

MERRIMENT MAKING

HOW TO EMBODY, CREATE, AND SPREAD JOY

"Mary's spirit is
incandescent."
SARK



MARY ENGLAND

Chapter 1: What Is Merriment Making?

“Sing, laugh and be merry
because today you're alive.” -

Marty Rubin

What Is Merriment?

Merriment is a word that is derived from the verb, “merry”, that can be traced back to Old English in the 1500’s. Most linguists would refer to “merry” as being an “obsolete verb”, meaning no longer useful or old-fashioned. How utterly silly!

Don’t get me wrong, I am extremely fascinated by language and the way we are constantly evolving with what words mean. Truly, words have meaning because we give it to them! That’s how slang terms end up in the dictionary. Did you ever think that “Adorbs” or “TL;DR” would make it to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary? That’s pretty cool. We get to combine words and create completely new ones. That in itself is an act of Merriment, I believe. Wait, I’m getting ahead of myself.

Merriment was originally used to describe being entertained, specifically comedically. It very much corresponds to laughter, especially when you look at its biggest synonym at the time of origin, “mirth”. Mirth is simply being amused, specifically when you’re expressing that amusement through laughter.

There is a long list of words you could look up to help you understand the meaning of this word, but I want to create our own Uncustomary definition so we’re all on the same page.

Merriment - *To be joy, make joy, and spread joy*

How Did I Become A Merriment Maker?

When I was still working at the psychiatric rehabilitation center in my early twenties, I was about to graduate from college with my Bachelor's degree in Psychology. Whenever someone is about to graduate from anything, they start to field a ton of questions from anyone who obtains this information. "What are you going to do next?", "What are you going to do with your life?", "What's your plan?"

First of all, we'll learn in this book that it's only your business what your plan is, that it's okay to not be sure what your plan is, and it's incredibly important to first celebrate achieving something before jumping into the next chapter of your life. However, I didn't really know any of that yet, and I started getting pretty anxious thinking about my future.

Could I really work here for the rest of my life? I had been on the "front lines" of social work since I was nineteen, and the compassion fatigue was real. But the idea of moving up the ranks meant that I wouldn't have access to the clients in a one on one way unless I became a therapist. Deep down I knew I wasn't going to last much longer there with my mental health. I mean, people burned out there after six months, and I was living on a non-profit salary doing six different jobs for five years!

So what was I going to do? And what was I going to start telling all these people who couldn't seem to stop asking me what was next for me after graduation?

I started coming up with these seemingly wild answers that ultimately ended the conversation, but as I said them out loud, I realized I might not be kidding about the fact that I wanted to, "Write a book, open up a glitter bar, and sit on a rock in the middle of the woods to help people discover the meaning to life".

During the period leading up to my graduation, I had actually graduated from another program that meant much more to me than the diploma I never took out of the tube: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Up until that point, OCD was consuming my life.

I describe myself as being a “walking symptom” before then, because literally any extra brain and physical activity I had was spent making sure I stepped on top of every single leaf and sidewalk crack as I walked around campus, closed all the drawers in any house I was in, checked the doors and locks at night, and did my incredibly long bathroom ritual among about two pages worth of additional rituals with so many irrational rules and regulations I could barely keep up.

I was exhausted, and when I kept finding myself dissociating and ending up barefoot and/or without clothing face down in grass, either somewhere in my neighborhood or my own backyard, I realized that I couldn't keep living like this. After six months of intense and dedicated CBT where I addressed my fears that were basically keeping me captive in my own mind and body, I released so much space for me to expand as an artist, entrepreneur, and woman.

That is where Uncustomary began. I started documenting my creative projects on a simple and very poorly designed blog. Eventually, I not only share my external projects, but the progress I was experiencing inside myself. I began talking about the evolution I was experiencing as a person, being open about having mental illness, gaining a hundred pounds in less than two years after having an eating disorder as a dancer, and being radically honest with people about what lit me up.

One of the things that lit me up was the ways in which I spread joy. I would make art installations for people to enjoy, stuff goody bags for people to find on the street, create interactive projects through snail mail, share ways I boosted morale at my job, or just write lists of things that made me happy from my Happy Journal.

My online presence grew a lot, especially for having no knowledge about what I was doing. I connected with so many people around the world, as well as myself.

A huge turning point for me was when a six and a half year relationship ended with my boyfriend. He told me he knew I was capable of more and our relationship was holding me back from being who he knew I could be. I was so sad, angry, and scared. I didn't get off the couch for two months. I hadn't been without him, let alone single, as an adult, and now he was breaking up with me under the guise of it being for *my* benefit? What a load of shit!

As I would drive home from work, I was so used to going directly to his cul-de-sac at the back of his quiet neighborhood. My car was even more quiet, filled only with the sounds of my sobs as I had to remind myself out loud to not get off on his exit and go back to my dad's house.

I realized I wasn't coping well with this transition, and that was okay. After all the talk about what I was going to do after graduation, I had started working more hours and saving money because I knew that I had about six months left in me at my job before I was going to quit to start my own business. I also needed about six months more savings in my bank account to do that in a smart way, but my intuition told me that if I kept seeing the spots in my day where he used to be, I wouldn't be able to focus and live, and there would only be a shell of me left in six months.

So I gave a month's notice at my job. Ill advised? From me to you, yes. I would never tell someone to quit their day job without a business plan, an enormous savings account, and a support system. I also generally don't recommend being so wrapped up in someone else that their lack of presence crushes you into a million pieces.

However, the decision to leave my job and start Uncustomary officially was what saved me. I knew it was what was right for *me*. I bet on myself, and it was really difficult, especially without the planning I was expecting to have compounded by intense emotions, but looking back, I wouldn't change a thing.

Looking back, him breaking up with me was also the most selfless thing he could have done, and the best present he ever gave me (besides introducing me to my favorite band and my cat, Bug). I will be forever grateful to him for looking me in my eyes, his full of tears, and telling me he didn't want to, but he had to, and one day he knew I would understand because I had big things to do.

He was right.

Uncustomary continues to grow, and it has taken on a lot of shapes in its evolution as I, the person behind, inside, and immersed in it continues to transform as well.

For example, when I started my business, I didn't know what to call myself. I came up with the term, "Merriment Maker" because even though I wanted to write a book, help people love themselves, and still somehow open up a glitter bar (whatever the hell that is, I'm still not sure), I knew it would all be done in rainbow dresses with balloons in the background, leaving a literal trail of confetti behind me.

Around four or so years into my business, I felt a lot of pressure to grow my metrics both with followers and income. I enrolled in a lot of classes, and everyone said to "niche down. NICHE DOWN! You have to commit! Commit to one thing, then you'll be successful!"

The idea of committing to only one thing still feels aggressive to me, and while I think the intent behind this is great for branding, education, and establishing yourself as an expert, we are all multifaceted human beings. I know I am, and so are *you*.

But did I listen to my intuition then? No. I let the classes tell me what to do. And since there aren't really classes on how to be a Merriment Maker, instead of making my own, I changed my job title to "Self-Love Coach" because it was easier to find branding tips for that.

I got so disconnected from my message, passion, and joy that I felt like I was drowning. I resented my business. It wasn't until 2020 that I had a lightning bulb realization that I might be a Self-Love Coach, but that's not who I am. I am a Merriment Maker. Just because there's not classes on Merriment Making doesn't mean it's not valid. In fact, it makes what I'm doing way more interesting if you ask me.

As soon as I realigned and reclaimed my title as a Merriment Maker, reintroduced myself to the world as Uncustomary, and started actively practicing Merriment in my own life instead of just knowing it as a concept I could teach, everything else started lining up for me as well.

Stagnant, stale, and toxic friendships and partnerships fell away. I figured out exactly what I wanted to be doing with my business, and removed old offers. I started charging what I knew I was worth. I climbed out of debt. I found the most honest, reliable, romantic, and exciting relationship of my life. I've become excited about money instead of scared of it. I've repaired and expanded my relationships with my parents. I unfollowed a thousand people on Instagram. I invested in my own education and started actually using the programs.

I also finally decided to stop waiting for a book deal to show up at my door and make it happen for myself, which is why we're all here now.

I may not have opened up a glitter bar, and I don't spend most of my day on a rock, but this is my second book in addition to multiple other publications, I am a life coach, and you know those glitter pills that go viral every couple years with the rumor you can eat them so you poop glitter? I was selling them for years before they went viral! I got 400 orders in one night, it was insane. You have no idea how many emails I've gotten, from women (specifically in the United Kingdom and France) who are furious at me that their boyfriend's feces isn't sparkly.

They say when you love what you do, you won't ever work a day in your life!

Reconnecting to Merriment is the best decision I've made in years.

And I'm so excited to show you how to do it.

What Is Merriment Making?

If Merriment is the act of being joy, making joy, and spreading joy, what do you think Merriment *Making* is?

Yes, it's pretty self-explanatory, but you came here to learn so let's get specific.

What does it mean to Be Joy?

Being Joy is about embodying the emotion of joy. You've heard the expression "unbridled joy" before, right? The word "unbridled" really just means unrestrained, uncontrolled, and not limited.

We're going to talk about embodiment in a much later chapter, but for now I want you to know that embodiment is the practice of using your body to express a feeling or sensation.

Think about it with someone that's not necessarily as subjective as joy, like being tired. How would you embody being tired or sleepy? What if you were an actor who had to demonstrate being sleepy? (This makes me think of the episode of "Friends", where Joey is instructing everyone on how to act like they like Rachel's meat trifle by rubbing their stomach and smiling, and Chandler says, "I'm not paying for those acting lessons anymore!")

Acting lessons and sitcoms aside, this can still be a good starting point for embodying a sensation or emotion. If you were tired, you might yawn, move or speak slower, stretch, sigh, have a more slumped over posture, wear something comfy to fall asleep in, or actually be lying down.

What if you apply this to joy?

How can you demonstrate that you feel happy about something? Maybe with smiling, laughing, jumping or bopping up and down, gasping, speaking more upbeat, dancing, twirling, or a relaxed posture and open arms/hands.

How can you demonstrate that you feel happy about something with your words? With your tone, noises, expressions, exclamations, body language, and behavior?

There's never a need to express joy in an inauthentic way. If you aren't happy about something, there's no need to fake it. In fact, it's pointless and you're just creating more work for yourself.

What if someone made you a sandwich because they thought you might be hungry, but it was with ingredients that you dislike, are allergic to, or make you sick? You might be more inclined to say something if you're allergic, but not if you "simply dislike" it because that person was being kind to you, and we don't want to be rude. There's actually a lot to unpack here with people pleasing, but moving past that, what is the simple potential reaction of you telling the person that you loved that sandwich to "be kind"?

They might make it for you again! Now what do you do? You eat the sandwich you dislike because you lied the first time and it's "too late" now? Before you know it, you're in a relationship with someone who is buying you ingredients of that favorite sandwich for your birthday because you just "love it so much", and you're finding ways to dispose of the sandwich like Rachel's trifle.

"Sorry babe, a pigeon just ran off with it!"

My point is that you shouldn't fake joy, satisfaction, contentment, or really any emotion ever because it is inauthentic for your own alignment and can create a lot of problems for the ways in which you interact with anyone and everyone else.

Honesty is always the best policy, including when it comes to our joy (and orgasms!).

That said, so much of our lives we have been told that we are "too much" of many things and "not enough" of the rest. We have been conditioned to live in fear of expressing ourselves authentically. We are either people pleasing and prioritizing someone else's joy about a sandwich above our own joy about the same sandwich, or we're actually really excited about a sandwich and want to jump up and down, but have been told that's too childish, immature, or inappropriate.

We've been told that it's "just a sandwich". "What's wrong with you?"

Hold it together! Dial it back. Turn it down!"

I am here to give you a fat permission slip on rainbow paper that said, Release it all and turn it up to eleven, “Spinal Tap” style. If you are excited about something, I want you to practice embodying that feeling. I want you to practice letting it out of your body. I want you to stop worrying that someone else is going to see your excitement and not talk to you ever again. I want you to realize that you can’t make or spread joy if you don’t embody it first.

In this book, we are going to work together to break through fears as to why you are scared of embodying joy and learn tools around loving yourself, feeling motivated, having perspective, connecting to pleasure, reigniting our passions, and so much more that will help you to do all of the things I just asked you to do.

What does it mean to Create Joy?

Once you are beginning to embody joy you feel from external stimuli inside your mind, body, and energy, the next step is to create your own joy.

In the first step of embodying joy, especially at the beginning, we are usually reacting to things outside of ourselves that we feel “make us” happy. Maybe that’s when you see a specific aesthetic, when you hear a certain song, when your friends send you loving text, or when you find out news that a marginalized group got legislation to protect them from future oppression.

It’s really important to be aware of what external sources are inspiring joy in us.

I strongly recommend writing a list of “I feel happy when...” and listing out one hundred things.

Yes, a hundred. There are seven billion people in the world and millions of experiences to have. I am positive that you *can* identify one hundred different circumstances, sensory experiences, repeated conditions, past experiences or memories, or concepts that inspire the feeling of joy in you.

Once you have this list, look for patterns. Where do you notice themes? Is it around visual inspiration? Is it around a subculture? Is it for a specific activity? Is it when you have interactions with people or when you're alone? Is it more abstract or tangible? Is it related to one of your love languages? What themes do you notice?

The themes for you will be different than anyone else's.

These themes are important for understanding how you want to create and spread joy, as well as the work we'll do together in Chapter 6 on Passions!

Let's say that you tend to notice that your list seems to have a lot of repetition around being creative, doing projects alone vs. in a group setting, and also creating change for a specific cause you love (like sustainable living).

How can you turn that into joy that you are creating for yourself?

Well, first of all, any time you're creating something, working alone, or advocating for change for sustainable living you're creating your own joy.

That's just one example. The point is that your list is full of one hundred examples of ways you have felt happy before, and now you have a huge jumping off point to start from.

It's also incredibly important to point out right now that while external things, whether it is seeing a dog with its head out of the window on a drive or a beautiful new outfit can inspire happiness, and there is nothing wrong with that, the only happiness you'll ever need comes from inside you. In fact, most things you need (after establishing safety and security) are things you already have access to inside of your mind, body, and consciousness.

How do you Spread Joy?

Merriment Making has three main components, and while it is immensely important to feel as amazing as we can ourselves, we are not inside of a vacuum. I believe one of the biggest reasons we are here, on this planet, is to be of service.

The ways in which we can be of service to others is massive. Some people will find their calling of service to their children, in teaching, medicine, sex work, painting, or animals. Some people will have a more micro approach where they are very focused on serving one specific person, and some will have a goal to affect masses of people, no matter who they are, as long as it is in alignment with their values.

The whole point as Merriment Makers is we have the opportunity to embody joy, create it for ourselves, and then share our joy with others by spreading and creating it for others.

Being a Merriment Maker is being of service as an act of spreading joy, kindness, and cheer. It is something that everyone needs and wants, often before they realize they need it.

Let's go back to the list you made of ways you have felt happy and the example from before. You might mix, match, and combine all of the categories together into something where you start your own solo creative project to make eco-friendly products that you donate to your community or start selling in a small business. Now you are being of service to others!

Remember, Merriment Making doesn't need to have a million followers or a million dollar budget to be effective. If you left somewhere or someone brighter, lighter, or more cheerful than when you found it/them, you have done an amazing job.

Reconnecting To Your Joy

This book is being written as vaccines are starting to become more prevalent in the United States for the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pain is far from over and the idea of "normal" was finally confronted as being nonsense a long time ago.

Many people feel like they lost their ability to go out and dream big because our safety rose to the highest priority. The thing about the way our needs work, according to Abraham Maslow, is we really aren't able to effectively focus on anything else if our safety and security is threatened. When we are actively in a state of fear, especially when it comes to our basic needs for shelter, health, food, money, etc. we are in an extremely heightened survival mode.

It is simply unrealistic to expect someone to go after a creative dream or do anything past surviving when it's unclear if they're going to be alive tomorrow for whatever reason.

So after more than a year, for many people, with safety being the forefront concern in our minds (even when it got sent to autopilot to wear a mask, wipe down groceries, and keep sanitizer everywhere we exist), we're not really feeling like joy is possible. It got pushed so far to the backburner that it fell off the stove top, and when someone like me comes in and tells you that Merriment Making is still as important as it ever was, or that we should be focusing on it while other countries still don't have vaccines, you lost your job, your healthcare, or a loved one during this collectively traumatizing experience, you might want to roll your eyes and completely dismiss it. I get that.

Frankly, it might feel irresponsible to want more for yourself.

And by more, I mean to feel happy.

And can we be even more real? It wasn't just COVID. It was life. It was everything.

This isn't to downplay the pandemic in any way. What I'm saying is your life stressors might have been extremely exacerbated by the pandemic, but you had them well before you even bought your first face mask.

It might be hard to think of life before this huge historical time period, or maybe that's all you can think about. I simply want to acknowledge that while we're more likely to feel disconnected from joy as a collective right now, that it's extremely possible that you were already there before 2020.

We are going to connect to joy together. And we're going to connect to it over and over again. As many times as you want to, as many times as you need to. We're going to take it back, and learn how to get it started even if you feel like it was never there before in the first place.

You see, we come into this world with unbridled joy and unlimited potential for exuberance and Merriment. I do believe that some of us are biologically wired differently than others, and no matter what it's going to be a little (or a lot) more difficult to practice Merriment than someone else. I believe that mental and physical illnesses can be genetic, that there is absolutely a physiological difference between my neurotransmitters and someone else's, which creates a potentially wider gap for me to feel, create, and share joy. That might be true for you, as well.

I am not here to tell you that any illness will disappear with the practice of Merriment. I am both a Merriment Maker and mentally ill. Merriment Making makes my life better, it makes other people's lives better, and it gives me more incentive to take care of myself, especially the symptoms of any illness.

I am also not here to tell you that the world is going to wake up "at peace" because people are reading this book. There is an enormous amount of tragic trauma, war, and collective pain happening all over the globe for generations. Being a Merriment Maker might not stop a war, and it won't erase trauma, but it can create a moment where we remember why we're fighting to be alive. It can create a connection between parties that humanizes us. It can have an incredible ripple effect that won't begin unless you start it.

I know that happiness can feel like a really frivolous and privileged topic. There might be a part of you that feels like with all the wars, oppression, poverty, and intense pain and trauma all over the world that the idea of focusing on practicing Merriment is selfish and superficial.

Please remember that your ability to have empathy for others who are in pain likely means that you know exactly what it's like to be in pain. And the fact that someone else is in pain does not mean that your pain is not valid. It is amazing that you have perspective and aren't attempting to be a martyr, but it is also important to recognize your own pain because without doing that you can't change it.

Creating more joy in yourself will give you more time, energy, and resources to actually make a difference for other people who are in pain. Remember that ultimately, practicing Merriment is to be of service. You can't be of service with your unique gifts if you are in so much pain and fear that you are scared to go after your dreams, whether they are for you, the collective, or both.

We are not our labels. They educate us on how to make our Merriment Practices work for us in a more catered and unique way. But if I let my illnesses stop me from practicing Merriment, from starting my business, from writing, from loving, from living... I wouldn't be here.

I want to show you that it's possible for all of us. Including YOU.

Confronting Fear

Why the hell is there so much talk about fear, war, rock bottoms, and illness in this book about Merriment? Oh, babe.

We think that because joy feels good that it's going to be easy. I have news for you: anything worth experiencing takes practice, and Merriment is a practice just like meditation, learning to ride a bike, or becoming an expert in anything.

The biggest collective secret and truth is that everyone experiences pain and everyone wants to be happy. If everyone is constantly saying they want to be happy and that's their big, ultimate goal, then why don't they just do it? Why do I still get so many emails asking me what the secret to happiness is? Why are people paying thousands of dollars to personal development gurus for get-happy-quick formulas?

Facing our fears is absolutely key in making any change. Ultimately we want to become more aligned. We know we want to be happy, we want to feel, create, and spread joy, but we aren't doing those things. The goal is to get the values of our desires, our mindset, and our behaviors all in alignment, but we can't do that if we don't look at the root of why we haven't been able to do it already.

If you think you can read this book and become more joyful without doing the work, I wish you well. I just want to remind you that right now there are fears, conditioning, preconceived ideas, limiting beliefs, and an inner critic all working against you. If they weren't, you wouldn't have bought this book to reconnect to your joy because you would already be a master.

So trust me when I say that you can't do surgery on a spleen if you don't know where the hell a spleen is. You're just going to be stabbing and jabbing around, and it's probably not going to end up well for anyone. In order to realign, we have to know what's out of alignment first. So make a commitment right now to me, but more importantly to yourself, that you're not going to shy away from the scary stuff. The more you work at it, the less scary it becomes.

The work we're doing when we are addressing our fears is what we will refer to as "shadow work". This is simply figuring out the "why" the fear or discomfort exists, and then creating more space and movement through the perspective and tools provided.

Remember when I told you about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy? I used to come home every night and walk around a table thirty times without "unwinding" myself and then sit with a dresser drawer open for forty-five minutes. I would cry, sweat, scream, and have a panic attack the entire time for the first few weeks. I would collapse in exhaustion. But every week, it got a little less painful.

Over time, I was able to sit with things, literally and figuratively for a lot longer, and at the end I felt more space in my mind and body that had previously been consumed by symptoms and fear. With that space I created Merriment, a business, and a loving relationship with myself among so many more things it would be an entire book just to list them. I addressed the root of my “why” (an irrational fear), I created more space (with perspective that I had more control over my fear than I realized and the things I was scared would happen if I did or didn’t do certain things weren’t factually accurate), and then I created movement in my life with the momentum of enthusiasm and love that I felt as a result of the first two steps.

Remember that only you know your body, mind, memories, and limitations. Staying in our comfort zone is beautiful for self-care, but won’t create change. However, we also never want to create new trauma or a dangerous situation.

Please stop if anything feels like too much. You are always in control.

You can always also get one on one coaching or counseling to coincide with the tools in this book.

If being happy was easy, we would all be happy. If being a millionaire was easy, no one would be broke. This isn’t an overnight scheme, but there will be a lot of bows to wrap it (or yourself) up in. I promise.

Being A Student Of Merriment

This book is going to teach you how to be a student of Merriment. In order to be a Merriment Maker, you are going to have to practice Merriment.

This isn’t meant to sound like more work for you. I mean, I guess it is, but it’s not. Anything is work, technically. You just either enjoy it or you don’t, right? And we’re constantly practicing things like we’re going to be in the Olympics for them all the time, we just don’t realize them.

For example, how good are you at Instagram? Shopping? Watching Netflix? Finishing off your favorite junk food? Slipping into an old habit? Communicating? Making nachos? Sexting? Making yourself orgasm? Writing emails? Being busy?

We're practicing things all the time. Some of them are things we love, some of them are things we resent. Some of them are things we wish we didn't spend as much time on as we did, some things we wish we practiced more or started practicing a long time ago.

I am so proud of anyone who is willing to look at what is uncomfortable. Merriment and joy might feel like fun and easy topics (well, maybe before you started reading this book, right? Ha!), but this is deep work. So thank you for being willing to take a closer look and trust me as your guide.

I am a lifetime student of Merriment, and I am right here with you, reconnecting to my joy, and awakening my soul, turning the dial up on my passions, and enlivening my life so I can give you real time results and tangible examples of how to do the same.

Chapter 2: Traumas, Addictions, & Habits

"I'm not telling you it's gonna be easy, I'm telling you it's gonna be worth it." -

Art Williams

Fears Are Traumas

At this point, you know this book is more than reconnecting to your joy and cultivating your own personal practice of Merriment; it's about confronting your fears. In every chapter we do a delicately balanced dance of nurturing both aspects of this process: fear and joy.

In this chapter, we are going to dive deep into fear, trauma, addiction, coping mechanisms, and habits (both "good" and "bad", "evolved" and "unevolved", "healthy", and "unhealthy").

To start, I want to flat out lay down a truth you might not have looked at as simply before: All Fears Are Traumas.

Now, that might seem overly simplistic, so let's unravel it a bit to get on the same page.

We do not come into this world with all the fears we have now. We come with love, and the unbridled joy and exuberance we talked about in Chapter One. Every time you had a negative, painful, or traumatic experience that was out of alignment with your natural joyful, unbridled, expansive, unconditionally loving self, a Block of Fear was placed in front of your natural wall of Love. That is all there is: Love and Fear.

