The Practice of Self Love
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Welcome.

I've been teaching love and relationship skills for over 10 years and what I've come to see is that everyone is searching for love “out there.” Where is it? Where is love? Is it under the couch, like coins? Is it on Tinder or eHarmony? Is it out on the street, a bar? Is it at the club, the next wedding I'm going to?

Where is love? People, men and women alike, are like bloodhounds, sniffing around, hoping that love will show up or be spotted somewhere out there, as if love resides somewhere outside ourselves.

In my webinar training on How to Inspire Love, I go into detail on the 3 specific ways to reverse the mistake that love is somewhere to be “found.” Instead, I show that love is something that's inspired. It's something that's created from within.

It's been my pleasure. It's been my honor to teach this far more effective way of creating love in your life, inspiring rather than finding, because it brings people back to self responsibility, which is where all of life's bounty is to be found, where all of life's good is to be found. It puts life under your control, as much as life can be controlled. Realizing that love is chiefly inspired takes us out of being a victim of love and of life, and puts us instead into the position of the entrepreneur, or creator of our own lives, as much as that's possible.

A meteor could still land on your head, so let's not fool ourselves that all of life is under our control. Though, when we take full responsibility for our lives, that which can be under our control, can be brought effectively under our control.

Something I've learned over this long period of teaching is that while I can teach people how to magnetize and attract, and ultimately inspire love in a partner day by day, moment by moment, there's been a missing element for a lot of people.

Let me talk about a personal story and I think that will explain it....

I was in a relationship for a long time with someone who I ended up calling The Sieve, you, know, like a kitchen colander. Do you know what a sieve
is, in the kitchen? It's a bowl with lots of holes in it. You put spaghetti in it and allow the water to drip out the bottom. I wholeheartedly loved this woman. I saw her greatness. I saw her light, I saw her potential. I supported her self-growth and her self-expression, her expansion. I celebrated her. I wanted her happy, but in the end, it felt like all the love I was pouring in was just leaking out the bottom. In many ways, we're all a sieve until we start plugging those holes where love leaks out. She was an extreme case.

She used to like that Groucho Marx quote, "I wouldn't belong to a club that would have me as a member." It wasn't funny in her case, because she didn't really trust her ability to be loved. She didn't trust that she was lovable. She distrusted my love, or anyone's love. And that's what turned what could have been a healthy and sacred bowl to receive love into a punctured sieve.

Brene Brown said it beautifully. She said, "Nobody can love you more than you love yourself." There's a great truth here; unless you can plug those holes of your own sieve, love will leak out of your life and leave you empty.

It is your own self-love and self-acceptance that will start plugging those little holes like little pieces of gum. Only then can you really inspire the love that you want and sustain the love you receive in return.

Anyone can, at any moment, spark attraction, infatuation, even affection - but it will pour in and pour right out the bottom. It will leak out until you plug those holes with genuine self-love, and genuine self-acceptance.

I want you to think about this image, that self-acceptance and self-love are like repairing any ways in which you have been a sieve, creating a bucket or what I like to call a sacred bowl. It's a place where love can land, and stay, and flourish.

I began to see how so many people were focused on finding love, they weren't doing this deep, initial, internal work, so that when they did spark it with somebody, it wouldn't stay.

So I began a course of research to make sure that all my students, clients and readers (and myself by the way) had the necessary preparation to be that receiving bowl where love wouldn't leak out.
I started poking around. There are spiritual traditions. There are emotional traditions. There's great work done in positive psychology pioneered by Dr. Martin Seligman. I recommend his book "Flourish," if this subject interests you deeply. He started looking at how psychology and therapy had always focused on what was wrong with people and how to get them healthy by comparison, where Seligman's interest was, how do you take someone who's kind of already sort of healthy and develop more happiness in life, so that we can flourish?

I started looking into neuroplasticity. The fascinating science of how we literally re-pattern our brain by how we think. Neuroplasticity means that our brain actually changes according to the patterns of thought that we undertake. The paths of our neurons actually change. This is very important. Our thought patterns really do determine the structure of our brain and the more we “practice” a thought, the easier time that thought will have becoming a dominant voice inside the chatter of our brain.

I explored the work of Brene Brown on vulnerability and shame; Dr. John Gottman of the Love lab who has studied what it is that makes couples last, what makes love flourish. Big one, by the way, in case you didn't know it: is positivity.

Positive statements towards your partner, according to research, appear to be the best glue to any relationship. He sets the minimum requirement is 5 positive statements to 1 negative statement. I often like to challenge this and say, "why not a thousand positive statements to 0 negative statements?" Push the limit. 5 to 1 seems to be the absolute lower boundary, the proverbial breaking point.

But can't we all do so much better than that?

What became clear to me, after all this time, is that most people make the same mistake with self-love that they do with creating love with others. In other words, they expect it to simply be what it is: "I'll find love when it happens. If it happens, when the universe brings me love, that's great." As if it comes from the outside: "I'll love myself when the time is right."
This is a faulty model to me. This is a victim model to me. The “life will happen to me” model rather than a “I will boldly forge my life to my best abilities” model.

I don't know about you, but I ain't getting younger, so I like to proactively create my life, in the direction that I desire, as much as possible.

The faulty model of looking for love to happen to you from the outside is just as faulty as the model of hoping that self-love will come to you when you make a certain amount of money, when you meet someone who loves you back, when your mother forgives you or is nice to you finally. All these things are dependent.

Self-love doesn't happen to us from the outside. Self-love doesn't originate from the outside. Neuroscience shows us, again, in the last 20 years that the brain is a malleable and programmable thing. You can program your brain, and that's what we're going to be doing. Here. Today. In order to generate more self-love.

You can generate self-love and self-acceptance by choice, so I urge you to take this seriously. Before you get into a relationship or if you're already in a relationship.

Some of us had pretty destructive parents and we need to generate a lot of self-love and self-acceptance, to repair some of that damage (like the holes in the sieve).

Some of us need to generate a little.

It depends on our upbringing and our various genetic and natural, chemical and hormonal factors.

No self-blame here. We all happen to be in the condition we happen to be in. It's not a judgment on you whether you love yourself a lot, or love yourself a little.

Either way, the process of generating self-love is in your hands. It's like a power station. You don't just power it up once. You don't find enlightenment, and then expect things to run forever. You don't learn a lesson and expect that your self-love will survive the necessary and
inevitable tough challenges of life, especially intimate life where you're shown your shadow over and over again.

As we get into it today, we're going to see that it's a practice. Self-love, self-acceptance is a practice. You've got to fire it up and you've got to feed it every day, if you want to have a happy life. You have to feed it every day if you want to find and inspire love, and then keep, sustain, and nourish love that you inspire in others.

You want to be a bowl that can receive love and hold it rather than a sieve where the love leaks out.

What is self-love? Let's get some basic definitions. I want to talk about what self-love isn't and what it is...

If people have self-love, basic self love...

it means we respect our thoughts, our feelings and beliefs.

We experience a deep inner sense of worth, and it's an ease.

It's not dependent.

It's a feeling that we have the right to our ideas, even if they're wrong, that we have the right to speak our ideas, even if they're crazy and wrong and that we expect others around us to be respectful.

People who love themselves acknowledge and accept the fact that we have faults, of course we do. We don't repress the reality of our shadows because we all have those shadow sides, those things that we're not so proud of. We all do, but for the most part we learn to forgive ourselves and, at the same time, not to whitewash them but to work on or refine ourselves so that we are even more worthy of vulnerability, connection, intimacy and truth. So, that we're not living in fear, that we're not living in lies.

Self-love isn't static. You don't attain it or gain it in a moment. It's not a noun, it's a verb. It's something you generate. As I said, like a power station. It means that you're learning from the mistakes you make in life and you're taking pride and solace, enjoying and celebrating the good things that you're doing in life. Self-love is truly an ongoing process.
How do you learn to love yourself? Well, it kind of originates in childhood through the nurturing of parents who showed you the benefits of being kind and honest, caring and good, thoughtful, and if they were good parents, they didn't brush over your imperfections. We all have them, right?

I remember, my son, one night when he was 6 years old, lying in bed. I was putting him in to bed and he said to me he says, "Baba?" I said, "Yes?" He goes, "Sometimes I have bad thoughts." He was really concerned about that, and I had to say, "Of course you do. We all have bad thoughts. Our brain, the Buddhists call it a monkey mind. It chatters. It throws up thoughts and ideas all the time. Some are good, some are bad. Some are funny. Some are scary, but they're just thoughts. It doesn't mean you're bad."

A good parent will accept the child's minor imperfections, not whitewash them. Work on them so they can improve and see that they can improve.

As we will see, self-love, self-acceptance comes from staking ourselves, not in the results of our life, but in the process of our life.

How are we doing? What's our process? In what ways are we moving forward? That is really the core of self-love and self-acceptance, not something that happens once. – but knowing you are on the journey. Don't worry if you don't feel like you're fully self loving and self accepting right now, you're probably with about 99% of other healthy humans in the world.

Those 99% of healthy humans stake their worthiness, their self-acceptance, their self-love in the fact that they're getting better and better every day, trying, doing their best, learning, growing, opening their hearts as they go.

Again, first lesson, we stake ourselves in our process, not in some static result where we look at ourselves right now.

People learn the art of self-protection as children. We protect our egos and we also learn how to love and we learn how to self-love through watching our parents.

Some of our journeys are longer, some shorter, largely depending on our parents. Once we emerge from childhood, then it becomes our
responsibility to continue that process, to gauge our judgment in protecting
our emotions and to weigh our progress at learning how to love ourselves
and others more openly, more honestly, more respectfully, more kindly,
more truthfully.

This idea of re-parenting, without getting to schmaltzy or new-agey about it,
is a very interesting subject. We take on the responsibility that our parents
may or may not have met so well, with us. Here's another example.

We're all wounded, all of us from childhood. We all didn't get the ideal love
that we wanted, the ideal love from other children, the ideal love from our
parents. We all had self-doubts. Re-parenting means you take over that
responsibility to re-narrative your self-worth.

Now, again, a tale of two women that I've been in relationships with. Both
had significantly wounding mothers, actually cruel, intentionally cruel,
uncontrollably cruel. One of these women made that wound the story of her
life, and because she was so wounded, she expected and she insisted that
everyone make up for that. She didn't have to step up in order to earn
people's love and trust. This woman had years of pain. She didn't have to
prove anything to anyone because she had suffered. Everything, every
encounter was payback – even though every person she encountered had
no idea why they were expected to pay back a wound inflicted long ago
and by another person. This woman comes off as entitled, demanding,
rough, uncouth and defensive.

The other woman decided early on that her mother was suffering deeply
and caused a lot of suffering, because her mother's mother was pretty
rotten, too. This second woman decided, as a young girl, "I'm not going to
let anybody control my future. I'm going to take responsibility for my inner
self." And, she became very strong because of it. She got advanced
degrees in human behavior and became a great and benevolent teacher,
friend, leader and beloved wife.

Two women, similarly wounded, one made her wound her life story. The
other made her healing her life story. You have a similar choice...

Before we get to how to really cultivate self-love, and I'm going to give you
two large sets of practices, I want to separate self-love from narcissism,
because this is a huge subject in our culture these days. We're always
looking at pictures of ourselves. We're always projecting ourselves into social media. There's a healthy way of doing this, but there's also a danger.

Everyone, more or less is trying to escape from the cage of the "little self." The "little self" is another Buddhist term which compares to "the big self," where we feel at one with all. The little self is best summarized as the ego.

We protect our little self by trying to seem important. The way we try to feel more important is to add to our own efforts. We try to become more talented, more learned, more attractive, more wealthy, more acknowledged, more admired. We throw our personalities out there. We take selfies, and show everybody how great we're doing until we exhaust ourselves.

It's very tiring to be important.

I've been as guilty of this as anyone. Guilty for protecting that child inside of me that has felt that maybe I'm not as good or smart or kind as I wish I was.

We puff ourselves up and we hope the world will notice our display like those birds that puff up their feathers. We try to prove how special we are, like birds in a mating dance, so that we'll be chosen.

The idea here of narcissism without getting too deep into the psychology of it is that the essence of this puffery is that "I have to be more than others" mentality. I have to have more than others. It's delusional. It's an attempt to outdo others as if, without outperforming or winning (whatever that would mean) that competition, we would not, right now, be worthy of love. Narcissism is necessarily comparative.
The Two Essential Levels of Practice for Self-Love

Today, in this piece, what I want to focus on is that you are worthy of self-love. You are worthy, not by comparison with anybody else, but by what you generate, your nuclear reactor, your inner generator of worth and love. It's all yours.

We're going to find our self-love within, and they're going to be two levels.

By the way, these 2 levels are much less all-consuming than the narcissistic attempt, the never-ending attempt, to blame the world and be negative, to blow ourselves up and be grandiose and point a finger saying, "You did this to me. You destroyed my dreams. You're preventing me from being the person I want to be."

As I said, that's exhausting.

By contrast, the actual practice of self-love is actually easy. Why?

Because it's simply a practice or set of practices. It's something you can do all by yourself. Now, there are two levels of generating self-love. I'm going to give you practices for both, today, and both levels are necessary, and those levels are doing and being.

Those two levels are (1) staking your self-worth in what you do, which is important, but also (2) in who you are, which is also important. We're going to get to that.

Before we get there, I wanted to dispel another myth. I've coached so many people, who - whether consciously or not - believed that they would only love themselves if they found somebody to love them. And here in this program, I want to really bring into the light the mistake of waiting for something or someone external to change something internal.

What is inside you being a powerhouse, when stoked, cultivated and directed properly, that which dwells inside you can move the world.
Remember, inner habits often resist change. So that new external love, even when we inspire it, is a change from what came before and without that internal fire keeping us open and feeling worthy of love, we're likely to resist love from the outside as change, as a threat to the "little self" we've been protecting and promoting.

Today, we're going to focus on your internal step by step movement into greater self-love, self-acceptance, and self-worth. 1) because it makes for a happier life, and 2) very specifically for the purposes of what it means to inspire love and keep love, so that you can actually experience deep love in this lifetime.

Love from other people, approval from other people can definitely reinforce our feelings of self-love and self-worth, but they can't replace them. They can't create them. It can help, absolutely. We all know that. We love getting reinforced, but I'll show you a crucial practice in this program to jump start this process of self-love before you meet the one, perhaps, who will love you over time and create a lifetime of memories with you.

Before we get started, I want to say that what we're going to learn together is self generated. It is not static. It's in motion and it's a feedback loop.

Other people are important, finding a beloved, inspiring a beloved, moment by moment. It's important, but self-love doesn't start when that person arrives.

You are the generator of love in your life.

Yes, the people in your life create a feedback loop. When you create it, I will give you practices to assure that this feedback loop is healthy and it compounds and grows your self-love and self-acceptance over time.

When you direct your mind toward how you're not being given the love you want, when your little self feels mercifully victimized, it's pointing that finger at the world. Your poking holes in your bowl, and you're becoming a sieve. You are also training your brain to not be that bowl. You're training your brain to have holes in your self-love.

When you're telling the world ...and please listen closely... when you're telling the world, "you're not seeing me for the amazing wonderful, lovable,
special person I am," you're reinforcing these neuro-pathways in your own brain, telling yourself you're not seeing me for the amazing, wonderful, lovable, special person I am. You're poking holes in your bowl.

Negativity, revenge, jealousy, seeking out proof that the worlds against you will create these negative neural paths. They will poke hole after hole.

Today, we're going to reverse that. You may have a lifetime of creating negative self-love, or lack of self-love in your life. I hope this program is a huge shift for you.

Today, we're going to generate self-love at the two levels I mentioned, doing and being. You will learn to love generously and abundantly and love yourself generously and abundantly. Through these practices, you will be filled with life and energy.

Again, all those negative voices, the victim voices, it's exhausting. The practice of self-love, it's really as simple as walking, one step after another.

It's gentle. It's actually easy.

On the level of being, The Upanishads, the great ancient Indian text said, "I took abundance from abundance and was left with abundance."

Isn't that a beautiful statement? I took abundance from abundance and was left with abundance. That is as beautiful definition of love as I've ever heard. It brings out the truth that your ability to generate love is infinite.

The kind of love that I'm talking about today is infinite.

It means it's infinitely available, and again, the two levels doing and being, the level of doing love is infinite because you can constantly add, add new kindnesses, add new gestures, add new connections, add new skills.

On the level of being, it's infinite, and it's not a question of “adding.” It's a question of accessing. When we don't cultivate the kind of self-love and self-acceptance that plugs the sieve's holes, it's like posting a sign that says, "Infinity may not enter here. I'm not interested in infinity. I'm just going to muddle along."
The practice of self-love, as I'm going to teach it to you here, is the happy discovery that infinity is already within you. You can pour love out all day long, and never lack abundance. I took abundance from abundance and was left with abundance. It's one of those beautiful things about love. You can give, and give, and give, and never be depleted.

