layered experience, with each layer representing a different way we connect with ourselves, others, and the world. This understanding has since guided how I approach all relationships, helping me see their depth, purpose, and limits with greater clarity.

The Universal Fabric of Love

At its core, love is an overarching force. It is what we are fundamentally made of and, arguably, our purpose on this planet. Love is the frequency through which the divine operates, creating and sustaining life itself. In its purest form, love is unconditional, akin to the agape described in ancient texts and to the Christ consciousness, which represents radical acceptance and compassion.



Love is both the beginning and the end, an infinite cycle of creation and return. It is as essential and pervasive as water, sustaining all life. Just as water can return to clarity no matter how muddied it becomes, love, too, remains pure beneath the layers of human emotion such as anger, resentment, or grief. Those emotions may cloud our experience of love, but they do not alter its essence.

Being in Love, Agreements, & Relationship Contracts

The second layer explores the experience of being in love. This phase is often marked by intensity and exhilaration, primarily driven by a surge of biochemical reactions designed by nature to create bonding.

Dopamine elevates our mood and creates feelings of pleasure and reward. Norepinephrine heightens alertness, energy, and excitement. Serotonin levels drop, often leading to a narrowed focus on the beloved.

This chemical cocktail is not meant to last forever. Biologically, it tends to sustain itself for two to three years, long enough to bond two people and support the possibility of raising offspring. Beyond that window, the fireworks of early romance require conscious effort to evolve. Shared experiences, intentional time together, curiosity, and honest communication become essential.



This is also the layer where relationship agreements live. Whether between romantic partners, friends, family members, or colleagues, these agreements form the structure of the relationship. They include spoken and unspoken expectations around respect, emotional safety, accountability, and care. When agreements are honored, relationships feel stable and nourishing. When they are repeatedly broken, erosion begins.

Presence, Boundaries, and the Right to Love Them From a Distance.



The third layer, conditional presence, is perhaps the most misunderstood and yet the most important. While love itself can be unconditional, our presence in a relationship should not be.

A clear example from my own life is my relationship with my father. His struggle with schizophrenia made our connection complex and, at times, frightening.

When his behavior became threatening, I had to make the painful decision to distance myself physically. I did not stop loving him, but I could no longer remain present in a way that compromised my safety.

The dissolution of my marriage brought this lesson into even sharper focus. Despite the vows we had shared, repeated breaches of trust and respect made it clear that staying present was costing me my well-being. Leaving was not a lack of love. It was an act of self-respect. I learned that it is possible to love someone while choosing distance to heal. These experiences taught me a critical distinction:

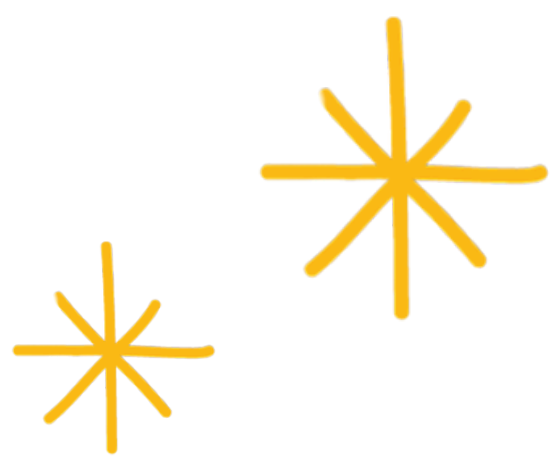
love does not require tolerance without limits.

Our culture often equates love with tolerance at all costs, promoting the idea that staying is proof of devotion. In reality, confusing presence with love can be deeply harmful. True self-love asks us to recognize when our presence is no longer safe, healthy, or respected.

This chapter invites you to look at your relationships through this three-layered lens.

Where is love present as a universal force?
Where are agreements clear, honored, or broken? And where is your presence being given freely without being protected?

Love, at its healthiest, empowers us to set boundaries, to step back when necessary, and to continue loving without abandoning ourselves. When we understand these layers, we learn that love is not only a feeling, but a series of conscious choices. Each relationship becomes an opportunity for growth, clarity, and a deeper connection that honors both love and self-respect.