Ultimately, we can distinguish any spectrum into these two topics: optimism and pessimism, abundance and scarcity. It's all love and fear. It doesn't really matter, and fear doesn't need to be bad, it's just not comfortable and our goal is to live, swim around, and thrive in our Joy and love as much as possible, and we can't do that if we can't even see the Wall of Love we came into this world with because it's covered with stacks of Fear Blocks!

The good news is these Fear Blocks don't need to be permanent; nothing needs to be! You can decide they are, of course. You can relent, give up, and ultimately decide they are too heavy to move or even too painful to look at. It is always easier to leave something heavy sitting where we found it, even if we know how it will feel to have a clear space and access to what that thing is blocking us from.

Everything you are scared of, whether it's commitment, success, intimacy, loving your body, joy, an animal, or whatever else stems from a past painful experience, which is trauma. You might not remember that experience wholly or in any way at all. The idea that your phobia of something that feels so irrational is based on an experience you can't remember might sound insane, and I get that. I'm not here to tell you that every rock needs to be turned over and examined, especially by yourself, because the truth is absolutely that the reason you don't remember is your body is doing its best to protect you from something it found or still finds painful.

It is never easy to learn why we are scared of something, even if we have a pretty good idea of why. It hurts, it sucks, it's emotional, and ideally needs professional assistance and support. Sometimes you might be surprised at how easy it will be to process something, but that thing can still lead you to discovering something else which is a deeper rooted issue.

Please remember that trauma is relative and valid even if you didn't realize it was traumatic until yesterday or years after the incident(s), you didn't have a "near-death" experience, you don't have PTSD/C-PTSD, even one person didn't believe your story or a part of it, you don't remember parts of it, you've never shared the whole story or all of it with anyone, or you feel like other people have had "worse things" happen to them.

When I refer to trauma, I'm referring to the definition that is a "deeply distressing or disturbing experience". Deeply distressing or disturbing is absolutely relative to everyone. What is traumatizing to one person might not show up as a five on a 1-10 scale, and what used to feel traumatizing to you, might feel extremely desensitized to you now. It's all about your coping skills, mindset, and the circumstances. This isn't about comparison, judgment, or labels. This is about moving forward.

Please also remember that you did nothing wrong by asking to be treated the way you wanted to be treated. You did nothing wrong if someone didn't treat you the way you know you wish to be treated now, but didn't know how to advocate for yourself then. It can be extremely difficult to forgive ourselves for what happened, even if we don't remember. That doesn't need to be an immediate act and can be an ongoing process and goal, but creating more shame and guilt for yourself while you are doing something as courageous as confronting your fear(s) is like taking two steps forward and running a marathon backwards.

Your fears are complicated, wrapped up, tangled, and layered like a knotted ball of yarn inside of an onion. Peeling it is time consuming, frustrating, and going to shed tears, even if it's involuntary.

Everything we talk about in this chapter is related to trauma. There are a lot of ways in which your traumas and subsequent fears can lead you to behaviors and beliefs that prevent you from practicing Merriment and reconnecting to your Joy.

I want this chapter to serve as a foundation for understanding fear in general that will be helpful to applying to any fears we tackle in the rest of this book, as well as any fears you uncover in your own shadow work in the future.

Coping With Trauma And Fear

An enormous amount of things can happen when we have experienced trauma and are now living in/with fear and either trying to process our trauma or avoid it.

We talked about rock bottoms in the Preface, and of course in response to any trauma any individual can experience a detrimental additional experience in response to the traumatic experience, such as self-harm, hospitalization, or incarceration.

Very often, however, people turn inward. They don't share what happened, they don't go "crazy" in a way that is obvious to their loved ones or the external world. They withdraw from their lives, society, and themselves. They build more Fear Blocks, and because those Fear Blocks are so heavy, they're likely dealing with guilt, shame, and pain, and things are feeling extra difficult at a minimum, they will start to look for relief.

That relief might not look like something that's "that bad" at first. If they did it once, it wouldn't be the end of the world, right? And that's how it works. Whenever your mind and body suggests a coping mechanism, no matter what it is, it's because it believes it's going to provide you with some relief, no matter how temporary, unhealthy, toxic, or out of alignment it is with who you are. It thinks this choice, this activity, behavior, action, is going to help you to forget, escape, or feel good if only for a second.

So in that way, it technically works. It worked at least once, if only for a moment. The problem is, you get a rush of Dopamine, a feel-good neurotransmitter in your brain, and your brain tells you, "Hey if you do that same thing, you won't feel that pain again". So you're much more likely to engage in that behavior again, and then again, and again.

This is how we develop coping mechanisms we label as “addictive”, “unhealthy”, and “toxic”. Ultimately, no behavior is necessarily good or bad; if we really only did it once, it might actually be fine, but our brains are simply wired to say, “Push the button again for the same desired result”, and that button might need to be bigger, more expensive, and have more severe consequences. Or hell, it might just not feel as good and you don’t want to do it again, but it’s already hard to stop doing it because it’s really difficult to stop something when part of your brain or body believes it’s helpful.

Self-Sabotage

Whatever coping mechanism you might have turned to in order to alleviate pain or create joy as a result of trauma and fear does not need to be judged.

There are some things people will say are “just blah blah blah” and some things people will immediately make a judgmental face at even the mention of.

Don’t let the stigma of anything deter you from addressing something. At the same time, don’t let the lack of stigma of something deter you from addressing something, either! By this, I mean if you’re struggling with an addiction to an illicit substance, it’s more likely that people will be judgmental, and you are not a bad person for this being the coping mechanism you turned to. And if you’re struggling with codependency, impulse shopping, or something there isn’t necessarily a 12-Step Program or traditional support group for, do not let that invalidate your experience and need/desire for support and resources on the journey of healing and self-discovery.

No matter what your “substance”(s) of choice are, it’s safe to say at this point you’re probably not using it in a way that feels good to you. If you made a list of your values of what your Highest Self believes and who they want to be and the things they would need to do to be in alignment with those values, in what ways would your current coping mechanisms be out of alignment with your highest self?

Numbing, escaping, dissociating, and distracting ourselves from our fears, traumas, and pain simply hides what we really want and need to address.

I promise you that the thing you are avoiding will ultimately be your biggest triumph in your story of self-love.

It is delicious to make choices inside our comfort zone that feel familiar but aren't doing anything to get us closer to where we want to be. Sometimes we think of our comfort zone as this comfy, cozy, cute place of self-care with bubble baths and whatever else is Instagram-worthy. It can be that, but your comfort zone can also be really grody. It's also full of unconscious decisions, and deliberately unaligned choices that we want to sweep under the carpet. That's not so cute, is it?

So why do we keep doing this? Why do we keep living inside of our comfort zone? Especially the super not cute comfort zone that we want to hide from the world and ourselves? Why don't we "just" address our fears and grow into our Higher Selves overnight? Oh, so many reasons!

We Like To Play The Victim

Before you say, "Oh no, not me! I would never play the victim! I hate when people do that!" Hear me out. I'm not saying you're consciously playing the victim.

It is much easier to actually have our fear and/or trauma be a (limiting) part of our identity. Why? It's ours. It's our story. It's our experience. It's unique. It's interesting. Feeling lazy, outcast, unique, freakish, etc. is actually a huge ego boost. We use pain as an identity more often than we realize, and most of the time it takes a big mind shift to even recognize we were even doing it or for how long!

In Psychoanalytic Theory, there is a concept called “Secondary Gains” which basically means when we are sick, in crisis, or experiencing adversity or any kind we ultimately get “advantages” or “benefits” as a result. These advantages, so to speak, aren’t usually conscious, and it takes a lot of self-awareness to even realize or admit that this is what’s happening, but I want to introduce you to this concept because it is incredibly eye opening.

Let’s use drugs as an example. For whatever reason you started using any drug, you have probably considered the notion of stopping or decreasing use if only for monetary, health, or relationship benefits. And yet, it’s almost never that simple. Would your bank account be bigger, your skin be clearer, and your relationships be stronger in terms of communication and connection if you stopped using this drug as much or at all? Likely, yes. But you don’t quit. Why?

Addiction, sure. Addiction is real. It is an illness. Whether it is psychological, physical, or both. Hard stop. Addiction can kill you. And certain substances like alcohol and opiates should also always be weaned off in a clinical and monitored setting because of the physical complications that can arise.

Is it always an addiction, though? No. I know people who drink, snort powders, smoke nicotine or weed, and could physically stop tomorrow with no physical issues. It’s not always the physical addiction that we’re conditioned to focus on. It’s the psychological addiction mixed with the Secondary Gains.

Secondary Gains for using drugs might look like the fact that all of your current friends use that drug, too. You might be worried if you stop using that drug you won’t ever see your friends again, will be the “sober” one, get made fun of, have to make excuses, or won’t even have anything in common with them once drugs are removed from the situation.

It might look like not having any sympathy from people who you know are worried about you and your drug use. It might look like having to be responsible with the money you have now that you're not spending on drugs or the time you're not using getting high.

We are actually much more afraid of success and responsibility than we are of failure! If you stop getting high all the time, you might have to actually look at your inner demons, clean your house, stop calling out of work, talk to your parents, and look at your goal list. You won't have the excuse of being high and broke from getting high to use as to why your life isn't going how you want it to. It will now be "your fault". We don't want things to be our fault, we want a scapegoat.

We want to blame Mercury Retrograde for when we forget our appointments, we want to use our toxic partner's shitty behavior as a rationalization as to why we did something shitty but not as shitty in comparison, we want to use our traumas, illnesses, fears, and coping mechanisms as reasons why we aren't living our dreams. It's not our fault, it's our past's fault. It's our trauma's fault. It's someone else's fault. Anyone else's, just not ours.

This isn't negating our trauma. Ever. This isn't excusing abuse. This is saying that whether or not there is justice, an apology, forgiveness, or anything following the traumatic event, you are still here. You get to choose how you want to live.

We get stuck wanting to go back to who we were before the trauma instead of focusing on building a new life.

It is safest to be unhappy. It is easiest to be pessimistic. The devil we know is to live with our old coping mechanisms. However, it's ludicrous to be shocked by repeated behavior that yields the same results. If you want different results, you need a different approach. Sometimes we have to honestly get really fed up with the way we've been doing things, flip the table, and try something totally different.

Your life right now is a result of past experiences and choices. What do you want your life to be like in a year from now as a result of the choices and experiences you choose to take part in in the next year?

What Does It Mean To Heal?

Remember that pretty much everyone has trauma. Certainly everyone has pain. So while your experiences absolutely make you unique, and you can definitely use your experiences to gain insight to your life purpose and how to help others, it is not who you are. Your pain and traumas are not what define you. Your coping mechanisms and addictions also do not define you.

Trauma is not the flex, the flex is healing. So what is healing?

Healing, by definition, is the process of something becoming healthy or sound again. The key word in that definition, I believe, is “process”. Healing from trauma is non-linear, but does have incredible results. It heals all parts of your body including your nervous system, empathic mind, psychic body, and vibration.

Is anyone ever really healed or completely balanced? Probably not. For example, if you were to look at physical “fit” metrics in terms of how fast someone can run, their muscle tone, their blood work, or whatever other “objective” measurements in terms of physical health and strength, you might find someone who checks all of the boxes you have set up on a checklist. Now let me ask you, is that person also completely healthy emotionally, psychologically, sexually, spiritually, professionally, financially? Or have they spent so much time working on their physical health that at least one of those things has fallen at least from a 10 to an 8 or 9?

I personally don't believe that you can be at a ten on “healthy”, “fulfilled”, “joyful”, “abundant”, or “satiated” in all areas of your life at once. I think we are all so multifaceted that when we pull our attention to one thing that something else must lose focus just due to physics. We recreate balance by continually rotating what is important to us.

It can also be asked, are you healed or just distracted? Many people I see who claim to “be healed” have identified that there was one element of their lives that was out of whack, and then they went really hard in another direction with something else. An eating disorder turns into an obsessive bodybuilding career or alcoholism turns into an aggressive zen/yogic lifestyle.

Is there anything wrong with bodybuilding or practicing mindfulness or yoga? Absolutely not! But you know what I'm talking about. It's the full 180 spin where you don't necessarily confront your fear, you kind of just put on a different outfit.

Creating New Habits

The reality is that new painful things are going to keep happening in your life. That's not meant to scare you, it's just the truth. When things get difficult, we will fall on our habits (our subconscious), so if your habits don't feel good then your fall back won't feel good either.

What are you going to do to create new habits that feel good?

Simply noticing a behavior is the first step. After you've noticed a behavior that no longer feels in alignment, you don't always have to replace it with something better and "more evolved" immediately. It can be anything different, including removing yourself from the situation, breathing, bathing, etc.

You also want to take a good look at who is in your life who encourages and enables you to participate in these activities. If you want people to respect your boundaries, you have to stop setting the precedent of disrespecting your own.

I also want to encourage you to get Sober Curious. (This is a term coined by Ruby Warrington.) Don't let the term "sober" throw you if the coping mechanism you're looking to shift and work with has nothing to do with a "substance". The idea of sobriety is simply abstaining from something. Sober Curiosity is literally getting more mindful about why you're doing what you're doing. If we use drinking as an example, you might question why you're drinking, when, who you're doing it with, under what circumstances, what emotions prompt it, what environments it's happening in, how you feel before and after, etc.

This can be applied to absolutely any coping mechanism you're looking to work with. Do you feel like you're a people pleaser? Getting Sober Curious about pleasing people doesn't mean that you won't ever say yes to making someone happy again, it means that you're getting clear about why you're doing it, where that desire is coming from, and creating better boundaries for yourself in the future. It doesn't mean you become sober from pleasing people, drinking alcohol, or impulse purchases, it means that maybe the drinks you have are more conscious to celebrate an occasion and you let your purchases mean something more special to you than dumping money on whatever happens to be near you at the register out of boredom.

There really aren't that many words to describe our relationship to addictions, coping mechanisms, and sobriety, which is why I love the concept of Sober Curiosity. I like the idea that we're recognizing more and more as a society that pretty much everything is a spectrum. If we can acknowledge that sexuality is a spectrum and you might not fall hard left or right in terms of hetero or homosexual and anywhere in between is just as real and valid without the need for a distinct label if you don't desire one, then we can do the exact same thing with sobriety!

Sober Curiosity also gives us the freedom of imperfection. The idea that you decide to stop doing something and you never do it again is kind of far-fetched, perfectionist, and setting yourself up for failure and disappointment, which will create a much harder landing and prompt for relapse. Remember back to the concept of rock bottom repetition?

I believe sometimes that slipping, even a little, can also remind us why we are stopping and want to not use or engage in whatever it is we are trying to readjust our relationship with.

That said, there are lots of reasons why we choose to numb/escape, so it's very important for you to create your own list of reasons why you want to not use. Come up with a list of reasons why you feel good without this activity or substance in your life.

There's a really great line in a movie with Reese Witherspoon called "How Do You Know" where her character says, "Don't drink to feel better. Drink to feel even better". I think that's a really great idea to wrap your head around with anything. Instead of escaping something, how can you use the habit you've had in the past to flip on its head and make it work for you?

(It's okay if this can't be done!)

You don't need a label to justify your process, healing, evolution, or discovery to anyone else or yourself. You don't need to be sober, addicted, in recovery, or anywhere in between to create movement that feels good. It can simply be! Let it be. Release the lexicon and labels. Approach your own mind and behaviors with curiosity instead of judgment and you will get so much further, I promise.

Ultimately, just meet the challenge where it is. Where you are starting is to acknowledge there is something you might be escaping or numbing with. To notice the behavior. To recognize you want to do something differently instead. All of these thoughts are active thought work that most people won't even bother to deal with their whole lives. You are already ahead of the game.

You don't ever need to "replace" a habit with something else, I find that it helps to create more things that feel good. Create more good so there's ultimately less time, fear, and opportunity for you to engage in the old habit because you're busy engaging in things that bring you Joy and Merriment.

Chapter 3: Loving Yourself Merrily

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.”

- Buddha

Sick Of Hearing About Self-Love?

Not to toot my own horn, but I was talking about self-love before it was cool. I certainly wasn't the first person to think about it or introduce it to another person.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter is literally from Buddha who died somewhere around 500 BC. The Beat Generation of hippies started promoting self-love in Western culture in the 1960's. In 1991, a children's book by Diane Loomans called The Lovables In The Kingdom Of Self-Esteem was published.

People have been aware that love wasn't only meant to be extended to others, but internalized as well for centuries and millennia.

That said, since around 2010, I have seen an incredible shift in the way we have begun to talk about self-love, self-esteem, and self-help. Hell, we don't even call it “self-help” anymore! It's personal development, self-development, or even personal evolution! The jargon we're using is becoming more expansive, deliberate, and empowering.

If you look at television and movies before 2010ish, the “Self-Help” section of the bookstore was mocked. It's usually full of women crying on the floor, looking to be “saved”. It was meant to be an embarrassing task to look for help and support on educating yourself on your mind, habits, and potential.

Why? The rest of the bookstore is all neutral or prestigious! Was the cooking, travel, or history section mocked in popular culture in that way? I don't think so.

People were bullied into feeling bad about *feeling* bad.

Around 2012, there was a huge shift in what is called the Divine Feminine Movement or the Awakening Of The Divine Feminine. Looking back, I can see personally for myself a huge shift that year, and so *many* people I admire or know personally also experienced a tectonic shift that year or close to it in terms of knowing there was something more for themselves.

(We'll talk more about this in Chapter 11.)

The point is, I believe this movement and global awakening of more womxn being in power, standing up to be heard for themselves and others is extremely relevant to the almost simultaneous shift we saw in how we began to treat self-development.

Self-love became a hot topic. It was almost a craze. The labels changed on the stands at bookstores. There were entire sections for self-esteem, self-care, and even masturbation! It wasn't just "how to get over X", it was how to *love* X, Y, Z.

During this time, I was already old school blogging, like many (but few in comparison to now) other people about self-love and body positivity.

I was challenging the idea of what it meant to use certain words like "fat", why commercials were only covering certain demographics, and making lists every day of tips and tools for people who didn't even know they wanted or needed this content. It was a really exciting time.

It was exciting because something I was so passionate about was becoming "mainstream". As with anything that becomes popular, there are advantages and challenges. It was wonderful to have more people interested in what I already knew about and wanted to make a career out of and be able to find resources locally, cheaper, and easier because they were more readily accessible due to demand.

It was also challenging because words began to get thrown around rapidly with the speed of the internet, things got taken out of context, things lost meaning, and there was a spike in judgment of people who were practicing self-love from others who thought it was too “new-age-y” or “woo”. People who were coming to this practice from a place of low self-esteem were now being bullied for taking a chance and being told they were naive, stupid, and toxically positive. It sucked.

To be fair, looking back, a lot of us were toxically positive, at least a little bit. We hadn't begun to dive deep into shadow work past our own personal therapy. We were only sharing tips on how to practice self-confidence, gratitude lists, and mindfulness. That's honestly why self-care started to get the rap of “bubble baths and pedicures”, because many people were giving surface band-aid advice for years, including myself.

We were also doing our best with what we knew with something that no one taught us either. If I could go back and do it differently, I would, but I also don't know how effective it would have been. Would people have been ready for it if most people in the industry were talking about things that felt “good” and a couple people were yelling, “Yeah, but ALSO please cry, scream, and do things that don't feel good, I promise it's worth it”. Which path would you have taken without evidence of it working yet?

Anyway, I think self-love has evolved so much since 2010, and it should. It will continue to. I'm glad it is and will. Why? Because we evolve, too. We get to make it what we want and share it with others if we choose to!

About eight years ago, I made an official definition of what I think self-love is, and I want to share that with you.

Self-love is a concept, a feeling, and an action all at the same time.

Self-love is a concept, where you approach your life with the notion that you are an important and unique individual. You have innate value, independent of your physical appearance and deserve to have a beautiful life. You accept who you are as-is, even if you have areas of your life you'd like to improve or evolve in.

Self-love is a feeling, where you experience the sensation of being enough. You feel beautiful, worthy, and empowered on a regular basis. You recognize these feelings aren't narcissistic because it's reasonable to want the best for yourself. It's being appreciative of who you are, your talents, your physical body, and your lifestyle.

Self-love is an action, where you take steps to put yourself first. You create self-care routines and implement them with priority and urgency. You say no to things that don't serve you in the highest regard. You have boundaries while maintaining compassion. You follow your dreams because you believe in yourself. (Putting yourself first also allows you to be present and serve others.)

Remember these elements of self-love as we continue through this chapter about Loving Yourself Merrily, this book, and your life.

Psychology Of Self-Love

What is the point of practicing self-love? Well, I believe it's to have a deeper understanding of who we are and why we're here; ultimately to prioritize our own happiness so we can serve others and spread joy. (*Sound familiar in terms of the theme of this book, my beautiful Merriment Maker?*)

So if self-love is the key to happiness, we need to understand what happiness is to move further.

Happiness is not feeling physically and/or psychologically “good” *all* the time, being sad or having any uncomfortable or “negative” emotions, something you can check off on a to do list, or an amount of money you can obtain. It is not solely dependent on having a relationship, a dream job, your youth, or the absence of a mental and/or physical illness.

Happiness is simply the combination of how satisfied you are with your life overall and how good you feel on a day-to-day basis.

Obviously this definition is very subjective, but it can be measured. There is actually an entire realm of psychology devoted to the study of happiness called Positive Psychology. Positive Psychologists measure happiness through many indicators including pleasure, daily mood, satisfaction, engagement, and meaning.

Perception plays a huge part in happiness. If you are able to have perspective in any and all situations, you are likely to be a happier person. This also applies long-term. For example, if you have a bad day, in that moment do you say, “My life sucks” or do you understand this is simply a “bad day”?

Genetics are also relevant. Scientists believe your happiness can be affected up to 50% by your genetics. Basically what this means is that like with anything else, some people are simply biologically predisposed to be happier the same way some are predisposed to develop anxiety. However, this does *not* mean you are “stuck with what you got”. Just because your parents were “unhappy” doesn’t mean you’re doomed! If it did, there wouldn’t ever be success stories of people turning their life around, so release that thought and limiting belief right now!

The point of mentioning this is the baseline you’re starting at might be lower than someone else’s, and that’s okay! It might be more difficult for you naturally to focus on the positive, but that doesn’t mean you can’t! It also might mean that you might not move from a 1 to 10 on a “Happiness Scale” quickly or at all. However, I can tell you that moving three slots forward will absolutely change your life, and that is definitely doable.

I'm not going to spend a ton of time on the science of happiness and self-love, but I do want to acknowledge before we go on that Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs absolutely plays a role. If you don't know where you're going to sleep, where your next meal is coming from, or your general sense of safety and/or security is threatened (which includes finances), your happiness is going to flounder scientifically.

However, once your basic needs on the bottom level of the pyramid are met, someone who makes \$60,000 a year compared to a millionaire doesn't show any significant differences in happiness measurements. The point here is that money can buy more freedom, resources, and opportunities, but the happiness and self-love we are focusing on will always be internal and come from a place that money doesn't buy. You already have those tools inside of you.

Loving Ourselves Through Fear, Trauma, And Addiction

Okay, so Chapter 2 was a doozy. I know it, you know it. And I'm super fucking proud of you for still being here and doing the work. If you somehow hopped, skipped, and jumped over the work in Chapter 2, I *strongly* recommend that you stop in your tracks right now and go back to do the work that awaits you there.

I put things in this order for a reason.

It can be really difficult to address things that feel sticky, icky, and scary. That's what Chapter 2 brought up. My hope for you is that working closely with the behavior that you wanted to reevaluate your relationship with gave you more perspective on why you were drawn to this behavior in the first place and compassion for yourself for the time you've spent on it until now. I hope you can feel for yourself the same kindness you would for anyone else who is going through this book, and not berate yourself simply because it's you. I hope you are aware that you are human, and any habits or addictions you have are coming from pain, fear, and trauma. I hope you believe in your bones that you didn't deserve that pain, fear, and trauma. I hope you understand also that no one can kick start the healing around this pain but you.

After going through such a difficult topic and chapter, the idea of loving yourself might feel more distant than it ever has before, and I want to acknowledge that.

It's okay. You're still in the right place, I promise.