One of my favorite teachers, and a former partner of mine, David Deida, says...

"Love is native to our being. When you're in love with a man or a woman, the love you feel does not come from him or her. It is the love flowing from your own heart that you feel. Your partner is simply giving you an excuse to love."

An excuse! This is a wonderful way of looking at your partner, by the way or anyone in your life. Your partner is not someone who gives you love, who you “found” love in, that external person. They're an excuse for you to turn on that generator and love generously and abundantly.

Let's look at these two levels again. The first level is the level of doing. I do love well. I do love better, and better every day. I do self-love well. I take care of myself. I nurture myself. We'll talk about that.

The negative flip-side of “doing” love says, "I have no worth. I have no self-love unless I can make myself worthy through my efforts in the world."

The Course in Miracles says that the second level – the practice of being love - is our nature. God, infinite worth – I already have it! And all my efforts can't do a thing about that, because I am by nature made of infinite worth. This is the spiritual approach. This is what Kabbalah calls Shekhinah, or it’s called Christ consciousness, your inner Buddha, your Brahma. This is the part that you access.

In the practice of Self Love - there's the part that you do and the part that you access – because you already are infinite love.

Whether you're religious or not, whatever definitions or names you give to your infinite well of love - it doesn't matter to me.
That infinite ability to love, that infinite worth is within you because you are part of this evolving universe, whether you want to give it a personality or name, or not, you're part of something magnificent! The evolution of life. The desire of life to flourish and grow and evolve.

**How to “Do” Self Love**

Let's talk about the first mode of self-love.

Remember, both modes are essential, doing self-love, being self-love. Let's talk about doing self-love, the action, the daily practice of cultivating self-love, and self-acceptance.

The first step on our journey here is to challenge your notion that love is a feeling.

Love is not a feeling, it's a perception. Dr. Maxwell Maltz, author of "Psycho-Cybernetics" says, "Since love is a perception, you get to alter your perception."

We're taught that love is an emotion. Think Romeo and Juliet, you feel these elated emotions. That's not what love is. That's infatuation.

Remember, Romeo and Juliet were 14 and 13, and they died within 3 days. This is not really a model we want for love. Love is not that initial flight of delight and wonder – it's a perception of something in the other.

When you love another, it's not because they're categorically different from every other human being on Earth. George Bernard Shaw, one of my favorite writers, said “marriage is based on the exaggeration of one woman's virtues above all others.” It goes both ways by the way, for men.

We exaggerate. We diminish the centrality of our partner’s flaws. We focus on the good. It's a perception. And we see the - whatever you want to call it - the infinite divinity of another.

We see the virtue of the other. We see the delight of the other. We tend to downplay what we don't like about them. Doug Stanhope is a very wild
comedian, and he says, "Poetry is like children. You think yours are beautiful and special, but they’re pretty annoying to most other people."

That's the comedian’s version of what Shaw said. When you love something - whether it's your own poetry, your own children, your partner - you choose consciously, or unconsciously to perceive the good in the other. It's not an emotion. It's a perception.

So – let’s turn this lens on ourselves. Self-love, similarly is seeing the infinite worth, the divinity, the good in yourself. To focus on the good in yourself. We have the choice to focus on what makes us cheap, and mean, and selfish and grumpy, and callous. We all have those aspects of ourselves, but we choose not to identify with those qualities when we cultivate self-love.

There was a great story from the Roman period in Jerusalem. There was a rabbi named Akiva who was very, very brilliant. He's gone down as one of the most brilliant rabbis of all time. His brilliance offended the Roman overlord. So this overlord sent his wife to seduce Akiva and show that he was just an ordinary guy.

She dressed up as Roman women would do, lit candles and had perfumes and diaphanous scarves and when Akiva saw her, what did he do? The story says “he spat, he laughed with joy and he cried.”

Why? The story goes...

He spat to avoid being seduced by her pure physical allure, which apparently was quite a lot. He laughed with joy at the pleasure of her beauty. (Notice, that’s a celebration of beauty, not a lustful desire to own beauty. I teach this in my courses for Men – to raise lust into celebration).

He cried because he saw how her beauty, as is everyone's beauty - is merely a reflection of the greater beauty of the feminine divine, of Sheckina, of God, whatever you want to call it. Her beauty was a part of a larger beauty.

Notice what he perceived in a beautiful woman. The physical allure. Rabbi Akiva was smart, he spat to avoid being overtaken by that physical allure.
He instead delighted in it... He laughed. He took pleasure in her beauty, and he cried because he was overwhelmed by the grace and magnificence of the beauty of sharing life in this universe.

This is what I mean that love is a perception, not an emotion that overtakes us. It's a perception of the infinite good in the other.

So too, self-love is a perception of all the infinite good you have within you whether it's come out or not yet. We're going to learn how to access it in the second part of this program.

In order to feel self-love, you don't have to build up some crazy idea of perfectionism. You don't have to make up for the past. You don't have to make believe that you're a saint. Remember, the Course in Miracles says, "Grandiosity is always a cover for despair." So let's leave grandiosity out of this. Let's save ourselves the trouble of unrealistic – grandiose – expectations.

Material traditions teach that you have to be rich and successful and drive a great car, and have a fancy tombstone to be considered worthy of love.

Spiritual traditions often counsel the opposite. Self-flagellation, breast beating, anger and shame for being a sinner. To practice self-love, you have to escape this idea of your natural state as being a sinner, (which I happen to think is a criminal idea that we're born as sinners).

Lord, what a horrible, shameful tradition that is.

The worst of material traditions say you have to be rich, more or less to be worthy of love. The worst of spiritual traditions say you have to be something other than you are. That you have to be saved by some outside force – and until you do that – you're not good enough. You're not worthy of love.

This idea of being a sinner or “not enough yet to deserve love” also comes at us socially. “You're not good enough. You're not smart enough. You're not kind enough.” It happens in school. You emerge from childhood into the world as an adult, and because of these voices, you feel that you’re just not enough.
That's death to self-love, death to self acceptance.

Let's turn to Mary Oliver, who is an American poet. The opening lines of one of her master poems called Wild Geese, to me is a directive to end this need to be other than what we are, to have to believe that we have to be richer, or smarter, or thinner, or something other than we are in order to earn love. Let's listen to Wild Geese, and especially these opening lines and the last lines...

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile, the world goes on.

Meanwhile, the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile, the wild geese high in the clean blue air are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting over and over announcing your place in the family of things."

How beautiful is that!

She says, "You don't have to crawl over glass repenting." You don't have to go to confession and say you're full of shame or you're a sinner. You don't need someone else to absolve you of your shame. You don't need someone else to prove that you are worthy of love. It begins within and nowhere else.
Love is a perception, not an emotion. Begin by perceiving yourself as belonging, as she says in the family of things.

“You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.” Self-acceptance. Getting real with your actual bodily reality right here in the gift of being alive. Exactly as you are, part of this evolving, beautiful story of life on earth.

Love is a perception, not an emotion. When you choose to perceive yourself as belonging – as being worthy of love, worthy of acceptance, you are taking a huge step toward filling those holes in the sieve and becoming that beautiful bowl that can hold, and cultivate and nourish love.

Here’s a second practice: rehearse and review your lovable self so you can live into it.

Again, this goes back to neuroplasticity. There's been so much written in the last 10, 15 years as we begin to understand the brain, as we begin to image the brain, we can see the brain actually programming itself.

Every CEO, every athlete, every great speaker rehearses his or her performance ahead of time. Why? This is a way of carving pathways in our brain so that it becomes easier the second time we do anything.

My bride has a saying she says all the time, and it's a way of training her brain. She says,

"The right things will come at the right time, and the right people will arrive at the right time to serve my highest good."

This is kind of a mantra she says to herself and she teaches. What that does is it wakes up the brain to see the right things at the right time, and the right people showing up, so you can actually recognize them.

It's also a way of stop berating yourself that things aren't showing up when you want them to. As my father told me many times, "The universe isn't here to give you what you want. You're dealt cards, and you play them."
When you start training your brain to review and rehearse your lovable self, you'll start seeing what's lovable and what's admirable about yourself. And you stop blaming the universe for not giving you what you want right now.

You want to train your brain. You want to light the road in front of you. There's a book, Bird by Bird. What a wonderful book by Anne Lamott, and there she writes about another writer, E.L. Doctorow:

"He once said that writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way."

So it is with the practice of self-love. We light our path. We look for our lovable self emerging in the lights just ahead of our car. You don't have to see exactly where you're going in the future. You don't have to see your ultimate perfection. You don't have to see your destination. You don't have to see everything that's going to pass along the way.

You only have to see 2 or 3 feet ahead of you.

The next choice you make in your life, is it lovable? Are you rehearsing your lovable self in action? Are you practicing your lovable self? This is how, as E.L. Doctorow says, "You can make the whole trip that way, little by little."

Visualize yourself as more lovable and step into it, doing the things that cause you to love yourself just a little bit more, just a few feet ahead.

Here are some headlights for you to illuminate the path just in front of you. Ready. These questions are practices; questions you can ask yourself daily:

What would I look like if I acted with a little more compassion and forgiveness?

What would it look like if I was a little more generous or thoughtful today?

What would I look like if I was a little more joyful in my body today, if I danced?
What would I feel like if I set tighter boundaries on how I allowed people to treat me (We'll be talking about that soon)?

How would I be perceived and felt by others if I took on one creative project that made me happy? Painting, dancing, writing?

What would it feel like if I made 10% more effort to meet my beloved in the world?

What if I wrote to 5 more people online, attended one more social event, smiled more?

These questions are a way of training yourself, rehearsing yourself through these questions to move your car forward a little bit. You light up the area in front of you with these questions.

What's one more kindness I can do? What's one more expression of joy I can have? What's one more creative, joyful thing I can do to create more love and joy in my body today?

You light up the world in front of you, and you step into it.

You don't have to see the great distance. You just have to see what's right in front of you. This is how you promote happiness, self-liking, and self-love.

Here's another exercise to contextualize this process...

Again, this is a form of rehearsal for your mind, a way of creating neural pathways, a way of reorganizing your thought patterns to cultivate more self-love. And it has to do with how we tell ourselves our life story.

Everybody develops stories around their life. We all tell stories about who we are.

I once taught a writing course called spiritual autobiography, and I would have people write their autobiography in 3 minutes. They'd look at me like I was crazy. I'd say, "Write your life story. Go."
They'd write their life story, and then they would read their life story and people would laugh and cry, and share and hug and they'd say, "That was great. Let's do it again, write your life story in 3 minutes, except this time, you're not allowed to repeat anything, person, place thing that you mentioned in the first. Go."

They looked at me like I was crazy. Then, they started writing, then they read their life story and it was entirely different from their first story, and they cried and they laughed, and they hugged. They were amazed because they saw that the story they told of their lives was not the story of their lives, it was just a story. Then, what did I do? I said, "Ready, let's do it again. #3, write your life story and you can't repeat a single, person, place or thing." They looked at me like I was crazy and sure enough, they wrote their life story again.

We can re-tell, re-write and re-narrativize our life stories multiple times

The problem is that kind of get stuck in one story, and what I want you to do in this program is to shake loose the stories you've been telling that don't cultivate self-love, and start telling stories that do cultivate self-love.

When you look at the past, rewrite the story of your past. Describe the challenges you've overcome. Focus on the challenges you've overcome and the personal strengths that you discovered and that allowed you to overcome your past challenges.

By contrast, people who don't cultivate self-love, tell the story of, “he done me wrong, she done me wrong. These are the bad things that happened to me.”

To cultivate self-love, you must change how you tell your story of your past.

First writing exercise:

Sit down and tell your life story focusing only on the challenges you've faced, and the strengths you discovered and cultivated to overcome them.

Second writing exercise:
Describe your life right now. But, this time, don't focus on what you're lacking, again, our entire culture is built around showing you what you're lacking. You don't have that Maserati. You don't have that perfect marriage in the Viagra commercial with bathtubs overlooking forests. I don't know how they came up with that one. There's so much that we don't have and the culture wants, the commercial culture wants you to remember that so you keep spending. That's how our culture happens to be built.

Let's redo that. Instead of focusing on what you don't have, describe your life right now and instead, focus on how you differ from your past self. What strengths do you have now that you didn't have before? What skills do you have now that you didn't have before?

What do you like about yourself now, more than you did before?

Write that. If you are listening to the audio, stop the recording now, or stop reading here.

Go do that. Write your story. What strengths do you have? What skills do you have? What do you like about yourself now more than you have in the past? That's the story you should be training your brain to be thinking.

Third writing exercise:

Here, we cultivate self-love by writing about the future. This is fun. Write about your ideal future. How will your future be different than it is now?

How will you be different than you are now? Talk about your qualities. How will you be in relationship? How will you act in relationship? Here's the key part. I cannot underline this enough. If you want to be in an intimate relationship, what are the top qualities that your partner will love about you?

That's how I want you to look at the future.

Go write, then return to reading.

A few years ago, one of my friends from childhood committed suicide. I was stunned. I used to say, "He's the only person who I thought was happier than me." He seemed happy. He loved his child. He had a happy marriage.
He was beyond successful in Hollywood, almost an unconscionable, unparalleled level of success, deeply loved by people he worked with, but something happened in his brain and he fell into an instant and inconsolable depression. It was chemical. His daughter said to me, "It was like he got cancer," and he killed himself suddenly.

I was in shock. A friend said to me, and I think this comes from 12 Steps...

"Never compare your inner life to someone's outer life."

Again, self-love, self-acceptance begins in halting that habit of comparing ourselves to others. We all know what's inside of us. We all have our self-doubts.

I had dinner the other night with a brilliant, multi, multi millionaire, great looking guy, fantastic guy, Midwest values, sweet, kind, humble.

He was afraid to let go of a woman who had clearly deceived him, had done this multiple times, was horribly abusive and what he said to me was, "Basically I'm afraid, because I'm afraid no one will ever pick me again.

When I was a kid, I was always the last one to be picked for teams."

That is the power of story. The destructive power of a story he's been carrying around for years.

How do we frame our lives? How do you frame your life? What's the story you tell yourself about your worth and have people loved you well enough so far? Can they? How do we create meaning out of the raw data of life?

You've had plenty of relationships, whether they're romantic or not, and you've drawn conclusions and created stories around them. They're really just stories. We happen to be storytelling creatures. Our brains happen to organize knowledge really well in stories.

It doesn't mean the stories are true, they're just stories.

The story you want to cultivate for self-love, for self-acceptance is very simple.
"I am worthy of love and every day, I grow more aware and I make better choices. I'm even more worthy of love."

That's the story you want to be telling yourself. Every single day.

The story people regularly tell themselves is, "I failed once in marriage, so I'm bad at it."

Let's shift that to, "I failed once in marriage, but I'm wiser from my experience and even more ready to be better at relationship now that I have more skills and wisdom."

When we compare our past self, where we didn't know as much, didn't have as much wisdom, to where we are now, suddenly, we feel more capable!

What we don't want to do is compare ourselves to others. We'll never be as rich as Richard Branson or as handsome as George Clooney, or as witty as Tina Fey, or as sexy as Channing Tatum or Jessica Alba, or you fill in the blank.

It doesn't mean we're too small a vessel to receive love. They may seem like a big vessel in some ways, and we're big vessels in some ways, always remember that.

It doesn't matter if you're bowl is huge, or your bowl is regular meal sized. If it holds love, you're in great shape! As long as you are narrativizing your life story as a story of "I am worthy of love."

Rumi had this great phrase: "the cracks in the vessel are where the light gets in."

It's exactly our flaws, our imperfections, our vulnerabilities that lets the light in. That allows us to wake up and decide who we want to be. It's because we've cheated, or been cheated upon, was reactive, or judgmental, or entitled that we now know what it feels like and so now we can course correct.

The pain of our past is the doorway to the pleasure of our future, because we are self repairing vessels.
We are sieves, self-repairing sieves when we plug the holes.

I remember when I first met my bride. She asked me very early on, on a date. She asked, "Have you had your heart broken?" I said, "Yeah, that's an interesting question, why do you ask?"

She said, "I find that men who have not had their heart broken tend to care less about breaking other people's hearts; they're more careless in breaking other people's hearts."

The fact that we've experienced pain does not guarantee that we're not going to experience more pain, similar pain. The fact that we've experienced pain, especially within an intimate partner, opens us to our deeper wisdom and our ability to love better.


Don't write a story where you feel sorry for yourself. Write the story about how much of a loving and skilled and appreciative and love-worthy you are now because you had your heart broken.

Now you know how to cultivate a full heart, even though it may have been broken in the past.