Journal Prompts:

1. List the three main relationships in your life. Which agreements are no longer working?

Is it a job that pays the bills but no longer nourishes your soul? A friendship that feels one-sided or draining? A partnership that feels more like roommates than a connection? Agreements can be revisited and redefined. Which agreements are no longer working for you, and what would need to change for them to feel aligned again?

2. Is there someone in your life you love but choose to keep at a distance?

Meaning, you care about them, but their presence no longer feels healthy or aligned. If not, which relationship in your life might feel more peaceful if you limited your presence or created more space?

3. What is one boundary you need to set or reinforce to protect your presence?

For example, this could mean saying no to extra work hours, limiting how often you engage in draining conversations, declining invitations that leave you exhausted, or creating distance from someone who repeatedly crosses your boundaries. What is one specific step you can take this week to honor that boundary?

Reflections:

04 Love is Thicker than Blood

The adage that says blood is thicker than water has always been meaningless to me, and a trap for many. It suggests that loyalty is owed simply because of shared bloodlines, allowing disrespect, abuse, and toxic behavior to hide behind the pretense of family.

I learned early in life that this was not true.

One summer, when I was in third grade, my father thought it was a good idea to send me to spend time with my aunts and five of my twelve cousins at the beach apartment complex owned by our grandfather. During that week, I endured constant taunting from my cousins. They told me I didn't belong, that I should never have stayed, and that they couldn't wait to be free of my presence. Why, I'm not sure. I only remember wanting to play with them.

The cruelty didn't stop during the day. At night, they whispered mean things beside me until I pretended to be asleep. That week taught me something that stayed with me: blood had very little to do with love. And later in life, I would discover that love often appears in the most unexpected places.

Just before my twenty-first birthday, I found myself abroad, surrounded by strangers from my own country. What connected us was not closeness, but circumstance. We were all Brazilians on work-and-travel visas, far from home, navigating the United States together. At the time, the J-1 visa allowed college students to work for a few months and travel briefly during school break.

When I first arrived, I gravitated toward other Brazilians instinctively. We shared language, culture, and familiarity, and that felt comforting.

But one day, a quiet realization settled in: many of the people I had connected with would never have been part of my chosen circle had we been living in Brazil. Beyond nationality, we had little in common.



As I began branching out, forming friendships with people from different parts of the world and with locals, something shifted. I learned that while shared identity can create quick bonds, it does not guarantee depth. In fact, clinging to what feels familiar can sometimes limit our ability to form more meaningful connections.

This was my first experience of what I later came to understand as ego death. The term can sound mystical, but it is not. Ego death is simply the loosening of the identities we cling to in order to belong, and a return to shared humanity rather than labels that divide us through inherited narratives.

Religion, politics, nationality, sports teams, even family names all create invisible boundaries around who we allow ourselves to connect with. Blood, in particular, is often treated as the ultimate override, as if shared DNA alone grants permission to stay, endure, and tolerate harm.

I no longer accept that premise

No one in my life has access to me simply because of a last name or shared blood. Love does not require self-betrayal. Loyalty does not mean silence. And belonging should never come at the cost of dignity or safety.

Blood is not thicker than love. And love can be found in people who appear to have nothing in common with you. When stripped of egoic allegiance, people can meet at a deeper level, a love more expansive, unconditional, and not confined by family, religion, nationality, or any other label the world assigns.



66

Self-love, at its core, is the courage to choose alignment over obligation. It is the quiet knowing that you are allowed to belong to yourself first.



Journal Prompts:

1. Where in my life have I confused familiarity with love?

Reflect on relationships that felt safe or familiar because of shared history, culture, or blood, and notice whether love, respect, and care were truly present.

2. What relationships in my life are rooted in choice rather than obligation?

Explore the connections you have chosen freely, and what makes them feel supportive, expansive, or loving.

3. If loyalty were earned through care instead of blood, who would still have access to my heart, and who would not?

Consider what boundaries might shift if love, safety, and respect were the requirements for closeness.

Reflections:



05 Becoming Your Own Safe Place

On the journey of self-love and self-return, I often guide my clients through an inner-child integration meditation. It is a gentle yet powerful practice, designed to reconnect them to the parts of themselves that carry wisdom from before the world convinced them they were not enough.



What often surprises people is how much the timing varies. Some clients can trace their sense of wholeness well into their early twenties. Others struggle to remember a time when they felt intact at all, having absorbed painful messages early in life that quietly shaped how they saw themselves. There is no right or wrong timeline here. There is only awareness.