If we can't love ourselves when we're scared, traumatized, and in pain, when can we? We tend to show love for things when someone (including ourselves) is happy or sad. Celebrating or grieving. The extremes, right? We get cards for weddings and lost loved ones. We hug when we're excited to see someone and when we need comfort.

So I want to offer you two pieces of advice around this: 1) If you need comfort, allow yourself to give it to yourself. Also allow yourself to ask for comfort and support from others. 2) Why are we waiting for the extremes to love? What if we hugged, kissed, cuddled, sent cards, and blew bubbles when we were simply content, hungry, full, horny, sleepy, busy, overwhelmed, or calm?

That's what self-love is, babe. It's loving yourself every day. During every emotion, state, stage, and chapter. Stop waiting for someone to offer you an invitation to a dance party if you want to dance, and recognize the world is a damn stage.

Fuck Stability, Embrace The Storm

The older I get, the more I crave stability for sure. I guess it's more security that I crave. My 20's and even the beginning of my 30's were a shit show in terms of security and stability. I was sporadic and spontaneous, and sometimes (most of the time) in an unhealthy way. I sabotaged myself with my spontaneity thinking it was cute and whimsical, but really I was setting myself up for future stress when the rug was ripped out from under me.

It took me a really long time that I was the one who was ripping the rug out from under me. I had been blaming the world, partners, friends, roommates, the government, my parents, whoever really depending on what was happening at the time for why I felt like I was back on my butt on the ground.

"Where did that rug go? I was just standing solid a second ago!?",
I'd think to myself.

Then one day in therapy, my therapist was asking me what I was scared of and I was using the rug metaphor and I realized no one was holding the other end of the rug. It was my hands. Every time that rug had been pulled, it was me on the other end.

Sure, there were times that people did absurd, outrageous, and even abusive things in/to/around me that affected me. But I also continued to choose the same people over and over again, to not leave, and I finally started to take responsibility for my own behaviors and roles in these relationships and situations.

I had been so obsessed with being a wild woman, that I thought I needed to create my own chaos in order to be interesting somewhere deep, deep down. It wasn't conscious, but it was happening.

Here's the thing, though. I am a wild woman. And I want you to be wild, too, if that's something that calls to you. The section of this chapter is called "Fuck Stability, Embrace The Storm" because we need evolution. The storm I'm referring to is our personal evolution. It's the world at large, honestly.

I saw this meme that said we aren't all in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm. The thing is that some of us have canoes, some have yachts, some have tug boats, and some of us are drowning. I thought that was an apt metaphor to describe life, and a great way to articulate why I think Merriment Making is so important. It's not just for us, it's for everyone once we get to the point where we are ready to extend our efforts, resources, and services!

In terms of stability, I want you to have stability and security in terms of the lower section of the Hierarchy Of Needs. I want you to have all your basic needs met.

I want you to have stability in any area of your life that you desire.

I also think it's important to honor consistency in terms of our values and authenticity. What are your values? I want you to use this month to write out your own Manifesto and a list of values (see worksheet). Get really clear on what your unique values are. It's impossible to live in alignment (like we talked about in Chapter 1) if we don't know exactly what our values are. This way, you can be explicitly clear about what is and isn't in line with your beliefs as you make decisions for your day-to-day decisions and future plans.

So it's a balance, babe. Honor consistency of values and the security of your needs, while also embracing the storm that is your personal evolution. It will ebb and flow like the rocky waves at sea as lightning strikes twice. You can do and be all of these things. You can do and be anything you want or can imagine.

Being Kind To Our Inner Critic

One of the ways I can look back and see growth in terms of "toxic positivity" or "spiritual bypassing" (i.e. slapping on a band-aid without looking at the more deeply rooted issues) I did was with the way I addressed the topic of my own inner critic as well as teaching others about theirs.

My approach was much more based around telling the inner critic to "just shut up". To ignore what they had to say and counter the negative thoughts and feelings they were spewing with more positive thoughts so the positivity would essentially "drown out" the negativity. Hot updated tip: that does not work!
(If it does, it won't last.)

Before I go further, let me be clear about what I'm referring to when I talk about the "inner critic". Your inner critic is essentially the voice you hear/feel in your head. It tells you you're not good enough, not pretty enough, not talented enough. It warns you not to try because you won't succeed. It questions if this is worth the effort. It delays your start with procrastination out of perfectionism. It tells you ultimately that you're not worth it.

Where does this voice/feeling come from? Simply put: your past. This inner critic is a culmination of all the negative comments, glances, perceptions, bullies, trolling, harassment, abuse, neglect, teasing, and everything in between from peers, friends, family members, teachers, strangers, and the media. All of these innumerable experiences (many of which you might not even remember for many reasons ranging from self-protection due to what you thought was normal at the time), have led to subconscious insecurities. Some of these have become so strong and painful that they have leaked into your consciousness as well.

No matter where they are in your mind and body, they are relevant and painful, and there is a part of your mind who has essentially absorbed all the negativity and compartmentalized it. That means this part of your mind is flooding with negativity and insecurity, and it's essentially all it knows, which is why that's all it has to offer when it speaks. This is your inner critic.

I still absolutely advocate that you name your inner critic like I used to, but I used to tell you to name your inner critic someone you disliked, a name you hated, or even a politician you despised. I think that's getting farther away from the point and even creating more negativity, though. Naming your inner critic is great because it personalizes this voice/part of you that has been trying to connect with you for so long, and we're angry with it. But it's difficult to have a conversation with someone and make real progress if we're not even willing to learn anything about them, let alone their name!

Maybe you don't want to name your inner critic after you, but name them something you can be compassionate about without it triggering you.

The point is I want you to respect your inner critic.

Why should you respect your inner critic? I know it's hard to imagine respecting someone who you feel has been bullying you for so long. I also want you to remember what we are taught about bullies. Bullies usually have a lot of emotional things going on and they are lashing out because they are unhappy. The best way to actually stop bullying behavior is to connect with the bully where they are.

I want you to acknowledge that while it might feel as though your inner critic is a separate entity from "you", it is actually one of many parts of you. And this part of you is wounded. It is in pain, traumatized, and in fear. Remember back to Chapter 2!

This part of you has seen some shit. This part of you has seen things you might not even remember. It wants to protect you from future pain, and it doesn't have more "evolved" tools to talk to you about the pros and cons of something. It only sees fear and is trying to convince you to run from pain! It's tactics are the ones it has been taught, which are to bully you!

I want you to treat your inner bully like the child you were, and the child that still lives inside of you. I want you to imagine hugging your inner critic. I want you to tell your inner critic you understand they are scared. You can apologize for what they've been through, but also express gratitude for their strength. You can be very honest with them. Tell them you know this is all they know, but you are actually safe right now and you don't need to be told X, Y, and Z. In fact, THEY are safe, too! They need to be told they are safe. They need self-love tools maybe even more than you do!

Create a dialogue with your inner critic. I want you to meditate and visualize your inner critic as a child. Write a journal entry to them. Tell them why you're grateful, why they are great, and demonstrate ways they are tangibly safe (they might not have been checked in with when you were feeling safe, they may have only been activated during negative experiences, so we need to check in with different parts of ourselves regularly).

10 Steps For Working With Your Inner Critic

1. Approach your inner critic with compassion, curiosity, and empathy (like a bully/your inner child)
2. Name your inner critic
3. Create a dialog with your inner critic. Use this script: "[Inner Critic Name], I know you're upset and we've been through hell, but we don't have to be scared. We aren't in danger anymore, we are safe, we are free, we are beautiful, we are loved, and we don't have to answer to anyone because we're an awesome adult!"
4. Acknowledge your inner critic is a separate voice from past experiences that have influenced low self-esteem NOT your own inner monolog
5. Label your negative thoughts and list them on paper or use your worksheet (ex: "I'm not worthy of a significant other")
6. Counter each negative thought with 3 logical/neutral/or positive ones (ex: "Everyone deserves love and I am part of everyone")
7. Do shadow work with each negative thought as much as possible (find EFT/tapping videos, meditations, journaling prompts, etc. for each negative thought which is a limiting belief)
8. Start countering each time you actually think a negative thought with at least one logical thought. You can also start your dialog every time with your inner critic with the paragraph given in point #3.
9. Eventually build up to three thoughts (ideally positive). These thoughts can also ideally not be directly related to the negative thought. (Ex: If the negative thought is "I have an ugly body", your thoughts can be 1 about your body, "I love my legs", and one that's not about your body to make the issue more about loving who you are as a whole, like, "I love my sense of humor" and then something general that you generally love in life, like "I love that I can see rainbows!")
10. Consider changing your dialog and sentence structure of the positive thoughts to "We" instead of "I". So you'd say, "We have lovely legs, we have a great sense of humor, and I love that WE can see rainbows".

There is also another part of you called the inner advocate. This part of you might not come out very often, and it might not even have been called off the bench yet.

That's okay. Your inner advocate is here to help you be assertive, to brag about your successes, to create boundaries, to say 'yes please' and 'no thank you', and to stay in alignment with your values.

You can work with both of these parts simultaneously, but I want you to first address and create a dialogue and ongoing relationship with your inner critic before you move on to your inner advocate. Your relationship with your inner advocate will naturally strengthen over time as you build your confidence and feelings of self-worth.

Self-Esteem, Confidence, + Worth

Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Self-Worth are terms that get thrown around a lot, and honestly get interchanged a lot in addition and on top of Self-Love and Self-Care. To be honest, I don't mind that much, because the intention is never malicious and done in the spirit of personal development and care. If you find that one term serves you best, or fits better with the way you speak, by all means use it more or in an overarching way. However, as someone who studied communications *and* psychology and is generally curious and passionate about language, I want to break down these first three terms for you in the way I best understand them so you can integrate them into your studies and practice.

Self-Esteem – Developed from extrinsic experiences that you've had that form how you feel about yourself today; this is directly related to things people say about you or how you think people perceive you.

Self-Confidence – The faith we have in ourselves regarding our skills, ability, or aptitude regarding various subjects; more intrinsic; allows you to anticipate compromising situations, say yes to new experiences, and take on new challenges.

Self-Worth - The internal recognition that you are a valuable person on this earth, in this body, that is worthy of love from yourself and others

Self-esteem is the feelings of confidence we have in our own abilities and worth, and they're more likely to come from external forces than within. For example, your self-esteem can be more easily damaged by another person's negative comment about you. Many people grow up with constant criticism, bullying, judgment, and trauma that has programmed them to have low levels of self-esteem. Low self-esteem holds you back in every single area of life. Remember when we talked about the inner critic? This is where your inner critic gets all their ammo!

When someone has low self-esteem, it's likely to affect a ton of other areas of their life. I'm going to list a bunch of ways this can manifest in someone's life. Some or many of these might hit home for you. I want to warn you that it might create stress or anxiety for you. Take a breath. Remember that this is not a judgment, only an acknowledgment and a call to action that we can work on this together.

Low Self-Esteem Might Look Like:

- A pessimistic attitude/negative outlook
- Being obsessed and focused on your weaknesses or flaws (mental, physical, emotional, all of the above)
- Doubting your choices
- Feeling like you're not enough
- Wondering why people want to hang out with you
- Large amounts of feelings of shame, guilt, stress, anxiety
- Inability to accept positive feedback or compliments
- Very sensitive to criticism (feels like an attack, can't be used constructively)
- Preoccupation with judging others (including their personal appearance)
- Being socially withdrawn
- Not expressing/vocalizing your needs and desires (not feeling like you're relevant)
- Letting people walk all over you -- even allowing abuse and staying in unhappy relationships (platonic or romantic) because you're afraid no one else will like you

- You don't sit up straight and tall/have poor posture
- Shaking fear of failure
- Not able to leave the house without doing an intense or specific beauty regime
- You give up easily because it feels like nothing matters

When you have low self-esteem, you're also less likely to find a partner(s), get a promotion/have a job you're proud of, and generally be happy. Quite a list, huh? Yeah, it's pretty intense. I know. But don't worry. Again, if you identified with anything on that list, I have ideas, inspirations, and solutions for you. And believe me that you are NOT ALONE! If you don't feel like your self-esteem is high (like through the roof high) you're among 85% of the population.

You also have work to do! You deserve to think highly of yourself, and you deserve to have a "Self-Esteem Reserve" built up like the tallest bunker ever so no one's mean judgment about you will ever make it over to affect you. You can build a Self-Esteem Reserve by consistently working on boosting your feelings of self-confidence and self-worth.

So if that's what low self-esteem looks like, what do we want it to look like in a high self-actualized state? Well, the opposite, right?

High Self-Esteem Looks Like:

- Ability to create boundaries and say no without feeling guilty
- Not worried about what other people think about you
- Not scared of getting feedback or criticism because if it serves you it will only make you stronger
- Feeling like just because you had one negative moment or experience that it doesn't speak for who you are as a person or that everything is ruined
- Not shying away from conflict if necessary because you stand up for what you believe in
- Accepting yourself (and physical body) as it is in this moment
- Being able to be happy for other people's good news/fortune without overwhelming jealousy

- Feeling satisfied in relationships, and knowing when it's time to leave
- Celebrating your successes and honoring your strengths
- Expressing what you want, and not being afraid to chime in
- Accepting praise and compliments with a smile and belief
- Not letting perfectionism hold you back from starting or finishing
- Starting things and going after your dreams because you believe in your ability to make them happen and that you deserve for them to come true

That all sounds really wonderful, right? It is. Straight up. But let me lay this out for you. The things on the high self-esteem list? None of that is possible 100% of the time. Even people who work on their self-esteem and confidence every single day for decades still have setbacks. It's absolutely okay to fall down. The whole point of self-confidence is that you pick yourself back up again because it's not the end, it's just an experience.

I also want to take a second to address something that some people are wary of with self-confidence, which is this idea of needing to walk this fine line between self-love and narcissism. Let me tell you something. Most people aren't narcissists. As an empath I've attracted my share of narcissists and sociopaths (that's a whole other book!). My point is that these people have very specific characteristics that are neurodiverse, by which I mean diagnosable by the DSM, the same way that my OCD is diagnosable. Now, being narcissistic doesn't necessarily mean you have Narcissistic Personality Disorder, but I think you get my point.

Which to take it further is that MOST people are operating from getting themselves out of the gutter with their self-esteem. We are struggling with all these things we've been told, heard, or thought we should be and have internalized.

I would actually argue that if you have the self-awareness to question if you are narcissistic you are probably coming from a people-pleasing background and are the opposite of a narcissist.

Loving yourself and working on your confidence does NOT make you a narcissist! It makes you someone who is able to take better care of themselves, and in turn help the world by giving your gifts easier because you are operating at a higher self-actualized level. If we have no self-esteem, we aren't going to try to share our art or skills or gifts with the world because we don't perceive them to have value. So when you build your confidence, it actually benefits not just you, but everyone who can come in contact with you and your extenuating gifts and energy because it means that you're ready to radiate brighter and more brilliantly.

In short, don't worry about being a narcissist. If you literally can't have a conversation without thinking about yourself and don't experience empathy when someone shares strong emotion with you, talk to a therapist. Otherwise, please work on boosting yourself up, up, and UP.

Where Did Our Confidence Go?

We aren't born lacking self-esteem and confidence. In fact, we have an abundance of it when we enter this world.

After working with so many people in various coaching scenarios and modalities, I have recognized a recurring theme in terms of the first time our confidence is shaken, and I wasn't surprised that it had to do with being out of alignment.

Think about when you were a child. You knew what you believed to be true. Some of that might have been from your vivid imagination, but you also had a very strong connection to your gut instinct, or intuition. You could tell when something didn't feel right. You knew when things did and didn't feel safe. You saw and felt things very transparently.

One day, maybe between the ages of five and ten years old, you shared something with someone you trusted. Maybe it was a caregiver, a parent, a teacher, an authority figure, or someone you had faith in. Someone you believed "knew better than you".

You told them something that happened or something you felt, and they told you no. They told you, “No you didn’t see that”, “You’re wrong”, “That’s not what happened”, “You’re crazy”, “Stop lying”. You insisted that’s what you saw, that’s how you felt, that’s definitely what happened! They dismissed you and insisted very strongly that you were wrong. They did it so sternly and assertively that you began to question whether you were actually right.

Did that *really* happen? Did you make it up? Is that feeling real? Are you a liar? Who was right? After all, you trusted them, and up until that point you didn’t believe they had steered you wrong, so why would now be different? But something in your tummy told you it was off this time. And from then on, you began to question when you were right. Whether your feelings or perception were valid. This had a direct effect on your self-esteem, confidence, and worth. Our belief of what happened and what we were told happened were out of *alignment*.

Now, maybe this scenario didn’t happen to you, or it’s not an exact replica of a memory you have. Maybe it did happen quite like this but you blocked it out, or maybe you’re remembering something almost verbatim right now and it’s bringing you back. All of these are okay.

The point is a lot of the time our confidence is directly affected at an early age by our caregivers, and it’s not intentional or malicious, it’s a lack of understanding or compassion for our uniqueness.

Now, you have the opportunity to do two things.

One, go back to your inner child and talk to them. Tell them you believe them. Tell them you’re sorry they didn’t get any validation from the person they shared their experience with. Tell them this experience doesn’t change what they felt or saw, and it doesn’t change their integrity or ability to be a good person, honest, or effective. Hug them, hold them, tell them what you needed to hear when you were younger. You can do this in a meditation, in a letter, or with a therapist.

Second, you have the opportunity to now listen to children and other people in general. To hear their stories, to believe them, and hold space for them in a way that gives them a sanctuary and time to share, vent, or explore whatever they need to explore. This is a way we are Merriment Makers: by taking the experiences we know we needed and providing them for others.

Remember that self-confidence and self-worth and more internalized states, and that's what we're ultimately after. Raising our self-esteem is a lot of shadow work exploring the wounds and trauma we've experienced before now (and in the future). Raising our self-confidence and worth is about loving ourselves, creating rituals, and participating in activities that remind us of our value without validation from anyone.

It sucks that people didn't give us validation when we were young and really just wanted to be heard and believed, but we can't chase validation for our entire lives to rectify that. Validation is external, and ultimately it doesn't matter what anyone else says or believes about us. Anyone can change their mind about us in a second, so the only consistent thing we have is our values and unconditional love for ourselves.

Loving Our Physical Bodies

Body love is an incredibly important part of self-love. In fact, it can often be the most difficult part for many people. We often find it easier to love our minds, personalities, choices, and even create peace with our past before we can create peace with our physical bodies. There are many reasons for that.

One of them is obviously the pressure from society and the media. It's absolutely horrifying how aggressive things have become in terms of the way the "beauty" and fashion industries among others market off of insecurities they create so they can manufacture products they sell to "fix" those insecurities. In a natural state, most people would not be bothered by half of the things you see products sold to add, remove, or amplify in the beauty section at your local drugstore.

Have hair here but not there, make your eyelashes giant, be tan (but not dark), whiten your teeth, be thin and also curvy, have no wrinkles but also don't demonstrate or admit you've had surgery. It's really outrageous. There are literal "beauty standards". Have we even looked at just the word "standard" next to beauty? I thought beauty was subjective? How can there even be a standard for beauty? Isn't that absurd?

The beauty standards are even more outrageous for people of color. They are essentially supposed to look as Caucasian as possible, and then there aren't even any products available even if that's what someone wanted to do (and most of the time those products are literally locked up for "security"), which shouldn't be a thing.

People with disabilities are shunned. If you have a wheelchair, cane, hearing aid, eye patch, prosthetic limb, or a scar, people feel as though it's "more polite" to look away because we were told that was "nice" as little kids when we were curious and stared at something that we hadn't seen before.

Fat people are automatically lazy and unhealthy and people cross their fingers to not sit next to them on an airplane. They wonder how they "get to have sex". Yet skinny people are automatically anorexic and should be models.

Trans and nonbinary people who don't present as masculine or feminine are still being targeted for violent hate crimes for things like existing.

The hate crimes for the way people look don't stop there, and continue for Black, Brown, and all people of color, Jews, Queer Folk, Deaf people, Blind people, Houseless people, people with burns or facial abnormalities, people on the spectrum, people with mental illness, and people chronic illness, among many other marginalized groups.

Why can't we accept that people look differently? We are supposed to. Someone looking differently than you or than what you have experienced doesn't equal a threat. Approach life with curiosity and benevolence instead of judgment and hate, and you will create peace every time.

We all have our own hang ups about our bodies. Besides the media and marketing telling us what's "wrong" with us, and potentially being targeted by strangers for our appearance, we might also feel as though our bodies have betrayed us in some way. It's possible if you have experienced a mental or chronic illness you know what it's like to feel like you're no longer in charge of your own body. To lose control of your bodily autonomy is scary at best, and it can create a very rough relationship between our minds and physical body.

When adults are asked what they would change about their bodies, they usually sigh and say, "How much time do you have?" When kids are asked this, they usually either say, "Nothing" or "I'd add butterfly wings". The same way we don't come into this world with an inner critic or low self-esteem, we also don't arrive with body image issues. They evolve over time.

Body love is not simple, and it's not expected for you to go from body loathing to body love in one leap. There are many steps and spaces on the spectrum of body love, like frustration, grief, neutrality, like, and positivity. It doesn't need to be radical unconditional love at first, the same way when you start dating someone, you feel the waters out and get to know them. I want you to start dating your body!

Here are some ideas on ways to start your body love journey now!

- Challenge societal norms - what regimes or rituals do you have that you do because you feel like you're "supposed to" or feel obligated to do? i.e. what would you stop doing if you didn't see anyone for a month?
- Appreciate what your body does - make a list of things you're grateful your body can do (internally and externally)
- Change how we raise children, the dialogue we use, the compliments we give
- Write a journal entry of what "empowerment" means to you
- Spend time naked (or at least with a part of your body exposed) at least 5 minutes a day
- Move your body - any movement is good, sitting, standing, arms, legs, facial movement
- Connect sexually (unless you are aromantic or asexual and this doesn't apply to you) - masturbation, having sex, embodiment practices (more on this in Chapter 11)
- Stop judging others and notice where you are drawn to judge
- You can celebrate your flaws, but what if you stopped drawing attention to them and just said, "I'M BEAUTIFUL! LOOK"

The problem, besides externalized hatred, is internalized hatred. It goes back to bullying. We hate ourselves, and we project it. I'm obviously not saying someone who hates their hips is entitled to commit a hate crime, that's insane. I'm saying that there's something to judgment being a mirror.

Judgment Is A Mirror

When I was a teenager and extremely sick, I pulled hair out when I was anxious (Trichotillomania). This combined with the overplucked eyebrows style of the early 2000's made for some extremely thin eyebrows, and a lot of extra insecurity. I was obsessed with how my eyebrows looked, but I couldn't stop plucking them multiple times a day.

Since this was a huge issue for me, I was really worried that people were staring at my eyebrows every time they met me. I did my best to distract from my eyebrows with a lot of eye make-up and long hair in my face, but every time I was around someone, I was terrified that's all they could see.

Somehow, this obsession expanded from not only my own eyebrows, but onto other people's eyebrows. Every time I met someone, the first thing I did was stare at their eyebrows, and the weirdest thing was I was actually judging *them* on theirs! I started creating ideas in my head about what certain shapes of eyebrows meant for different people as a way to make myself feel better. It was like bullying inside of my own head. I never ever said anything to anyone about it, but in my head I would think really mean things about this person I knew nothing about based on their eyebrows, which honestly looked just like mine!

It was really a way my inner critic was coming out to bully me through a very specific avenue. This is what bullies do, right? They're unhappy, so they lash out. I'm glad I kept my words in my mouth, but the obsession was strong and years long.

After I started working on my relationship with my own body and was able to stop pulling, specifically on my eyebrows, I noticed my desire to check out other people's eyebrows lessened over time, and now I don't even look or care.

I think this is a really good example of how judgment is a mirror. When we are unhappy, we will find ways to find evidence for this, even in our subconscious minds. We will project our unhappiness, bully ourselves, or worse.

Again and again, my goal for becoming a Merriment Maker is as much for you as it is for the rest of the world. If you are embodying, creating, and spreading joy, you will be able to share these lessons with others who will also be able to embody, create, and spread joy. The more people we have as Merriment Makers, the less hate there will be internally and then externally, and the more peace there will be, one person at a time.