**Practice Number Four: Identify with your Greatness.**

Now, this is a fascinating idea. We talked earlier about love not being an emotion, not something that you feel, but it's a perception. It's a choice, and sustained love means a continuation of your perception moment by moment.

It is the choosing of having that perception moment by moment, going forward.

We also learned about how our perceptions and how our stories shape what we actually see, what we actually notice, and how we organize knowledge.
My mission here is to help bring this into consciousness, into your awareness so that you have the power to choose.

Once we've seen our stories, once we've had our perceptions, where do we identify ourselves? Where do we put our identity? Where do we choose to say, "This is me!" Where do we stake a flag and say, "This is me, and this is not me?"

Fascinating question.

And a crucial one if you are to live a life where you love yourself and can receive love effortlessly.

The clue comes in your self-talk. Listen to how people talk.

**Step #1: Detach Identity from Passing Feeling**

They'll say, "I'm an idiot. I'm a loser. I'm clumsy." Right, "I am clumsy. I identify with being clumsy."

I remember once when I was teaching at university, I had a student who would come in and say, "Sorry I'm late. I'm just a late person." I had him sit down, and I said. "You know; you probably weren't born a late person. If we did a DNA analysis, we probably wouldn't find you're a late person. You're a person who organizes his life such that he's often late. Does that make more sense?"

I took away the identification of being a late person, just like you can take the identification away from, "I'm not worthy of love."

The task here is, and this is very fundamental, we separate the behavior from the identity. It's not that, "I'm a loser" but "I feel like a loser in the moment."

Not, "I am an idiot," but, "I feel like an idiot in the moment because I made a mistake."

Not, "I am angry!" I am not the incarnation of anger, but, "I am feeling anger at the moment. I'm feeling anger."
That's the first step. A very important practice.

To stop identifying with non-self-love. To separate “I am” from “I feel.”

If you feel something bad, that's good. Admit it. Feel it. Feel it totally. There's probably some treasure to discover there, but don't identify with the bad feeling. That's number one. There're three steps here. the first thing we do is we detach that I am, the identity with something that's not self-loving or self-accepting.

Step #2: Author a Positive Identity

The next step is to create something positive to identify with.

This is better: "I'm learning. I'm on an upward curve. I'm a problem solver. I'm a good friend."

These are positive identities that will cultivate self-love in you. If you are going to identify yourself with something, identify yourself with something in motion.

Notice the ones I chose. "I'm learning. I'm on an upward curve. I'm a problem solver. I'm a good friend." You're not identifying yourself with something static, but rather with your ability to learn and grow. This is positive. This is where self-acceptance and self-love is really based. It creates more self-worth.

Now, when we turn our perception on ourselves, generally people tend to see all the things that make us unlovable. We're always in comparison to other people. We don't have to do that anymore. You don't have to do that. It's really just a choice.

One of my teachers, Marc Gafni says,

"Self-perception means that although you are aware of the full complexity of your surface personality, the good, the bad, and the ugly, you identify the essence of who you are with your good. Your good, loving, giving, creating, and generous self."
Let me read that again because it's crucial.

"Self-perception means," and again, self-love means, "That although you are aware of the full complexity of your surface personality, the good, the bad, and the ugly," so we're not in self-denial here. We're not saying deny your negative side, your negative qualities, which we all have, so though you don't deny those, "You identify the essence of who you are with your good. Your good, loving, giving, creating, and generous self."

Now Gafni gives a parallel to parenting, because this is where we actually do this most often. We tend to - those of us who have children - tend to identify the essence of your children as good, and you tend to be more forgiving of their bad qualities, and you work with their not so good qualities, but you don't assume they're “bad” people.

You identify them with their virtues, not their flaws or weaknesses.

Gafni says that, "The sacred task of the parent is to reveal the unique beauty of the child to the child." It's beautifully said. Not to flash her picture to the world, declaring her beauty in broad, boasting statements, but...

"To reflect her gorgeousness back to her in a loving gaze or quiet words of confirmation."

Let's re-parent ourselves right now, and rephrase that to ourselves.

The sacred task, our sacred task, and our task here today as you're listening, as you're reading, is to reveal the unique beauty of ourselves to ourselves.

Not to flash our pictures on Facebook, or declare our beauty and boast to the world. That's not what we're talking about. To reflect our own gorgeousness back to ourselves as we loving gaze or quietly confirm our worth back to ourselves. We love ourselves as much as we may love a child.

If we choose to be happy, if we want to be happy, if we want to experience love and be loved, then our task is to reflect our unique beauty back to ourselves.
Not as a show, not as a demonstration to the world, not as proof of something, not as a salve, but as a perception of our essence, in the same way that you would perceive the essence of a flower, or a beautiful river, the essence of who you are.

It's easy to identify those expressions of essence when we look at our kids. I'm a father, so I can immediately call up so many times where a child might make a present for a sick neighbor, or he gave his cinnamon roll to a beggar on the street, or the time a friend's daughter cut her hair for cancer patients. She donated her hair, or the time your kid spent three weeks on a science project, and he had that intense focus.

We tend, as parents to identity those moments with their essence. We see their greatness.

Now can we do that with ourselves? Think about yourself for a moment. What are the moments where your goodness has really come out, that you can identify with your, your goodness with your essence? For me, things that come up is sitting with my kids, drawing monsters with them, or sitting by their bedsides, hearing their fears and telling stories with them, loving them.

Also, times with my wife, obviously, times I've given to my parents, times I've had incredible focus, and accomplished things that I'm proud of. Those are all good. Those are kind of evidence of my goodness, right? Evidence of my essence.

What are yours?

**STEP #3: Seeing Your Essence as Beyond Personality**

Now, we can actually take this another level.

Your essence, your goodness, the part of you I want to identify yourself with doesn't even have to be based in your accomplishments.

Listen closely, because this is a new idea. You can actually identify your essence not with your doing but with your very being. When I think of my essence personally, when I think of my childhood and I look back, and said, "Who was I really? What is my most real self?"
I actually remember sitting by a brook. My grandmother had a farmhouse up in the Hudson Valley. I would sit on the little dam and just listen to the stream for hours, catch frogs, enjoy the shade, watch. I remember this, watch the shadows of the trees on the moving water, listening to the burbling of the water, imagining I could hear voices in the burbling, and just being in the beauty of the world.

This is also part of our essence.

In our accomplishment and production-crazed culture, we forget that we're part of what, again my friend Gafni calls, our “evolutionary, unique self,” that we're part of something beautiful.

Our essence is part of the unfolding of life in this universe. You don't need religion to explain it. You can have it if you want it, but we're actually part of something that's really astonishing.

When you look out, as I often do into the night sky, there's not a whole lot of life out there that we can see. This planet is amazing. The story of evolution is amazing. The evolution of our consciousness is amazing. Your greatness, your essence, your goodness, the beauty of who you are does not actually have to be dependent on the good shit you've done in your life.

You can access your ultimate worth in your ability to connect with the fact that you're participating in something astonishing, great, beautiful, full of grace, full of wonder.

Your participation in the unfolding of life itself can be a place for you to identify your essence.

This is a way of loving yourself, your grand self, not your resume self.

It's a way of getting away from self-criticism, and just feeling yourself. As Mary Oliver said, in that beautiful poem about the wild geese, that you finally just come home in the world, that you belong. We're going to talk about belonging in the moment.

There's another poem that I read often I've probably read it hundreds of time in my life. It gives me great solace. It's called The Peace of Wild
Things, and it's by Wendell Berry. Great Kentucky poet. It's called The Peace of Wild Things, and it goes like this.

*When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,*
*I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

How beautiful is that poem?

It's about being free, as he says. When he despairs or fears for the future, he rests in the grace of the world, in the evolution of life, really, and he's free.

Your greatness, you get to identify your self-love, not just with your accomplishments, not proving that you've done something, but what you actually are: the peace that's in you, the serenity that's in you, your greatest heart that's in you, your participation in something that's so beautiful.

Two ways of identifying with your greatness, not just your goodness, your greatness.

(1) One is the good things that you've actually done, right? The realm of doing, but also

(2) ... the realm of being. To rest and go lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and where the great herons feed.

Beautiful.
To be part of the natural processes. This has done wonders for me, and it's certainly if you've been a student of romantic poetry, going back to Wordsworth and Coleridge and that whole period, and later American Transcendentalism, there's a huge tradition. It goes way back to the Romans, the Greeks, to be able to identify with the natural beauty of yourself in the world, and get away from all those little anxieties, those little social anxieties that we torture ourselves with.

This is a method for self-love.

**Every Day Self Love Practice**

Here's a practice...

Once we know that part of ourselves, how can we put it to work? Once we know that we're great, that we have greatness in us, and again, not the false, showy greatness, but the greatness of simply being a human being with tremendous heart, the tremendous generosity of spirit, with tremendous ability to love. Abundance from abundance, and you're left with abundance.

Visualize your highest and best self that lies deep with inside you. The best, most ideal self you can perceive. The part of you that's absolutely lovable beyond belief. Now, what you do is imagine that self? Got a good picture of it?

Imagine that self-stepping outside of you, and looking back at you, at your current life, where you are, what you're wearing, what you look like. Then imagine what this highest or best self might advise you to do.

This highest or best self might tell you to just relax. It might tell you to go out and tell your mother you love her, even though she's been a pain in your butt for years. It might be, "Go start that creative project." It might be, "Go take a walk." It might be, "Go back and get that lover, because you really love that person, and your ego has been getting in the way." I don't know your life, so I can't tell you. You know your life. Take your best, most loving self, the greatness of you, put it in front of you, and listen to what that highest or best self advises you.
Why do we do that? Why do we play these games with our minds? It helps us. It actually helps us detach parts of ourselves. Our brains are arguments. They're not unitary things. Our brains have multiple voices going on all the time. We do these small, artificial practices or exercises as a way to help separate things out. The way you separate out strands from a yarn.

Now this process of visualizing a separation or detachment from your current suffering self, the part that doesn't love you. To separate the part that you do love, it helps you tap into the wisdom that already lies inside of you. Your highest self, and this is a beautiful way to cultivate real self-love, and to promote healing, and to make really good decisions for yourself from that place of self-love.

Please use this exercise whenever you feel particularly downtrodden or stuck. Whenever you feel a crisis, or you need some, even just self-soothing or some self-love, take a moment, take some deep breaths, because that helps settle you into your body. Practice this visualization. Your best self-stepping outside of you, sitting opposite you, maybe taking your hands, and giving you some advice.

**Practice Number Five Self-Acceptance.**

Accept yourself, good and the bad.

Now, this is kind of a long story in my own life. It sounds easy -- “accept yourself.” It’s not always so easy.

When I was young, I guess I was in fifth grade or so. I remember at holiday time, my parents gave me The Peanuts, Charlie Brown book of proverbs. A little tiny book, little square book. I think I still have it somewhere. I remember, I curled up on the couch and cried. I might have been third grade or fifth grade. They came over to me, good parents that they were, and they said, "We're really sorry. We don't have any money right now. We really can't buy anything big."

That's not why I cried. I cried because I thought they were telling me I was a bad person, and I needed proverbs to make me a better person. Clearly, I had some feelings about myself that I wasn't such a good person. I had, in my case, a sister who had died. I probably felt guilty about that. I didn't do
it. I was a baby at the time. I probably held my younger sisters off at arm's length so I wouldn't get hurt again. I probably felt bad about that when I look back.

I felt bad about myself. I didn't accept my feelings. I didn't accept who I was.

Then many years later, very similarly when I first started dating, one of the first women I was dating sat me down on a second date and said, "Adam, you have flaws. F-L-A-W-S. You have flaws."

My heart sank. She looked at me and she smiled, and she said, "You know what, they're really small, and it's okay." She could already see that I was kind of guarding against my inner flaws, that I wasn't accepting myself. I was still trapped.

This was the beginning of my new life, the beginning of my evolution, my second part of my life at age thirty-nine. I always say, "It was a midlife awakening, not a midlife crisis."

There's a psychologist named Dr. Michael Bennett who has a fascinating book that he wrote with his comedian daughter. It's called F*ck Feelings. That's right. F* Feelings. He has a lot to say about self-acceptance, because he's been working with clients for years and years and years. Dr. Bennett says,

"We're often too busy with wishful thinking, instead of problem solving. Wishful thinking does not help us accept ourselves, and it prevents self-love and self-acceptance..."

He says...

"In a world where feelings don't rule, many things can be changed, and the acceptance of limits, not limitless self-improvement is the key to moving forward and dealing effectively with any and all the crap that life can throw your way. Acceptance of the limits."

It's what my father said to me often. He used to say - now my dad grew up in the Great Depression, went to World War Two. He registered, enlisted on the day he turned eighteen. He used to say to me all the time when I
was a kid, "Life's not fair. Who said life should be fair?" That was his philosophy. He said, "You're dealt cards, and you play them as best as you can."

I think that was a very healthy thing to teach me, because self-acceptance really begins with accepting the cards you are dealt.

If you're in front of the TV, and you're watching Millionaire House Swap or whatever those shows are, or Cribs. You see people with billions or millions of dollars every day, and they're perfectly beautiful, and won that genetic lottery, it's very easy to say, "Life's not fair," and to convert that into self-non-love.

If you start with the fact that life's not fair, and just deal effectively with what life throws at you, that's the place of self-acceptance. That's the place where self-love actually begins.

Expectations that you're going to get everything you want, like in the book The Secret, which revived that notion, can actually make you feel like a failure, because, how come the universe isn't delivering what you want?

Dr. Bennett says, and I love this,

"Instead of looking at ourselves as failures because we don't have everything we want, look instead at ourselves as striving, but often unlucky heroes..."

I love that phrase. We are heroes of our own lives. Absolutely. We strive and identify with our striving, fantastic. That's good. We're growing, but sometimes we're unlucky. It happens.

What he says is that actual self-acceptance, real self-acceptance, can teach you that there's no situation in life that can't be endured if...

(1) you keep your sense of humor
(2) bend your wishes to fit reality
(3) restrain your negative feelings so you don't do stupid things to people
(4) manage your bad behavior, and
(5) do what you think is right in accordance with your values.
That is the core of self-acceptance.

He says...

"Self-acceptance means you learn how to manage life's challenges, rather than resent or make up stories about them, or identify yourself with those challenges, with those "failures" and judge yourself around them... in most cases, you've not failed, and you don't need to try harder or wait longer for improvement to come into being. Instead, you just need to accept that life is hard, and your frustrated efforts are a valuable guide to identifying what you can't change."

He says, "When you accept whatever you can't change," you know maybe age or intelligence or your behavior of your spouse or your kids or your feelings or your boss or your country or your president or your pet, the things that you can't change,

"You can now become more effective at managing life's problems instead of vainly and persistently banging your head against the wall because you can't change them."

When you can't accept reality, when you can't accept the cards that you've been dealt, you will spiral into non-love, self-non-love, and self-non-acceptance.

When you can accept it, now you can start the road of changing what you can change, and taking pride and love and acceptance in the fact that you are a, what was his phrase? "A striving, but often unlucky hero." Very healthy.

In his book, a very interesting work, he says, really put your brakes on unreasonable expectations that the world was built for your convenience, and start dealing with it.

I'm fortunate in a lot of ways. I have cultivated over the years on many great teachers and many great friends, many great friends who are great teachers. I put out a call on my Facebook page when I was writing this. I said, "Talk to me about self-love. What have you folks learned over the
years?" Dr. Susan Campbell, one of my favorite writer/therapists, wonderful, beautiful human being, she wrote me this piece.

"I was born loving myself. By the way, most of us are. I do not recall ever not loving myself. I think my parents lived in a field of love for each other and for life, so that context made all the difference. I did go through a phase in my thirties when I was highly self-critical, observing all my automatic behavior patterns. During this time, I was able to witness myself being self-critical, and I felt some sadness about this." She accepted. "This ability to witness both the thoughts and the sadness seemed to bring some compassion to the critical thoughts, and I coined the term compassionate self-criticism. I never wrote about this concept, but it has helped me pay attention to my realistically critical thoughts, and heed them when I see them as beneficial to my development."

Isn't that a beautiful quote? Beautifully expressed, by the way too.

It's a practical and honest way of observing herself, not fooling herself. When we talk about self-love, we're not talking about again, showing off yourself, or denying your shadow, or denying the areas where you want to grow.

What she points out here is a way of observing yourself, compassionate self-criticism.

You don't give up the self-criticism. She's honest with herself, and then that allows her to see how she can develop, as she says, in ways that are beneficial to her development. It's a beautiful phrase.

Self-acceptance means honesty, sometimes brutal honesty. Sometimes it means going to your friends and asking, "What are areas that you believe I can work on so that I can be more self-loving, more successful in my life, happier? What do you notice about me?" You have to be very brave.

