

*Self*  
**LOVE**

**HOW TO LOVE YOURSELF UNCONDITIONALLY**



**CYLON GEORGE**

**Self-Love:**

**How to Love Yourself Unconditionally**

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This book is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. The reader should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/her mental health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention.

### **A Free Gift**

In appreciation for your purchase of this book, please accept my free gift, [20 Little Tricks to Improve Your Mood Even if You Feel Like Punching Something \(Or Someone\)](#). These tips will help you practice self-love when external circumstances threaten to derail your peace. I hope you enjoy.

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## Introduction

To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it.

—Mother Teresa

Are you struggling to balance the expectations of others with your own needs and desires? In your desire to be selfless, do you consistently prioritize other people's needs over your own? Have you lost the motivation to pursue the things you once loved? Have you fallen out of love with yourself?

A good majority of us have been socialized to be suspicious of self-care. In our homes, at school, and in our houses of worship, we were taught to value service to others above all else. We the selfless are doctors and nurses, moms and dads, teachers, religious leaders, volunteers, policemen, and firefighters. We the selfless can be found in every profession and walk of life.

Though you do so much for others and the community, the good work you do may be in jeopardy if you're not keeping your own lamp filled with oil. If you're exhausted all the time, on the verge of burnout, or constantly blowing your fuse over slight annoyances, you may already know what I'm talking about but haven't been sure where to turn.

As a child, I was shy and had a severe stutter. I was regularly teased for my speech impediment, and I internalized the negative words people said about me. After enough teasing, staring, and jokes at my expense, I became sensitive.

I began to interpret every remark, look, and laugh as a personal attack. The world felt unsafe, and it was hard to be in public, especially if it meant speaking.

My emotional sensitivity remained as I grew. Even after my stuttering subsided, I was still sensitive to how others perceived me. My inner critic was born to protect my childhood self from the humiliating experiences of my condition.

I thought that if I could get people to like me, they would accept my imperfections. I thought that if I followed the expectations of others, catered to their needs, and remained silent when those needs conflicted with my own, I would be respected and thought highly of, even loved.

I thought my path to freedom from my suffering was to become totally selfless.

But my path to self-denial actually deepened my preoccupation with myself.

When it comes to self-love, we either choose the path of total self-indulgence or self-denial.

However, the spiritual teachers, sages, and mystics down the ages have shown us another path. The Buddha, after experiencing both extremes in his own life, came to enlightenment by forging a middle path by balancing these two forces. Jesus spent much of his time ministering to

the poor and healing the sick. He also often withdrew from the crowds to pray and renew himself spiritually.

The journey on the middle path takes us deep inside ourselves. But this journey is not for the faint of heart. We'll navigate the emotional and spiritual minefields that cause suffering. By going directly to the source of your pain, you'll finally have the opportunity to free yourself from the beliefs and habits that keep you from loving all of who you are unconditionally.

I know. This approach is very different from others which seek to navigate you around the pain rather than through it. If you've tried these "pain free" methods before, you'll undoubtedly know that the relief is only temporary. The freedom you will find on this journey will last much longer. Instead of dreading future storms, you'll have the confidence and tools to navigate your way safely through the challenges. You'll find peace and well-being, even in the midst of storms. And by learning to love yourself well, you'll transform your life and the lives of those around you.

## Chapter 1

### The Case for Self-Love

#### Conflicting Messages

We live in a society that has grossly distorted the idea of self-love. We struggle to truly love ourselves because we've absorbed the message that doing so means being self-indulgent or neglectful to others. We struggle to extend loving-kindness to ourselves even as we strive to extend it to others. Sometimes we even treat this type of emotional self-denial as a badge of honor.

Ironically, one of the main forces driving our collective aversion to self-love is our individualistic culture. We live in the age of selfies and "i" devices. Companies make billions by figuring out and catering to our personalized needs. We're constantly told: "Follow your dreams" or "Do what feels good to you." In media, we're confronted with images of pop stars and other celebrities who conspicuously splurge on themselves while over a billion people live on less than a dollar a day. This is what we call self-love.

#### Soul Love

The mixed messages we've received all our lives have created a false dichotomy within each of us. When it comes to self-care, we falsely believe that our only options are either pop culture self-love or heroic selflessness. This type of dualistic thinking has created a poverty of the soul because neither option gives us what we truly need; we've lost our ability to love and care for our very souls.

Whether we splurge on ourselves or deny ourselves, we have fundamentally lost touch with our true selves. Both attitudes are forms of escapism and denial. What are we trying to escape? Our fundamental suffering of restlessness. Catholic priest and spiritual author Ronald Rolheiser writes:

"There is within us a fundamental dis-ease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life, of ever coming to full peace. This desire lies at the center of our lives, in the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of our soul....Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside us."

Instead of tending to the fire of our souls, we either pour gasoline on through pop culture self-love or we try to douse it with buckets of water through heroic selflessness. In our vague existential pain and suffering, we self-medicate with drugs, alcohol, work, money, status, every other conceivable addictive substance, and even by focusing on others' pain to ignore our own.