Mirror Work For Merriment

Speaking of mirrors, if you haven't tried mirror work, it's time! Mirror work is something I learned from Louise Hay, and simply put it's the act of engaging in positive self-talk, out loud, while looking at yourself in the mirror. More specifically, the positive self-talk takes the form of positive affirmations, and your best results come from making eye contact.

It can be very uncomfortable at first, but it's one of the best self-love techniques for building self-confidence that exists.

Positive affirmations are effective on their own when you write them down, repeat them out loud, or read them as reminders on a regular basis, but mirror work takes positive affirmations to the next level because you get to face yourself as you're saying the thing that may be difficult for you to believe still. You get an immediate visual on how your body reacts to hearing these words. Basically, we can't hide from ourselves in the mirror.

Mirror work is free, quick, easy to repeat, you're able to do it alone, it builds self-confidence, you gain body positivity, become more aware of your connection to your body and your thoughts, and all you need is a mirror and a positive attitude.

How Do You Start Mirror Work?

- Make a list of positive affirmations that you want to start working with
- Pick a private place with a mirror
- Look at yourself, make eye contact
- Take a big deep breath in, then out
- Say the positive affirmation out loud while looking at yourself
- Repeat your affirmation at least five times while maintaining eye contact, and notice how your body and face are reacting, as well as any emotions that are coming up for you
- Take another big deep breath in and out
- Say, "I love you" to yourself in the mirror at least three times to close out your session

- Go to a place where you can document your experience/journal. Write down what affirmation(s) you used, how comfortable you felt at the beginning and at the end, how long you worked for, etc.
- Repeat every day. Twice for best effects. Try to work for five minutes (set a timer!)

Tips For Mirror Work

- Try adding your name into the affirmation, so you're addressing yourself
- Figure out the best time of day to do this, so you're likely to actually do it daily
- If you're not sure where to start with positive affirmations, you can list out things you like about yourself or you know you're good at; worst case just go with "I love myself"
- Try smiling while you're saying the affirmations, or at least in between speaking
- Try sprucing up your mirror with stickers, sticky notes, notes in dry erase marker or lipstick, etc.
- Try mirror work wearing no make-up, so you're completely bare and vulnerable with no extra mask/layers (bonus points if you're totally nude)
- Kiss the mirror at the end of your session
- Feel free to add other elements to this ritual, like putting on an ointment, getting dressed, putting on lipstick, lighting a candle or incense, etc. beforehand
- Take mirror work to the next level and gaze into the mirror at your naked body for a whole minute before you get into the shower (bonus points if you say out loud why you love your body) or dance freely in front of a mirror
- Talking to yourself in the mirror isn't insane, I promise

What Can You Do With Your Square Footage?

One time, my boyfriend's laptop stopped turning on, and we took it to a tech store down the street to get a diagnosis. Inside the store front in the strip mall was a 12 foot by 12 foot white box. The walls, floor, and ceiling were completely white. On the side there was a counter with a hole for you to speak to the salesperson and slide your device/payment through. I felt my heart begin to race.

I immediately blurted out, “Are you okay?! How do you stay in here all day?!” He looked at me with his head turned to the side and said, “Yeah I guess it is a little bleak, huh?” I looked at my boyfriend and said, “I’m sorry, I can’t” and went outside in the fresh air.

I couldn’t stop thinking about how it wasn’t the small amount of space that made me feel claustrophobic and panicky, it was what they *did* with it. It felt awful and like I was waiting to be tortured or something. Truly terrible . I mean, get a rug, a plant, and a piece of art from a thrift store and immediately I would have felt more safe.

I’m not going to sit here and get into color psychology, Feng Shui, and how and why we feel safe and secure in different spaces, but what I want to propose to you is this:

What if we are all 12 x 12 boxes and we get to choose how we present ourselves to the world? We get to choose how we decorate, how sturdy we make our foundation, how much sunlight we let in, how many people are allowed in, what colors we paint with, and how much work we put into ourselves?

As we close out this chapter on self-love, I want to remind you that your 12 x 12 box is going to look different than every other box, and some things you might not get to choose, like where it’s originally located or if there’s a chip on the side, but there are so many choices you DO get to make.

You might not have the resources to make all the changes you want at first yet, but can you love your box the way it is now, knowing you’re in charge of everything else that happens to it from now on? I hope the answer is yes.

Chapter 4: Optimism, Positivity, + Perspective

"Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so."

- Noam Chomsky

Is Optimism Even Realistic?

We've been told it's pretty dumb to hope or look for the best possible solution. We've been told to wait for the other shoe to drop. We've been told people who have positive attitudes are stupid, naive, and just "haven't lived" yet.

Is being optimistic even available or accessible today? I'm here to tell you that it is. But in a different way. A more *practical* way.

First, let's talk about what optimism even is. With anything in life, there is a spectrum, and on that spectrum I believe the energy usually correlates between love and fear. So, for instance, with optimism and pessimism, optimism is to love as pessimism is fear. As with any spectrum, most people don't fall hard for one extreme or the other, which is where other terms come into play like "realism" or what I like to call "practical optimism".

Honestly, I think we can get a little derailed with terms like "realism", though.

If you're a realist, you're simply trying to experience life from an objective perspective and acknowledge that sometimes stuff happens? Yeah!? Same!

Pessimism and optimism is more about your worldview. It's about who you are when shit goes down. When things get really difficult, are you able to see any possible good outcome? Or does your mind immediately doom scroll? That's where we want to see where you are on the spectrum.

Practical Optimism

I want you to be able to find good things. However, I don't want you to do things that sacrifice your self-care or you just say the world is fine when you know it's not. That's not what this is about.

I love the idea of being a practical optimist because it's the idea of taking realistic and positive action to increase the likelihood of possible results.

We can be hopeful and confident that success can happen, but we also know that shit is also going to go down. So how can I go through the shit and still find the good?

This isn't live, love, let breathe, bleh. It's about being real about life and how we can find the beauty in the discomfort.

Why Is Positivity That Good Anyway?

There is a reason that everyone you look up to practices positivity and optimism as much as they can. There is a reason they do not feel they are above it or feel as though it is naive, childish, or stupid. There is a reason that when they are in alignment, they always come back to principles of positivity.

We've talked before about how we can overlook the "simple" or "basic" steps to something because they won't work for us, or they simply are too simple! I can't drive it home enough that you cannot skip the simple, especially as a Merriment Maker, because joy is simple. I also want to propose to you the notion, as we embark on the new territory of Optimism and Positivity, that it might be possible the reason certain ideas have felt too simple to you before is you were *being pessimistic*.

Maybe our dissonance from “simple practices”, the things we don’t want to participate in for whatever reason, is due to being jaded! Maybe we have used logic and experience to rationalize our way so far to the other side of the spectrum towards pessimism when it comes to taking action. So when these actions feel annoying, repetitive, and we don’t see immediate results we disregard the practices as simple, basic, and ineffective, and then we generalize this feeling to any kind of “simple practice” in the future.

We all want these overnight results. We want to “Be Positive” by this time next week. We want what we want when we want it now, whether it’s with our business, our bank accounts, or relationships, our bodies, our relationships to our bodies, our general outlooks, our Instagram following, etc. We want there to be a tangible outcome of “success” generated overnight. That is not real, babe.

What is real is your ability to practice these simple principles. What’s also real is how willing we can be to sit in our misery of our current state of anything and all things, wishing it to be different. We can rattle off a list at the drop of a hat as to what we want to change, and if you think the energy of what you wish your life looked like and how it feels instead isn’t living rent free in your brain aren’t creating both physical and emotional energetic drains, you’re wrong.

Why are we so intellectually aware of what we dislike, but so physically and mentally avoidant to showing up to doing the work? Why do we believe things can happen for other people but not for us? Why do we logically understand that if we had put five minutes in every day for the past year on a project, we would have made substantial progress on that project by now, but cannot and will not start putting five minutes in now? What is holding us back from our own progress?

Our own belief in our desires? Of our worth?

The answer is everything up until and including this chapter in this book. It’s our fear of being joyful which tells us being happy is too much, so we better stay miserable. It’s our trauma and pain that created fears which turned into habits we use to escape, numb, and cope with. It’s our lack of self-worth and internal love for ourselves and bodies which prevents us from taking any risks that will create rewards.

It's our lack of optimism and ability to create and shift perspective which tucks all of the aforementioned fears into bed with a big weighted blanket and says, "That's right, baby. It's not like it matters anyway! Go to sleep. The world is on fire. Nothing you do will make a difference."

That's bleak, right? I know it is.

I don't want to scare you, but I kind of do.

I want to motivate you, not freeze you. I want to ignite you in this chapter to realize all perspectives are absolutely yours to choose, create, and change. It is up to you every single day to choose how you want to respond to your first and second thoughts, a stranger on the street, an activating text message, your alarm reminding you to move your body, a news report, an accident, a spill, a memory, an injury, or an opportunity.

In this chapter, I hope to share with you inspiration, reminders, and tools to help you approach every aspect of your life with more deliberate positivity and perspective.

Partying With Positivity

One of my favorite human beings is Andrew WK. Andrew WK is a singer and an inspirational speaker whose whole brand is about partying. I love it so much because there is a generalized connotation around "partying" which implies in order to "party" you must not be sober. I don't know when that became a thing, but it's very silly.

Honestly, I guess it's more of a code thing. Like, "Hey, do you *party*?" But honestly, why? First of all, that's not authentic. If you want to drink and/or use drugs, then be up front about it, and let's also not generally imply that anyone and everyone who is celebrating something without being intoxicated or who doesn't use substances "doesn't party", but I digress.

Andrew WK took that shit back. Eating a pizza in the bathtub in the dark? Partying! Telling yourself you're hot as hell? Partying! Sleeping in without an alarm? Partying!

Basically, Andrew WK branded self-love and self-care as “partying”. This naturally led him to branch off from not only creating some music I really enjoy, but giving inspirational talks. He is an incredible human being, and at the time I'm writing this, he is engaged to the lovely Kat Dennings which is the only celebrity couple I will ever give a damn about, but I digress further.

I bring this up because, for a while, I even made some videos where I dressed up as Andrew WK, or “Uncustomary WK”, and shared how to “Party With X”. How To Party With... Your Feminine Power! Your Self-Confidence! Your Positivity!

I love to ask, “What Would Andrew WK do?” Or, “How can we make this a party?” As a Merriment Maker, I encourage you to do the same. I want you to ask yourself how your life can feel more like a party. How can you celebrate yourself, others, and the world? How can you party with the darker parts of your past, your personality, and humanity? How can we bring the dark out into light and dance with it? What is your ideal version of a party?

Chapter 8 will get much deeper into Celebrations, Play, + Pleasure, but for now I want you to keep that in your positive party pocket, because I want to share with you a list of 9 Principles Of Positivity I created while I was channeling Andrew WK.

9 Principles Of Positivity

Positivity Principle #1: Party With Appreciation

It's kind of bizarre to me that I got this far in this book without getting deep into talking about creating a gratitude practice, but to be fair if you know me *at all*, it's been something I've talked about intensely for ten years. It's always had its own chapter, usually right at the beginning of any course or book, and this time I approached things differently.

This is partially because I generally made a bit of an assumption that at this point in your life you have probably heard of a gratitude practice, likely have one already, and that might have even been one of your additional “feel good habits” you added on back in Chapter 2.

It is also partially because I thought this time it was more important to address our basic needs and deepest fears, including trauma and pain, before we attempted to start something new (if a gratitude practice is indeed new for you).

A gratitude practice is simply demonstrating what you appreciate about life.

To start a gratitude practice, I recommend:

- + Choosing a system that works for you -- a physical journal, a document on your phone, a vlog, etc.)
- + Creating a routine (including what time of day you will document) and sticking with it strictly for two weeks, especially at the very beginning
 - + Writing in a way that appeals to you (a list, paragraph, poem)
- + Establishing a minimum effort (on a difficult/bad day, what is your goal to still write down?)
- + Including anything and everything -- don't feel like something is too big or small; (you can get your juices flowing with a list of 100 Things That Make You Happy)
 - + Being detailed -- it's okay to repeat things, but try to be specific about *why* your cat made you happy *again* today

The point of this is by recounting the good things that happened in your life each day, you will start to notice even more good things! You will start to appreciate the beauty that is happening to you, for you, with you, about you, and around you. You will start to realize how much potential there is for future goodness in your life, the world, your body, your bank account, your relationships, and all the nooks and crannies.

If you are not practicing gratitude yet or have stopped, please start (or start again). I implore you. It is an active game changer. When I look back at what truly changed my life in the beginning of my self-love journey, it was Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to confront my fears around my anxieties and starting a gratitude practice. Hands down.

Also, I want to remind you to physically say “Thank you”! Say thank you out loud every time something good happens. Say thank you when you get a new client, a check in the mail, a PayPal notification. Say thank you when someone holds the door open for you. If you can send a thank you note, send a thank you note.

No one is ever hearing “thank you” enough, I promise. Have you ever received a text from someone thanking you for something at all, out of the blue, or for something very specific and your reaction was “UGH! Not another one of these gratitude texts! Send it to spam!”?

I truly hope you are surrounding yourself with people in your life who are sending those kinds of texts. And if you’re not, be the first one. Right now, send a text or e-mail to someone saying thank you. It can literally be for who they are.

“Thank you for being you. I love the way you X, it inspires me to Y.
I really appreciate Z. Just thinking of you. Love you.”

Positivity Principle #2: Party With Kindness

When we are kind to others, others are kind to us. This allows for something which can feel “selfish”, which is to be that sense of faith being restored in humanity.

How many times have you seen one of those Good News articles where someone does something, usually for *someone else*, where we hear ourselves say, “Wow, that really restored my sense of faith in humanity”?

Now, I would argue it’s terrifying how often our faith is shaken, which is a much more complicated topic, but what I want you to glean from this is that YOU can be the pebble that creates that ripple effect in humanity.

Kindness creates ripples. Have you ever heard one of those amazing stories about a drive-thru window where someone decides to pay the bill for the person after them as an act of kindness and that inspires the next person to do the same, but it doesn't stop there, so it goes on and on for hours? Each person is genuinely surprised and moved by what's happening! They were expecting to pay for their own drink, and instead decided to pay for someone else's the way someone else showed them it was possible to do.

Here's where this gets interesting. That opportunity is always there. We always have the opportunity to be kind. It doesn't need to involve money, but the potential for kindness is infinite. It was also infinite in this drive-thru line.

The inertia was created, and the momentum built for hours and hours. Hundreds of customers. The opportunity existed and someone ceased it. It could be argued that every day acts of kindness aren't happening because people aren't taking advantage of these huge opportunities to make waves. Because let's think about the fact that it "went on for hours". That means it stopped, right? So one person at "the end" decided they didn't want to pay it forward.

There are a ton of reasons why this person didn't elect to pay it forward. Maybe they could have really used the money or the next person's order was twenty times more expensive than theirs. Who knows? It doesn't matter. The point is the car after that could have done the same thing the "first car" did and pay for the car after them, but they didn't. Why? Because the example wasn't represented.

You see, there was no "first car" and there was no "last car". There are only people with infinite options and opportunities. You can be the example that starts the story or the reason the story has an end time. The choice is yours.

How other people respond to your acts of kindness is not your business. It is a gift. It's your energy that's being put out into the world. If someone stops the ripple and the water becomes stagnant with them, that's okay. It's not great, but you get to go out and throw more pebbles in the water.

So don't feel stunted, stuck, or pessimistic about your kindness and positivity being unrippled. If you want to see kindness, start it.

Sometimes people will be kind to you even on days when you're actively not being kind or nice! Aren't those the best experiences, though? Those mean even more, right? Why? Because you know you're not a bad person, you were having a bad experience, and someone saw through that and was kind. They were positive despite your attitude and circumstances and restored your faith in humanity, if only for that second. And isn't that a Magical Moment Of Merriment?!

Positivity Principle #3: Party With People + Media

Remember how I just said I hope you don't have people in your life who would say, "UGH!" to a text message of gratitude? Those people are real. It's not that we can't love those people, but sometimes we can love them from far away.

The reason we might want to love them from far away is because some people are in a place where they aren't ready to embrace joy. It's still scary. We know what that's like, though, and that's okay! But we're ready to move on from being scared of our own happiness, and that can't happen if we are surrounded by people who complain, moan, groan, gossip, whine, and don't do anything to find solutions.

You want to feel uplifted and supported in an environment of people who celebrate positivity. Without people who support positivity, you will be lured back into pessimism without fail. It is always better to have less friends who are positive than a bunch of friends who are negative.

Those people will also likely not be very supportive of your own happiness or anything that doesn't feel difficult or challenging. How do they react when you share your celebrations and good news with them? Do they say "Must be nice!" or change the subject? Do you not even know because sharing good news would be scary and your relationship is actually founded on complaining about your partners or doing things you know aren't good for your future/best/happiest version of you?

Going back to Chapter 2 and looking at the Secondary Gains of hanging out with these people might be beneficial as an extra exercise. It is difficult to release people. Whether they are going to be helpful for our future development or not, we kept them in our lives for a reason. We love them! Releasing love is never easy. I want to also remind you that you can also love cigarettes, but that doesn't mean they help you evolve or make your body feel good.

Cut them out, though? Isn't that mean? I've written whole articles on the concept of whether or not it's selfish or cruel to cut "toxic" people out of our lives. The truth is, I don't even know if I believe in "toxic people" anymore. I think there are only people, ideas, products, and things that aren't in alignment for *us* at this point in our lives.

Let's face it. The people, places, or products we now have deemed "toxic" might have at some point been fun as hell! They might have even enlightened us! Just because someone else is not where you're at doesn't necessarily mean they're toxic.

Let me be clear: I believe in abuse. Cutting an abuser out of your life is a totally different ball game, and one that should be played. Calling an abusive person "toxic" is like labeling poison as "toxic". Yeah, no shit. Calling someone you outgrew toxic is like saying the thing you're allergic to is something *everyone* is allergic to, or even something you just can't stand the taste of anymore.

Also, there is a difference between "cutting someone out" and "ghosting". There is a difference between stating your boundaries and having discussions with compassion and deciding things aren't working out mutually or even just on your end. Hell, you can even have multiple discussions over and over again where you try to be clear but things don't work out and things naturally fade away. But no-call, no-showing someone who is expecting you without explanation is cold. I would argue that's more "toxic" than cutting out the "toxicity" in some cases!

Anyway, the point of this is to surround yourself with positivity, and yes that includes people. I just want to be clear this isn't meant to be all peace signs and spiritual bypassing. Yes, outgrow what doesn't serve you, but keep kindness in mind as you do it. People are people, too.

Besides people, you also want to keep in mind the kind of media and entertainment you are digesting on a regular basis. By this I mean movies, TV shows, podcasts, music, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, all of it.

Why are we so drawn to and obsessed with movies about war, violence, horror, and the apocalypse? I have a theory. It's because it's been represented so many times.

Representation is so extremely important. For marginalized groups, for kindness, for entertainment, for literally everything. Our brains, most of the time, have a visualizing a scenario we haven't seen or at least seen something very similar. It's why a Black Woman taking office in the United States in 2021 was a huge deal for womxn and girls of color around the world, it's why the person in line at the drive-thru had the thought to continue the act of kindness, and it's why there are way more movies about war than there are about a utopia.

There is tons of research on this phenomenon, actually. Specifically geared towards violence, gore, and horror; why and how people are so under stimulated and unsatisfied in their own lives they seek out movies that raise their adrenaline even when it doesn't feel *good*. We have become desensitized to violence, war, rage, and if you were to ask even a 12-year-old what different kinds of ways the world could end in an apocalypse, I bet they could give you at least three.

Has the world ended? Not really, I guess. We've had a lot of chapters like with the Ice Age or the dinosaurs being completely wiped out with an asteroid. In The Bible there's the story of Noah's Ark. There's a lot of representation in history and stories alone that tell us about a bleak desolate wasteland.

Now we invent horrifying ideas of how it could happen. People literally say things like, "We need a new plague!" Well the wishes came true! There are so many TV shows about zombies I couldn't name them all if I tried.

Is it really that interesting? More than that, is it *helping*?

No more than reality TV, I guess. I acknowledge that not all entertainment is meant to evolve us. Sometimes we genuinely do want to relax, laugh, numb, check out. But how often are we doing that? Remember Chapter 2. Is all of the media you are ingesting a way to check out? Are the TV shows you watch about horror and/or people who are sociopaths or narcissists? Is the music you're listening to about violence or being depressed? What are the lyrics you have memorized actually saying? What lines from a movie can you quote by heart? Why are they so funny? Or is it funny how not funny they really are? There really just is no way that your mind, body, spirit, and energy will not be affected if the only things you're absorbing say that women are bitches and the world is dying.

I'm not suggesting you completely wash out or change up what you like to watch or listen to. You can still really like a genre and find a way for it to not collapse around you.

I'm suggesting you become more aware of what you're drawn to, why, and what the running themes are. I'm asking you to look at those themes and see if they play a role in the fears, trauma, and pain you identified in Chapter 2. I'm asking you to be more deliberate about when you tune into a playlist or turn on Hulu.

The same way happiness and optimism aren't naive or stupid, neither are feel-good movies or media. It's actually completely okay to enjoy them. There are also feel-good movies and songs within the genres of horror, heavy metal, goth, punk, and anything else. There can be good in everything, I'm not out to personally attack any genre. (Punk is literally my favorite musical genre, and it's literally about talking about how fucked up things are, haha.)

I want to challenge you to ask yourself, "Do I need a conflict for this to be interesting?" If the answer to that is the case about the media you're ingesting, what do you think the answer is going to be for your own *life*?!

My favorite movie of all time is “Amélie”. I’ve been nervous to show it to people who haven’t seen it in the past because there isn’t really a conflict. It’s a very different structure than what we’re used to seeing. It’s whimsical, romantic, soft, vulnerable, and kind. There’s no violence or perceived villain. It’s a story, and it’s delightful.

Many people will watch that movie and ask me,
“What was that? What even happened?”

If that’s your reaction to a movie like that, I wonder what your reaction is to a positive day. Do you feel the need to create tension? To create drama? Do you find yourself having headaches or other physical pain when things start going really well in your life because you’re subconsciously sabotaging your own joy?

What if instead of Hollywood saying, “This won’t make money, this will never happen”, they started giving artists the green light on projects that showcased what their version of heaven or the afterlife is, or maybe a utopia, a magical faerieland, documentaries of eccentric and fabulous people, or fantasies about what it would be like to overthrow the patriarchy and live in a society where there was NO war?

Maybe then we would start visualizing it. We could start seeing it represented. We could start picturing it for ourselves and then living it out. Or at the very least, we could leave a movie theater feeling inspired rather than shattered.

Positivity Principle #4: Party With Solutions

Just because we want to surround ourselves with positive people doesn’t mean we and the people we love aren’t going to have adversity come up. There is a difference between saying, “I’m here for you, this is what I can do for you, would you like solutions, how can I support you best right now”, and full on commiserating.

There are a lot of ways to comfort people. Knowing someone's Love Languages are very important.

However, when someone reaches out to you with an issue or a concern, it is very important to first acknowledge the pain the person is experiencing. Then, ask if they would actually like solutions. It needs to be clear if they actually want solutions for this particular issue. They might just want to vent at this time. They also might not be clear in their current mindset about whether or not they are reaching out to vent or if they want solutions. Lots of times we are quick to say, "This is what you should do" or, "This is what I would do" when the person just wanted to be seen or heard.

You are also absolutely allowed to say, "Hey I'm here right now, but I'm actually unfortunately also going through something and I'm not really in a great space to hold space for you tonight. I would love to be there for you, though, can we schedule a time to talk that works for both of us?" You can also ask them how much of an emergency it is, if they need a hospital or crisis line, if they have another option for support, etc. You can be supportive while still having boundaries for yourself.

The thing is if we get into a pattern of saying, "That sucks" and wanting to hear it repeated back to you because you need validation that what's happening to you does in fact suck, you're ultimately allowing yourself and whoever else you're including to dwell repetitively in your life.

We're also objectively better at finding solutions for other people's issues than our own most of the time, especially when something is fresh because emotions are heightened. This is why asking for solutions and not just venting is highly effective.