Then you tell this person you say it to, "And I promise I won't get angry at you or take it out on you if you tell me the truth, because I want to hear the truth." Then you have to follow through on that.

Sometimes it's very important to be brutally honest about yourself, but what she's saying, you can also be compassionately honest about yourself.
Compassionate self-criticism. We don't back off from learning how we can make ourselves happier, more effective, more loving, but we do it in a compassionate way.
Let's turn this into a series of practices for ourselves, for self-acceptance. Ready? Here are some practices for improving your self-acceptance.

Self-Acceptance Practice #1: Set Clear Intentions

It starts with intention. There's a psychotherapist named Jeffrey Sumber who talks about this. He says...

"It's vital that we set an intention for ourselves that we are able to shift paradigms from a world of blame, doubt, and shame, to a world of allowance, tolerance, acceptance, and trust... If I set my intention that a life with self-acceptance is far better than a life of self-hatred, then I begin a chain reaction within my being geared to a life of peace."

I love that he uses this phrase a chain reaction. It is a chain reaction. It's actually neuroplasticity. It's actually training your brain to think along certain lines, to create those neural pathways that become well-trodden paths.

Taking those old paths of blame, doubt, and shame that we often have dug in for years, we can change them right now. We can start that chain reaction by deciding that a life of self-acceptance is better than a life of self-hatred.

When we set an intention towards self-acceptance and self-love, it acknowledges that self-loathing simply doesn't lead to a satisfying life, and self-love does. We start with the intention to create new pathways in our head. Step number one.

Self-Acceptance Practice #2: Celebrate and Prioritize Your Strengths

This is a big one. We often don't do that. We tend to put emphasis on our shortcomings, rather than our strengths. Many people fail to see their strengths, and they cling to those old scripts. We remember negative things because of our fear-based minds.

I won't get into how our minds function, but our minds hang on to trauma. Our minds hang on to pain because that helped us survive as a species.
We carry around all the danger, and danger signals, and fears which really are signals about our lack of worth, because it keeps us on our toes. It's good for survival, but really bad for happiness.

Now, is that fear-based reactivity and remembering our weaknesses good for survival anymore? That's a really big question. Are the kind of dangers that were dangerous to our ancestors a hundred thousand years ago still dangerous to us now? Probably not.

Our fear instinct is still well intact. Remember, human beings are not predator animals. We're not lions. We're not tigers. We don't strike, kill, and then rest twenty hours a day. We spent most of our history as prey animals. Which is why fear is so endemic to how we react to each other.

The very process that we're doing today, this very process of bringing love into awareness, and learning how to cope with fear rather than be prey to fear is really the story of human evolution at this point in our history, and really is part of whether we'll survive or not as a species.

Are we going to be led by fear or are we going to be led by love?

One practice you can do to contribute to the evolution of humankind is to focus a bit on your strengths. Here's the practice...

List ten strengths that you have. If that's hard for you, list one. "I'm a kind person. I can be kind." If you can't come up with a second, do one a day for ten days or twenty days. You'll come up with stuff. A lot of people don't have practice in recognizing and stating their strengths without self-embarrassment. You'll see that once you start doing this practice, see if you can get twenty total. You'll recognize that you are intelligent. You are creative. You are a problem solver. You are powerful. You're articulate.

You're handy. You're generous. There's so many things that you, so many qualities that you have.

Sometimes we really can't see ourselves this way until we clear away the weeds of negatives self-talk, which is why this exercise is so important. Celebrating your strength is like exposing the flowers when you cut back all that mess of weeds in the garden. This way when you look at yourself, you
don't see a bunch of weeds in the garden. You actually see those brilliant flowers, beautiful. That's who you are.

This is how we rewrite our self-perception.

That's number one. Make a list of your strengths. Here's another one. I have more for you.

**Self-Acceptance Practice #3: Celebrate and Prioritize Your Past Triumphs**

Make a list of all the hardships you've overcome. This is something we forget to do.

We tend to remember the hardships. We don't remember the fact that we actually overcame them, solved them, created a solution, created an alternative, stepped away.

Make a list of the hardships you've overcome, and how you've handled them. This is a great way to self-accept. It takes the focus away from the hardship, and puts it onto solutions you've created, even if it meant you had to run away from something to get away from something difficult.

**Self-Acceptance Practice #4: Celebrate and Prioritize the Good You’ve Done**

Also, here's another list. Write these down. Make a list of all the connections you've made with human beings. Make a list of all the lives you've touched for the better.

This is one of the most effective practices I'm going to give you in this program.

Make a list of the things you did and all the lives you've touched for the better. See if you can come up with twenty. See if you can come up with fifty. Keep it next to your bed. Refer to it. We too often forget how we've made people's lives better, because our brains tend to go to the traumatic. Again, we tend to go to the fear. Keep this list close by.
Self-Acceptance Practice #5: Forgive Yourself

Next, practice forgiving yourself. Past regrets, hanging onto those regrets can prevent us from practicing self-acceptance in the present. We carry these old stories about all the bad things we've done. Let's take care of that. Forgive yourself. Set a new intention. "I made a terrible mistake." If you've hurt somebody, go to that person and apologize. They may accept it. They may not, by the way, but that's not your problem anymore. Ask for forgiveness, genuinely. That's step one.

Step two, set a new intention by extracting the lesson. It's not just enough to say you're sorry to someone. If you said something cruel, say to a sibling, a grown sibling, ask for forgiveness. They may or may not forgive you. Then you can set a new intention. I advocate vocalizing it aloud to them so it's not just some private thing in your own head.

Say, "I spoke cruelly to you. I'm setting an intention, a commitment not to do that ever again."

That's called extracting the lesson. You make the new commitment, and now you can move forward. Then of course do your best to keep your new commitment. That's the best way to handle forgiving yourself.

Just saying you're sorry, and not making a commitment, that's kind of half the job.

Simply doing this process, and committing yourself to new behaviors will cause you to stop hating yourself, berating yourself, and will help you love yourself even more, and prepare you for more love and intimacy in the future.

We've all made mistakes, whether we carry them as poison in our system is up to us.

Whether it's about something you've done, or a personality quirk that resulted in some social faux pas, it's important that you learn from the mistake, make the efforts to grow, and accept that you cannot change the past. We let that go.
Sometimes you'll have remorse come up. Of course you will. I do too. Say to yourself this...

"Hey, I made the best decision at that time with the information I had at that time. That behavior may seem embarrassing in hindsight, but at the time, it was the choice I made. Maybe it was the best choice given what I knew back then, given what I was feeling, maybe not, but it is the past. I am not that person anymore. I am committed to a new behavior."

This is how we cultivate self-acceptance and self-love.

**Self-Acceptance Practice #6: Gently Quiet Down your Inner Critic**

Many people equate their inner critic with the voice of reason. I had a writing partner once who, oh god, he was very cruel to people around him. His big excuse was, "I'm just being honest."

The voice of criticism is often that, “I’m just being honest, just the voice of reason.”

People do that with themselves as well. The truth is, as cruel as we are to others, we're often much more cruel in our speech to ourselves than to those we love. There are things that you would never say to a loved one, but you will say to yourself. Incredibly harsh unwarranted judgment.

What do you do with that voice? That, "Oh, I'm just being honest. Look how horrible I am" voice?

To quiet that cruel inner critic, we talked about cultivating the compassionate inner critic above from Susan Campbell, to quiet that cruel inner critic, choose a realistic mantra, a statement that will steady you, calm you, and encourage you during the times when that inner critic is berating you.

Someone, a simple one is...

"I am only human. I am doing the best I can, and that is all I can do, and I am committed to doing better."
Nice and simple. "I'm only human. Doing the best I can. I made mistakes. That's all I can do, and I'm committed to doing better."

Again, identifying your essence with your process of improving of opening of loving more. I took abundance from abundance, and still abundance remained. Identify yourself with your process of growth, increased love, not with past actions which can't be changed.

I learned it from that date I had long ago. One mantra is, "Sure I have flaws, and those flaws aren't small, and I can work on them." There's another mantra. Our mistakes and our imperfections are not proof that we're bad or wrong or failures. They're not proofs of anything. They're only proofs of, they're fingerprints that we're human. They're also always just opportunities for ourselves to learn, heal, grow, and love better.

**Self-Acceptance Practice #7: Grieve the Loss of Unrealized Dreams**

And let them go. Dr. Bennett says "Many of our problems with self-acceptance come from our inability to reconcile who we are compared with the idealized dreams of our youth, all those great things we were going to be."

Sometimes television and magazines and podcasts and gurus and motivational speakers raise unrealistic expectations. Then we measure ourselves against those incredible expectations, and we mourn that they haven't happened.

What we do? The choice we make for self-acceptance is yeah, mourn them a little bit. Grieve them a little bit. Write those dreams on a paper and burn it up. Release them to the vastness of the ocean. Smile and thank them for accompanying you this far in the journey – and release.

Then... take a deep breath. Look around. Look at your resources, look at your abilities, look at the list that we made, the people that you touched beautifully in your life, the accomplishments, the solutions that you've created, your strengths, look at all those things. Get back to being the best you possible in the moment right now. That leads to self-acceptance and genuine self-love.
Self-Acceptance #8: Do Something Nice for Someone

This is an ancient one, a way to create self-acceptance and self-love is to perform charitable acts. Do nice things for other people.

Sometimes it's actually hard to do nice things for ourselves, and it's easier to do them for others. Get into the practice of when you're feeling bad, go do something nice for somebody.

Once you see how your deeds are positive influence in other people's lives, it's harder to hold onto the idea that you're no good, because you're actually witnessing that you're doing good for others. That happens to clear a path for us to do better things for ourselves.

Self-Acceptance Practice #9: Realize that Self-Acceptance is Not Resignation.

It's not, "I'm giving up on my dreams." It's not giving up on the person I want to be.

Acceptance is letting go of the past and the things we can't control because they're out of your control. They're in the past. Only when you'd o that can you really focus your energy on that which you can control, which is right now, which is the present. That is empowering.

That empowerment creates a feedback loop of self-love and self-acceptance. You must let go of the past. We don't let go of the lessons that we learn from the past, but we let go of the pain of the past.

This is the beginning of making positive changes.

Again, you can't fix the broken bulb that you don't see. You have to have compassionate self-criticism.

You have to look at what you've done in the past, what has worked, what hasn't worked to create love and happiness in your life.

You can't make believe it didn't happen, but you can't carry the broken glass or that broken bulb around with you, and say, "This is me." I imagine
you've broken a few bulbs in the past. I imagine you've had some bulbs broken by others in the past. Tidy it up. Sweep it into a dustbin.

Remember the lessons that caused those bulbs to be broken, and look forward, and leave the broken glass behind.

**Self-Acceptance Practice #10: Just Be Kind to Yourself**

If you remember that poem by Mary Oliver, you don't have to crawl across miles of broken glass. You don't have to repent. You just have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Why do I love that phrase so much?

When people say, "I want to be kind to myself," they think it's all about thought or ideas or beliefs. Start with your body. Start with the texture of the clothes you wear. Get a massage. Sit in the sun. Whatever makes your body feel good, return to that kitten, dog, animal body that just loves being alive.

Most people are so hesitant to show even a shred of self-kindness, because they feel like they don't deserve it, or they think it's selfish. But we understand that weakness and frailty and making mistakes are all part of human experience.

There's a psychologist named Deborah Serani who wrote a book called Living with Depression. In it, she says,

"Coming to accept who you are involves loving yourself because of your flaws, not in spite of them."

Remember the crack in the vessel lets the light in. The flaws that we have allow us to see how much more we can actually love. It shows us where we can improve. Where we can open our hearts. Where we can learn to love ourselves and others better.

By the way, if you didn't have flaws, think of someone who you think doesn't have flaws. You probably hate them! Nobody likes people who act perfect or seem perfect. Nobody's perfect. Why would you want that in
yourself? It's a funny thing. We tend to be angry at ourselves that we have flaws. Again, imagine someone who doesn't have flaws, and how annoying they seem.

Finally, one more practice for self-acceptance...

**Self-Acceptance Practice #11: Practice it till It’s Natural**

Or as we commonly say, fake it till you make it. It's an old phrase, and it actually has credence the more we understand about brain scans and neuroplasticity, we can actually lay down pathways in our brain to create patterns.

If you're unconvinced you're a worthy person, stay at it. Stay at these practices I've just given you for self-acceptance. Keep practicing self-compassion along with all the other practices I've given you.

Most of us don't talk directly to the deity of choice that we might happen to believe in. We can have the faith that when we stay the path, we create a wake that comes in behind us. That wake is actually our brain. Our brain actually starts creating new pathways that support our self-acceptance.

We might call it grace. In religious terms, they call it grace or spiritual terms you might say the universe supports you. In physical terms, your brain will support you. The more you practice self-acceptance and self-love, the easier and more natural it becomes. Fake it till you make it. Start laying those pathways.

Do the practices.

Self-acceptance and self-love will become natural.

Speaker 1: Welcome back to The Practice of Self Love. Let's talk about Practice Number Six, and this practice is releasing shame, or as Brene Brown calls it, developing “shame resilience.”
Self-Love Practice #6 Shame Resilience

First let's mark the division between guilt and shame.

Guilt, as Brene Brown explains so well, occurs when we've done something bad and we feel bad about it. I did something bad.

Shame I am something bad. It becomes your identity.

Remember - how we identify ourselves, where we stake our identity will determine how well we can cultivate the self-love that will allow us to be in a love relationship and receive love for a lifetime.

Brene Brown says that we often don't eradicate shame as people would like to do, but, instead, what we can do is develop a resilience with it. This means that shame may still be inside of us, but we can deal with it in a very practical way. We can still operate effectively and productively even if we still feel some shame. She outlines four basic steps for developing shame resilience and let's look at this.

The first thing to do is recognize shame when we feel it. We don't press it down. We simply say, “oh, this is a feeling of shame, I'm experiencing it right now.”

Some people are afraid to do that. They're ashamed about being ashamed, so they say, oh I'm just embarrassed, or they call it guilt, or they call it depression, but shame is something very specific.

Shame is “I am bad. I don't feel like a worthy person. I don't feel worthy of love.” Whenever those feelings come up, don't whitewash it. Feel it.

Second, understand what activates your feelings of shame. You have to understand your own triggers. If somebody lets you down, for instance. If someone insults you. If someone tells you you're not enough, you're not good enough, no one's going to love you. Some people feel shame just if they make a mistake. They start spiral into “I'm not good enough.”

Some men, especially, I've noticed, feel shame when women reject them, “reject” them, and instead of just understanding that it's one woman in one
moment of time, they take it instead as a judgment on their entire character and they spin into shame. I'm sure that women do this as well, but I've heard it more from men, because they make more effort at meeting more women.

What happens when shame takes over is that we go into what's called the shame spiral. We get triggered, it feels bad. We can then make a choice. Are we going to process it and say, “okay, that happened, what can I learn from it? Maybe there's something to learn, maybe not, onward. I feel like a good person. I feel like a worthy person. I'm going to go on to the next thing.”

Or, if we start spiraling down into shame, we get that same trigger and we just start feeling awful about ourselves and go down and down and down.

How do you stop that from going down? Well, the third step is you start making meaningful connections, reminding yourself, as we did in our list making earlier, where we made lists about the people we've affected well, the connections we've made, the lessons we've learned - we prevent that downward spiral by cultivating those practices of self-love that we've been talking about throughout this program.

Once we get a bit of a foothold on our actual worth, then we practice what Brown calls critical awareness. We ask ourselves, “am I really unworthy because that one person didn't want to go out with me? Am I really an unworthy person because I reached out to someone and they didn't reach back?”

Of course not.

Let's remember Susan Campbell's term, compassionate self-criticism. This is the perfect opportunity to apply it.

Look at yourself. Really look at your process. Look at your trigger. Look at your reaction to a feeling with compassion. Say, “oh, I see that I'm doing that, and have compassion for myself. I understand that we all have reactions and habits and that those can be healed and fixed with attention and effort. And I'm going to start now.”
In many ways, this whole program on the Practice of Self Love is nothing but a set of tools for you to use to practice compassionate self-criticism. To do so, we are honest with ourselves, but also kind.

The next step, the fourth step is really the key one in my view. I mean, they're all key but this is where that shift happens.

Speak your shame out loud, she says. Shame cannot survive exposure. It's the shadow, the shadow part of ourselves, the part we don't want to see. And shadows can't survive what?

They can't survive light.

What happens to so many of us feeling ashamed about ourselves, that we're not good enough, we're not lovable enough, we're not smart enough, we're not pretty enough, and as soon as we say it out loud, we discover that other people start saying, “ah I feel the same way. “

We blink our eyes and we say, “really, I had no idea you felt that way!”