By actively trying to quench the unquenchable fire of our souls, we create much needless suffering in the world. The fire of our souls does not need quenching; instead, our souls need to love and be loved. However, our souls don't just need the love of other people—they also need our own love. To fully accept the love of others we must first love ourselves.

We do not love ourselves solely for the sake of loving ourselves: we love ourselves so we may unconditionally and completely love both ourselves and others. Our culture may be individualistic on the material level, but on the soul level we're all connected. How I treat my soul not only affects me, but also the world around me in ways I can see and in ways I cannot see. We are all intimately connected in ways we are only just barely beginning to understand.

To love the soul means to commit to tending our fires. Doing so will often be painful because it involves coming face to face with our suffering. Tending our fires involves owning up to our mistakes, facing our perceived imperfections and flaws, and getting to the root of our worries and anxieties. It means facing our chronic tendency to compare ourselves with others.

You may be forced to wrestle with the real reason why you sabotage your own happiness when everything's going well, why you end up with romantic partners who do not treat you with love and respect, or why you're stuck in menial jobs even though your education and skills could take you much further.

Tending to the fire may involve going back to your childhood to understand how the people and environment around you shaped your self-image for better or worse. Tending the fire may feel way more painful than just keeping things the way they are right now, but with acknowledgement and understanding comes self-compassion. And with compassion comes the option of letting go of the beliefs that keep you from extending love to your own soul.

## **The Nature of Suffering**

If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.

—Victor Frankl

## **Why We Suffer**

Our experiences early in our lives shape who we are. Past histories likely hold important clues to why we struggle to love ourselves. Here are some common reasons:

1) You grew up in a religious tradition or household that stressed sin over grace.

If you grew up in a household that stressed human sin and depravity over grace and mercy, you will almost certainly struggle with self-love. In fact, religion is one of the primary ways we gain and perpetuate distorted images of self-love.

However, religion is not the problem itself, but rather in the ways we misinterpret our faith and traditions. Within Christianity, probably the most succinct example of our misinterpretation is the way our traditions have taught us about the relationship among sin, repentance, and forgiveness.



Richard Rohr, in his book *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, brilliantly summarizes how most Christians through the ages were taught to see sin and repentance:

sin > punishment > repentance > transformation

In this configuration, for the wrongs of our sin to be righted, we must first experience punishment then repent in humiliating fashion before being transformed.

But Rohr argues the biblical pattern of sin and repentance is actually:

sin > unconditional love > transformation > repentance

In this model, the “punishment” we receive for our sin is God’s unconditional love. It’s the transformation we experience in this lavishly generous encounter that finally leads to repentance, which is nothing more than resolving to turn away from the path that leads to hatred and instead taking a new path that leads to love.

2) You were parented in non-affirming ways.

If you did not grow up in a household where you were affirmed and told “I love you,” you may struggle with self-love.

In some cultures, it’s not customary for parents to show physical affection to their children. This is by no means an indication that they do not love their children—they are simply perpetuating the parenting styles of their own parents. Other parenting styles that inhibit your ability to fully love yourself include constant criticism, nitpicking, and overprotectiveness.

Overprotectiveness may not be an obvious contributor to our general lack of self-worth and self-love. You may think that being overprotective is how parents show love. This may be true, but it also sends a powerful signal to children that they do not have what it takes to care for themselves.

Parents, in their sincere desire to protect children from pain, either don’t give children a chance to make their own mistakes and learn from them or berate them when they do.

3) You were bullied.

One of the biggest symptoms of our inability to love ourselves shows up in how we treat each other.

Almost every child knows what it’s like to be bullied—unfortunately, it’s become a rite of passage. But with the rise of the internet and social media, bullying has achieved new levels of intensity and cruelty. We’ve seen many tragic instances of young people taking their own lives because they’ve been publicly shamed or bullied online. Some of these attackers are so vicious and cruel that they often continue their online taunts postmortem.

Bullying is also on the rise among adults. In addition to being bullied online, adults often face bullying in the workplace by hostile coworkers and bosses. These sustained assaults on a person are hard to bear and can do tremendous damage to a person’s confidence and overall

sense of well-being. Often the person being bullied may feel like they are totally helpless and have nowhere to go—especially when they are bullied by a boss. Shame and fear may also drive them to remain silent and become loners.

4) You were abused or neglected.

The reality of childhood abuse and neglect is most heartbreaking. If you were abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, you're almost certain to suffer from low self-esteem.

You may harbor a deep mistrust of others and intense feelings of self-hatred. If you struggle to hold down a good job, abuse substances, or suffer from anxiety or depression, your past history may be directly connected to your present circumstances.

You may not think that there's any hope for you, but know that you are not alone. Know that you can learn to thrive through the love of others and the support of a caring and effective therapist.

5) You struggle to move on from past mistakes or regrets.