There is a difference between having a painful moment and constantly dwelling. You are able to empathize with someone without fully commiserating. You also do not have to share a grievance just because someone else is going through something. Just because someone shares something difficult doesn't mean you have to say, "Oh man, that sounds just like X" in order for that conversation or *you* to be valid or productive. You can just say, "I'm so sorry. That sucks. Do you want to brainstorm or would you like me to just hold you?" That is enough.

You are of course allowed to dwell and feel melancholy. However, when we love someone, coming up with ideas for how to move forward and feel better (with consent) is the ideal relationship you want to be in because you're both supporting each other as well as helping them grow. The reason the consent portion is so important, is not only are you not acting like their life is yours and giving them unsolicited advice, but you also get to keep track of how many times you ask if they would like to grow instead of dwell and which one they choose. So if they're 10/10 on dwelling instead of looking for solutions, that's a lot of data for whether or not you are in alignment with that person anymore.

I don't know about you, but I want people in my life who push me. Not pushing my buttons, but challenging me. I want people to call me on my bullshit in a nice, loving way. If we don't move outside of our comfort zones, we aren't going to grow as people, and relationships are some of the greatest containers for personal growth!

Positivity Principle #5: Party With Affirmations

Positive Affirmations are really just writing down and/or saying something positive that we want to speak into existence. It's a way to get clear on what it is you want, and to reaffirm your and the world's unique sense of worth and Merriment.

You can really elevate the power of Positive Affirmations by coupling them with Mirror Work, which we went over extensively in Chapter 3.

This is a reminder to really pay attention to the dissonance you feel. When something feels the most out of alignment or the most difficult to say, that's where you want to focus. That's the affirmation you want to incorporate into your routine. The more you say it, the less discomfort your body will feel around it, and the more you will begin to believe and accept it as truth.

Positive Affirmations are a way to turn resistance and a limiting belief into something that goes in your personal manifesto!

Positivity Principle #6: Party With Failure

As mentioned before, optimism is to love as pessimism is to fear. Using this same application, love is to success as fear is to failure.

When we are living from a place of fear, we are less likely to try new things. We're also likely to label our own experiences as "failure" instead of experiences.

We will stop ourselves from attempting again because we're worried that we're going to "fail" again.

The word "failure" has a lot of weight and activation for some people. I want to acknowledge that. I also want to peel the layer back as to why, which is usually because we have been told we are Failures as people by someone else.

An optimistic worldview might say, "fuck failure". Failure in itself is not a bad thing.

It is an attempt that didn't go as planned or "succeed" which is very subjective. If you aren't failing, you aren't trying, and you aren't living. To fail doesn't mean you are a "Failure". However, since we are all failing all the time, we are all also technically "Failures". So if everyone, including Beyoncé, is a failure, can we just agree it all cancels out to being human? Can we release this word? We can change it out for "experiences" or a "mistake" if you want.

It's okay and natural to slip up, fall down, and also to *feel negative*. It's okay to have pessimistic thoughts and spiral. There is a difference between having these moments, and deciding they are who you are or that you now must operate under the umbrella of a pessimist because your brain naturally has a built in negativity bias.

I want you to forgive yourself for failing. We've all done it. Millions of times. Every day. It's not easy. But we have to breathe, and we have to move on, because if we don't we will get stuck in the spiral, negativity, and pessimistic thoughts and we won't ever try again. Life is it's own spiral, babe. It's about experiences, making mistakes, collecting new data to make the best decision you can next time, and moving fucking forward.

Otherwise what are you gonna do? Just sit on the couch and watch Netflix? Then the next step is to say you can't find anything to watch out of a thousand things and you "failed at Netflix". Not here, not today. We're fucking busy going out and trying things. We're going out and trying, and guess what? WE'RE GOING TO FAIL! Hell yes, beautiful babe, we are going to fail our beautiful butts off. No one goes out and gets it perfect on the first or hundredth try. Isn't that so fabulous? I can't wait to fail with you.

Positivity Principle #7: Party With Stress

We can't be positive if we're stressed out *all* the time. Illnesses, anxiety, pain, and stress in general all contribute to how we can get the feeling of burning the candle at both ends. If you're burning the candle at both ends, there is nowhere to put the candle, and at some point you're going to have to drop the candle so you don't burn your hand and something else is going to burn.

If you are burnt out, tired, and exhausted how on *earth* are you going to look at the glass as half full? You're not even going to have the time, energy, or a clean glass at all to fill up, let alone to fill up with water to decide if it's half full or empty.

So please take care of yourself. Take care of your mental and physical health. Self-care is real. Please make time to actively practice stress reduction.

We all have stress. We also all have enormous options and resources, many of which are free, simple, and quick that can lower our stress levels and increase our feelings of restoration and yet we are not prioritizing them. We prioritize other people's comfort, our to do lists, deadlines, expectations, drama, negative people, zombie movies, and so many other things instead of a five minute meditation, EFT video, or dance session.

We have endless options and opportunities. Self-care is one of them. Self-care is a tree with many branches. If you imagine your tree of self-care, how many of those branches are being utilized? How many are dead and not getting water? How many have nests in them from two winters ago hanging out in a crevice? Give your self-care tree life, and let them flourish.

You can argue that you can't afford the time to practice self-care.
I will argue that you can't afford not to.

Without managing our stress we will not be able to be positive or have perspective.

This isn't easy. None of this is easy.

When I first started going to Physical Therapy for my knee injury, I realized quickly how Physical Therapy is no different than Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). When I started CBT, I did exposure therapy for rituals of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder that I thought would make the world end, and over time the discomfort decreased.

It was no different with my knee. It hurt so much to do the simplest movement at first, but then I started to do it, add weights, and even do squats! There was a time when I thought I wouldn't walk, I'd have to quit my job, move back in with my dad, and I honestly even wanted to die. But that was one moment.
And this right here is another one.

With deliberate action, we can do almost anything. We can reprogram our minds and bodies, and maybe even become stronger than before!

Our health, happiness, and success are all relative. If you choose to work on it, with it, through it, and for it and not believe that the world is out to get you then it's already happening for you. It's already in motion. It's already a success.

Positivity Principle #8: Party With Responsibility

Stop blaming other people! Stop blaming the world!

When you stop blaming other people you can become a positive role model. Someone is looking at you, babe. I promise. You are leading by example simply by existing whether it's for someone you babysit, on Instagram, your child, or walking down the aisle at the grocery store. You are representing what other people can be. You can inspire someone in the way you grab a can of soup or the way you're dressed.

The example you set can be a positive one, or it can be one that stops that ripple effect of kindness, inspiration, and positivity.

Blame often comes from unrecognized jealousy. So if you encounter someone with what you feel is a "perfect life" or at least wonderful or perfect in a particular area, don't let that feeling of activation be something that tears you down, let it build you up! Why does jealousy need to be negative? Let it be data that informs your next positive inspired action!

Instead of blaming them for why they are happy and have what you want, start owning your emotions and desires. What do they do that's different from what you do or what you imagine is different which you feel might make a difference in this area? Do you want to ramp up your embodiment practice to feel more sensual? Do you want to create a business plan so you can also travel around the world? Start doing things.

You make your own decisions and choose your own path. You need to start making moves now. What are you waiting for? You know what you want. You know what you're sitting on. You know what you're being lazy about. You know what you're making excuses about. You know what you're putting on the back burner that you want to be on the front burner. You fucking know.

So much of our alignment would be adjusted if we stopped acting like we didn't know what we already know.

What you don't know is what's going to happen next in the world. Why are you going to gamble against yourself?

Stop blaming other people, circumstances, the government, this time in history, the weather, or literally anything else you cannot control (which is pretty much everything) for not living your life. What is your role in this? Be real.

If today was your last day on earth and it was hailing, would you say, "Fuck it, I'm just gonna spend my last day inside and not try to do what I wanted to do", or would you FIGURE IT THE FUCK OUT? I'm not suggesting you put yourself in danger every damn day or we need to constantly be on the go. I am suggesting we save our fancy clothes and dreams for a rainy day and then blame the rain that it's too wet to go outside.

If all you can control is yourself, then become a master! Not a control freak, a master. Learn. Learn about your mind, body, spirit, and energy. Learn everything you can. Control what you put out into the world and what you consume from it.

If on your last day all you have to say is, "My life sucked and it was because of this person, that president, and that storm", I'm genuinely sad for you. Because that person, president, and storm DID suck. They were awful. They had huge roles in our evolution and transformation. But is that the headline? Is that your epitaph?

That's why we start and end with gratitude. You can complain and blame all day, but a master knows it's much more powerful and skilled to choose to find the sparkly lining.

In fact, how can you have gratitude for those awful things? That's the biggest source of love and positivity. That's the biggest flex.

Positivity Principle #9: Party With Allowing

Remember that telling people that positivity, optimism, happiness, and Merriment is bullshit, naive, and stupid is a copout and another way to blame and not take responsibility for what's actually happening.

Acknowledge that this work is difficult. Acknowledge that choosing the sparkly lining is that harder thing to do. Acknowledge that not everyone might want to do it.

When someone is operating from a true place of pessimism they have decided there is no hope for them, therefore they need to be the rain on everyone else's parade. They can't let other people like things.

If someone likes pineapple on their pizza and they don't, they're a horrible person and need to be told so! There is only one right way to live life and they're it! They have all the answers even though they can't just let someone else live their life.

I might not know a lot about a lot of things, but I do know if someone feels the need to enter someone else's life to tell them they're wrong for liking pineapple on pizza just because they don't, I think they might be more wrong just because they're trying to restrict things including happiness.

Let people like things. Let people like things that are different from what you like.
Let people be optimistic! Let people make mistakes!

What if what that person is doing works out for them beautifully? What if it doesn't?
It doesn't really matter. We can't predict things. If someone isn't harming us, it
doesn't apply.

A Positive Perspective

If your body is craving positivity and missing more optimistic worldviews, like the hope and faith you might have had at as young as five-years-old, then go back out and grab it in your hands. It's yours. You can have it again, I promise. Hope, faith, and optimism are as real as you allow them to be, and I want them to be technicolor vibrant in your life.

I promise you are going to feel connected to positivity and the world more than ever if you follow these tips. In the future, if someone tells you having a positive attitude is bullshit, you won't feel the need to defend yourself or even get into a debate about it. You will feel so confident and aligned with your purpose and truth, you can just shrug (or not) and keep fucking going.

Chapter 5: Merry Motivation

"Desire is the key to motivation, but it's determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal - a commitment to excellence - that will enable you to attain the success you seek."

- Mario Andretti

What Is Motivation?

Motivation is the general desire or willingness to do something. Motivation comes from an intrinsic desire deep inside of us, which is connected to our personal purpose. This is not to be confused with inspiration, which can really add fuel to our fire of action, but is ultimately the process of being mentally stimulated.

Through this process, we end up doing something with that energy, which usually results in creating something related to our deep desires.

Motivation is a true unadulterated desire to do or engage in something. No one, including society, is telling you that you should do this thing. There's a difference between playing an instrument because it feels good or someone telling you that you need to play the piano. You might still be playing the same instrument, but the reason you're playing it is completely different.

I just laid out a seemingly simple explanation of what motivation and inspiration are. We all have things we want (desires) and we all have felt activated by something (inspired), so if it's that easy, why aren't we constantly motivated?

That's what this chapter is here to unravel and provide solutions for.

I can sit here and give you tips for how to do things quicker all day, but what I want to focus on are the deeper fears that are blocking why you might not be feeling motivated. Until we focus on the fears, anything else is a band-aid fix.

Self-Sabotage

The first reason many of us struggle with feeling motivated is self-sabotage. We self-sabotage in many ways. We discussed how our past pain, fear, and trauma shows up as self-sabotage in Chapter 2, and this applies here as well.

Specific ways we self-sabotage in relation to motivation (taking action) are procrastination and perfectionism. You might not think of these immediately as forms of self-sabotage and they don't always mean self-sabotage, which I will discuss in a moment, but let's take a deeper look at what it means when they do.

Procrastination

Procrastination can be a bit easier to wrap our minds around as a form of self-sabotage than perfectionism because we can see a more immediate result of how things can go wrong. For example, if you have a deadline for a project for school or work and you put things off till the last minute, something could go wrong. The things that could go wrong are essentially infinite, right? A malfunctioning printer, software, a sick child, car trouble, getting your period. Who knows.

The point is, had you prioritized this project earlier, you wouldn't be doubly stressed now worrying how to fit in the thing you already knew was due and this thing that happened on top of it. I'm sure you've been there.

So why do we procrastinate? We already said it's a form of self-sabotage, but why would we do that to ourselves? Since 88% of the workforce admits to procrastinating every day, I'd say pretty much all of us know what this is like in some way. Yet we continue to do this thing that doesn't yield ideal results.

There has to be some sort of benefit, right?

Many people at first glance would assume procrastination is about being lazy.

It's actually not! The word "procrastination" is derived from the Greek word "akrasia" which translates to "doing something against our better judgment". If that's not the poster child word for Secondary Gains, I don't know what is!

The reason(s) you're procrastinating will vary depending on the task you're procrastinating on. For example, the Secondary Gains of procrastinating on publishing your new e-course or submitting your art into the local gallery might be so you can keep saying you're not an artist yet, to keep yourself small, to complain you're not making money with other people who are doing the same thing.

These gains come from fears of success as much as they are from rejection. Your experience may vary, but most of the time we're simultaneously worried about what people will think of us as much as we are of the potential change in our lives that would occur if we were to become successful from the thing we love so deeply.

Not to mention we get a huge rush of adrenaline when we're on a deadline! We are conditioned to believe we "work better under stress and pressure". I promise you this isn't true. It's a chemical trick from the adrenaline. The person who picks up the car because their baby is stuck under it isn't really that strong, it's a chemical trick. You think they don't hurt their muscles and ligaments and are sore as hell the next day after lifting that car?

We don't talk about that part, we talk about the miracle. Sure, it's amazing! Our bodies *are* amazing. However, what if we avoided the catastrophe when we can and let the miracle be a shift in perspective (which a miracle is by definition), when we realize we can find success and joy without sweating while waiting for the timer to buzz.

Of course, procrastination intensifies with our moods, pain levels, illnesses, and external circumstances including fear. These are never to be overlooked. The point is to draw attention to the portion you can control as much as possible, which is your thoughts. Your thoughts can be changed, even if they are what you've been taught to believe from your first memory.

If you recognize you're procrastinating often, or even more than you'd like, ask yourself what you're getting from doing this. What tasks are you consistently putting off? Are they work related, creative, health, financial? Are you scared of success, rejection, or pulling back the curtain to see what's there? Do you genuinely dislike the task? If this is the case, what can you do to outsource the task or remove it from your life altogether?

Look for themes. Go back to Chapter 2 and complete the Secondary Gains homework but specifically for Procrastination habits and fears this time.

It will also be helpful for you to look back at the first time you procrastinated on something. It was probably when you were a child. Think about what that task was, but more importantly, why you procrastinated on it. What were you scared of happening? Were you afraid it wasn't good enough? Were you afraid you were going to get in trouble? What was going on? This will provide a lot of insight into why this started happening, when, and the patterns that have continued up until and including now.

Perfectionism

Now we can see how procrastination can self-sabotage us, let's move onto perfectionism.

So many of us struggle with perfectionism, but here's the dirty little secret we don't want to admit: we like it! We don't want to release perfectionism. We don't want to give up being a perfectionist. We like the way it can help things, fix things, and bring "order" to chaos.

When I work with people who acknowledge perfectionism is something they want to work on, there tends to be a lot of resistance around even the idea of releasing this part of themselves, including the label of being a “perfectionist”. Or maybe they are excited to release the label, but they really want to keep the “skills” of being a perfectionist in their back pocket, so to speak, so when shit hits the fan, they fall back to what feels natural.

A lot of times we have a false idea of what perfectionism is, so let’s get on the same page. Perfectionism isn’t just making sure all the pages are smooth and there aren’t any typos. That can be part of it, sure, but it’s much, much deeper than that.

Perfectionism is having unrealistic expectations and standards, very specifically for ourselves. It’s very similar to the root of Imposter Syndrome in the sense that we believe other people are allowed to be X, Y, and Z but we can’t be. We believe someone else can be an author without being an imposter, and we believe other people are allowed to make mistakes, but not us. We don’t give ourselves permission and grace. We are very rigid and unyielding with ourselves.

Perfectionism is rooted deeply in fear, specifically in a fear of failure. Remember back in Chapter 4 how we were wanting to Party With Failure (AKA Acceptance)? This is heavily connected to perfectionism. If you connect with perfectionism, I strongly recommend going back to Chapter 4 and looking at everything related to Partying With Failure, especially the journaling questions. Is there someone who called you a failure in your past and you are now scared of proving them right or living with the purpose of proving them wrong?

Perfectionism can also be connected to control issues both with ourselves and other people. This is also connected with a Party Principle from Chapter 4, Party With Allowing. If you struggle with perfectionism, you might find yourself looking to control more than projects, but life in general, especially things you know you can't control (unrealistic expectations). This might show up as giving unsolicited advice, being the caregiver, or even feeling like a martyr.

This combination of fear and unrealistic expectations creates high levels and recurring disappointment which can lead to depression. We are living to show we aren't a failure and taking care of other people's needs who didn't necessarily ask for it, and trying to control things outside ourselves. Perhaps the biggest mistake of all might be believing a state of "perfect" is even a thing. No wonder disappointment keeps coming back around again.

A lot of our feelings of perfectionism are rooted in low self-esteem and self-worth. We don't feel "good enough".

Perfectionism actually can be coupled with procrastination sometimes because we want to fix things and make them "better" so many times that it's never ready. The keyword there being "never". Sometimes, without a deadline, we won't ever release or share what we're working on because it's not "good enough".

There it is again. Good enough. What does that mean exactly?

When people put products out in the world, they tend to put a lot of extras and bonuses with their products because they're worried the product isn't "good enough". We do this because we're scared the original product isn't good or worthy enough so we need to spice it up.

Where do you do this in your life? Where do you feel the need to add dazzle and sprinkles because you're worried the cupcake wasn't delicious on its own? Including yourself.

Why can't you let yourself be you who are?
Why do you need to add things you think you should be?

SHOULD. We are obsessed with should. Right now, instead of reading this book, what do you think you should be doing? Is it a chore? Is it laundry? Why is it always laundry? Is it something boring or something that doesn't light you up?

Why SHOULD you be doing that?

Should you be "always improving"?

Should you be "perfect"?

Should you be working 100% of the time to fix yourself?

Should you never rest?

Throw all of these in the trash.

Why can't we enjoy where we are? Why can't you acknowledge we're all imperfect and always will be? Why can't we remember that joy is good for our physical and mental health?

This moment is beautiful. Look, feel, breathe it in. Your imperfections cancel out because we are all imperfect the same way we are all failures. It essentially means nothing because we are all experiencing the same thing. Joy increases your health and quality of life. Fear and panic decreases it.

Dysfunction

Perfectionism and procrastination in the ways I have just spoken of are a form of dysfunction. In psychology, we look at the disruption and dysfunction of a disorder in an individual's life. This is very important to distinguish "abnormal" psychology from something else, like a personal preference.

For example, I have Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). For many years of my life, it was undiagnosed and untreated. If I couldn't organize every shelf at a video or bookstore I would scream, cry, and need to be dragged out. I used to miss going out with my friends because I would get stuck in a ritual doing something over and over again. I'd hear the car outside beeping and I'd cry because I couldn't go to them. Eventually, they'd leave me. I was told I was flaky, and I was so sad I had to go being flaky because the real answer was more embarrassing, especially because I didn't have a real explanation for what was happening then.

When I've heard other people say, "I'm so OCD about my markers", I've often challenged them to ask what they mean by that. If they have OCD, I can bond with them over it. If not, I can potentially let them know that's not the proper use of that mental health diagnosis and actually takes away from the meaning of the word that felt like home for me when I was fourteen.

The point of this is some people prefer their markers to have all the caps on and in rainbow order, and it might bother them if they aren't like that. However, what happens if they aren't like that? Can you not sleep? Do you have a panic attack? Do you need to go back home to fix it? Or is it closer to a temporary annoyance?

This is what I mean by disruption and dysfunction. Some people have preferences that are stronger than others because they see that other people don't give a damn about how their markers go and will throw them willy nilly in a box in total disarray, so they believe the way they are organizing theirs must be irregular and strange. But if your life can continue when your preference is challenged, your preference is a preference, not an illness (in most cases in my experience, especially before being treated). (I'm not a doctor.)

How does this relate to procrastination and perfectionism? Well, there's actually technically nothing wrong with either of them. Yep. Procrastinating, i.e. putting something off till tomorrow isn't illegal, immoral, and it doesn't make you lazy or a bad person. It can actually be an act of self-care! In fact, when you take a mental health day, you kind of *need* to procrastinate on some things!

Perfectionism can be really helpful if you're working on a very detail-oriented project or have a job that requires you to be very focused, organized, and thorough.

It's also okay to not struggle with either of these things! That's actually awesome!
This is about drawing awareness and pulling back the curtain.

The point is, where does your procrastination and perfectionism go from being helpful to disruptive and dysfunctional? When does it start to interfere with your life? Where does it start to hinder you? When does it start to create more stress than it alleviates? That's what you want to be aware of, babe. If you become aware of any behavior's help vs. harm, you will become more aware, mindful, and relaxed!

Also, if you do feel dysfunction and distress and aren't ready to release the perfectionism and/or procrastination parts of your identity because you find them useful, then acknowledge and own that. You can't do anything unless you're ready, willing, and able.

Once, I used the metaphor of shaving versus waxing. If you only want to shave the dysfunctional perfectionism parts away and dull it down a little bit, then you're not ready. If you like having the perfectionist label or part as an excuse and secretly love the hustle, getting shit done, and believe it helps you.

If you think about not just waxing but laser hair removing the dysfunctional parts of perfectionism away and it sends fear down your body and you think, "That's nuts! What if I need it? What if I forget to do something at the end of the day and I don't have any caffeine? That's insane, I'm just going to reel it back. I'm just going to shave it so it can come back if I need it, thanks".

This applies to anything. If you aren't ready to remove a limiting belief you have recognized as a problem, then you aren't ready to take action on it. That's okay, that's where you are. But you also need to acknowledge that any work you do in this area isn't going to stick very long, it's only going to stick for however long you shave.

We aren't expecting overnight results or success, obviously. Every topic is a starting point, an acknowledgment. But if you cling to the Secondary Gains of your limiting beliefs that are motivated by fear instead of intrinsic motivation, know it will be more difficult in the long run.

Toxic Productivity

You don't need to be "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger" like Daft Punk said. At the very least, they broke up while I was asleep in the dead of night and didn't have the decency to pass their masks on to anyone. So this tradition dies with the band. No one carried the torch. If you take anything away from this, the people in Daft Punk might be dicks.

Hahah. I kid (I love you Daft Punk!), but in all honesty, let's talk about why we're so obsessed with being busy, productive, the "hustle", and being motivated in general.

When I ask you who you think of who is the most motivated, who do you think of?

Now be real about if you feel like they are truly motivated or what you're basing this answer on is actually based on productivity. Do you feel like you're tapped into vibing their genuine desires or how much they're creating and sharing and the tangible results you can see of that? Sometimes we feel like someone who is motivated and/or productive might look like someone who can put out lots of work/content without appearing overwhelmed.

More often than not, we have muddled our feelings between motivation and productivity. Motivation is our internal desire and productivity is output. That output can absolutely be related to our internal desires, but it can also be related to anything. Anyone who is productive is motivated. It's just that motivation might be coming from fear or love. If it's intrinsic, it's usually coming from love, and if it's extrinsic, it's usually coming from fear.

We are currently living in a very masculine and patriarchal society which runs on a lot of ideals that are not inherently bad, because most things are neither bad nor good they just are, but have been taken to extremes and gotten out of control. These ideals include valuing output over input, money over feelings, growth over health, and numbers over nourishment.

Many people have started to realize, for decades (and longer) now, that money, output, growth, and numbers are not bad, but we cannot have them without also valuing input, feelings, health, and nourishment among many other things. In fact, when we value the individual, more growth occurs, not just for money and companies, but for the individual as well. It's essentially a win-win.

Do you find saying "I'm busy" feels good to say? Does it feel like an accomplishment? Do you say it even when you're not? Why is that?