That simple act of reaching out and coming to understand that so many people feel the same way helps dissolve that shame.

Shame cannot survive being spoken aloud. Shame thrives like certain kinds of bacteria or algae in the dark. Your fourth step is to just bring it out into the light. It means welcoming your shadow, sharing with someone else, and seeing that other people also experience shame as well.

Suddenly you don't feel like you're alone and guess what? The shame dissolves.

We tend to feel even more ashamed when we think we're the only ones feeling a certain way. I've worked with thousands of men and women at this point. So many women have come to me feeling ashamed that they lost their marriage, they lost their husband, they don't feel attractive anymore, they're never going to meet someone, and as soon as they speak it out loud and someone else says the same thing, they're like, “oh, I guess I'm not alone.”

That helps.
Similarly, men feel like they're unattractive, that no one's going to want them, and then they find out that other men who are equally good men feel the same way, and suddenly that isolation - which has accelerated, amplified that shame - stops. It no longer has a grip on them. And they can begin meeting women with a healthier self-regard.

When you allow yourself to feel the shame, when you analyze how real is it actually, and you analyze it compassionately, and then you speak it aloud and you share with others, and you reach out to others and come out of the dark, bring your shadow out of the dark, find that courage to speak your shame – you will find that shame does not have to have such control over your feelings and actions.

And I think you'll discover that all that fear you had of how people would react when they knew what you were ashamed of or the fact that you lived with that shame - it'll surprise you how people are actually much more compassionate with us than we are with ourselves.

One of the great examples of shame that I've seen in my life with friends - you know the old one about the guy who finally comes out as gay? Probably about three times in my life, a guy has sat me down or sat us down and said, “I have to tell you something.” I said, “what?” And he says, “well, it's really hard for me to tell you. “He says, “well, I'm gay.”

And my, or our response is always, “duh. We've known for ten years!”

Often you'll find that the very thing you're ashamed of, people already understand that you feel that way. People aren't as stupid as they seem.

So that's the process for releasing shame, if you're more interested in this process I highly recommend you dive into Brene Brown's work, you can certainly watch her TED Talks which I think are necessary education for everyone anyway, and you can certainly read her books, The Power of Vulnerability, especially.

**Practice Number Seven Give Gratitude.**
Almost every personal development or spiritual text talks about the attitude of gratitude and how important it is to feel gratitude. There's a reason for that...

Gratitude shifts our energy away from feeling bad about ourselves, it shifts our energy outward. We are suddenly happy for the good things we have and everything changes in the brain. This is how you focus your brain on the good. If you want to learn how to cultivate self-love you’d better be grateful for the good things being poured into your bowl.

Let's go back to that image of the bowl and the sieve for a moment...

When you don't give gratitude, when you're “woe is me and life doesn't treat me well,” people pour love in and it goes right out the bottom.

When you do the practice of giving gratitude, that immediately plugs up the holes. You're grateful for every drop of love that's poured into your bowl and you cherish it.

And guess what happens when you cherish the love that someone pours into your bowl? They're encouraged to keep pouring!

Now, it's good to say gratitudes. Say them aloud when you wake up. Say five when you go to sleep. It's even better to write them down. The very act of writing engages your brain in a deeper way and literally inscribes the reality of those words into your conscious and subconscious mind. Have your gratitude journal right next to your bed. I can't tell you how many programs recommend this because it's important. It immediately starts your day with gratitude and it finishes your day with gratitude.

In this way, you lay down new and powerful neural pathways.

There's a tradition, a Hasidic tradition, Eastern European Jewish tradition, called “One Hundred Blessings.” That tradition is to say a hundred blessings a day, to give gratitude a hundred times a day. They worked this out about three hundred years ago, two hundred fifty years ago, and they had categories for all of things that you could be grateful for that you might not have thought of yourself.
There's a blessing or giving of gratitude for the very act of waking up. There's gratitude for drinking water. There's gratitude for bread foods, for vegetables, for fruits, for meats. There are different kinds of categories there.

There are words of gratitude you say when you see something of beauty like a rainbow, or the sky or trees. There is a special giving of gratitude for men when they see beautiful women, that raises the initial thrust of lust that most men will feel and raises it to something holy, because in this tradition the gratitude was a blessing, giving thanks to God.

My favorite of all the categories of what you can give gratitude to is when you go to the bathroom. There's a special giving of gratitude that goes like this. The translation is “thank you God for keeping my ducts and valves open.”

Nifty, huh?

In other words, you give gratitude that you can have a nice visit to the bathroom and everything’s going well. We may smile at this idea We may think it's strange, but try getting constipation! Try not being able to go to the bathroom! That's when you really appreciate it.

Instead of waiting until you don't have it - they paved paradise put up a parking lot, so before they pave paradise - give gratitude now.

Every time you go to the bathroom.

Every time something in your body works. When you walk, when you turn on your car, when you put heat on in your house, when you see your children, when you have a kind moment with a friend, when you get on public transportation and someone has built that for you. There really are infinite opportunities.

Imagine the person you would be. Imagine the person you would be if your day was a constant meditation of gratitude. What if somebody encountered you? Let's say you're single at the moment, and you're getting on the subway or the BART in San Francisco, and you're in this state of gratitude.
You've said gratitude for the sun, for that hot pretzel you had getting into the subway, for the fact that there is a subway, for the nice person who stepped aside, who's probably not from New York, who stepped aside and let you have a seat, for the newspaper in your hand, or the New Yorker that you're enjoying reading, and you're just giving gratitude after gratitude.

Say you're a single woman and a man sits next to you and he looks at you and you look up at him and you'll probably smile and say inside, “I'm grateful that I'm sitting next to this man who's smiling at me.”

How do you think he's going to react to you, how is he going to respond to you? He's going to meet you in the midst of an ongoing meditation of gratitude. You're going to be full of radiance and joy, good feeling, happiness in the world. Don't you think this is how we want to encounter each other? Not only the first time we meet but every single day if we're going to be in a relationship!

One of the things that makes me happiest in my own intimate relationship is that people comment that my bride always seems to be smiling. This is a woman who has cultivated incredible joy, incredible self-love, incredible self-acceptance, having come out of very difficult circumstances. It's a practice, not a “gift” that you're born with. One of the things that I found most appealing about her in the beginning was her sense of graciousness.

Big word for me – an important quality. Her sense of graciousness to those who did do good things for her. She was very clear about it. It's a very attractive quality.

So...

Write down five things you're grateful for in the morning, write down five things you're grateful for at night, or if you really want to go for this, a hundred blessings a day of meditation. Try it. Try it for fifteen minutes, try it for thirty minutes as you're heading to work or going for a walk, how many different things can you be grateful for in your life? You ground yourself in the reality that the world is constantly giving you gifts when you do this practice. My teacher Marc Gafni says, every moment you're getting kissed by the universe, it's showering you with gifts, are you noticing it?
Now, this is a crucial practice for being in an intimate relationship, because one of the biggest reasons you hear people break up, marriages or girlfriends, boyfriends, is that people feel taken for granted. When we develop this muscle, this practice of gratitude, we then apply it to our relationship. It's one of the most essential traits of successful relationships.

Let's think. What are some other examples? This is a fun game, by the way. What can you be grateful for?

When you walk into the supermarket give thanks for the abundance of food that's available. Once I spent about seven months in India. I call it the entomologist’s tour. Entomology is the study of insects. I did not go to study insects, but they apparently were there to study me.

The first time I walked into a supermarket when I came back to the states I was almost in shock. I had not seen that much food in one place for seven months. This is many years ago, by the way, before India became prosperous in the new way. It was amazing!

When you see someone sick or a hospital, you pass a hospital, give thanks for your own good health. When driving, be grateful for the other drivers who are following the rules more or less.

If you have a partner, thank them every day for caring for you, for caring for your heart. If someone's kind to you, if someone smiles at you thank them.

Thank yourself for the fact that you have breath, that you have oxygen, that you have water, that you have warmth.

I have a friend named Annie Lalla, another one of my wonderful friends. She's known as a love coach, a cartographer of love, as she says. She has a wonderful practice, which I share as often as I can with my students. I'll quote her because, if you remember I put out into the world, I asked my friends, what are some practices you have around self-love? I have so many wonderful teachers as friends and here's something she sent me...

Annie says, "I started noticing every little pro-Annie gesture from friends, family or strangers. An elevator door held open for me. A random smile. Helping with directions. And I began to see them as a smuggled I love you from people, as expressions of love from people. Also the shadow of trees
on sidewalk, smell of my own shampoo, the breeze on my neck, full moon, 
a dragonfly's sudden appearance, a nearby park, a child's laugh. I try to 
see them, also, as smuggled I love yous from the universe at large. Taking 
radical responsibility for noticing and feeling all the infinite I love yous being 
presented to me every day is one of the ways I accumulate my internal 
sense of being loved. It's like being on a reconnaissance mission for 
affection in everyday reality. The data is endless."

I love Annie. I think you can see why. The fact that she would offer this and 
send it to me and now to you is an “I love you” from her.

The data is endless. Be on a reconnaissance mission for gratitude. Don't 
just wait for things to come to you. Run outside and find as many people, 
things, experiences, sensations that you can be grateful for. Cultivate that 
muscle of gratitude. Bring that into a relationship and your partner will 
never feel taken for granted. They will probably return the favor, because 
you'll be modeling it so beautifully to them.

**Practice Eight, Forgive Yourself.**

Let's dive more into forgiving yourself, because this is a big one.

In order to truly love yourself, you can't hate the experiences that shaped 
you. I'll say that again. In order to love yourself, you can't really hate the 
experiences that shaped you.

In many ways, be like Annie in our last section, and look back on those 
experiences, the people who broke up with you, the people who were 
maybe cruel to you, the people who ignored you, the disappointments. In a 
sense, those, also, are I love yous from the universe, because they gave 
you the fuel to develop into the wiser person you are today, the more 
resilient person you are today, the one who can cope with the world and 
deal with crap in ways that you couldn't before because you're stronger 
now!

William Blake, one of my favorite poets said, "Love to faults is always 
blind," meaning we don't see faults, "always is to a joy inclined. Lawless, 
winged and unconfined and breaks the chain from every mind."
Well, yes and no. A certain kind of love will do that. A deep love. Not infatuation.

Whoever said love is blind is actually wrong. Infatuation is blind. Martha Beck, wonderful coach, great writer, says,

"Love is the only thing that lets us see each other with the remotest accuracy."

Love is rigorously honest and perceptive. The chosen perception.

Infatuation is blind. It's the same with self-love.

You can clearly see what doesn't feel lovable about yourself and still love yourself, because if you remember there are the two levels...

The first level is your level of doing. You can forgive yourself around things that you have done. We talked about the process. Apologize, set a new course, set an intention, set a commitment, and then keep your agreement, keep that commitment. That is one road into self-love.

The second level, of course, is not about doing but being. Well, there's nothing really you can possibly “do” to forgive yourself for being a being of love.

We block love in many ways. We get egotistical. We get full of shame. We get full of doubt. Those are things we do, but our essence doesn't change.

So let's look at some more practices for self-forgiveness, because I know this is a big one for a lot of people.

One practice to start is to “categorize the offense” – that thing you want to forgive yourself for. Most of us find it hard to forgive ourselves when we've done pretty much one of four things. If we fail at something big at life, like making your marriage work. If we've hurt somebody. If we've hurt our self by choices we've made, maybe drinking or drugs or some other self-destructive behavior. Or maybe we did something that maybe we shouldn't have done. Or maybe we didn't do something, rather, that we should have done, like put money away for our kids for college, or resolve a family dispute before someone died.
Instead of just feeling shame, in general, about ourselves, categorize the offense into one of the categories. What was that thing that you feel bad about? Once you can identify that thing, that thing is no longer “you.”

Remember shame is” I am bad.” Guilt is “I did something bad.” Forgiveness can handle “I did something bad.” Forgiveness can't handle “I am bad.”

Separate the thing you did from you as a being. That's step one.

Step two is, articulate it well, admit the harm it caused, don't try to white wash it, find a trusted friend, say what you did, say the damage you caused, and chances are this very act of sharing will remind you that you're not this horrible person because truth is your friend has done something that they feel bad about.

Brene Brown has found in her research over and over that the very act of sharing is healing. She says, "We commonly think we're alone and unique in our suffering, but this only makes healing more difficult."

She points out that confessing what you've done also prevents you from slipping into denial, suppression, repression, forgetting, all the things that roil in your stomach and create the anxious, self-protective person that really can't love or be loved.

The next step is to identify what you want to get out of this process of self-forgiving.

Maybe you want to get forgiveness from someone. Maybe you want to reconcile with that person. Or maybe you actually don't. Maybe you just want to tell that person you're sorry and let them know that you did something wrong and you feel bad, but maybe you don't want them in your life, that's fine too.

Maybe you just want to get rid of the shame, release the blame, clear the air or feel calm.

Find out the goal that you have in this forgiveness process. The goal can't be everyone in the world loves you. The goal has to be very specific. Know what you want to get out of this process.
Part of that is releasing those unrealistic expectations, the whole world is going to love you, everyone's going to give you everything you want, this is the wish of a three-year-old, where the parents, theoretically, supply your every need.

So decide on your goal, and set your expectations and your actions upon that.

The next step is to identify your own hurt. Realize the hurt feelings, guilty thoughts, the stress you feel when you're trying to fall asleep, or in the middle of the night – and own the fact that that is what's making you feel bad. The feeling. The memory. The thoughts. Not the thing that you did ten years ago, or five years ago, or two months ago.

The thing that's making you feel bad is the constant regurgitation of your bad feelings and that's what you are going to release in your process of self-forgiveness. That's what causing the problem. It's a habit of thinking.

The process of forgiveness, and making amends, by the way, what can I do to make amends, and setting a new commitment, that will clear out the anxiety. It won't change what you did, but it'll clear out the anxiety and allow you to function more lovingly and productively.

Next - you've got to be willing to hit that “stop button.”

Replaying over and over in your head what you did isn't going to help the person you hurt, it just makes you feel awful. Now, there's a reason we go over and over, we ruminate upon our sins, and we focus our attention on what we've done badly. It's a secret way that we prevent ourselves from taking action.

In the book, How We Decide by Jonah Lehrer, Rhodes Scholar and noted author, he talks about the prefrontal cortex where we do our thinking. It can really only do one major thing at once. When you're spinning your wheels and telling yourself I’m so bad, I'm so bad,” what you're doing is you're preventing change, you're actually preventing your courage from stepping in and making a step to make that shift to apologize, to ask how you can make amends, to shift your commitments, and your intention and to start a new behavior. That's your choice.
Living in this shame and this constantly feeling bad about something you did, prevents your prefrontal cortex from doing what it actually does best, which is solve problems. The problem here is you're spinning in your head all these stories about how horrible you are. You can only do one or the other at a time: worry or fix.

So when you notice that spinning going on in your head, you need to remind yourself that what you're doing is actually preventing a solution from happening.

Next step... Make a sincere apology.

You'll be surprised how often this step is just easy. When you say you're sorry, people are sometimes just waiting for that apology. Try it. Say it in person. Don't do it by text. Ask to speak to the person like a grownup, face to face, be sincere.

If they don't accept your apology, there's nothing you can do about that, but you've done your best. You can also ask; how can I make it up to you? Then, again, you can't control what they're going to say.

Do your best. If they ask something of you and it's something you can do, do it, if you think it's fair. Then make a commitment to yourself to change your behavior, and change your behavior. That is the process.

It's a simple process

There's another process you can try called positive emotion refocusing technique or PERT, P-E-R-T. This is a forty-five second strategy doctors have developed that you can use whenever you start beating yourself up over mistakes that you've made.

Again, it's very simple. Ready?

Close your eyes. Draw in a long breath that gently pushes out your belly, nice and full. Then slowly exhale through your nose as you relax your belly. Do it again. Draw a second breath. Fill your belly. Relax your body, take yourself out of tension.
Now you are coming to a state where you can actually do this practice. On the third deep breath, say an image or create an image of someone you love, or a beautiful place in nature that fills you with awe. Maybe it's a beautiful beach, a path in a redwood forest, your favorite mountain river tumbling over rocks, the top of a mountain with fresh powder in the morning. Breathe deeply. As your mind just sits, as we did in the poetry earlier, just sits with the beauty all around you, just breathe that in and notice how you feel and allow those feeling of peace to center in your chest around your heart as you breathe steadily. Feel the peace of the world at peace.

When you're in this peaceful state, now you can ask yourself, ask this peaceful incarnation of yourself what you can do to help yourself feel better.

Say, “what can I do to help myself feel better right now?”

Then wait for the answer, it'll come to you.

When it does, open your eyes and put it into action.

This is a practice that we do because when we ask ourselves what can I do to help myself, when we're in a state of anxiety and chaos and shame, we won't receive, necessarily, the right answers.