We've all made mistakes in our lives. But sometimes we're so ashamed of our past that we become stuck—often willing or unable to forgive ourselves and move on.

Betrayal or the desire to cause physical and emotional harm to others can be particularly hard to get over. Also, our decisions that go against our deeply held values can trigger feelings of self-loathing or self-hatred.

These feelings are often accompanied by a desire to punish ourselves for what we've done, which we do in conscious and unconscious ways. Sometimes we engage in vices to numb the pain of regret. We may also unconsciously try to sabotage ourselves so that we never feel a sense of satisfaction, joy, or success.

5) You don't like certain aspects of yourself.

We all have parts of ourselves that we wish we could remove by waving a magic wand. This is especially true of our perceived character defects and physical flaws.

We glorify external beauty and tend to compare ourselves to others and judge ourselves, sometimes harshly, when we don't measure up to external standards of beauty.

People who are bullied because of their physical appearance can carry deep and painful wounds throughout their whole lives.

## **Self-Compassion**

Most of us spend our entire lives doing everything imaginable to avoid our past suffering. We do not examine our past in the attempt of solving past issues, instead choosing to fixate on or use it to justify our maladaptive behaviors. Exploring our past experiences gives us the opportunity to become aware of invisible forces and influences that change our behavior. This in turn gives us the opportunity to transform our self-loathing into self-compassion.

Kristin Neff, a researcher who has dedicated her career to studying self-compassion, notes that there are three specific aspects that define it:

1. Self-kindness: Treating ourselves with kindness and understanding rather than with critical self-judgment.
2. Common humanity: The experience of being connected with others in our experiences of life rather than feeling isolated or alienated.
3. Mindfulness: The quality of being aware and present to our suffering rather than ignoring or exaggerating it.

This self-compassionate person is not immune to the suffering that comes from restlessness, self-doubt, or criticism, but they are able to extend kindness to themselves in the face of their own pain. Rather than being caught in their own ego, the self-compassionate person finds a path to healthy self-love. And by being present in their own suffering, they are able to be present to the suffering of others on a much deeper level. This is an important point because self-compassion is never just about the self.

Most of us, if given a choice, will not choose to feel pain. This is understandable. No reasonable person will choose to be in pain but, according to renowned Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön, the practice of compassion “involves the willingness to feel pain.”

The great paradox of self-compassion is that we free ourselves from suffering not by avoiding it, but through the suffering itself.

If you can stay long enough with your own suffering, you will learn to free yourself of the suffering that causes the most pain—resentment, bitterness, unforgiving, and self-hatred. As painful as they are, these ways of suffering are all optional, and you will discover the freedom to choose your response to your circumstances and challenges.

### **The Interconnectedness of Soul-Love**

We live in a culture that chooses separation and fear over oneness and love. Because we've lost the language of the soul, we've lost our ability to see our individuality as something utterly rooted in a larger reality beyond ourselves.

As long as we're living within our narrow notions of self, we will continue to struggle to truly love ourselves. When we conflate the self with the ego, when we constantly speak and think in terms of “I,” “me,” and “my,” we suffer. This is the idea of self that we struggle to love because there's no room for love when we're preoccupied with ourselves.

The language of the soul points to a much deeper reality of the self that transcends the personal ego, that's connected to God and to other people, the part that continues after we die. It gives the whole self a sacred dimension.

The soul animates us and makes us who we are, yet it transcends us. The soul is powerful and immortal yet fragile and in need of our attention and love. The soul does not require perfection,

yet it's made perfect when we love and accept ourselves just the way we are. Acceptance is the place where healing begins.

If you've fallen for the belief that self-love is all about you, you may resist the idea of self-love. If you've tried to become self-sufficient to numb the pain of the past, you may have only discovered the deeper pain of self-isolation. If you've become totally selfless to escape yourself, you may find yourself weighed down by exhaustion and resentment. You may have become ironically more preoccupied with yourself, not less.

To experience true inner well-being, we need to be willing to care for ourselves and others. We must see beyond the false dichotomy of having to choose between yourself and other people because loving yourself on the level of the soul simultaneously connects you with yourself and others.

Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela both popularized the African worldview called ubuntu. The meaning of the word is often translated as "a person is a person through other persons." To be fully human, we need each other. Tutu once said: "The completely self-sufficient human being is subhuman. I can be me only if you are fully. I am because we are, for we are made for togetherness, for family."

Soul-love is about recognizing the interconnectedness of all aspects of our reality. It's realizing that the way we treat ourselves informs how we treat others and how others treat us. It's recognizing that some of the challenges you currently face are not of your own making. You don't have to beat yourself up for your shortcomings—just knowing you're not alone in your suffering will give you strength when you feel like giving up. It will remind you to extend the same compassion to yourself that you instinctively extend to others in their suffering.

Always remember that you can choose to respond to your necessary suffering in ways that will minimize needless suffering.

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Interested in reading the rest of the book? You may purchase it [here](#) for just \$2.99.