We have been taught that if we're not busy, we're lazy. This is not true. We are also being taught the kind of busy you must be related to creating/earning money. So if you are "busy" with rest or "busy" with creating something that doesn't have a return on investment with some form of financial gain, you're not really busy. In fact, you "should" probably change your schedule so you can do something of more value.

On a side note, this rule seems to be canceled out if you're busy with errands and chores, because people tend to dislike these activities the same way they dislike the way they make money. Work, errands, and chores are things people don't like to do, but like to complain about, so if you say you're busy with something in those areas, people will say, "I hear ya! I've got to X, Y, Z" and not guilt you in a way they wouldn't if you said, "Sorry, I can't come out, I'm staying in reading".

Remember most people aren't ready for joy and Merriment. Most people are stuck in fear and are comfortable there. It's okay if they don't understand where you're at, and it's okay if where you're at activates them. That's their stuff, not yours. And maybe, just maybe, if you tell them you're staying in to play, they might realize it's okay for them to do the same.

There Is No Difference Between Work And Play

Truly, in this world, there is no work and play. Hear me out!

In this world, there are simply activities you get paid for and activities you don't get paid for.

There are absolutely different kinds of activities. You can be creating, playing, or resting, but Merriment can exist during any and all of these activities. Merriment can technically be present all day long. It doesn't need to be, and it realistically won't, but when we say we need "work-life balance" is to say we dislike work and there is no option for Merriment to exist in our work.

Take this even further. How can you bring Merriment to anything? How can you bring Merriment to doing your laundry? How can you bring Merriment to shopping? How can you bring Merriment to chores, errands, or anything you potentially dislike or feels mundane or you don't naturally feel excited to do?

When you bring Merriment to all aspects of your life, you start to actually feel it. You begin to embody the joy. If you think about how you could sweep the floor or select your jam from the shelf in the most joyous way possible, you will naturally train your body to feel like this is a fun activity and you will show others, if only by example, that this doesn't need to be a drain or dread.

Remember the more you overextend yourself, the more you play into hustle mindset, the more you glorify being busy, the more you feel the need to "prove" you care about something or someone in an extrinsic way, and the more you operate from fear instead of love, the more exhausted you will become.

You are allowed to burn the candle at both ends, but it is only safe to burn it at one.
It is more economical and safe to not let it burn 24/7 either.
Sometimes, you need to blow it out and let the wax reform.

All Progress Is Progress

I really need us all to stop dulling down our successes and progress. I need us to stop comparing ourselves to other people's success stories instead of their behind the scenes struggles. There are no overnight successes.

In fact, you don't want overnight success. You're meant to build in stages. If you win the lottery while you still have unhealthy money habits or Oprah shared your business and it got a million customers overnight before you had an assistant, you would be broke in a couple months and your business would go under. Why?
Because you don't have the framework to hold up that foundation.

Many of us have regrets even when our couch pillows say, "Live Life With No Regrets!" They may not be conscious, but if we think about "all the time we wasted" on staying too long in this relationship or not starting this habit last year, we can feel disappointed, depressed, and disheartened.

It sounds easier than it is, but do not regret the time wasted. The simple fact is you can't do anything about it, you can only control now. I will tell you the experience and wisdom you learned from what you feel is a mistake is extremely helpful if you allow it to be. If you learn from it now and don't repeat it, you will be extremely successful in that area. This includes if you wish you had started or stopped something long ago. That means you need to start or stop something right now.
Imagine where you would be in a year from now if you did that today!

All progress is progress. We blast through Micromovements, which are just one to five minute actionable steps towards our goals. The point is we are taking the time to show up for ourselves repeatedly, every day. It's the same as a self-care ritual, but for our goals and desires. Obviously you can work for more than five minutes. You are never limited. The point is to not pressure yourself to work for three hours every day. We put so much pressure on ourselves to write an entire book in a month because it's National Novel Writing Month and then get disappointed because it turns out we didn't cancel the rest of our lives to do that humongous task. We don't think about scheduling in lunch and life and we absolutely must.

We talk shit on baby steps. Guess what? Baby steps are only baby steps because a baby is taking them. Your steps aren't baby steps, they're steps. Maybe they aren't leaps, but as long as you're not moving backwards, you're moving forwards. It's okay to stand still, and it's okay if you make a mistake and it feels like you've moved backwards, but here's a hot tip for you: mistakes are actually a Huge Leap. Mistakes show you things that might have taken much longer to learn, and while they may be frustrating and time consuming, you're not moving backwards, you're actually skipping many spaces all at once when you sit down to unravel them.

There's an old proverb that goes:

You can see a pothole in the sidewalk and you can blame someone else for it. You can still go down the sidewalk and pretend it's not there, and it will take you a while to climb back out. You can go down the sidewalk, see the pothole fully, and you can hop out with ease. You can walk down the street and go around the pothole. Or you walk on a different street entirely.

Taking Action Tips

1. Factor In Life

Stop assuming everything is going to go seamlessly. I'm not asking you to manifest something awful. I'm asking you to be a Practical Optimist! Hope for the best and prepare for some wiggle room! Stop thinking, "This should be fine, even though it hasn't been in the past". Give yourself MORE than fine.

Give yourself the opportunity for great.

Schedule in room and space for lunch breaks, physical pain, mental health days, flat tires, doctor's appointments, responsibilities.

If you know something takes four hours to do and you only have four hours left to do it and you haven't eaten lunch, you're not going to operate at your highest potential because you're hungry, let alone if something else takes precedence. Schedule space.

2. Big Ass 'B' - Learn From Your Mistakes

John Mulaney has a bit where he's making a birthday card and starts with a giant "H" for "Happy" and immediately regrets it because it took up way too much space on the card. He has to squeeze in the rest of the letters because he didn't account for how much space was on the card. He sweats it out, then goes onto the next word saying, "The past is the past" and starts off with a "Big ass 'B'!"

OH NO! He's made this "B" even bigger than the "H" even though he just made the same mistake with the first word, and now he needs to fit in even more letters with this next word. This is our self-sabotage all in one. I laugh so hard at this bit, because it's me, it's all of us. We know better, yet we make the same mistakes, even back to back like this.

ow, whenever I do something like this, where I should know better (remember the origin of the word “procrastinate”), I say out loud to myself, “Big Ass ‘B!’”. It’s a way for me to remember I’ve done this before and create an additional muscle memory that I don’t need to replicate it again.

You can copy this method, and also I want you to take it a step further.

When you feel the inclination to realizing you’re Big Ass B-ing something, write it down. Write down what you tend to do even though you know better, and then write down what you can do differently next time. It will help you to have a plan in place, even subconsciously, so when this issue comes up next time, you’ll remember there’s an option other than your knee jerk (self-sabotage) reaction.

3. Imagine Yourself As A Motivated Person

Close your eyes and imagine yourself as a highly motivated person.

If I came in as an Uncustomary Fairy Godmother and sprinkled some magical motivated dust on you while you were sleeping and you woke up as a fully actualized motivated person, what would that look like?

Does your mood change? How? Are you scared? Are you happy? Are you relieved? Are you proud? Are you confident? Are you focused on your feelings instead of your productivity?

Instead of focusing on the output, are you focused on your emotions instead? Does your perfectionism and procrastination disappear? Are you clear about how you don’t need to take quantum leaps and just put one foot in front of the other? Are you less stressed?

Also, I want you to take a second look at what you just asked for with this magic fairy dust. Did you give yourself exactly what you wanted or did you believe in yourself and ask for what your heart desires? If a genie came out of a bottle, don’t just ask for a sandwich. Ask for exactly what you want. There’s nothing wrong with only wanting the “basics” or being a minimalist. But don’t squander the infinite potential.

Simultaneously, note that if you didn't need that much with this magic fairy dust, you might actually not be very far away from what you want and need. This is possible. Even if you did ask for a "lot". You wouldn't ask for it if you didn't believe it somewhere inside of you.

Remember you can be your OWN fairy godmother.

4. Think About How A Merriment Maker Would Perform This Activity

Come up with a list of things you don't like doing, and think about how you could do each of these things from a Merriment Maker's mindset.

Conclusion

Ultimately want to create more space and room in your life/mind

Merriment is the name of the game. Merriment is fleeting if we are looking to be perfect, if we are should-ing our way through life. Some people will tell you you SHOULDN't look for joy and there's no reason to be happy. It doesn't matter what they think. It doesn't matter what your inner critic thinks. Those people and your inner critic are scared. Hug them and tell them it's okay to be scared and you understand why. Instead of being scared today, you are consciously choosing joy and Merriment.

By choosing Merriment today, you will be able to spread that Merriment to your inner critic and the other scared people out in the world over time. This is an inside job that leads to an outside force. The force of Merriment is powerful and unstoppable, but it does not and cannot exist if we don't create the vibration within our own hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits first.

Chapter 6: Passion + Purpose

“He who has a why to live for can bear
almost any how.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

A Sudden Urge For Purpose

Purpose, purpose, purpose. In the past years, our desire to “discover our purpose” has almost imploded. I’m not upset about it, but I am fascinated by it.

Suddenly, we are yearning to know what on earth our purpose is, and its core I believe this desire comes from wanting to be of service. At its worst, it comes from a fear that what we’re interested in isn’t “good enough” in some way because we see others being so clear about what they love to be, do, and create. So we question if what we love to be, do, and create is up to snuff.

A general purpose, when we aren’t talking about our life purpose, is essentially the reason something was done or created. When we refer to our purpose, we are talking about our life purpose and we’re really wanting to know why we’re here.

What is the reason we are doing things and creating things?

Your purpose is informed by your passion, and the point of recognizing your purpose is to bring clarity to the rest of your life. When I talk about living in alignment with your values, beliefs, thoughts, and actions, you will find it much easier to live and act in alignment if you know what your purpose is. If you are unclear about your purpose, you’ll find it more difficult to define your values and then live in accordance with them.

In this chapter, I'm going to talk about how purpose connects and overlaps with passion (I'll use these words interchangeably), and tips on how you can recognize what yours is so you can continue to live in alignment.

How To Turn A "Fuck No" Into A "Fuck Yes"

Most of us have at least one or two things we know about ourselves or want in our lives that aren't negotiable. Reading that, you might say, "I have way more non-negotiables than that!", and if you do, that's amazing. I want you to have a lot! The thing is when I say "non-negotiable", I mean "non-negotiable". I mean no exceptions, at all costs. You can not be bought, coerced, or compromised in this area. The belief you have translates to how you speak, behave, react, create goals and follow through on them.

If you look at a non-negotiable on these terms in an honest way, your list might start to shrink down at least a bit. That's okay. Merriment Making is about alignment. That means your non-negotiables are just as important as your values in terms of acting from a state of authenticity. In fact, acting in alignment with your non-negotiables and your values are one in the same, it's just being clear about what you do want versus what you don't want.

Knowing what we don't want is pretty easy, isn't it? As humans, we have a built in negativity bias. We are pretty damn good at judging and complaining. It comes very naturally to us. My advice is to use that to your advantage.

I don't mean to constantly judge and complain out loud or let it consume you. You are not in charge of your first thought, you are in charge of your second and the rest. Your first thought is a visceral reaction. It is a knee jerk. It might be conditioned from your upbringing or culture, and it also might be your body telling you, "No, absolutely NOT".

It's okay and important to have, "Fuck NO" reactions to things. I want you to. The important thing, however, isn't just the "Fuck no", it's what the "Fuck No" gives you the opportunity to learn, do, and create. The "Fuck No" is creating space.

A no is a space for a yes. This doesn't mean you need to fill your schedule with something else, although that could technically be saying no to an errand and filling that space with rest. The idea is bigger than a schedule. It's paying attention to what feeling that "No" is giving you. What about this are you actually saying "No" to?

Are you saying no to tardiness? To something mundane? To the color indigo? To bright lights? To people who lie? To large crowds? To big cities? To plastic surgery? To closed mindedness?

What are you saying no to, and what would feel better in its place? Likely, it's the opposite of that thing. Of course, the answer might be more nuanced. If you're saying no to big cities, that might not mean you're saying yes to nature exclusively, for example, but you're actually saying no to something specific about big cities like public transportation or pollution. Be specific and clear every time your body gives you a Fuck No.

If you need to, keep a list in your phone of the Fuck No's you feel during the day and every week come back to it and rewrite it into your Fuck Yes's. In order to turn it into a Yes, I want you to ask yourself these questions:

- 1) Where did I feel the No in my body? What did it feel like?
- 2) What about this No am I upset about/not wanting in my life?
- 3) What is the opposite of this No? What space does this leave for me to say Yes to?

Question one allows you to be more aware of the feelings in your body when you're getting a new "Fuck No" so you can pay attention. Question two makes sure you don't skip the specifics. Is it really big cities you're saying no to or is it something more nuanced? And question three turns this into something action oriented.

All contrast in our lives creates frustration. This frustration helps us to create boundaries. Our boundaries give us the opportunity to define our values. Our values inspire passion and action.

We cannot have passion without contrast. What we don't want informs what we do want. You need the Fuck No to get to the Fuck Yes. The problem is most of us get stuck on the Fuck No.

Don't Wait For A Different Life

One of the biggest concerns my coaching clients tell me is that they don't feel seen. It's a huge issue that seems to plague entire generations. Whether we're too much or not enough, we don't feel like we're seen or understood.

Why is that? Truly it's enough for an entirely different book. Simply put, we grew up being told we were both too loud, obnoxious, fat, much of a know-it-all, etc. AND not soft enough, not skinny enough, not well mannered enough, etc. We were both too much of a softie, lazy, and aggressive, AND not smiling enough, good enough listeners, good enough at sports, etc.

We were all struggling to be and become ourselves, and on the way there were shamed. These roots stuck, and we are terrified to be too much and not enough, while desperate to be both at the same time.

Besides crippling self-doubt and low self-esteem and the awful consequences that come with it, one of the specific effects I see as a result of the too much/not enough dilemma is we know what our complaint is, but we don't know how to change it when given the opportunity. By this I mean, we know we want to feel seen, but if someone asks us how can I see you or asks to see you, we don't know what to show them.

In the pursuit of our desire to feel seen, we tend to place blame on a lot of external factors in the process. It's not that these things aren't problematic, but we aren't really looking at the root of our personal fears.

What's fascinating is that she gets a promotion and is constantly around the second most powerful person in the company on a daily basis, but never throws her hat in the ring. She never views herself as someone who has a seat at the table and just continues to complain she doesn't have a seat at the table. One day, her coworker gets frustrated and says, "You have a chance right now! Ask for what you want!"

She was wildly thrown off guard. She said she wanted a seat at the table. He said she had it and to now ask for what she wanted. Then she just started randomly listing off totally different job positions.

It wasn't that this was just a stressful conversation, it's that even in a totally prepared situation, she had NO IDEA what she wanted. She hadn't thought about what she wanted, how she wanted to be seen, show up, or be of service. Instead, she was focused on how she clearly couldn't show up and be of service because someone else was able to do it instead of her.

I'm not saying there are insane injustices in systems all over the world which keep marginalized groups from being seen even when they are doing everything they can to be seen.

What I am saying is don't complain you want to be seen if when the light shines on you you have nothing to show.

Don't get stuck on a "Fuck No" without going through the process of what your "Fuck Yes" is.

You Aren't The Only Person Who Is Purpose-less

In all the classes, workshops, and lectures I've taken on purpose and passion, one of the most recurring questions I've seen has been, "But what if I don't have a purpose?"

When I first heard it, it made me laugh. If you're wondering the same thing, I'm not laughing at you, I just want to walk you through why this question is not the one to be asking.

First, let's be real about where this question is coming from: your inner critic.

Remember, your inner critic isn't really you. It's a conglomerate of mean and judgmental voices you've collected throughout your life from your family of origin, bullies, the media, and maybe even your specific culture or religion. Whenever your inner critic says, "You're a failure", it's rehashing a fear from long ago, even if you can't remember exactly when you first heard it or from who. It's confusing because you're hearing it from inside your own head, but that doesn't mean it's YOU. Please refer to how to talk to your inner critic from the chapter on Self-Love.

Your inner critic is trying to trip you up by asking if you don't have a purpose. It is acknowledging that purpose is real, and available to other people in a real way, but simply not available to YOU specifically.

Let's take emotion out of it for a moment. Logically, if we have determined that purpose is real and it is available to other people, those elements are neutral and controlled. That means the only element left is whether or not it is available to you. What is the statistical probability that out of the almost 8 billion people in the world that you are the only one who just didn't get a purpose?

Whether you believe a higher power is as assigning them or you are in charge of discovering your own or some combination of the two, what are the sheer odds that you are the special person who didn't get passion?

Yes, you are special. But you are not special in that way.

The question to ask isn't, "What if I didn't get a purpose?" The question to ask is, "How do I discover my purpose?"

Your Purpose Brick

Here's where you roll your eyes at me. It's not about finding your purpose, it's about recognizing it. I know, I know. Hold on.

Okay, you know how the whole theory behind Merriment Making is that we have Fear Blocks that are in front of our natural Love Wall? We are born with our wall of love and that never goes away, it's just that our traumas, fears, and pain turn into Fear Blocks that cover up our Love Wall and make it difficult for us to feel unconditional love and joy.

It's the same thing with purpose.

On that Love Wall, there is a brick. One of those bricks is your Purpose. The thing is, it might still be blocked by a Fear Block. You might not be able to access the Purpose Brick because your Fear Blocks are in the way.

You might find it helpful to do a visualization exercise where you imagine the Fear Blocks being moved or obliterated in some way, and accessing your Love Wall. You might imagine yourself going up to your Love Wall, even if you have to climb through the Fear Blocks, and finding the Purpose Brick. Maybe it's a different color than the other bricks. Maybe it slides right out of the wall for you to read. Maybe there's an inscription on it. Maybe it's blank for you to write the inscription on it. What feels good to you here at the Love Wall? What does your Purpose Brick look like?

If you feel like your mind is still blank, that's okay. Don't stress. I've got some ways for you to move those blocks and make that image clearer.

Yes, You Can Choose Your Passion

First of all, if it helps for you to release the idea of purpose being “assigned” to you or something you “innately know”, let’s go ahead and do that.

To do this, I’m going to share something with you that’s kind of controversial: I believe sexuality can be chosen. Hear me out.

I’m Queer and the idea of discriminating against someone for anything, including who they love is insane to me. I don’t understand why it’s even a political issue, it’s a human right to love who you love how you want to, including marriage. I’m sure you knew that already, and I’m sad it needs to be “disclaimed”, but until it doesn’t need to be I will continue to clarify.

I believe many people are born attracted to who they are and aren’t. Some people suppress these feelings due to pressure and fear, some people embrace them immediately, some people eventually embrace them over time. In this way we are, as Lady Gaga sings, “Born This Way”. And that is beautiful.

It is also beautiful to “choose” who we love. By this I mean, I can choose to be in a relationship with a woman because I love that particular woman and that relationship is what works best for me and us. Maybe I feel as though mixed gendered relationships haven’t worked for me because of how we communicate and I’m open to trying something different. Is that wrong? Is that insane? Is that unethical? Is it smart? Is it honest? Is it strange? Is it too logical? What is it?

Maybe it just is.

Slowly, I’m seeing people release labels and expectations when it comes to relationships, gender, sexuality, religion, and so much more. I’m seeing people be okay with releasing the control of needing to ascribe solely to one deity to describe a feeling of connection to a higher power. I’m seeing people be okay with not needing to ask, “Oh so you’re gay now?” or say, “It’s okay I’ll love you anyway” or “No matter what” instead of simply, “I love you”.

My point with this is there is no right way to live. The only wrong way to live is to be clear about what your values are and then live in opposition to them.

If you're wanting to recognize your passion and feel like you want to choose it instead of letting it choose you, that's great. If you want it to find you, that's great. If you're open to either, that's also great.

There are so many choices you could have made up till now that would have brought you to a different point. You might not be reading this chapter. Hell, you might not have even bought this book.

In an alternate universe you might actually be the antithesis of your passion. Remember contrast leads to passion. In an alternate universe you could have gotten stuck on the "Fuck No" instead of being aware there was passion available beyond it.

Passion: A Personal Brand

I want you to think about your purpose and passion as if you were a brand for a moment. It doesn't matter if you have a business, in fact, even if you do, I want you to disregard it for a moment. If you have a business, it's likely your business is a clue into your passion, but first and foremost we must be clear on who you are as a human.

The idea of branding yourself might feel corporate, capitalist, and kind of cold and insane, and I get that. But please know this is a thought exercise, not something you need to go out and create with marketing tools on the internet!

Your personal brand is a love letter to the world. It is the legacy you leave behind. It is how you make a room feel when you enter it, and how it feels when you leave it.

It might help you to think about aesthetics for a moment. What colors and styles do you wear and decorate with? What kinds of images, videos, articles, gifs, etc. do you feel inspired to share online? What do people describe you as? What are the recurring themes about who you are, what you create, and how you live? These are clues into your personal brand.

Brands also tend to have slogans. You don't need a slogan, but honestly a value is kind of a slogan already! You need words to communicate what you're passionate about to others. I want to encourage you to be very thoughtful with your words. Don't just take a slogan you see on a tote bag and apply it to your life without further evaluation!

Let me give you an example. We often see phrases like, "Live Boldly" and "Light Up Every Room You Walk Into".



At the core of these phrases is something most of us desire: to live with passion and have an impact on our environment with the life we live.



However, language is important in general, as well as when you are creating your values and personal brand.



If the way you're passionate about living isn't about living loudly or boldly, those expressions might not only not inspire you, but feel like pressure to be someone you're not. They might make you feel like you're failing at being a passionate and effective person if you don't feel as though the life you're living falls under "bold" or "loud", even though you might be passionate and effective through subtlety, empathy, and quiet caring amongst other things.



You don't need to be the lamp, the star, the sun or light in every room. You don't need to be the source of illumination in an environment if that doesn't appeal to you, especially if you prefer to work behind the scenes and in the shadows.

Instead, what if you focused on warming up a room?



What if the way in which you impacted the people you meet, the art you create, and the legacy you leave behind isn't by shining light, but by warming hearts, seats, and souls? What if the warmth is from candles, ambiance, and love?



Does the idea of warming up a room feel better/different to you versus lighting up a room? Do you still prefer the idea of lighting up a room? Or do you like both?

If you do like the idea of lighting up a room, there's nothing wrong with that. There's also nothing wrong if neither of these ideas inspire you. This is just an example.

One of the lessons you'll see over and over again in marketing is when you appeal to everyone you become for no one. McDonald's, Nickelback, and WalMart are all popular, but who are their customers? Can you come up with a clear image in your mind? Not necessarily, and if you do, is it a good feeling?

Now think of an artist you love and imagine who their ideal customer is. Can you come up with a clear image in your mind? What do they look like, where do they live, what are they interested in besides this artist? Is it clearer? Does it feel more exciting?

Are there people who are very clearly not going to be a customer for this artist? What about someone would make them the antithesis of the ideal customer for this artist?

You are the star of your movie. You don't want everyone to have a ticket. You get to decide what genre your movie is, who you want to reach, and what message you're trying to get across.

It's okay to turn people away. In fact, you want to turn people away.

Fill The Hurt In Your Heart With Service

I don't believe passion is meant to be monogamous or stagnant. By this I mean you can have multiple passions and your passion can change as you grow. It's okay for you to be interested in more than one thing, it's okay for you to be deeply interested in one thing for your whole life. There is no right or wrong way. It is, again, like love. You can choose it, you can let it find you. You can date around, or you can marry your high school sweetheart. Try what feels good.

When you're in the process of recognizing your passion, I want you to ask yourself, 'What hurt my heart?'

The same way Merriment Making is about confronting your fear to unlock your pleasure, recognizing your passion is about plowing directly into fear to discover what you're passionate about loving and serving.

What hurt you the most in the past? What still breaks your heart now? The traumas from your past can inform where your purpose lies.

This happens so often, think about it! People who have suffered from addiction become AA sponsors. People who have suffered from abuse become social workers. People who grew up with a parent with mental illness go to school for psychology. People who watch a relative die from lung cancer become researchers for the effects of nicotine. People who weren't taken care of in a medical setting become attorneys for malpractice suits. People who grew up in orphanages become foster parents. There are a thousand examples of this.

The idea is we use our personal experience to notice where people need something and we fill that void with a service.

The idea is what hurt our heart is now what fills it up.