From a place of peace, we often have much better judgment.

Finally, we had talked about making things right, making amends.

You want to make amends. In order to make amends, you look for a way to be kind to those whom you have hurt. If you spent somebody's money, give them the money back. If you missed something that was important to a child of yours, go out of your way by making sure that you're not only there next time but twice, three times, five times, take the whole team out to dinner.

Make amends.

If you think you've made mistakes that can't be fixed with someone, because maybe they've died, maybe it was someone who was sick, you
wish you were there for them, maybe your friend was dying of cancer, go help out in a cancer ward if they've died and sit with someone who is alone. Find a local hospice and volunteer.

Do good rather than feel bad. Doing good, volunteering at a cancer ward after your friend has died and you weren't as good of a friend, will that bring that friend back? No.

Your choice is not fixing the past ever. Your choice is doing good rather than feel bad. Not only will you forgive yourself, but you'll start that feedback loop of loving yourself, accepting yourself, liking yourself because you're actually taking action.

This is how we begin to tell ourselves a new story about who we are.

We are that flawed hero who sometimes unlucky things happen to.

Again, I love that definition of ourselves. We are flawed heroes who are doing our best, who move forward, sometimes unlucky things happen, it doesn't mean we don't have control of who we're going to be from now on.

With forgiveness, again, remember, do good rather than feel bad.

Sincerely apologize. Make amends. Set a new behavioral commitment for yourself and keep that commitment. Share your shame with others who you trust. Find solace in the fact that they probably feel bad about similar things. Lose the story that you are bad. Own the story that you've done bad. Fix it. Self-forgive. New behaviors. More forward.

Self-love will suffuse you and you will be a gift for those who enter your world.

The Practice of Self Love Part IV

Practice Number Nine: Building Feedback Loops.

Now as I said earlier, you can't create self-love just from the feedback of those you surround yourself with, but you can create feedback loops. And
the love and support and acceptance of the people you surround yourself with can help grow the self-love that's already there.

Now here's the thing: You were not born with low self-esteem. You were not born without loving yourself. Every baby is born just loving being alive, just so happy to experience what is and to explore the world. It's other people who have diminished that love of life, that self-esteem.

Now let's look at what self-esteem is, and self-love, because self-esteem isn't claiming infallible brilliance. It's not Donald Trump. It's not claiming that you're just this outstanding, magnificent person who's better than other people, or better than you actually are, even.

What it is, is what Nathaniel Branden in his book The Six Pillars of Self-esteem, says...

"Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness."

That's it.

Self-esteem is not an undue self-regard. Self-esteem is very simply the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life, and being worthy of happiness.

Now, it makes sense that in the journey of creating higher self-esteem that you want to cultivate relationships, not just with anybody, but with people who actually make you feel those two things, or rather than “make” you feel those two things, support you in feeling those two things.

One, competent to cope with the basic challenges of life, and secondarily, people who support your belief, your core belief that you’re worthy of happiness.

How do you do that? First, you get rid of the people who don't do those things.

If someone degrades your self-esteem by telling you you're not competent to cope with life, by telling you you're incompetent, by telling you that you
have no skills, by telling you that you'll never improve - this is not someone you want to be around.

I was with someone for a very long time who told me I had “no money karma.” That was her response when a particular stock trade didn't go well. Even though I made tens of thousands of dollars in the stock market, even though I had successful business decisions, not all the time did everything go well. When it didn't go well, she challenged my basic competence to cope with the basic challenges of life.

"You don't have money karma."

That's what you call a story. It hurt. It hurt who I was. And this person undermined my fundamental sense of competence in life. She had to go.

The first thing you want to do is figure out who in your life is challenging your competency, and who in your life is challenging your right, your sense of worthiness to be happy. There are people out there who don't want you to be happy because it threatens their own sense of not being happy. Usually it's a sibling, a parent, an ex. Sometimes, it's a friend.

Now as it turns out, I had a friend like that. When we both got divorced around the same time and he was one of the only single guys I knew, because I was mostly a “dad” at that point and most of my friends were couples ...

I noticed that when I had a great date, he would find a way to put that person down, or put the reason why we got along down. The way he framed everything, any success I had with meeting new women was a fluke. I cut him out of my life. I had the good sense to do that.

If you have quote-unquote "friends" who put you down, who attack these two things, your competency to cope and your worthiness of happiness - you can cut them out of your life. If they're a colleague, you can stop talking about your personal life and I highly recommend you do that now.

If it's someone you have to see, colleague or family, stop talking about your personal life. Of course, if it's family and you have to see them, you want to learn how to set boundaries, and we'll be talking about setting boundaries
in a little while. It's one of the most important things you can do to support your own sense of self-love.

Now as I mentioned, as I was putting this program together, I put out to my wonderful circle of friends and colleagues, teachers, writers, thinkers, about their practices of self-love. One of my friends, actually a former student ...

Her name is Helena Summer. Amazing woman. Former nun, of all things.

She's a teacher, she's a love coach, but she had a harrowing youth. She actually grew up during the war there in Serbia, in Croatia, in that area, and witnessed terrible things that I would not wish upon anyone else listening to this program right now, her friends literally being blown up in front of her.

She wrote to me this...

"I haven't loved myself but I was getting open, becoming receptive and more curious, more willing. Then my first husband showed me what it meant and how it feels to be properly loved. If that love was not poured on to me, I would have never known the beauty of love, for how could I teach myself a language I didn't know exists? He spoke love, he spoke acceptance, he spoke sweetness, and all the beautiful accents of it. Before him, I had a wall around my heart. Then I created a door and the willingness that grew. He knocked, and all the sunshine that I never saw just embraced my soul."

By the way, English is her second language. I'm so touched with her language and I'm very impressed with her story.

She had walls around her heart. She had to learn that she was worthy of happiness.

That first marriage played out (he was her Priest!) and with love, she moved on. She wrote to me...

"I got married a second time. "He took me to a whole new level. Thus my experience is that we are in this together. We show each other, we teach each other, we give each other. We are all babies in love and we are all parents."
How beautiful is that?

Here's someone who, even though she says she didn't have inner self-love, she probably did. I know her. She is an amazingly sunshiny person. I think that's probably her natural state. Being among men, in her case her two husbands, who showed her love, who poured love on her, allowed her to cultivate the self-love, the love of life that was already there.

We must surround ourselves with people who lovingly gaze at us, because we will start to believe them – and then believe them more and more.

I like that she says we're all babies in love and we're all parents. We all have to develop our own inner self-love and we have to parent ourselves.

Give ourselves the wisdom, give ourselves the honesty, give ourselves the feedback, give ourselves the discipline to separate ourselves from those who will hurt us, just as a parent will protect a child.

When we surround ourselves with people who, let's say, gaze lovingly at us, gaze supportingly at us, again, we tend to believe them. Just as when we have abusive parents or abusive partners, we tend to believe them. Even though in our heart of hearts we may not actually believe them, we tend to live according to their story, especially if it's consistently told and convincing.

When others look at us with loving eyes, we feel energized, uplifted, vibrant, alive. We feel safer in the world and we feel more courageous. That's why in all the above sections so far, I've been teaching you how to look at yourself with loving eyes.

First, be your own lover, so to speak.

Put your loving gaze on yourself, your accepting gaze upon yourself. It will make you more courageous. The steadier your loving gaze is, the more gratitude you show as well, the more we will feel steady as lovable. Love's eyes sustain us, nourish us, and connect us to the essential aliveness that courses through our bodies and through the universe. Being seen makes us feel alive and happy and, most importantly, worthy of love.

So, how do you cast loving eyes upon yourself?
Well, some of the mantras we've given. The self-acceptance that we've given. Reviewing the accomplishments, you've had. Reviewing the ways that you have affected people's lives well. Reviewing your strengths.

Remember your strengths diary. List ten and then list one more every day. Keep your loving gaze on yourself by doing all the practices in this program.

There's a Kabbalistic mystic who said that "the gaze of seers" - mystics are known as seers - loving eyes, right? - "not only sustains but actually creates God."

It's a Kabbalistic belief that it's the love we create that actually sustains and creates God, God's very self. It's what creates "divinity." Whether that's true or not, I can't say, but the concept that a loving gaze can transform reality, even ultimate reality - that is true, and that can work for you today and every day.

When you surround yourself with people who offer you a loving gaze, an accepting gaze, who support these two key things, your competence and your worthiness of love, you'll enter a new realm.

One of my old favorite writers, as you should know by now, especially on this topic of self-love and self-acceptance, is Brené Brown, the great shame researcher of our time.

She makes the distinction between fitting in and belonging, and I want you to pay close attention to this, because ... It's kind of a personal one for me because this difference has plagued me and my life in the past. Now that I know the difference, I get it. I know how to act to cultivate belonging.

Fitting in is when we have to twist ourselves, contort ourselves, to feel accepted, but when we belong somewhere, we feel already accepted as we are. When we try to fit in you will always feel a secret shame because you're not being yourself. When you actually feel as if you belong with others, you're at peace. You're at home. You feel that competence. You feel that self-love. You feel that worthiness of being loved.

When you're trying to fit in, it's a constant agony. It's a constant anxiety.
But when you belong, it’s an easeful feeling of finally coming home, and it’s a huge relief when you can relax your shame and relax your shadow and share your truths with somebody safely and honestly.

Really belonging with somebody. It could be that one friend, that one family member. In very unusual cases, a community that actually accepts you, and that is rare. You can finally drop the pretenses, drop the masks, be yourself, and belong.

It begins with finally just accepting, owning, and claiming your worth as a human being, who, while not perfect, is on the journey. Who can stop and recalibrate, who has a good heart, who brings gifts, who is competent to cope with life and is worthy of love.

Bring that person outward to others, find another person who feels that way, and sit with each other, and belong with each other. Remember: you get to create your circle of friends and support by also being that creator of circle and support for others.

Here's your task for the day...

On your journey into more self-worth and self-love, how can you create that sense of belonging for someone you're close to, so they can finally totally relax and share anything with you? It's a rare and beautiful thing. I'd say that I have maybe four or five people in the world that I feel that comfortable with. That's enough. Surround yourself with those who love you.

Now here's a practice so that you can identify who is worth your time, who is worth your investment. Ask yourself: what kinds of people do you surround yourself with now? Ask these questions. Think about the people you're closest to. Who among them speaks negatively to you? Who among them reinforces your negative self-talk? Who among them says, as people said to me before as they began to insult me, "Hey, I'm just being honest" or "You need to know this"?

They're not doing it out of a sense of help. They're doing it out of a sense of manipulation, making their lives more convenient or making themselves feel better about themselves. Ask you: who is genuinely on your side?
Who's on your side in your journey of growth, self-acceptance, evolution? Ask yourself: are you choosing people in your life to do your own dirty work of negative criticism because you're not willing to choose a different reality, because you haven't found the courage to stop that critical voice from the inside?

Sometimes, and this may be difficult to hear ...

Sometimes we keep negative people in our lives close to us because it's our shadow externalized, doing our dirty work for us. They're saying the things that we're saying to ourselves inside that are keeping us small, that are keeping us separate, that are keeping us feeling awful about ourselves. They are confirming what we suspect at our worst – and there's a strange comfort in that.

By surrounding ourselves with people who speak those internal negative thoughts that we have back at us, there's a confirmation bias, and it keeps us in that little box, cozy and warm and scared, but it's in a familiar place.

Watch what happens when you start to remove those people from your life, surround yourself with people who accept you, surround yourself with people who believe in you. (In a few minutes, I'm going to give you very specific instructions on how to set boundaries on those who won't respect that.)

**Practice Number Ten**

This is a big one. Identify with Your Journey. As I've mentioned, identify with the work of self-love, with the process of self-love, not with the result.

This is a lesson I actually learned a little bit late in my parenting career. I think we were both great parents with our children. They have terrific self-esteem, they work hard, they're kind, they're loving, they're thoughtful, they're happy. What more could parents really want? They're healthy, too, as a bonus.

One thing I learned later on, when they were already late teens, was not to compliment your children on their intelligence, but rather on their hard work.
Now, it's difficult, because if you have kids or if you've been around a baby, and you've seen them become a toddler and then a kid and then a teen, you're amazed at the transition into brilliance, creativity, curiosity, the things they pick up.

The evolution of human intelligence is a beautiful thing to watch! Of course, when you watch it in your own child, you just think he or she is a little Einstein, because you're amazed. They went from a gurgling, mewling and puking mess of saliva and poop, into little beings that write stories and create art and tell you they love you. Of course they're brilliant.

What happens is, when parents compliment intelligence, the children start to rest on their intelligence. Then when they hit challenges, these little Einsteins ... when they suddenly can't do calculus, as I hit my point in eleventh grade ... now they go into shame because hey, "I'm supposed to be intelligent! I identify with being intelligent. Now I'm not. Now I'm a fraud."

The instruction is to start early with children, and to praise their hard work, because that never stops. When they hit a challenge, they don't say, "Hey, I'm supposed to be intelligent. I'm a fraud." They go to their new identity, their identity of being a hard worker, of someone who can solve problems, and they go, "Hmm, I've hit a big problem but I can handle it, because I'm a hard worker and I can solve problems."

So, too, it is with our journey into self-love.

Pay attention to this one because this is a huge one. You'll save yourself so much trouble, and you will accelerate your self-love, and you'll also be able to create so much love for your partner.

Michael Bennett, who wrote that book F*ck Feelings, says, "The aim is not to love yourself as some static thing, but to learn to love the effort you put into putting up with yourself and your life."

To learn to love your resilience. To learn to love how you cope with things. To learn to love how you solve problems, even if it takes time. Self-love means respecting yourself for how you deal with, for example, bad luck. It happens. Not judging yourself for the overall quality of your luck.
This is the danger of ideas like karma. When things go bad for you, people make a story out of it and say, "Oh, it must be some terrible karma. Something I did in this life or a last life or a hundred lives ago." Suddenly you're in this big story about how you're a hard luck case, and that's your identity. This is terribly destructive.

Instead, identify yourself with how well you're coping with your journey. Remember we made a list of strengths earlier on. Keep it close. Open a file in your computer. Refer back to it. We all need it from time to time when things go with difficulty.

Identify with the journey. Identify with your work. Identify with your resilience. Identify with how well you can cope with trouble and do not identify with your state in the moment, whether it's financial, emotional, relationship, physical. Identify with the engine that you are that can improve your state.

**Practice Number Eleven.**

Another great one. A great way to get yourself out of a funk and increase self-love, which is to Give Generously.

If you are feeling sorry for yourself, or if you're feeling not lovable, or if you're feeling lonely, rather than trying to get someone to come and make you feel better, go out and help somebody.

Go feed the homeless, go help a friend, make a meal for them. If someone is sick, visit them. If a friend is moving, go help them move. Twenty years later I have so much gratitude toward one particular friend who helped me move when I was moving a house with little kids, and we were tight on money. I still remember, and I have so much affection for him, even twenty years later.

There's an old teaching: even if you're in the middle of a meditation and you're experiencing enlightenment, and you're receiving the divine presence, and a guest arrives at the door who's hungry, stop your meditation, go greet your guests, take care of your friends, then finish your meditation later.
The teaching there is that greater is receiving guests than receiving the face of infinity, or the divine.

Doing good for someone is actually a way of creating that sense of abundant, infinite, good feeling. David Deida, who's one of my favorite teachers, says,

"The simplicity of it is this: Give everything you have to give in every moment completely."

Now, by the way, that is an enormous statement. Deida talks about the true spiritual life as not something you strive to attain later. The true spiritual life is opening to reality right now. Opening to the love that is right now. He says, "Give yourself in every moment. Live so that when you die, you die fully given."

There are fewer joys than that.

I think it was Mother Theresa who said, "Let them eat you up. Give yourself completely."

By the way, giving yourself is a great guard against narcissism as well, and one of the problems we have today, one of the problems we have with actual self-love, is that people feel like they have to put on this big mask of self-love and make a show of it.

The simplicity of it is this: Give yourself. Create some good. It is one of the fastest ways to generate self-love, and when you meet somebody romantically or intimate situation, imagine yourself, if you've just done good for somebody, how you're going to feel about yourself, versus sitting home and feeling bad about yourself and then you meet someone. How are you going to feel? How are they going to perceive you?

If you're listening to this and you're preparing for a great love relationship, perhaps again, perhaps for the first time, put yourself in the state of someone who loves themselves, for good reason because you've given well. If you're in a relationship and you want to revive your relationship, you want to fill those holes in the bottom of your sieve ... Do good for your partner. Do good for others.
I can tell you on a personal note, one of the joys of my life, one of the things that makes me love my partner even more, are her acts of kindness, which seem to come out of nowhere.

