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Why Do This Work?



*“Your task is not to seek for love but merely
to seek and find all the barriers within
yourself that you have built against it.”*

- Rumi

If you're reading this book, I'm guessing that you're feeling stuck somewhere in your life. You're struggling with fear around not knowing who you really are, where your relationship is going, or whether your career is the right one. You might have a vague sense that things could be better, but you can't figure out what that looks like or how to get there. You probably don't know what you're doing—or not doing—to end up in the exact same painful relationship, dead-end job, shallow friendships, or unhealthy habits you've found yourself in time and time again. You might even be wondering if this is just normal. That only special people get to live fulfilling lives, and you're not one of them.

I get how feeling stuck or lost and fumbling through life with no real purpose or direction is deeply frustrating. I empathize

with how you may be spinning out because life is happening too fast and you just can't seem to find a harmony between work, family, relationship, health, and fun. I can say these things, because it wasn't that long ago that I was going through the exact same thing.

I was operating on auto-pilot (in what is known as the Iago trance) and just going through the motions day after day, taking whatever life decided to throw my way. I felt frustrated, anxious, lost, disappointed, and overwhelmed. Working sixty to seventy hours per week, giving all my energy to everyone else, and not paying attention to how I was treating myself landed me in a debilitating state—mentally, emotionally, and physically. I was a mess.

That was when I began my own journey toward understanding how and why I had turned out the way I had—the same journey you're embarking on now. At a deeper level, I found that everything I thought, said, and did (or didn't do) was the result of unresolved past wounds and the beliefs I'd acquired along the way. I didn't know how to deal with difficult situations and painful emotions as they were happening, so I stuffed them away, thinking that was the way to handle them. That's what everyone around me did. How could I know any different?

I'll be honest with you. It took a lot of work and commitment to transform that old life into the one I live now. It wasn't always smooth sailing, but using the processes I'll share with you in this book, I finally healed past wounds and discovered a new way of navigating difficult emotions as they come up. I now have a career that is exciting to me and a relationship that I'd only ever dreamed of. I feel excitement in exploring far outside my comfort zones. I've learned how to keep myself healthy, live in a place of harmony, and become adept at knowing when and how to enforce boundaries. I now feel capable and confident when facing difficult conversations, and can communicate my needs clearly. When uncomfortable

emotions arise, I now know how to process them so they strengthen rather than debilitate me.

I don't tell you this to boast, but to let you know that you too can have a life you love. But first, you need to learn how to heal your heart.

I have experienced many different processes as I've sought to heal my own emotional wounds. I also teach different approaches to healing and use a variety of methods for one-on-one work with clients. I've come to realize that there is no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to personal growth. This book focuses on mindfulness-based processes that I have found highly effective. I also teach other approaches that are equally effective. For other options to assist you in your personal healing and expansion, please see the Resources section at the end of this book.

The Good, Bad, and Ugly of Emotions

As human beings, we are meant to experience and express the full range of our emotions. When we bury uncomfortable emotions consciously or unconsciously to avoid the pain, we disable an aspect of ourselves that is required to be whole. Our journey as human beings is to develop a greater understanding of who we are and make strides toward greater evolution. To do that, we must be willing to embrace all aspects of ourselves.

Embracing all aspects begins with resolving past experiences that left an imprint of negative emotions and limiting beliefs—beliefs and emotions that adversely impact your experience today. These negative emotions are caused by unmet needs and unfulfilled desires. Left unresolved, they become buried and fester like an untreated wound. And if we don't learn to navigate new emotions as they arise, we end up adding more weight to our already overloaded baggage.

Emotions in the moment—positive *and* negative—are perfectly normal. We're human beings with human emotional responses. Our emotions and experiences are what create color and texture in our life. What kind of life would it be if we didn't experience love, joy, awe, and excitement? And, though most of us would prefer to stay on the positive side of emotions, our negative feelings are important to experience the fullness of life as well. They guide us, help us survive, and even give us the added push we need to stretch beyond ourselves.

It's reasonable to experience anger when someone violates a boundary. It's appropriate to feel sadness when we lose someone dear to us. It's understandable that we feel fearful when doing something new for the first time or when we are threatened. These are all rational, healthy human emotions as we experience them in the moment.

These emotions only become stuck in our systems and turn into baggage when we don't allow ourselves to experience them—when we choose to reject, bury, and avoid them through various means.

The Baggage We Carry

Baggage is a loosely-wrapped term for anything that prevents us from being able to move powerfully forward in our lives. Heightened negative emotions that are inappropriate or unwarranted based on something that has just happened are indicative of baggage tied up in the emotion. Limiting beliefs that you have about yourself, other people, or the world you live in are also baggage. In each case, there has been a build-up of negative emotions and beliefs based on past experiences, and this is what we call baggage.