After learning this about myself, I learned something more: I've been mistaking boredom as another term for inertia. If someone is bored that means they aren't being productive, especially creatively. Deeper than that, I've realized we can be "busy" and "productive" even creatively from the time we wake up till we go to sleep and still be bored.

If I can occupy every moment of my day and still be bored, then boredom doesn't equal business. And business doesn't equal creativity. And none of this equals passion or purpose.

One of the ways we make sure we are occupied all day is with screens. Since getting an iPhone, my phone tells me every day how much time I spend on it every day even if I don't ask for it. I average four and a half hours on my phone every day. Yes, a lot of my job is conducted from my phone, but much of this is mindless and not deliberate. I choose to spend hours on my phone every day by not choosing to do something else.

Not choosing is always a choice. A no is a yes to something else. And a yes is a no to something else.

We need to be bored. We need to let ourselves be bored. We need to disconnect. We need to go back to the beginning of this chapter and think about why there is a sudden urge for us to know our purpose.

It's because of how many different streams of input are telling us that someone else has discovered theirs. Until now, we didn't need to label our purpose, we simply lived it. We didn't need to announce we had a passion, it vibrated through us. We didn't have to declare who we were because the world felt it when we left a room.

An epitaph is a phrase usually written on a tombstone to sum up who a person was after they have died. I like to think we can write our epitaph now, and work backwards.

You can make a last will and testament that says what you want your epitaph to say. You could even write your own eulogy for someone to read about you at your funeral, but you aren't actually in control of what someone does with your tombstone when you're dead or what they say about you when you're gone.

What you are in control of is how someone feels when they are with you and when they aren't. You are in control of how you help people. You are in control of whether you confront your fears. You are in control of whether you embody, create, and spread joy. You are in control of how authentically you live in alignment with your values.

Two Opposing Truths

Speaking of living in alignment with your values, I have an exercise for recognizing your passion if you're still not feeling inspired.

When you make a list of your values, you're likely to have more than two things. This is natural and expected. For this exercise, you can pull out your preexisting list of values, or start from scratch because I only want you to have two. We can call these values or principles.

The idea of boiling your values down to two things can feel really intimidating, but don't freak out. Remember your passion is non monogamous and fluid; it can be rewritten whenever you want.

These two values are going to be very broad concepts/feelings. Your preexisting list of values might say something like, "I believe clear, open, direct, and honest communication is the core for any relationship" or "It is important to me to be curious instead of judgmental". These are very specific in comparison to the values I want you to focus on for this exercise.

An example of a value for this might look like a single word. Autonomy, Growth, Harmony, Stability, Optimism. What is THE most important thing to you in the whole world to be, create, or do? Start a thesaurus before you Google examples of values to influence you. Listen to your gut.

For example, my value is “Merriment”. This word to me means to embody, create, and spread joy. (It’s absolutely okay for you to innovate a name for your value or to create a specific definition for the word as it means to you!)

Now I want you to do a little writing, be it a list or free association. What about this value is important to you? Be specific. What does it give you the opportunity to do? What space does it give you? What does it inspire you to be?

For example, if I were to write about Merriment, I would write about how Merriment to me is more than joy, it’s about the process of confronting your fear to experience pleasure and joy.

In this writing portion, you might have a clue as to your second value. The key here is you don’t want your second value to be a synonym for your first value.

For example, if my two values were Merriment and Optimism, that wouldn’t be very interesting or dynamic. I would essentially be repeating myself. Optimism is covered under my definition of Merriment, even if it’s not in the first sentence.

It might help to make a list of words that support your first value so you can rule them out as being your second value.

Your second value is meant to be not necessarily the opposite of your first, but opposing. The idea is a passionate person can have a passion and a value system that is not only interesting but dynamic. It holds two opposing ideas as truth. We can see the grey without shunning the white or the black ends of a spectrum because we've been taught there is only good at one side of the spectrum.

Conceptually, there is only love and fear. And our fear operates out of a protective kind of love, so unless we are taking away the rights, safety, or security of a person we are operating from fear, love, or somewhere in between. It's aware love, or protective love. Our love is dynamic. Our passions are, too.

So my second value, to finish out my example, is fear.

Joy and fear don't seem like they should go together, and yet that's what this book is about. Here they coexist.

To find your second value, you need to ask your soul. You might need to ask your heart where it aches. You might find the second value back in the section of what hurt you and how you want to be of service.

If your heart aches for people who are houseless, why? Ask why over and over again until you can't answer any more specifically.

Why does your heart hurt for people who are houseless?

Because they should have homes.

Why?

Because they deserve to.

Why?

Because everyone should.

Why?

Because we need to be safe.

Why?

Because there are scary things outside.

Why?

Because people can be bad.

Why?

Because they've been hurt, too.

Why?

Because they're scared.

Why?

Because they had abusive childhoods.

Why?

Because their parents were abused, too.

Why?

Because we don't have enough systems and tools available for parents.

Why?

See how many different directions that could take? Those why's could have lead to specifics on drug abuse, child abuse, social work, parental education, birth control, homeless shelter resources. It's about allowing your personal experiences, pain, and fear to show itself. The more you ask why, the closer you get to a state of what to do/plan of action.

Your second value could be determined from either the overarching point of heartache or the plan of action.

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Your second value could be determined from either the overarching point of heartache or the plan of action.

Examples might look like commitment and flexibility. Tolerance and justice.
Pragmatism and adventure.

Once you are clear about your two values/principles, think about what someone who is passionate about those two things might do with their life. That could be your purpose!

Fuel Your Passion

Now we are clear not only are you someone who wasn't skipped over for having a unique purpose, but that you know what yours is at this moment in time. The next step is to acknowledge that just because you know what it is doesn't mean anything happens.

Passion has the unfortunate opportunity to become shelf knowledge the same way a book does. Two people can buy a book and one can read it and one can put it on their shelf. That book is used in a completely different way. Two more people can read the same book and one can keep the information in their mind and the other can implement it. Again, that book has been used in a completely different way.

Some people won't bother moving their Fear Blocks to try to get to their Passion Brick. Some people will get to their Passion Brick and be intimidated by what it says. Some people will love what it says and take the brick home to display proudly on their mantle. They'll show their brick off at parties, bragging about how shiny it is, but not do anything about it. Some people will live the message of their Passion Brick without ever needing to show their brick to someone else.

These are not the only options, but the Passion Brick has been used in many different ways the same as the book was. Don't let your Passion Brick become shelf knowledge or a trophy on the mantle. It is information to inspire your actions.

The same way you have freewill to recognize your purpose, you have freewill to choose to not show up for your purpose and forget about it.

Remember in this version of this timeline of this life, this is the passion you chose based on all the other choices you made. This is a passion you're excited about based on your experiences.

No matter how natural and visceral excitement and enthusiasm is for a concept, a passion, or even a person, if we leave it dormant, we will grow apart from it. Enthusiasm must be nurtured. Without enthusiasm, your passion is a task.

This is why Liz Gilbert says that all creative endeavors or passions are a "shit sandwich". She reminds us to choose something we love so much that we don't mind eating the shit sandwich that accompanies it, because everything comes with a shit sandwich.

We don't like to think about the shit sandwich. We think even if we make money from what we're passionate about, we'll "never work a day in our life". I think that's such shit.

I have my own business based on a concept I created. I work from my house and pay my bills with money I make from products and services I sell to people I adore around the world. I am incredibly proud of my business. I also work very, very hard. It is very, very hard.

I'm tired of people saying work is only ever fun and easy. It's not! Business is still business, and money is still money. Creativity still requires time, energy, money, and supplies.

The grass is always greener when we're not eating that particular shit sandwich.

When we think, "It must be nice to always travel", the person who travels all the time might be sick of the inside of airports, travel regulations, layovers, and time zone hangovers.

When we think, “It must be nice to work from home”, the person who works from home might be sick of being hunched over on screens, the construction next door, working around the clock, and not having any social contact.

When we think, “It must be nice to have a steady paycheck”, the person who has a steady paycheck might be sick of their long commute, fluorescent lights in their office, power tripping boss, and inconsistent schedule.

Life is not easy. Life is complicated, dynamic, interesting, and rewarding. So is your passion.

Act Swiftly & Seek Awe

There are a ton of tips on how to “fuel your passion” and “stay motivated”, but I don’t find them all to be a one size fits all experience depending on your purpose and personality.

The two things I believe to be universal to keep your passion and enthusiasm active and engaged are to act swiftly and to seek awe.

Acting swiftly applies to everything, especially to creativity and inspiration, but to everything.

When you have an idea, write it down. Once you write it down, carry it out. If you don’t write it down, you won’t make it happen. If you don’t have a system for what to do with things you write down, you won’t be able to make it happen. The longer you wait to bring it to life, the less effective it will end up being.

I have incredible amounts of notes in my phone and in notebooks. I’ve learned to organize them by category. These categories might not become clear until after you do some “Brain Dumps” and see patterns, but I promise once you know what categories you return to, it will be easier to go straight to the category when you have an idea instead of brain dumping and organizing it later.

For example, I have categories in my phone like, “Instagram Ideas”, “Places To Visit”, “Shopping List”, “Product Ideas”, “Good Things About Life”, “Bucket List”, “Quotes”, and “Gift Ideas”. There’s also a general “Brain Dump” I use for random things, but it gets messy and it’s a lot more effective for me to put things into existing files than search later.

Organizing ideas might feel antithetical to acting in alignment with your passion, and depending on how you operate it might be! I find however, many people when it comes to their passion (especially or exclusively) have a lot of ideas which come in an overwhelming way. When we’re excited about something, ideas can feel like a flood! Sometimes we need to create structure so we can create freedom.

My point in telling you this is to prevent you from Inspiration Overwhelm. When you discover or reconnect with your passion, it’s like having a new relationship! Exciting, intense, and consuming. Be proactive with protecting your passion. Create systems to nurture it. There’s no such thing as burning too bright, but you can stop adding logs to the fire.

When I said to act swiftly with everything, I meant it. Not just with writing down ideas, but with bringing them to fruition. And not just with ideas, but with life.

If you procrastinate with doing your laundry, bringing that clutter up the stairs to put away, picking up your medicine, scheduling your meals, signing up for a class, or stretching your back, how do you think you’re going to treat your passion? Practice like you play. If something takes less than three minutes, don’t waste time writing it on a list. Just do it.

In fact, how much time do you spend planning things and making lists instead of doing what you know needs to be done? Lists have their place. I adore them. But sometimes I use them to give myself a feeling of control or accomplishment instead of doing the things I know would actually make me feel better. Use lists to help you, not stifle you.

The last tip I want to leave you with is to seek awe.

The definition of awe is respect mixed with fear and or wonder.

Most of the time we use the term “awe” to describe experiences where we see natural wonders like canyons, waterfalls, or stars. When we come to terms, if only for a moment, with how small we are, with the idea that we aren’t alone, with how we are a cog in a machine. It’s when our ego leaves and we are left with a personal reverie.

So seek out awe. Seek out nature, orgasms, connection, eye contact, things that alter your perception of space and time, space, meditation, spirituality, art, poetry, murmurations, animals, oceans, and the stars. Seek out transcendence. Over and over again.

Your enthusiasm will take care of itself. Then all you must do is persevere.

Chapter 8: Celebrating, Play, + Pleasure

“Trust that your body remembers
what it feels like to play.”

- Keri Smith

When you think of Merriment Making, the topics titling this chapter are maybe more on theme with what you were expecting to talk about the entire time in this book. I hope it's becoming clear now that Merriment Making is an ongoing process of living, and as trite as it seems, a state of mind. Each of these chapters builds in a purposeful way.

In Chapter 6, we talked about passion and purpose. The reality is once you have discovered something you want to do for a long time or even the rest of your life, you are faced with a level of consistency that can feel daunting to even the most avid creature of habit. This is why in Chapter 7 we discussed how to deviate and prevent ourselves going on autopilot with adding mindfulness, succulence, and zest to our lives.

In this chapter, we're going to amplify succulence and zest into three new themes: Celebrating, Play, and Pleasure. As usual, each of these themes comes with its own spectrum of blocks and fear which we will explore.

Ego

In psychoanalytic theory, there are three interacting parts to the human personality known as the id, ego, and superego. Now the id and superego aren't really in our standard jargon. Those didn't really make the cut. Ultimately, your id is your animalistic urges, the ego is "reality", and your superego is your morality. If you were thinking of a 90's cartoon, the id would be the devil on one shoulder telling you to "do it", the superego would be the angel telling you to "think it over", and your ego would be you as yourself listening to both of them.

Ego is really meant to describe our whole self. In this way, I understand why it's been taken into the general lexicon to describe when we say, "That was a totally ego-driven decision", because technically everything we do is ego!

Why am I talking about ego? Because ego is childish. The id is programmed with you when you arrive as an infant. It's all you have. The ego developed as a child.

The ego also can not be killed.

Recently, I've seen such a huge drive in personal development and spiritual realms to "kill the ego". I'm over it. To kill the ego is to kill the self. You can not kill the ego unless you kill the self. If you want to become less selfish, become more of service! If you want to become less focused on yourself, focus more on others! But your innate desire to look out for yourself, to care about survival, to give a shit if you feel good -- that's not going away. It's not supposed to. "Looking out for number one" is selfish by definition the same way "feeling or showing the want or need for food" is hungry by definition. We need to stop trying to make the human condition evil when it's not evil.

There is a difference between you prioritizing feeling good and billionaires prioritizing going to space instead of feeding starving children.

So the ego is childish. It is stuck in childhood because that's where it was born. It makes childish decisions. It can also make decisions like a teenager and an adult.

I need to remind you that every decision you make is also coming from the decisions you made as a child and teenager and every age you've been because you're not just an adult or whatever you are now, you're everything you have ever been! You are a beautiful conglomeration. This is a stage. Just because something is the "last stage" doesn't mean the other stages don't matter.

The ego is childish. The ego is childlike. Why do those sentences sound so different? Why does one sound annoying, frustrating, and selfish and the other sound whimsical, fantastical, and fun? They're the same thing. Children are both childish and childlike.

We have coined this phrase, "Childlike without being childish". Okay well this fish is "fishlike without being fishy". WHAT? Stop. It's a fish, it's going to be fishy, let a fish be fishy. Let a child be both childlike and childish. Don't steal the wonder of a child and be mad when you're also a bit childish. I'm not Uncustomary-like without being Uncustomary-ish. How insulting is that when we apply it to a person? Don't try to have your cake and eat it, too. How many metaphors can I fit into one paragraph?

Everything we discuss in this chapter is derived from being both childish and childlike. From ego. So if you still have a candle burning stigmatizing being childish and the ego, blow it out now.

Kids Were Always Cool

I used to really dislike kids.

What happened was I've known since I was eighteen or so that I never wanted to have children, and as soon as I vocalized that opinion I was met with an enormous amount of backlash, feedback, pressure, questions, etc.

Now, I've truly never liked the aesthetic of babies. Like baby babies. The new ones. I think they come out too early. The human gestation process is insane and they need to learn how to do more before I can see them.

But because at an age before I was able to legally drink I was being bombarded at family gatherings that weren't even my own about when I was going to get pregnant, I generalized my dislike of babies to all children to make it clear about how much I didn't want to have kids.

How could I be a mother if I didn't even want to be around a kid? It ended up being a self-fulfilling prophecy for a few years because I honestly started really disliking them and the tactic didn't even work because people would argue that it would be "different with my own".

A few years ago, I realized as long as kids can kind of talk, play, and aren't shrieking, I actually really like them. We have so much in common! We like bright outfits, stickers, mermaids, big toys, bubbles. I mean honestly they're some of my best customers and innate Merriment Makers. Avoiding them was avoiding joy if only for the crazy and profound things they say.

Kids were always cool, I was just being a dick to express a desire when people weren't respecting a boundary. That's a take home lesson.

What Would A Kid Do?

Another lesson is kids. Kids are an important lesson.

You absolutely don't need to have them to learn from them, which is why I brought up my story. Remember any time you interact with a child you are molding them. They might not remember what you say but they'll remember how they felt. And at the same time, we can use them as models for ourselves!

Ask what would a kid do in this situation? Do that. Well, kind of. Some of it. I mean we teach kids how to do stuff. Probably don't drive a car or operate a machine like a kid would. Probably don't point to someone with a scar the way a kid would. Actually don't do a lot of things a kid would. I'm talking about weird play stuff. Let's be clear. Weird, play, curious kid stuff.

Why do kids get passes for doing weird stuff? If anything, we should get more passes, I think. Tell me all the inane things you had to deal with this month.

I mean, if I had to count how many hours I had to spend on the phone with my psychiatrist's assistant explaining that I just needed them to please call my pharmacy because the date they have is incorrect, listening to her saying over and over, "No call your insurance" before she finally just did what I asked, I would run out of fingers to count on (also if you're keeping score, I was right and she didn't acknowledge it).

My point is we have a lot of annoying things to do. Those damn logistics. Most kids don't have the level of stress you do. They can take a nap at any time and they're screaming they're tired. Just LAY DOWN, kid. Hahaha. So if you're stressed, what would the coolest kid you've seen in the past year do? Put on overalls and skip down the grocery aisle? Get a giant pixie stick? Moon your mother? Just scream? Grab the microphone at the pharmacy and start doing Seinfeld jokes into it? "Hey, what's the deal with all these medicines?!"

Like really. What's the worst that's happening if you do those things? Okay, probably don't moon your mother. Or maybe do it. Know your audience. Don't get arrested and come at me, otherwise blow off some fucking steam and live your life. You're not going to remember how stressed you are, but you are probably going to remember the time you made Chewbacca noises into your partner's voicemail for six minutes.

But I'm An Actual Parent!

Okay, I know that people who aren't parents aren't allowed to talk about anything related to children or parenting. I think that's fair in the same vein that we can never truly know what it's like to experience something until we experience it. I submit to that entirely. I don't think you can know mental illness until you have it. I don't think you can know OCD even if you have another mental illness. Literally any experience.

That said, you know what I did? I accepted help from a professional who went to school on how to perform Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for individuals with OCD who didn't have OCD. I did that for six months and now it doesn't rule my life.

Maybe if he had OCD he would have still been able to do that job just as effectively. Possibly. I'll tell you I could never do it as someone with OCD! I think it was great to have someone outside the fog I was in to direct me. Sometimes it takes a neutral third party to ground us.

My point is this: I'm not a parent. I will never be a parent. I am about to give you a couple small pieces of advice for parenting as they relate to Merriment Making as a Merriment Maker, not as a parent.

This advice actually applies to any area of life. If you are immediately 'arms-up-defensive nope! or 'I am kind of miserable and unless you are kind of miserable too we can't talk about it', then I submit to you that you're not being productive, you are commiserating. If you want to lift each other up, look outside the bubble of similarity. You don't have to do it. But if what you're doing isn't helping and you feel like you only need to be a survivor in this area, is that something you feel happy with? Or are you wearing your surviving identity like a badge of honor?

All I want to say is I understand as parents you have minimal time for yourselves because so much of your time needs to be spent in the same physical space with your child so they can learn, eat, and be physically safe. I'm not here to change how much time you are spending with your child and tell you to "just take ten minutes to yourself" because that seems like it's not realistic or safe.

What I am here to do is propose that you add Merriment Making to your routine.

Kids are natural Merriment Makers. They want to be embodying, creating, and spreading joy. In fact, it's us and the world who kind of unintentionally kicks it out of them ever so slowly. Or you acknowledge where you're already doing it. How much of play time is already Merriment Making?

As much as we need to get some juice and inspiration from kids about how to innately be Merriment Makers, as a parent, I believe it's extra important to model that you make time for Merriment Making. Maybe that looks like fifteen minutes a day or a big project every Wednesday. It can be something you do together or you can both do separate things side by side. The modeling of time isn't just so they see this is something you do together, it's so they see that their parent prioritized themselves so when they grow up, whether they have kids or not, they remember it was a normal behavior to celebrate, play, have fun, and take time for themselves! If all they see is their parents running around ragged, they will subconsciously repeat those patterns as an adult.

Merriment Making is just as important to teach them as anything else.

I am not telling you that as a parenting expert. I am telling you that as someone who has studied personal development, the inner child, trauma, psychoanalytic theory, and psychology. I'm telling you that as someone who didn't watch a parent do that for themselves. Do with it as you will.

What Is Play, Though?

What do kids do that adults don't? What is this secret sauce kids seem to have figured out (or not lost yet) that adults don't know (or have forgotten)? The simple answer that can overarch any response is play. Kids play and adults don't.

Play is simply when we are doing something because it brings us enJOYment or pleasure instead of us doing it because it serves a "practical" purpose.

Play is natural and ultimately necessary for our happiness. There are many other reasons that adults are unhappy, but I want you to find me a happy adult that has zero play in their life. Alternatively, I want you to find me an unhappy adult who is actively playing every day. The odds are extremely slim. It's not causation, but the correlation is high.

Let me be clear that “playing” doesn’t need to be on a playground. Dr. Stuart Brown has identified eight major play personalities. You might be a combination of two or three!

9 Play Personalities

Joker - laughing, making other people laugh, jokes, comedy

Kinesthete - moving your body, sports, group activities, being outside in general

Explorer - doing new things, learning, adventuring, researching

Competitor - beating records, sports, watching sports, setting goals, trivia

Director - organizing events, organizing physical things, leading a group, providing an experience, hosting a party

Collector - searching for items, collecting, organizing your items, researching the history, sharing your collection with others

Artist/Creator - creating anything, observing art, giving art you made to others

Storyteller - imagining adventures, performing, acting, writing, reading novels, watching theater

The point here isn’t necessarily to give yourself a new label, it’s to remind yourself that if you like to collect acorns you find outside, that is playing. If you like to read fiction because it takes you to a magical world, that is playing. If you like to write jokes, that is playing. If you like to host parties, that is playing.

Pretty much anything that gives you enjoyment can be put somewhere on this list of play personalities. But guess what, if it doesn’t that doesn’t mean it isn’t valid. It means you’re extra interesting! You were ahead of Dr. Stuart Brown. And he was a doctor!

This list is honestly here to validate your child self, your teenage self, and your current self. Anything that has ever brought you a feeling of pleasure is play. So that’s what we’re calling play. PLEASURE IS PLAY.

When Did You Stop Playing?

Now that we know what play is, let me ask you when you stopped playing. Think! Seriously. Take a second and think when you stopped playing.

You might be able to identify a singular moment or a year that feels like, “Oh damn, that’s when I stopped playing”. Or maybe you stopped playing with this thing around this age and with another thing around this year. Maybe you’ve experienced long pauses with certain types of play and you’ve returned to it and paused again. The truth is there’s likely to not be an exact answer, and that’s okay.

Play is very flowy, so it’s difficult to pin it down. Play shouldn’t be pinned down. The point of asking this question is to get your brain thinking. Actually, I kind of tricked you. When I asked you to think of when you stopped playing, I wasn’t really interested in the time. I was interested in what activity you were trying to figure out the timeline for.

So when your mind tried to find a date, what were you trying to find a date for? What did your mind prioritize in terms of play? We just identified there are an enormous amount of types of play, which means you could be searching for all different types of activities. So what came to your mind? There might have been 1-3 activities. Stick with those.

There is something about those activities you miss. Whether you stopped 20 years or 2 months ago, your brain and body prioritized those. Now we need to figure out why.

It’s Not Always About The Activity

A mistake some people make is assuming they need to recreate the activity they did as a child or a teenager the exact same way they used to do it in order to be happy.

You can do that. For some people it’s going to be the way to go. But, even if you end up there, I still want you to go through this process of making sure that’s the right thing to do for you.

Write down what play activity came up for you in the last section, then make a list of all the good things about that activity. Specifically how it made you feel, what it allowed you to do, and any logistical benefits to it. For example, if you liked collecting stickers, maybe it made you feel organized, it allowed you to create colorful binders you shared with other people and learn about stationery, and it was great because it was compact and you could carry it with you. Be exhaustive with the list.

The point of making this list is to identify what the activity gave you. Maybe you do want to go back to collecting stickers at this moment in time. Maybe you want to do a variation of it. You could think about something that was annoying about it and that's how you change it up to accommodate your needs now as an adult.

You can also look at your results and say okay, so I enjoy organization, binders, color, stationery, and being able to move around freely. What are other activities I can do today that meet those desires?