Just this week, we were at a restaurant. We go often to this restaurant, and the waitress there has gotten pregnant. She is not married but she's very excited about being pregnant, having a baby, but she's very scared, too. During lunch, while we were waiting for one of the courses, my wife got up, went next door, a few stores down, to a shop, and bought some baby things for her: a little stuffed animal, a little burping blanket, and a baby blanket, and came back.

When the waitress came back she had this beautiful bag waiting for her with gifts, and she took it out, and I can tell you, the tears. Not only did that make her moment, it made her day. It probably made her week. It might have made her month.

When I see my bride doing kindnesses for people like that, trust me, it deepens my love for her and deepens my devotion for her. Put yourself in that position and imagine how your present or future partner or lover will feel about you when they witness your kind heart.

By the way, if you're a guy, it just so happens that this morning I read that a sanitation worker who found kittens in a garbage can was voted the sexiest man alive. Why? Not because of his job, but because of his kindness.

Let's not forget how sexy kindness is.

**Practice Number Twelve: Ask for What You Want, Set Boundaries and Keep Them**

Okay. I have mentioned that we're coming to this, so let's do it. Let's do this right.

There are techniques that actually make this work, and ultimately, it's your commitment to keeping your word to yourself, that you are worthy and you are setting boundaries and you will keep them, that make this all work.

Practicing self-care and setting boundaries and saying no to abuse of any source: this is a foundation of self-love.
We teach ourselves what we're worth by what we allow. We train others how to teach us, how to treat us, rather, by what we allow. Internally, we teach ourselves what we're worth by what we allow.

Setting boundaries tells people, therefore, not only how they can treat us, but it tells our subconscious mind how worthy we feel we are.

Now what are boundaries? Boundaries are personal, emotional divides that we impose on each other, right? They're walls to preserve the value of self-love.

To create an emotional space or a place like a boundary is like creating a dividing line between yourself and another. I want you to understand this. A lot of people who don’t feel self-worth, and you may not be one of them ... as you get to the extremes, they don’t feel separate from others. They feel kind of like a doormat that gets absorbed into others, to mix metaphors.

They feel they don't have a right to have their own feelings and their own boundaries.

If you might have some of this, setting boundaries is essential for you to individuate as a loving and lovable, individual, unique human being. It dignifies your worth because it dignifies your unique identity as a human being who has never existed before and will never exist again.

Just like boundaries between countries protect people from getting invaded, emotional boundaries protect you from getting invaded by other people's imposing, predatory energy and opinions.

I may have mentioned the book The Mastery of Love by Don Miguel Ruiz, who is best known for his book The Four Agreements. In this book, The Mastery of Love, he talks about how his tradition divides people into two types: dreamers and predators.

We all are dreamers. We dream our reality. We make it up out of our natural DNA, our parenting, the influences we had as kids, our relationships growing up, the movies we saw, the books we read, that which we observed, and we create a story of what reality is like. We're all dreamers.
Then there are predators. Predators are insecure, so insecure that they have to dominate your dream. They have to change your dream. They have to tell you what to think or feel. These could be religious people, these could be political people, they could be little tyrants at home, where they have to control your inner dream.

These people are energy killers. They will wear you down, if they do not respect or accept your boundaries so that you can live your life according to your own values and your own self-worth. These people have to be kept outside of your inner world.

What happens is that they will try to ... They are usually very good at this - they are usually manipulators or dominant people, very strategic in their rhetoric. They'll try to wear you down, and slowly you'll give in or surrender. You'll just accept that you're a victim of some kind of emotional abuse, just as you might have been when you were a child and you didn't have power.

What happens if you don't set up walls and keep these walls? Anger or resentment or even depression, anxiety symptoms, will develop. This is kind of what those people want. They want you so weakened and so injured, they can keep dominating your inner reality.

Your task? The road to self-love and self-worth is to feel that hurt, absolutely, and create absolute boundaries of what people are allowed to say and, of course, do to you.

If you need help, get a coach. I have coaches who work with me who are available. Get a therapist. Understand your pain. Create boundaries and keep them.

Now let's talk about the actual process of creating boundaries.

As I said, boundaries are important, not just for convenience. It's crucial for your self-love because boundaries encourage self-respect. It encourages individuation for yourself, respect for yourself. In relationships, even in marriages over decades, healthy boundaries help you identify what you're responsible for and what they're responsible for. It makes limits clear.

Good fences make good neighbors: so, too, in relationship.
When you understand your own thoughts and values and emotions, boundaries become much easier to set, which is one of the reasons why self-awareness is the core of all this work that we're doing. Being aware of what's real for you, what actually hurts for you, being aware of what your actual strengths are – this helps assure that no one can take that away from you.

Boundaries aren't about being mean to other people. They're not meant to be punitive at all. Instead, healthy boundaries are essential for you taking care of yourself, so you can always be at your best at your core competence.

Remember, core competence is one of the two foundations of self-esteem. If you're not at your best, if you don't believe in your core competence, your relationships won't work. You'll become that sieve, rather than that sacred bowl.

Setting clear boundaries can be as simple as saying yes or no when someone asks you to do something. It doesn't mean that you'll never do anything you don't want again. We all will, for the sake of love, for the sake of friendship. That's part of life.

It means you're actually making a choice. You're being intentional in your decisions about what you do and why you're doing it. Setting boundaries is about making choices purposefully, rather than feeling like you didn't have a choice from the start. Got that?

Now, this is a practice I recommend to a lot of people who have been too nice in their lives, too giving, not creating enough boundaries to allow their own unique self to express themselves, because they're always pleasing others. Before someone asks you something, say within the next week, track your feelings. Don't say yes right away. You might even say no, even if you want to say yes, as a practice.

Try saying a decisive “no.”

Just for the practice of saying it!

Then, once you said no and they accept it, you can say, "You know what? I'm going to do it for you. I'm just practicing saying no." Let them know that
you're undergoing a practice. That's up to you. If you have a tradition of saying yes when you meant no, use that practice.

Here are a few more tips on setting boundaries.

Additional Tip #1

Setting boundaries, again, is the first step to regaining control of your life. If your relationships have been abusive, if you've been too submissive, then this is your responsibility. You have a choice. Ask yourself: Is it really worth the pain and suffering to be with someone who's abusive, someone who's not respecting your self-worth?

Sometimes it's hard to imagine our life without a particular person because they've become such a big part of our life. It could be a mother. Could be an ex. It could be your partner. This process of setting a boundary and removing them from your life, or creating very clear boundaries of how often you will allow that person to speak to you, it might seem like you're learning how to walk again because it's actually learning a new experience, and change can be scary, and that takes courage.

I know a woman who's a very highly developed woman. Thirty, a coach, thoughtful, incisive, helpful, and yet she has allowed her mother, her very abusive mother, to say horrible things to her all her life. A couple of years ago, she started the practice of saying to her mother, "If you say anything cruel to me, in any way, I will not speak to you for thirty days," and she said that without anger, without crying, without being punitive, just saying "this is my boundary".

What do you think started happening? Of course, the mother stopped saying punitive, horrible, destructive things. She may have thought them, but she stopped saying them.

This is how you create change in your life. You start seeing that there's another option.

Additional Tip #2
Learn to set limits and watch how it affects a partner. The setting of boundaries can be something new if you're in a relationship, and your partner may feel threatened by it. They might say, "Hey, this is a BIG change" even if it is small. And they might not be that enthusiastic about it.

You have to frame it like this: "Hey partner, this boundary is important to me. This is the reason. Period. I am cultivating self-love in my life. I am cultivating positivity in my life. I am cultivating a new way of positive self-talk in my life, and I've made a decision that I won't allow negative talk to come into my world. If you feel something negative, if you want to say something negative, bite your tongue. If you do say something negative to me, here's the consequence,"

...and then set out the consequence.

It could be three-day silence. It could be you'll leave for a night. It could mean whatever you want to create. Say it with the feeling of self-compassion and compassion for your partner. Hold steady. Don't confront them and blame them and make them wrong. This is the key here.

For those of you who are in relationship now with people who are abusive or negative, and with whom you need to set boundaries, don't make them wrong. Just make yourself right for yourself.

I would add this: "I am on a journey of creating more self-love and I know you love me, and I know that's important to you, so I'm so grateful for you for supporting me in creating this boundary for myself, to make sure that no negative talk comes in at me, whether it's from you or anybody else, and I'm really grateful that you're supporting me on my journey. Period."

This helps take the blame and shame away from them.

Additional Tip #3

Direct and unambiguous communication.

One of the things I've noticed for people who are not used to setting boundaries is that they're very vague about it, and people can misinterpret. They may not know what you actually mean. Speak very clearly, as I just demonstrated, and repeat yourself without explaining.
For example, use simple repetition. If your boyfriend insults you, you can say to him, "By the way, I won't allow insult in my life. If you insult me again, I will stand up and walk out the door at the next one, and I will not have contact with you for thirty days. Period."

Again, no blame, no shame. If he questions you about it - "This is my boundary, this is the result if you do not keep my boundary". That's it. No argumentation, no yelling, no screaming. "This is my boundary; this is the result if you do not keep my boundary."

People will come to respect you for this. It gets through when you do it from a place of self-compassion and without making them wrong.

Additional Tip #4

Another way of creating boundaries has to do with emotional boundaries. If you were lucky and had a healthy, nurturing childhood, you probably grew up feeling grounded and you learned how to nurture your sense of self-love and self-worth, and you probably have a sense of feeling internally proud of your strengths, a reasonable sense of that, which is healthy.

If you had a relatively healthy childhood, you learned how to set emotional boundaries, and learned how to say no, and learned how to put boundaries around emotional abuse, because you're used to being loved as a child.

If you were fortunate enough to have a healthy, nurturing childhood, you don't have to scavenge around for affection, or you don't have to desperately try to please others so you can feel good about yourself and feel loved.

If you had a healthy, nurturing childhood, you probably sense that you are loved for our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, just for being in the world, even when you made mistakes.

If you had this kind of childhood, be sure to thank your parents while they're still around, and thank them for your ability to model this behavior in the people in your life now.
Now, if you didn't receive that kind of parenting, this is your chance to give it to you now.

Let's go back and look at those things that good, healthy, nurturing parents gave. They allowed you to feel self-love, self-worth, and a feeling of internal pride about what you've accomplished. You can do that for yourself right now.

As a child, if you had those good, healthy, nurturing parents, you felt loved just for being in the world, and if you made mistakes that's fine, because you were already loved. You can do that for yourself now. Model the great parent for yourself. Take care of yourself. Protect yourself from those who would do you harm, just as parents would.

Create your self-care non-negotiables, the things that you will absolutely do to take care of yourself. The first one might be putting boundaries up against negative people in your life.

Second, anything that supports your sense of inner health, inner happiness, boosted mood, anything that makes you feel good about yourself.

I've given you a lot of practices already: listing how you've affected people well, listing your strengths ... Here's some other things. Getting thirty minutes of exercise a day. That's a huge one. Simple exercise releases happy hormones and will change your state. Another thing you can do, non-negotiables: make sure you have standing dates with friends or family, people who support you, and make sure you're spending time with them.

I've noticed that when people feel bad about themselves ... I've gone through down periods ... You kind of want to hole up a little bit, and not reach out to people. This is actually one of the times that can be most beneficial for reaching out. Sometimes it's good to stay in and watch Netflix, but sometimes it's good to reach out.

Get out into nature as much as humanly possible. Sit in the peace and beauty of the world. Drink enough water. This is something that people forget to do. They get dehydrated and they get moody, depressed. Get enough sleep. Put an hour or two toward creative projects that give you joy.
Go through your list. What makes you happy? What reinforces your inner self-esteem?

Because we not only want to set up boundaries against those who would hurt us. We want to set up walls to make sure that we protect our time, so that we do the things inside those walls that make us feel happy.

These are the activities that, no matter how busy your life gets, no matter how tired you get, no matter how often your inner thoughts may tell you you're not worthy to take the time to do these things, these are non-negotiables. You commit to yourself to do them regularly because self-care is self-love in action.

I'm going to say this again. Self-care is self-love in action.

Every time you take an action of self-care, you are cultivating and nourishing your self-love, preparing yourself for an even better love relationship. What are those acts of self-care? As we've just seen - setting boundaries against those who would hurt you. Creating boundaries to protect time and space for you to do the things that you love doing.

Self-care is also taking care of your body. Simple exercise. Our bodies were not meant to sit. Our bodies were meant to walk. The more physical activity you undertake, the more happy hormones you will release. That is just science.

Also, physical accomplishment tends to lead to pride and we have that great feedback loop when we exercise, and prove to ourselves that we're living, vibrant bodies.

Another essential aspect of self-care ... I'll leave off on this one, because I talk about it elsewhere and there's so much information on this ... Eat healthy. Eat real food, food that goes in the ground, organic. Eat healthy meats, organic. Not stuffed with hormones. Not stuffed with junk.

I've come to see people who regularly drink a Mountain Dew or a Coca-Cola as an act of self-hate at this point, because we know what that overload of sugar does to your body. When you eat healthy, whole foods, that itself is an act of love. Start there.
That concludes the section of this program around the doing of self-love.

In the next audio, we're going to look at the being of self-love, which is an entirely different practice. What we've been talking about are things you can do. In the next audio, in the next section, we're going to talk about accessing things you already are.

I'll end with a quote from teacher David Deida. Again, I love this guy. He says,

"Feminine and masculine needs for appreciation grow through levels, from self-doubt to self-assurance to self-giving. At the lower levels, a relationship can be rife with neediness. You are needy for constant reassurance that you are loved, desired, and attractive, and your masculine partner is needy for your admiration of his success and attainments....

...The middle levels of growth involve developing self-appreciation, self-acceptance, and self-admiration.

The higher levels of growth involve surrendering, open, and giving your deepest gifts of love and freedom in spite of whether you feel appreciated by others or yourself."

That, my friend, is where we are going in the next section. Thanks so much.

The “To Be” of Self Love The Second Level

Now, it's time to talk about the second level of self-love.

If you remember, the first level was the level of “doing” self-love: "I have no worth unless I can make myself worthy through my efforts."

The second level is the level of just being self-love. Being love itself.

This is actually one of my favorite subjects because it's the most liberating. It is a kind of final belonging, a kind of final coming home to your essence, to who you actually are.
Because whoever you are, no matter what you've experienced, no matter who has hurt you, no matter what you've witnessed, what damage you've seen in the world, what damage you've caused -- you are already an infinite fountain of love.

You don't have to do anything; you just need to relax into the love you already are and access it.

In the first level, all the techniques, all the exercises we've been learning have been essential. They're ways of forging our personality level into an active machine of generating self-love, self-esteem, self-worth.

It makes us much more attractive. In relationship, it makes us a much better partner and makes us happier. All good. Those are the things to do.

Now we're talking about the second level, and this is just something you access. You remove the obstacles to get there.

David Deida, one of my favorite teachers on this subject says,

"As a body in a world, here is our choice: we can be more loving or less loving. That's it. We can relax as the entire moment's show of love's swirl, feeling open as all, a vicious rainstorm, tweeting birds, our lover's lips, a sense of worthlessness, or we can close to some aspect of experience, pulling away as if we were separate."

What he's showing is the path to accessing the infinite source of love that you actually are. No matter what your religious beliefs are or aren't, it's irrelevant.

You have access to that infinity as long as you stop creating a distance between yourself and everything around you. He calls it "relaxing as the entire moment's show of love's swirl."

In his world, which comes from Vajrayana tantric traditions, all of the world is an expression of love. Everything is an expression of love. In different traditions, they call it Christ Consciousness. They call it Shekhinah in Kabbalistic terms, the feminine aspect of God, the indwelling aspect of the divine that's here all around us.
It's also called the inner Buddha, Brahma or Bhakti in Indian traditions.

Whatever the name, the insight is that we are bathed in divine radiance. No matter what the religious tradition or spiritual tradition, the insight is there. That when we relax ourselves and stop separating what the Buddhists call our little self from the big self, our little ego from Brahma, from the “all that is,” we become part of what Deida calls love's swirl. He calls it “the show of love's swirl.” All the action, all the motion, all the life teeming around us, we're part of it.

Already.

We act as if we're separate from it. We build houses. We put on roofs. We put up windows. We wear clothes. We shuttle around in cars, but we're still part of the natural world.

We're still part of love's swirl.

I forgot who originally taught me this, but we look at space and we look at objects in our physical universe and we call it gravity, how everything is pulled toward each other.

But we can also call it allurement. I now call it allurement. Bodies in space are allured to each other. They pull towards each other. People are allured toward each other. Gravity is nothing but matter wanting to be closer to other matter. It really hit me when I was in the jungles of the Amazon and you can see how many vines there are and how many branches intertwine around each other. Everything seems to be grabbing on to everything else.

Nothing is separate.