This baggage can severely derail us in the moment. Unresolved emotions shape our responses to life pretty much every day and in every way. It's like a snowball rolling down a snowy

hill. At first, it's not very significant. As it rolls downhill, not only does it pick up speed, but it also gets bigger as the accumulation of snow becomes compounded. By the time it reaches the halfway point or bottom of the hill, it's gained a level of momentum and mass that has the capacity to do some very real damage.

A negative emotion that we don't process works in much the same way. It begins with a single event at some point in time when we couldn't properly digest the energy of the experience. The event may have been huge and dramatic, or it could be an event that seems insignificant to us as adults, yet felt traumatic to us as children. We didn't know how to resolve the emotional pain we felt in that first experience, so we buried it. As we continued through life and experienced the same or similar emotions and similar events, we just kept pushing the pain further and further down inside us to avoid feeling it.

This was our initial coping mechanism. We never learned how to properly deal with our emotional bruises, so we coped by avoiding them. Those unprocessed emotions compounded over time. What was once anger in the moment has now become generalized anger or even an underlying sense of rage that colors how we view the world and all our experiences within it.

We've all known people who are pissed off at everyone and everything all the time. They walk around like time bombs ready to explode over the smallest offense. What about the people who are perpetually frightened and worried? They hesitate taking even the smallest step outside their heavily guarded comfort zones. The person who is afraid to love? The one who feels unworthy? The ones who are relentlessly cynical? Who feel hopeless and impotent? All are examples of people carrying a lot of baggage in the form of unresolved past negative emotions and limiting beliefs.

Compare this to nutrition on the physical level. In his book, *Free to Love, Free to Heal*, Dr. David Simon writes that if you consume more dietary fat than your body can properly metabolize, it will lead to blockages in your blood vessels and arteries over time, and ultimately cause a heart attack. Atherosclerosis is a physical example of how past undigested residues can interfere with the free flow of energy in the present. From a medical point of view, unhealthy saturated fats and dietary fats accumulate and create physical disorder and disease.

The same is true for an accumulation of toxic, negative emotions that we don't metabolize or digest. Sooner or later, that toxicity will take a detrimental toll on our emotional body.

Your heart and psyche are both continually striving to metabolize energy and information. Your mind works day and night, during both the waking and the dreaming states, to process your thoughts and experiences so the intellect can grasp or make sense of them. The unconscious mind works diligently to process our feelings and experiences to extract what we need for our personal growth—meaning, lessons, wisdom, and knowledge from the experiences we've been through—so we can release anything that does not support our growth and expansion. But sometimes, the unconscious mind becomes conflicted and can't figure out how to process an experience. Or, in the processing of an experience, the unconscious mind accesses existing patterns or strategies from the past that keep you from growth and expansion.

You know that a negative emotion has turned into baggage and become toxic when you experience it in a way that is disproportionate to something that has just happened in the present moment. It's when you drastically overreact. You're consumed by whatever emotion you're feeling, and can't pull yourself out of a full-on tailspin. Another way of recognizing baggage is that you tend to bring the same negative emotion to *every* interaction. This way of being may be so familiar to

you that it's like the air you breathe. And because so many others live their lives through their baggage, it may even seem normal to you. While it is common, it's not necessary—or healthy.

Letting Your Baggage Go

A critical key to living a life of purpose and passion is to learn to live in the moment. Many of us spend way too much time ruminating about the past and worrying about the future because of the baggage we carry. Living in the past or future prevents us from being present in the moment, right now, where the beauty, love, gifts, and joy reside.

I wrote this book to share some of the processes I've used personally, in my workshops with students and working one-on-one with clients for many years. These processes can help you break free of negative emotions from the past that consume your daily life now: anger and resentment, sadness and hurt, fear and anxiety, guilt and shame. They will also help you let go of the negative or limiting beliefs you hold as being true about yourself, other people, or the world you live in.

The purpose of releasing negative emotions, unhealthy decisions, limiting beliefs, and baggage in general is to free ourselves of the weight and our self-inflicted obstacles. It's to drop coping mechanisms that no longer serve us on our journey. It's an opportunity to clear the slate and begin anew. It's the foundation that allows the person we truly want to be to emerge.

By clearing out toxic residue from the past, you have more capacity to experience positive emotions. Old negative patterns squelch a positive mindset and emotions. For example, you start falling in love with someone, and the resurfacing of old negative feelings about being hurt in the past causes you to pull away. Or maybe you feel eager to start a new job, but the

memory of embarrassing past failures turns your excitement into fear and doubt.

When you learn to release and let go of the stuff that doesn't serve you, you create space. You're opening a channel where there used to be a bottleneck or constriction. Like a water hose, when you squeeze it tight, the water can't flow. But with an open channel, your energy and emotions flow freely. You can traverse and experience more aspects of who you are, because you no longer have so many areas that are shut down. You can actually be happy from the inside out. You can even feel happy for no reason. You feel a lot more creative, inspired, and confident.