For me, I believe my soul always knew I deserved to belong, but I never truly felt that I did.

That sense of belonging did not arrive through relationships, achievements, or external validation. It came later, when I learned how to parent myself. That process unfolded gradually over the past fifteen years, as I picked up the proverbial shovel and began unearthing family patterns and societal narratives that needed to be broken and dismantled.

This chapter is an invitation to do the same, gently and honestly.

Imagine yourself in your dream place. It could be by the ocean, in a forest, or in a quiet, magical room. Anywhere that feels safe and expansive to you. For me, it is by the ocean. In this place, your breath slows. Your body softens. Your nervous system begins to feel at ease. Behind you, you sense movement.

As you turn around, you see all versions of yourself standing there: the perfectly adorable baby, the curious toddler, the mischievous and magical child, the awkward preteen, the growing and tender teenager, the young adult, filled with questions and doubt; alongside each version of your adult self, leading all the way up to who you are today.

Take a moment to look at them. Look into their eyes. See the worth they were born with. The God-given value they carried before they learned to question it.

Each one arrived in this world ready to love and be loved.

Now ask yourself, gently and without judgment: When did the gap appear? At what age did self-love begin to give way to self-doubt? What was that version of you going through? What did they witness? What did they need that they did not receive?

This is not an easy exercise. It asks for honesty, patience, and the courage to be vulnerable with yourself. There is no need to rush it.

When you recognize the moment where the light dimmed, imagine yourself stepping closer to that version of you. Come down to their level. Look them in the eyes and say what they needed to hear then:

It's okay. I see you.

I've got you now. You are loved.

You are worthy. You are safe with me.

It was through this process that I learned what it truly meant to mother myself. I began giving my inner child the love she had been craving, not by blaming my parents or rewriting the past, but by taking responsibility for the care that was missing. Most parents are doing the best they can with the tools they were given, and still, some needs go unmet.





Gaps in self-love can happen to anyone, whether you grew up in a seemingly loving home or in clearly abusive circumstances. This work is not about assigning blame. It is about reclaiming yourself, especially when the messages that taught you to doubt your worth came not only from your family, but from the world around you. That is where our responsibility begins.

When you realize that you are already worthy of unconditional acceptance, you gain the ability to protect the inner child who needed it most.

You can remind them that what happened belongs in the past and no longer has the power to harm them. From this point forward, you become the safe place. You are the parent now.

You get to create a loving home within yourself, one where your inner child is seen, protected, and loved without condition. This is not about reliving pain. It is about integration. It is about offering yourself the care that allows self-love to settle into the body and stay.

This is how wholeness returns. It comes quietly, through presence, through care, and through the remembering of who you were before the world asked you to doubt yourself.



Journal Prompts:

1. When you picture yourself as a child, what do you notice first?

2. What did that child need most that they did not consistently receive?

3. What does that part of you need from you now?

Reflections:

06

Loving from a Full Cup

We can only love others as much as we love ourselves.

Not because we don't care deeply, but because the way we give love is shaped by what we believe about our own worth. When self-love is missing, love becomes something we search for rather than something we share.

Please do not read this as an attack or a call-out. It isn't. It's an observation born from lived experience, including my own.

Even in the story I shared about the day my daughter was born, I had not yet learned how to fill my own cup. Motherhood entered my existence like a flood of love, expansive and overwhelming, a love that felt endless and capable of filling infinite cups. And for a while, it did.

The trap for many parents, however, comes when we place the responsibility for filling us inside that relationship. When our sense of meaning, connection, and emotional fulfillment becomes overly dependent on our children, imbalance quietly takes root. This is where codependency can begin, even when it is wrapped in devotion and sacrifice.

I first became aware of this when I separated from my ex-husband and felt the absence that not having my daughter fifty percent of the time created in my life. The quiet was loud. The gap was undeniable. Later, heartbreaks throughout the last fifteen years of dating brought me back to the same place again and again. Empty. Different relationships, same ending.

It wasn't until I learned how to love myself and intentionally meet my own needs for safety, joy, and connection that something shifted.