That really is the foundation of knowing your inner love.

In The Course of Miracles, it says that love itself is available. It says, I'll quote you...

"You do not need to earn it. It is based on nothing you have done or achieved. It is based on nothing anyone thinks of you. If you were a homeless person without a penny, dirty and disheveled, forgotten by
everyone, all of this limitless self-worth would still be yours. It has nothing to do with anything particular to you. In this sense, nothing particular about you matters. Your special talents, your special traits, your special place in the world, none of them can increase your self-worth one bit because it is already infinite."

It's the same idea. You have access to infinite self-worth just by virtue of your being in the world. In Kabbalah, there is the idea that the divine origin of the universe wanted to create a physical manifestation of divine consciousness. And so opened the little hole in itself, in the all - what we now call the Big Bang - amazingly, it's exactly the same description of the universe.

In Kabbalah, it was God who wanted to create something physical so He created the tiny hole in essence or in consciousness to create the physical universe and the energy was so much, it exploded outward and divine sparks were sent out infinitely creating the universe.

And now everything you see are those divine sparks of the original Godhead. That's the Big Bang. This was spoken 600 years ago, by the way.

The important idea about this notion, again - putting religion aside, putting dogma aside, belief aside, I don't really care about that here – there is the truth behind these notions.

And that is that every single person, every being is an irreducible and unique expression of that divine energy. Now, if you don't want to use the word "divine," then you can just say a unique expression of “the evolving beauty of this universe.”

We're all part of the evolving beauty of this universe and we're allured to the other sparks all around us. You don't have to be religious to tap into this truth.

Marc Gafni says, "Love is to perceive another person unmasked in the pristine beauty of their spiritual and emotional nakedness. Love is the pleasure produced by such a perception."

It's how we see each other beneath the level of personality.
What's an example of this? A great example comes from Anna Karenina, the great novel. When Levin sees his wife, Kitty, after giving birth to their child, here's the quote...

"He had to go, but he was unable to move, so struck was he by the look on her face, her flushed face, with soft hair escaping from under her nightcap, was radiant with joy and dissolution. Levin was astonished of what was laid bare to him now when every veil has been removed and the kernel of her soul shone through her eyes. And in this simplicity and in this baring of her soul, he could see her, the woman he loved more clearly than ever."

When we see the kernel of each other's souls, we love them more than ever.

It's been said that all our personality traits, all our charm, our intelligence, our wit, our fear, all our elocution, everything about who we are - is just a way to try to win acceptance and belonging from childhood and we're still doing it all the time.

Think about it. When someone drops all that personality charm, which we find interesting and entertaining and lovable, what happens when people drop that and just get really vulnerable?

It's like that moment in Anna Karenina, the kernel of their soul shines through and we see something different. We see that level of other people at their being level, not their doing level. The kernel of her soul shining through her eyes, that inner fire, that inner being, so worthy of love.

What about yourself?

The goal now in this program is to do that for yourself, to see your own raw authentic self without the veils and masks, without the personality levels over you. They're all just veils and masks, all our charm.

Beneath that there is something else that is utterly and completely worthy of love.

Deida calls this “love beyond personality.”
It's actually one of the most useful ideas I've ever come across. If we understand that our personalities are really just strategies to get what we want, acceptance, belonging, love, affection, care, then we can separate that for a second from something else that we really are.

What's beneath all that strategy is something else.

Deida gives this beautiful image. He says, beneath all the personality traits that we bring into the social world, beneath our personality traits, imagine yourself you're just a hollow tube of love, just a mere tube.

Imagine you were just an empty vehicle, something where love could just pass right through. Then what you do is once you understand that way, look at everyone else the same way.

In a sense, everyone, beneath their personality, is just a vehicle, a hollow tube, through which love can pass.

It's true, love does pass through us. It's given to us by others. We feel it from people, even from dogs. We feel it from the universe and the beautiful moment of looking at the starlit sky or mountain range, we feel love.

It moves through us and we have the capacity if we don't block it - to have it move right through us and into somebody else or back into the universe – or a pooch – right back into being.

In a sense, we receive this beautiful energy of love from others and can pass it on if we choose to. Deida gives this beautiful image that underneath it all, when you get to the "kernel of our souls," to use that phrase, we are vehicles of love loving other vehicles of love.

We are nothing really but love loving love.

It's the circulating energy of love just moving through people and we're stops on the way. To me, this is one of the most beautiful and useful tools of self-love - visions of ourselves, of people who can cultivate a genuine and deep self-acceptance, self-love, and a sense of belonging as we've talked about in the world, a sense of belonging in humanity.

Here's your practice...
Walk around today, tomorrow. Look at other people. Use this image in your mind: “we are all just hollow tubes, passages of love that pass through us.”

We're carriers of love. It comes in, someone smiles at you, you pass the smile to someone else. Your mother gave you love. You give love to your children. Someone gave you love and relationship, you learned how to love, you pass it on to someone else.

When you get really good at this, the quality of your love starts taking on what we call unconditional love – a free flow – unblocked - what people call Christ consciousness or Shekhinah or Holy Spirit or whatever term a particular spiritual tradition gives it.

It's the kind of love you can access that is not dependent on whether someone did something nice for you or whether it's serving a purpose or whether you're trying to be liked or whether you're trying to be accepted.

It's just the love that you feel when you step outside our social network of getting and spending and proving.

It's the love you have access to all the time and that you can share anytime you choose no matter what happens.

When you see yourself this way as a vessel of unflawed love, and by the way, as a flawed vessel, we are all flawed.

I do not like setting up unrealistic expectations.

We are all flawed vessels of an unflawed love.

Loving other flawed vessels of unflawed, flawless love.

What a notion that is!

When you really own this, when you really get this, you tend to look at other people and your anger, in your expectation and your sense of privilege goes away because you just see that everyone is just a flawed vessel of unflawed love.
Everyone has that capacity, but we're all flawed in the moment.

Now, I'm going to show you some exercises in a few minutes on how to bring this notion of love to the forefront of your life. It starts with yourself.

The first practice is to, number one, keep evolving the first category, the doing level of love every single day and bringing that level of doing into deeper and deeper self-love until you start really feeling yourself as a stream, a fountain, a geyser of love that's just blocked.

There is skill in this process and I teach these skills, the communication skills, especially, in my program called How to Inspire Love, which offers 39 days of practices which inspire love in a partner.

You also want to release the blocks to yourself. Rumi, the great Sufi poet said,

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself you have built against it."

How do you remove these barriers? How do you remove these blocks?

Well, we talked about it. You develop shame resilience. You remove judgments. You remove selfishness. You mitigate and remove negative self-talk. You remove people from your life who negative self-talk at you. You stop being a doormat and you build barriers that are walls of self-care. These are all the things we did in Part 1.

Speaking to another colleague of mine, my dear friend, Bruce Muzik, who runs a program called Love at First Fight - a fantastic program for couples - when I asked him about his practices for self-love, he said, "You can't love yourself because you already are love."

He's very clear on this. He says,

"Every mystical, spiritual tradition worth a salt has essentially said the same thing. Everything is love. You are love. Get over it. Get over your sense of separation and everything will just turn out fine."
That is his summation of the best of spiritual traditions. I love that. Nice and short, to the point.

Now, unlike the world of doing, the world of being is a process of undoing.

The last bits of wisdom I want to share with you today, the last pieces to the puzzle I want to give you to genuinely cultivate realistic and resilient and powerful self-love is to undo, is to remove the barriers that you have already put in front of love.

Let's listen to David Deida again. He says,

"Right now and in every moment, you are either closing or opening. You are either stressfully waiting for something: more money, security, affection; or you are living from your deep heart, opening as the entire moment and giving what you most deeply desire to give without waiting."

Deida has a beautiful way of summing up the most profound realities of what love actually is. "In every moment," he says, you're either opening to love or you're closing yourself off from love. You're either opening yourself to the reality of this moment and being a part of it, and not protecting yourself or contracting yourself or pushing away reality, but you're opening to it, feeling everything.

In feeling everything, what he calls opening as the entire moment, not just in the entire moment, but opening as the entire moment, no matter what it feels like, no matter how painful it be, how lonely you may feel, how stressed out you may feel, it doesn't matter.

Open to the moment and still choose to give most deeply what you most desire to give without waiting.

Radical generosity is the opposite of what our culture preaches. Our culture is all built around getting the best deal possible. What's the best deal possible? The best deal possible is you give as little as possible to get as much as possible.

Isn't that how we live in our consumer lifestyle? Of course.
The problem is how that transitions over to our intimate life, to our friendship life, to our relationship life, to our love life.

We're the exact opposite. True spiritual intimacy is where is you give as much as you possibly can give no matter what - because that is your living as love.

There's no strategy behind it except to live as love. To do that, you've got to surrender, on some level identifying your true essence with that level of being beneath your personality level.

I'll share some more from David Deida. He says to love without limits...

"Surrender means to love without limits. It means to relax your guard so your lover can feel your core, authentic, unhidden, and undefended. Your muscles relax. Your breath becomes full. Your body and heart willingly open to your lover. If you are hurt, then you are hurt, but in any case, you practice to remain open and full like the ocean. True surrender is true power. The love force that moves the universe is also the love force that breathes your breath and beats your heart. When fear dissolves, you no longer separate yourself from this single flow of immense force. Love is continuity with infinite life force, a oneness of being with no separation."

Notice how it all begins – and lives – in the body.

The practice is to relax your body into being, into openness, into surrender – into unblocked love.

David Deida brings together a few traditions. One of them I mentioned, the Vajrayana tantric tradition, and tantra is not just about sex, by the way.

Tantra is a very profound tradition and, Vajrayana tantra, one can say, is also known as The Great Yes. That's one of the names they have for it, The Great Yes - meaning you say yes to everything. This is where you recognize yourself as love as continuity with infinite life force, no separation.

You say yes to all that is and then you work from there. There's no separation. There's no God and devil. There's no pure and unpure. You say
yes to the unpure and you raise that up, too. You make that sacred as well.
You bring that into love as well. You bring everything into love.

Notice again - he says surrender is something you begin with the body. It's
not a conceptual thing. It's not handing over financial reins to somebody
else. That's not what we're talking about surrender.

We're talking about a bodily surrender so that you are in the moment
completely and as you are in the moment, you live as love, not in love, as
love, as the love that is flowing around you.

Remember the image of people as vessels of love who are blocked, but
that's what they are in essence. They're vessels of love.

When you begin to see yourself and others like this - you start seeing that
love is accessible everywhere.

Deida says...

"Trust, love, what we call sexy, who we trust in a business situation, are all
based on how open we are. Openness is bodily openness, muscular
relaxation, heart openness as opposed to hiding behind some emotional
wall, and spiritual openness, which is actually feeling so fully into the
moment that there's no separation between you and the entire moment."

I think you see there's a theme here.

To be loved, to access that part of you where it's so easy to love yourself
not because of your personality qualities, but because you are already love,
you are love in a state of being.

You're part of the pulsing reality of life itself. You have this privilege of
being part of the pulsing reality of the life force that's passing through this
Earth. What a privilege is that?!

To love that privilege, to love that opportunity, to join, to block that
separation, to undo that separation between you and the entire moment of
pulsing life around you right now, it's impossible not to experience a deep
sense of love, of self-love.
Again, not a love of the little self, the personality self, not the little ego, but the big self, the all that is, to be part of that.

He says elsewhere...

"Surrender means to love without limits. It means to relax your guard so your lover can feel your core: authentic, unhidden, and undefended. Your muscles relax. Your breath becomes full. Your body and heart willingly opens to your lover. If you are hurt, then you are hurt, but in any case you practice to remain open and full, like the ocean. Surrender is the doorway to the deepest possible sex. Each person, each mission, is meant to be lived to the point where it becomes empty, boring, and useless. Then it should be discarded. This is a sign of growth, but you may mistake it for a sign of failure."

What he says is everything we do in our life has an internal direction which is to empty itself, to give yourself so fully that you become boring and useless to yourself again and you have to dig even deeper, access even deeper wells of love. This is how we grow.

In our culture, we call it midlife crisis. It's actually midlife opportunity. It means that that first part of you, the thing that drove you for the first 40 or so years no longer drives you.

Often it's establishing a great sense of identity, identifying with your personality level and then you get to around 40 or so and you see that, that's an illusion. Your real self, your real wealth, your inner wealth is something deeper than your personality level. We call it a crisis but it's actually a discovery. You empty yourself as he says.

When fear around preserving this “identity” dissolves, you no longer separate yourself from the flow of life.

Remember, love is just a continuity with the infinite life force around us. The flow of growth, the desire to live, the desire to wrap yourself around someone else in the same way that I saw those vines reaching out to wrap themselves around the nearest trees.
Love is actually the key to this kind of connection. Self-love is the key to reaching out and connecting, to finally belonging as Brene Brown says and not just fitting in. You give love no matter what.

Sometimes I call love “the intimacy of infinite beginnings” because on the personality level, we're constantly cleansing ourselves. We're self-cleaning ovens. We're self-cleaning systems. We're cleansing ourselves of shame. We're cleaning ourselves of guilt. We're cleansing ourselves of selfishness. We're cleansing of contractions; all those blocks to love on the personality level. We begin over and over again.

If your partner is doing that too and they're not lying or hurting you maliciously, you have a beautiful thing going. You begin over and over as you shed all those blocks to love. It's the same with yourself.

As you walk in this world, it's a dusty world. It's a dirty world, but you can shower. We don't live in a heaven of pure clouds that cleanse you as you walk. We make the choices to cleanse ourselves as we go on the personality level, on the doing level.

We make mistakes; we lash out; we apologize; we recommit; we self-forgive; we start again. We can do self-love. The more we do it, the closer we come to being self-love. The closer you come to being self-love, the closer you come to understanding that you have infinite abundance of love to share. It's a practice.

If you want to use spiritual language, I am much less interested in finding that moment of enlightenment, that prize that people seem to go for. Less interested in being saved or finding God and much more interested in the practice of self-love and the practice of loving through your own pain.

To me that is the spiritual activity of someone who is seriously interested in love. When you do these things, you may find that you are enlightened at some point which is great, very nice, but the goal isn't to get enlightenment.

The goal is moment by moment, offering your love even when you feel hurt, offering your love even when you're tense, or angry or feeling misunderstood, or hated. It doesn't mean you become a doormat. It means you keep your heart open.
You can create boundaries to protect yourself from those who may wish to hurt you, but you keep your heart open, open behind the walls.

You breathe in the pain of what's around you and you breathe out love. You are not only an engine of love, you're an air purifier of love. It's your choice. Breathe in the pain of the world, breathe in the anger of others, transmute it.

Understand that they are just blocked love and breathe out love in return. By bringing the pain of the world, your own pain, the pain of others around you, their anger, their resentment, their smallness, their contraction, by breathing that into yourself, you see that you actually have the capacity to transmute pain into love. It's almost a magical skill that we all have.

We end up where we began, with the Upanishads. That quote, "I took abundance from abundance, and was left with abundance," that is the reality of love.

That is the reality of self-love. You can take as much as you want away from it. You've still got abundance.

This is your journey. It's your journey of discovering that you not only have the opportunity to do self-love and do love as activity, but also to relax into the reality that you are made up of love.

It's a journey we wake up to over and over again, and it's a journey of self-care and hearing our true selves.

We come back to my favorite poet, Mary Oliver, who actually wrote a poem called The Journey. It goes like this:

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice — — —
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
'Mend my life!' each voice cried. But you didn’t stop. You knew what you had to do, though the wind pried with its stiff fingers at the very foundations — — — though their melancholy was terrible. It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and stones. But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice, which you slowly recognized as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper and deeper into the world, determined to do the only thing you could do determined to save the only life you could save.

May that new voice for you be that she’s talking about, may that life you are saving be yours.

May the voice be the voice of self-love.

May the life that you lead stay grounded in your cultivation of self-acceptance, self-love, self-worth.

You are infinitely worthy of love and you can make yourself infinitely more worthy of love through the practices we’ve described in this program.

The voice that allows you to receive the love that you inspire when you learn how to be loved is a voice that inspires love.
I go more deeply into that in my program How to Inspire Love, which I highly recommend, with all its techniques on the personality level, all those techniques in depth.

What you'll learn is that the practice of self-love and the practice of creating love for you and for those around you is something that's done day by day, night by night, moment by moment, choice by choice, again and again and again, exactly like breath itself.

There's no magic moment when it happens and you're done.

It's a practice.

That's why I called this program The Practice of Self-Love.

It's something you can continue to do.

You have lots of exercises now on the doing and the being level, practices for every day, for every night, moment by moment.

As you journey deeper and deeper into a life of infinite self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-love.

Thank you so much. This is Adam Gilad with The Practice of Self-Love.

Thank you so much for being with me.