We all carry past baggage to some extent, be it our own past experiences or junk that was passed into our DNA through genealogy. In his book *Super Genes*, Dr. Deepak Chopra discusses what's new in the science of Epigenetics and how "the memory of personal experience—yours, your father's, your great-grandmother's—may be immediately passed on." He further elaborates that "the fact that memory can be inherited isn't new in biology."

Regardless of where the baggage comes from, I can tell you from personal experience that there's nothing more freeing than letting go of anything that binds you to the pain of your past. If an old decision, belief, or emotion prevents you in any way from moving powerfully forward, it's got to go. Plain and simple.

Journaling

Many of the processes in this book involve journaling, which is one of the most powerful and underrated tools you can use, and one that I rely upon regularly. By putting pen to paper, you involve both the left side of the brain, which is our logical analytical side, and the right side of the brain, which is the

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creative, intuitive side. The act of holding a pen and writing on a page allows the two sides of your brain to work together to draw your thoughts, feelings, and memories out from your psyche and into a tangible format for closer review.

Through journaling, you can pinpoint and focus in on more details of what you're processing. It also enables you to go deeper. Journaling can help you move sequentially through past experiences and provide insightful, intuitive, aha moments that you may have overlooked previously. I encourage you to embrace the process of journaling to express your feelings and observations. Allow journaling to be a powerful and cathartic tool for unfolding different pieces of the process.

Self-Reflection:
The Cost of Negative Emotions

For this exercise, using your journal, take some time to consider how your negative emotions from the past might be showing up on a daily basis. For example:

- Can you think of a time when your fear prevented you from going after something or someone you really wanted? Maybe you allowed it to sabotage your relationships or career.
- Can you recall a time when your anger or resentment got the best of you and you blew up? Maybe you said something you couldn't take back, or you did something that you were embarrassed about or regretted later.
- Have you ever felt as if your sadness or depression was holding you down, like you couldn't shake the dark cloud, somber feelings, and hopeless thoughts that were consuming you?
- Have you ever experienced so much shame, guilt, or embarrassment that you avoided putting yourself out there for fear of being laughed at or ridiculed or bullied by others?

Take some time to contemplate this and then make some notes in your journal. This will help you begin to identify what you're carrying around that you may want to consider releasing.



As you journal about your experiences, remember that your journal is for you and you only. Allow yourself to be honest. Write with compassionate self-inquiry. Your journal is not for public consumption. Think of it as you writing to yourself. You have to be able to rail at God if you want to, and use language you would never use in public. It's your safe place to rage, reflect, and contemplate. Your journal isn't meant to be perfect. You just write whatever comes to you based on the questions of each exercise. You're not trying to write a brilliant, clever essay or come up with perfect solutions. The idea is to let it flow and just see what comes through. By doing this, you'll find yourself expressing insights far beyond what your thinking mind can produce. Just put the pen to paper and let it flow.

For your journaling and the other self-reflective exercises I'll teach you, it's very helpful to set up a specific space in which to do them. Make sure it is a space where you feel comfortable and where you can be undisturbed for periods of time. You can choose a certain room or corner, and set it up with candles, music, or art that soothes you.

I truly believe that the purpose of life is to love more, be happy, and evolve as human beings. Of course, we are sure to meet challenges and obstacles along the way. Sometimes we

overcome them with relative ease, and sometimes we fall flat on our face. The nature of life is the ebb and the flow, the peaks and the valleys, the smooth terrain and the bumpy roads. The idea is not to eliminate challenge, because challenge is where we find our greatest lessons. Through our daily challenges and the things we perceive as obstacles, we develop new levels of wisdom. The task at hand is to learn how to move through our experiences—good, bad, and everything in-between—and to extract the lessons. To glean the wisdom from all of life's experiences and to utilize them to make better choices for ourselves in the future. There's no right or wrong choice in life, because no matter what we choose in any given moment, the lessons that we need will be waiting for us.

We're all spiritual beings having a human experience for a very short time. Every single one of us deserves to live a life filled with joy, love, happiness, and fulfillment. If we're willing to till the soil and uproot the beliefs and emotions that hold us back, we will reap rich rewards.

*“You are here to enable the divine purpose
of the Universe to unfold.
That is how important you are.”*

– Eckhart Tolle

Self-Reflection:
Who Might You Be Without Your Baggage?

Pull out your journal and let's start envisioning who you might become once you're free of the baggage that holds you back. For you, it may seem far-fetched to believe you have the ability to be, do, and have what you want in life. For this exercise, don't restrict yourself to what you think is possible for you. Write about what you would love, even if it seems out of reach. Imagine yourself without fears, doubt, anger, or sadness shaping your thoughts and actions.

- What does this new you look like?
- How does this new baggage-less you feel?
- How do you feel when you wake up in the morning?
- What is different?
- What sorts of possibilities are open for you now?
- Imagine yourself in life's challenging situations: How do you respond differently?