I stopped asking one relationship to be everything. I found grounding in community, nourishment in friendships, and excitement in my creative work. Movement, purpose, contribution, and connection became woven into many areas of my life rather than concentrated in one place. That was the moment motherhood changed, too.

I stopped raising my daughter to meet my needs and began raising her for the world. Love became cleaner. Freer. Less attached to fear or absence. When our cups are full, we do not cling. We do not grasp. We do not demand that love stay in one form to feel whole. We allow love to move.

Many of us learn how to give love long before we know how to feel it within ourselves. We offer time, attention, care, gifts, acts of service, loyalty, and emotional presence not out of abundance but out of hope.

Hope that if we give enough, we will belong.
Hope that if we are generous, attentive, or
accommodating enough, we will finally feel
chosen and secure in a relationship.

On the surface, this kind of giving can
look selfless, devoted, even noble.
Beneath it, however, there is often a
quieter motivation at play. We are not
only loving; we are seeking confirmation.
We are trying to meet a need we have
not yet learned how to meet within
ourselves. This is not a flaw. It is a
survival strategy shaped by unmet
needs and learned patterns.

At a fundamental level, human beings are wired
with basic emotional needs. While different
frameworks describe them differently, they all
point to the same truth: before we can grow and
contribute freely, we must feel safe, connected,
and valued.

When self-love is lacking, the nervous system prioritizes certainty and connection above all else. Safety and belonging take precedence, and everything else falls in line behind them.

This is where love quietly shifts from being an expression of abundance to becoming a way to secure stability.



We attach more tightly. We overextend. We stay longer than we should. We tolerate what drains us because the fear of losing connection feels greater than the cost of losing ourselves. We may call it loyalty or devotion, but often it is rooted in the belief that without the relationship, we will lose access to love altogether. This is what it means to love from an empty cup.

An empty cup does not mean there is no love present. It means the source of love has been placed outside of ourselves. Another person, a role, or a relationship becomes responsible for fulfilling our needs for certainty, excitement, and connection. And when that happens, love becomes fragile and conditional.

Moreover, it becomes something we fear losing, because without it, we feel unanchored. Loving from a full cup is different.

When you begin to meet your own needs for safety, connection, and self-worth, something fundamental shifts; love no longer feels like something you must earn, secure, or negotiate. It becomes something you already live inside of. Relationships stop being the source of love and become the place where love is shared.

From this place, giving becomes clean. You can offer your time without resentment and be generous without keeping score. Showing up fully without abandoning yourself becomes attainable. You can walk away without losing your sense of worth. Love stops being a transaction and becomes a flow. This is where growth and contribution finally come online.

When our basic needs are met internally, we naturally move beyond ourselves. We want to create, serve, and give; not to be filled, but because something within us is already full and wants to move outward. This is the difference between giving to belong and giving because you already belong to yourself.

When love flows from within, it becomes an ever-flowing fountain rather than a limited resource. Others may drink from it, but they are not responsible for refilling it. That responsibility belongs to you. And paradoxically, this is what makes love more spacious, more sustainable, and freer.

Loving from a full cup does not make you less loving. It makes your love more honest. It allows you to choose relationships from alignment rather than fear, from desire rather than deficiency. It frees you to love deeply without losing yourself, to give generously without depletion, and to receive without guilt. ***This is self-love in action.***



Journal Prompts:

- 1. Where in my life am I giving in order to feel chosen, needed, or secure?**

List one relationship or situation where your giving feels tied to fear of loss rather than genuine overflow.

- 2. Which needs am I asking this relationship/dynamic to meet for me?**

Consider needs like safety, connection, validation, excitement, or belonging. How might you begin meeting one of these needs for yourself instead?

3. What am I giving to others right now that I am not giving to myself?

Do you allow others to rest while you give yourself no break? How about mistakes? Do you show others a level of understanding you do not give yourself? Expand on the idea of what you could be doing to fill your own cup.

Reflections:

07 Integrating Self-Love Into Everyday Life

Self-care is the practice of **self-love** when you know your **self-worth** is God-given. Those three terms are often intermingled, and although they belong in the same conversation, each has a role in the intrapersonal dynamic (the relationship we cultivate with ourselves).

First, you understand your worth is not attained, but inherent. Then you realize that self-love is the energy that flows from within and spills into every area and relationship of your life. Self-care, then, becomes the aligned actions through which you integrate self-love into daily living.

At the beginning of this journey, I invited you to consider self-love the way we think about water. When we are thirsty, no one else can quench that thirst for us.

In the same way, so much of what sustains us in life depends on our own willingness to meet our own needs.

Most things, I would venture to say. When we do not learn how to meet those needs ourselves, we often look for someone else to do it for us.

Acts of service and feeling taken care of by others can awaken memories of maternal nurturing, whether from childhood or from what we were left longing for. This is not a book about blame, nor an examination of what was or wasn't done by our parents. It is an invitation to reclaim the power we have to make ourselves feel loved, supported, and safe.

Reclaiming that power does not have to look grand or dramatic. Often, it shows up in the smallest, most practical ways.



So let me ask you this:

What can you do for yourself that, if someone else did it for you, you would feel deeply grateful?

For me, it looks like fueling my gas tank before I know I have a trip ahead, especially given my tendency to run behind schedule. Or preparing food in advance, because while I love nourishing, homemade meals, I do not enjoy cooking twice a day. I don't mind leftovers; therefore, a batch of good soup can feed both my body and my soul for several days.



Some forms of self-care come easily to me. Others have taken much longer to relearn. Rest, in particular, has always been more complicated.

Learning to listen to my body and lean into rest rather than fight it has been one of the most meaningful shifts in my self-love journey.

I come from a long line of professional nappers. The siesta was woven into my upbringing. In Brazil, schools often run in shifts, and until about sixth grade, children go home for lunch. I would eat and then nap, and it was expected. I never resisted it. I enjoyed it.

Adulthood in the United States taught me a different story. Somewhere along the way, I absorbed the belief that the less sleep you get, the more productive you must be, and that running your body into the ground through hard work is admirable.

Motherhood brought me back to rest. My daughter was an excellent napper, and I relearned how to sleep whenever I could. And yet, even after rediscovering rest, the world has a way of pulling us back into old expectations. Life rushes in again, and it raises an eyebrow if you say you cannot make the 12:45 meeting because that is your nap time.

Rest is just one example. We all have our own version of this struggle. So, where is your snag in your self-care routine?

Is it movement? Driving everyone else everywhere while never making time for your own body? Or it could be something as simple as hydration. Don't get me started on the water and bathroom habits schools have normalized for children. Requiring passes to use the bathroom teaches kids to budget their bodily needs around permission. Some schools even tie bathroom access to homework completion or performance, subtly messaging that basic human needs come after productivity.

That messaging does not disappear when we grow up. Many of us carry it straight into adulthood. Performance, in particular, has always been something I needed to be pulled away from rather than pushed toward. Getting good grades was never demanded by my parents, yet achievement became embedded in me early on, likely as a way to feel validated. Being a high achiever has served me well in business, but it comes at a cost to self-love.

So what does a self-love practice actually look like?

For me, it looks like saying no to commitments that drain me and yes to moments of quiet recharge. It means protecting my calendar and not allowing outside demands to take precedence over what matters most. It sounds like saying, “No, I can’t attend that meeting because I’m taking my daughter somewhere fun.” It means moving my body because I know I am making deposits into my future health. It means preparing myself for tomorrow with intention, with a full gas tank, my favorite drink packed, and a nourishing snack ready.



Self-care is the daily practice that lives inside the relationship of self-love.

And when you truly understand that your worth is inherent, not earned, self-love becomes a natural consequence rather than something you have to force.

In the end, the person you will spend every night with and every moment of your life alongside deserves a priority seat.

This relationship deserves care, attention, and intention. You are the love of your life.



Journal Prompts:

- 1.** What is one small action I can take each day that makes my life feel easier or more supported?

Be specific. Think about sleep, food, preparation, movement, or boundaries.

- 2.** When do I most often feel rushed, depleted, or resentful during the day, and what need is being ignored in that moment?

Write about the pattern, not the emotion alone.

3. If I treated myself the way I care for someone I love, what would I do differently this week?

List tangible actions such as scheduling rest, preparing meals, leaving earlier, or saying no.

Reflections:





If you are here, it means you dared to go on this journey. That is not a small feat!

Every bit of time, attention and intention toward remembering who you are and peeling back the layers the world placed on you, is a worthy investment.

Love and light,

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