Scheduling Play?

I've said before that we need to schedule play, and I stand by that. I understand the idea of play is to be freeform and to exist without a specific purpose, but I also believe there is a container for the play! The purpose of the container is to play. What you do inside that container is 100% up to you. And let's be real, for most of us if we don't put it on the calendar it won't happen!

Schedule play dates. Put them on the calendar. An hour, an afternoon. By yourself and with a friend.

This also allows you to be as prepared as you can be for the play date as you would like to be! If you are someone who thrives on spontaneity, then you don't need to worry about this. If you are someone who wants an activity scheduled, then you can say, "Okay, on Thursday we're going to the Circus and I'm getting tickets now. I'll organize the carpool, pick out my outfit, and charge the camera tonight." If you're making something you can pick out all the supplies in advance. The point of this is to cut down on taking away from your play date time! It's all ready for you!

When you're on a play date with yourself or someone else, I also recommend bringing in the tips and practices you learned about mindfulness. At the very least, begin by putting your phone on 'do not disturb'! You can't truly play and not be in the moment! If you're distracted, you're not playing. Don't work during your play date. Make it worth your while!

Don't Play To Be Productive

Now, there is a difference between scheduling a play date and being prescriptive with your fun. By this I mean acting like play is a chore and essentially just playing to be able to check it off your to do list.

Think about it like a personal development activity. Have you ever made a list of things you want to do because you know it's 'good for you' and maybe something like 'do a five minute meditation' is on the list? But when you go to do the meditation, it's not actually about being mindful, you're really just punching the clock so you can cross something off that to do list of yours and trick yourself into thinking you're "productive"?

Remember, we're not here to be productive for productivity's sake. If you're only doing something to check it off the to do list, then don't do it. Who are you doing that for? You made the to do list. Just skip it.

Yes, there's a lot to be said for faking it till we make it and getting better with practice! I'm talking about genuinely doing something because we think we're "supposed to".

Yes, I believe meditation will help you with a lot of things. (I actually think playing will help you with far more than meditation will.) But if you are going into playing to cross it off your to do list every single time, I'd honestly rather you rest. That goes for so much in life, honestly. Going into an activity simply to say we did it is the equivalent of reading a paragraph and not comprehending it. Yeah, I technically read it. Okay, well what did it say? I. Have. No. Fucking. Idea.

So yes, I implore you to play. But play when you're present. Not to be productive.

Pleasure Can't Exist Without Pain

Honestly, that last part might have thrown you. That's okay. I understand the essential contradiction between needing to start and not wanting to do something or not being ready and needing to get into a routine.

There's a difference between creating a habit for brushing your teeth that you don't necessarily need to be mindful for in order to benefit from and creating a habit where you're essentially just wasting your time if you're on autopilot for the whole thing. That's why the chapter on mindfulness came first.

This concept is either going to feel incredibly liberating to you and you're immediately going to apply it to everything in your life like, "Oh shit! Yeah, I guess I shouldn't do anything that requires my brain if I'm not present for it. It would be more beneficial to do something mindless, tedious, or restful instead!" or you'll feel like it's a catch-twenty-two.

If you're in the catch-twenty-two camp, I want you to start with pure pleasure first.

While all play is pleasure, not all pleasure is necessarily play. What I mean by this is if we are doing something that qualifies as play to us, it is clearly pleasurable. We've covered this. However, if we are doing something that brings us pleasure, it doesn't need to be under the definition of play. An example of something like this could be eating, napping, having sex, or smelling something.

Notice everything I listed as an example of pleasure could also be painful. You can get food poisoning from eating, have a nightmare during a nap, be assaulted during a sexual encounter, or smell something that makes you gag.

There is a natural duality that anything that brings us pleasure can also bring us pain. Essentially, the bigger the pleasure, the bigger the pain potential as well. It's like emotions. You can have moderation and no risk, or huge risks and big highs and lows.

In fact, it's been scientifically proven there is pain in the same brain circuits that give us pleasure! Essentially, pain cannot exist without pleasure and pleasure cannot exist without pain.

The good news is that we all know what pain is, so we don't need to put ourselves through more in order to experience pleasure! Since we know what "bad" (painful) stuff feels like, we can experience what "good" (pleasureful) stuff feels like without needing to feel more bad stuff! I'm not saying more bad stuff is never going to happen again, it's just that if we were starting from a neutral state, we would technically need to understand what pain felt like to feel pleasure. In that sense, all the pain you've ever felt is a good thing so you can focus on pleasure.

How To Focus On Pleasure

One of the great things about pleasure is it's totally unique to you. What makes you feel good is completely different than what makes me feel good. It's fabulous and hilarious. Most of the time it doesn't take much to get us to feel good.

One of the worst things about pleasure is it's totally unique to you. That means you need to try stuff. If you don't try things, you won't know what feels good! Or you might think only a small amount of things makes you feel good or there isn't as much pleasure available to you as there is to someone else because you've been operating inside of a smaller bubble. Or worst case, you might mistake pain for pleasure because you don't know any better!

Intuition is imperative, but experimentation is key.

A "good movie" is as subjective as pleasure. Your definition of a good movie means nothing other than you know that you like it. It's your opinion. It's the same thing with what you find pleasurable. It means nothing other than you know you like it.

If you look up tips for how to experience pleasure online, they'll give you specific ideas like, "Be alone in your room for an hour". Yeah, maybe for the person who wrote that list! But that could be someone's nightmare.

Writing a list of how to experience pleasure is basically like me writing what your sexual kinks are for you. It doesn't work. Yeah, I can give you a list of ALL the sexual kinks known to us at this moment in time, and then there's still going to be someone who comes in like, "Excuse me, I don't see Olympic bronze medals covered in that tempura stuff they cook shrimp in at Japanese restaurants slowly dangled over your belly button on this list" and you're like, "Okay that is very specific, hold on, did you say *silver* Olympic medals?" They're like, "No, Bronze".

What was I talking about?

Honestly, you just need to explore some large categories of life with a fine toothed comb. Like food, sex, shelter, and nature.

If we're imagining a spectrum where 0 is neutral, -10 is the most pain you can be in, and +10 is the most pleasure you can experience, what can you do in these areas to get as close to +10 as possible?

Let's use food as an example. The obvious answer is eating food, right? Eating the most delicious food you could imagine. Maybe that looks like going to different restaurants in your hometown. Traveling to your dream destination to eat there. Ordering in a different language. Learning how to cook. Taking a cooking class. Ordering in from GrubHub. Trying cuisines you've never tried. Crossing a new country off the map every week. Trying the same dish from all the places in your town that make it.

That's just eating food and I'm not even extending it to beverages. What else falls in the category of food that's not so obvious? Maybe you'd get pleasure from making food themed art. Getting some novelty food items. Things shaped like food. Painting your kitchen into a rainbow. Growing an herb or vegetable garden. Organizing your refrigerator. Going to the farmer's market every weekend. Cooking naked. Having sex in the kitchen. Redecorating your kitchen. Smelling food.

You can conquer and divide to experiment and experience pleasure in so many ways. You could imagine looking at it as if pleasure must titillate either your senses, your intellectual mind, your emotions, your physical environment, your imagination, or your spirituality.

The point is to begin looking at life through the lens of pleasure. How can you give this part of your body an orgasm? What's the most amount of pleasure your forearm could get? What about your kidneys? The part of your brain that's satisfied by seeing things organized in rainbow order? Titillate yourself. Tell others how to titillate you.

Once you become more educated on what excites you, you'll naturally find it easier to ask for it from yourself and others as well as be mindful during the experience so you can make the most of it while it lasts. The latter skill will give you a more organic understanding of what I meant in the previous section of showing up for play when you're present, not just to be productive.

Is Pleasure Homework Counterintuitive?

You wouldn't show up to sniff a flower just to check it off a list to say you've sniffed a flower, right? Why does that seem silly but the idea of scheduling play and checking it off on autopilot isn't that crazy?

Honestly it's because we've now been programmed to know that we're "supposed to play" as adults because it's something we "don't do" anymore. In this way, playing has become "homework" for us, which is the antithesis of play.

Simultaneously, we don't get assigned "pleasure homework". That's not really a thing (yet). Yes, we're reminded to stop and be mindful and quite literally "stop and smell the flowers", but it's more in this "You're going too fast, slow down!" framework. The slowing down could really be applied to anything.

What I'm asking you to do here is actually pleasure homework in the sense I'm suggesting doing this thing might help you get to/feel something (else), but the idea is that you follow your instincts.

Ultimately the concept of Merriment Making is holding two seemingly contradictory beliefs to be true at once. That's the whole deal throughout the book, we look at spectrums. Right now, though, I want to acknowledge that self-help in and of itself is only helpful up to a certain point.

I can't and won't write an infinite amount of books about this topic, meaning Merriment Making or personal development in general. My goal here is to give you inspiration and set you free. Not just free from this book, but from your mind. I hope that what I'm writing is pointing out things you know somewhere inside of you already but have forgotten, or maybe genuinely didn't know yet. I want you to challenge me the same way I'm challenging ideas in this book. If I say something you know in your gut to be wrong for you, truly fuck it. Fuck it all the way.

I'm not here to tell you what is *right*. My goal is to shake shit up and give you perspective. I'm not right. I'm constantly changing my mind as I learn new information, and that's honestly one of the only reasons I believe I'm even "allowed" to write a book. I don't want to learn from people who are stubbornly stuck in their ideas. I want to know that people admit they have no idea. I want to learn from people who are still sick and struggling. I want to be human together.

Part of being human is admitting things are challenging. One of the challenges with Merriment Making is, like I mentioned, believing in two (seemingly) contradictory things. In this case, I'm referring to me, the author of this book and theory, assigning you homework *and* wanting you to be out in the world just living your life.

The whole idea is ultimately counterintuitive and at a certain point it becomes counterproductive. The point is for there to be a tipping point. The idea is that by doing the assignments you develop a taste for this aspect of life. You incorporate them ritually, whatever that means to you. I want to make things easier for you than they were for me. That means going over boring logistics and steps so you can take a shortcut if you want to. That part isn't really fancy or fun, but it leads to freedom.

Either way, when we get told to do something, there are usually two reactions. One end of the spectrum is our rebellious spirit which says nope, it's homework and that means it's obligatory and I'm not doing it. That means realistically the problem we're feeling or facing is going to stay the same because we're not doing anything about it. On the other end of the spectrum, we take the homework as a new gospel and abandon our own intuition. We become robotic to the assignment and forget this was just a reminder. This means we have a new problem because we lose ourselves.

The homework is here to wet your whistle, not to become your only source of noise. Remember you have your own voice. Life is all à la carte. The pre-made meal might be cheaper and easier, but it doesn't come with your favorite dessert, so you're going to need to deviate from the formula to have the grandest meal of all.

We're Not Fixing, We're Celebrating

You know, we don't just do this formulaic robot thing with the assignments inside of a book or program, we do it with the whole genre of self-help in general! Most of us come to self-help because we were told we were too much or not enough of something. We were told we were broken and needed to be fixed. Then we found out there was something called self-love, and the idea of that sounded radical.

We got a taste of loving ourselves, but on the way there we started being shown all these tools, tips, and trades we could buy and try. We became obsessed with how interesting breathwork, meditation, tapping, yoga, journaling, gratitude, affirmations, mirror work, or whatever technique we tried could feel good in the moment. Instead of diving deep into one of them and learning about ourselves deeply and intuitively, we start wondering what else was out there like this!

So we pile up more videos, more books, more podcasts, more programs. More things left unused, unwatched, and unread. More untapped potential not just on the shelf, but within ourselves. It's not that our potential lies within that unwatched media, it's that we *think* it does. We've been sold the idea that self-help is fixing ourselves instead of loving ourselves. When did this happen? When did we switch over?

We didn't notice. It came in like a wave during the night, under a cloak of benevolence. We all thought we were *helping* ourselves and each other with all these inspirational quotes and affirmations. We thought we were boosting each other up, but we were all after the next fix. The next fix of dopamine and the next way we could fix ourselves.

We came here because we were so down after being told we needed to be fixed and when that wave came in, we claimed a new role. We decided we would be a new type of duality. We would be both broken and the fixer. We would have a new type of kink where we take control of the thing that hurt us so much. Instead of waiting for the next person to tell us we needed to be fixed, we would learn about all our own broken pieces more than anyone ever had before.

We would pick up every broken piece and examine them with a magnifying glass with all these tools and techniques we paid for from gurus and people on the internet we never met and who would never know our names or stories. If someone came at us telling us we needed to be fixed we already knew. Here is my broken outline A-Z. I've done the analysis and I'm working on it all day every day. You can't touch me, because I'm fixing myself.

Instead of radically loving ourselves, we just took control of a self-torture button.

There is nothing wrong with having techniques and tools that work for you! There is nothing wrong with helping yourself when you're down. There is nothing wrong with learning more about yourself. There is nothing wrong with healing your wounds and cleaning out your closet because a clutter free space is easier to work with.

What I'm challenging you and myself to do is figure out how much of this is happening instead of loving yourself. How much fixing is happening instead of making art, food, and love? How much are you looking at old wounds instead of making new memories? How often are you picking at scabs and crying instead of falling over laughing? How much time are you celebrating life?

Merriment Making was never about fixing. It was always about playing, loving, and celebrating.

Today Is Special Enough

When people ask me in interviews what “changed my life”, the official answer is when I did six months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and started a gratitude practice and after that I had more room in my brain to be creative which is where my blog started.

The other thing that happened which is essentially the bridge between those two parts of my life is that I stopped hoarding supplies. I could not have started being creative and started my blog if I had not stopped being so damn stingy.

I’ve always loved art and craft supplies. When I had a pay check and no rent as a 20-year-old, I pretty much lived at the craft store. That weekly 40% off coupon was my best friend. I also joined a site called Swap-Bot where I did craft supply swaps through the mail with people in other parts of the world, so I got all these really cool pieces of ephemera in my PO Box. I slept on a red couch and spent hundreds of dollars on postage every week. It was a very different time in my life.

The thing is, I wasn’t using any of the supplies. Besides stationery to write letters or decorate packages, the only time the materials ever actually left their drawers was to go to another home in exchange for more stuff through the mail. I was really proud of how much cool stuff I had, but too proud. I was protective. Like a parent that was terrified to let their kid go play outside in case they got a scratch.

I remember one time a friend asked if they could use my supplies to make a scrapbook. I was really excited that I could help them and also show off my stuff. But like four times I had to snatch stuff from their hands and say, “Okay but these are special from Sweden so you can’t use those”. “*These*” were stickers.

After I stopped CBT, one of the ways I started being creative was with my gratitude practice. I thought it would be cool to make the journal pretty on the inside instead of only writing lists in it. I had all the means to do that, but even with my own journal I was hesitant to use my supplies.

I heard another part of my brain whisper, “That doesn’t make sense”, and I thought with another part somewhere in the middle of the irrational hoarder and the whisper that I could compromise by first using supplies I didn’t care too much about. I justified it by saying it wasn’t going to “leave the house” and I wasn’t “giving away” or “wasting” the supplies because they were still mine and I could “see them whenever I wanted”.

So I started decorating the inside of the journal and I was so much happier when I opened it up to write in it every day, so I slowly but surely started adding the more “special” stuff to it. I remember one day I put one of the most precious things I had in there, these swirly star wire things my friend, Sara, from Switzerland had sent me. (Shout out to one of the best penpals of all time.) I had six of them and I put one in the journal and I had enough adrenaline to fuel a generator. But I did it.

I started wondering what it would be like to do that with other stuff that wasn’t craft supplies. I started using novelty items I had put away or saved for “a rainy day” or “special occasion”. I would take them to restaurants or use them just to take a photo. Honestly, the more mundane or ridiculous I made the use of the seemingly special things, it became so obvious that what I was doing before was absurd.

I started thinking about what it would be like if I died and left all this stuff behind. How annoying. I mean, it would probably be a great haul at the thrift store for someone, but it’s just representing fun I could have had and didn’t.

Obviously we can’t live life every day like we’re going to die because hopefully we *will* actually wake up tomorrow and we probably want our bank accounts to not be drained, our house to be here, and to not have a duck tattoo on our forehead.

However, there is a certain “last day” energy we can tap into. If you were going to die today, is this the last thing you’d want to say to that person? Is this worth being mad about? Is this conversation interesting? Do you want to bother nitpicking over yourself in the mirror or do you want to go outside? Do you want to look at the internet or live your life? Is this how you want to spend today?

Ask yourself what you're "saving" for a "special" day. And then ask yourself how many times you could have actually used that thing and enjoyed it. Sure, if we had prom every weekend in high school it wouldn't have been special. There is a point in things being novel by spreading them out. I'm fully on board with that. I'm also on board with the idea that there are enough special things you can do a new one every single day for a year or more before you need to repeat that thing again.

You can find something new and interesting to do every day. It doesn't need to be using a hamburger phone or busting out your wedding china every night. You can do that once a year and it will still be fun when you do it once a year. There are absolutely 365 unique things about life you aren't doing. There is not a scarcity of interesting things in your life or the world. Don't hoard the fun.

So how can you do one new, fun, crazy, unique, interesting, novel, playful, bizarre, celebratory thing every day? Make a list if you want. It can be switching out your pen or running naked through the street. I don't care. Start with the habit, and let your body take it over. Say YES I can do that. Then say AND I could also... and see what else happens.

The whole point of this section, this chapter, and this book isn't necessarily a HOW to do something, it's a TO do something. I want you TO celebrate life. How to celebrate it is up to you. Your version of interesting is different, and I fucking love that about you.

Merriment Is Symbiotic

I want to remind you that what we're talking about here are not finite things. There is no way to win celebrating, playing, or experiencing pleasure. This is being done to do it. There are no levels to this video game, there are no points or other players.

The only video games I enjoy playing are called “Flower” and “Katamari”. In “Katamari” you are a big ball and as you go through the world you pick up colorful things that get added to your ball like a magnet. In “Flower” you are a flower and you fly through the air of meadows and turn dark spaces into bright flower patches, mountains, and other natural formations. As you turn more dark into bright, you get more petals on your flower stem.

These video games are essentially Merriment Making. It’s you as a being, going through the world, understanding you have an impact on the world and the world has an impact on you. You can affect the level of light in the world with where and how you decide to move throughout it, and as a result of that the world can affect your shape. It’s a symbiotic relationship.

I’m happy to understand that as much as I believe the first step of Merriment Making is to embody joy, there is no chicken or egg. I prioritize embodying joy because we tend to forget how to take care of ourselves. However, feeding the world will always help us feed ourselves. Don’t discount any step of Merriment Making, and know that if you are creating an energy wave of joy with the intent of yourself it will also eventually radiate to someone else and if you are creating an energy wave of joy with the intent of being for someone else it will also radiate back to you.

Joy is energy and it bounces and flows. Once it exists it must go somewhere. So keep creating more when you can.

Chapter 9: Creativity

“One day you will wake up and there won’t be any more time to do the things you’ve always wanted. Do it now.”

- Paulo Coelho

Pride In Creativity

Creativity is something we talk about almost constantly. We’ve alluded to it, danced with or around it, or directly addressed it in almost every chapter of this book, and it comes up in our lives or thoughts almost daily. However, when something is omnipresent the way creativity seems to be, we don’t do much investigating around exactly what we’re thinking about.

‘Do you know what creativity is?’

‘Yeah, sure!’

‘Okay, what is it?’

‘I mean...’

Truthfully, this can be applied to almost any topic we’ve discussed in this book. Joy, fear, pain, pleasure, play. The thing that’s different about creativity is we all seem to claim to know a little bit more about this topic than the others. We collectively admit earlier in the conversation that we might be lost when it comes to understanding the nuances of something as complex as joy or fear, but creativity? Pssh. We’ve got that one.

Why is that? Why is there so much pride around creativity?

I believe it's because creative endeavors are celebrated when we see them in an "accomplished" nature. When something has come to fruition in a way that appears tangible, we idolize them.

Artists become rock stars quickly and martyrs quicker, and it's because we're jealous. Even when we are making our own creative endeavors go from "ideas" to "reality", we still can't help but compare and look with green eyes. We make ourselves feel better by saying things like, "I could have made that".

We believe if we "could have made that", then we should somehow also be reaping the same benefits as that artist. This is not the case. The difference is that person did it. That person not only made this thing, but they put it out in the world, connected with their life purpose, maintained motivation, and managed the logistics of how to share and spread joy with the world as a Merriment Maker.

Imagine if you had made this thing, or anything you enjoyed creating and gone through all the steps to share it with the world, to spread joy as a Merriment Maker. Even if it's a Merriment Mission as "simple" as putting a sticky note that says "smile" on a pole outside. As soon as you put it up, someone walks by and says, "Pssh, I could have done that!" How would that make you feel? On the receiving end, we feel like that's unnecessary, yet so often we dish it out. We dish out troll comments, not just on the internet but in real life. We bring down the energy with our internal judgment, pride, and fear projected on another.

As soon as we see a disconnect between someone's "genius" and a "creation", we find excuses about why this creation isn't valid. This eases our internal fear and ego about why we haven't moved our own ideas into reality.

For example, if you invent a machine that flicks paint for you, people may be more likely to say you're less of an artist than if you had flicked the paint off of a paintbrush because we have established that a paintbrush is a 'valid' tool for a painter. Is a paintbrush any different than a machine, though? In both instances, they were the last thing the paint touched, not the artist's hands. If the artist made the machine, at least they'd be in charge of how the machine distributed the paint. Would it then, by these standards, only be "true art" if you directly applied the paint with your fingers? What if you don't have fingers?

Is it okay to use it with your feet or nose, or does that make you 'brave' even though those are your only options? So many questions that maybe don't need to be answered or asked in the first place.

I'll tell you almost everything I've ever made most people could have also made. That does not stop me from creating, and it shouldn't stop you from creating.

The first step in embodying, creating, and spreading creativity as a Merriment Maker is to release the pride (fear) that if someone else could have made what you did that it's 'not good enough'.

Adding joy to the world is something we all benefit from. If every single person added a sticky note to their wall that said "I love you", that wouldn't be bad or derivative. It would be a beautiful connection and declaration of love. Just because it's not a skill set that requires ten years of special schooling doesn't mean it's inadequate.

Releasing this pride starts with releasing judgment in others, too! Remember fear and judgment are mirrors. Soften all judgment with compassion. If you see something creative and feel the urge to judge it, even in your mind, shift the focus to think how you would feel if this was your project and you could hear those thoughts from someone else. Then change the narrative.

You can start by thinking why this person might have "only" done this with logic. For example, maybe they "only" had these tools to work with because that's all that was available. Then move on to how this is actually great. It can also help to see creativity through the eyes of your five-year-old self. Would this art excite you? Would your own thoughts or words be interesting or boring to five-year-old you, or would they think they're mean? Use that as a guide.

What Is Creativity?

We understand why we have so much pride around creativity, but that doesn't really answer what it is. Creativity permeates our existence. Without it, we would still be the first iteration of humans, as cavemen.

Creativity is the ability to solve problems, invent, discover possibilities, and produce new and novel things.

Creativity gives us the ability to solve problems. The moment we were hungry and realized we could solve that problem by hunting for food was creative.

Every time you have something in your life that doesn't feel good and you "fix" it, you are creative.

Sometimes we need "creative solutions", which means we have been taught that when we have Problem A, Solution B will fix it, but at this moment Solution B isn't available, so we need to come up with a solution that we may have never experienced before.

Creativity gives us the ability to invent. The moment we were cold and rubbed sticks so hard that it created friction to invent fire was creative.

Every time someone has come up with something that hasn't existed before is creative. Not everyone is an inventor, but if you have invented, this is a time when you were creative.

Technically, inventions are also almost always a creative solution for a problem. Solution B wasn't available and all the creative solutions we tried weren't working either, so something had to be created completely new to solve a problem.

Creativity is the ability to discover possibilities. The moment we traveled out past our homes in search of new land was creative.

Every time you had explored or been curious about something, it was creative.

Wandering and exploring doesn't necessarily need to lead to finding a solution for something, but it often does. This includes research which can lead to inventions!

Creativity is the ability to produce something new and/or novel. The moment we made clothing was creative.

Every time you make art or a meal you are creative. Any new product or creation is creativity.

In this chapter we're going to learn about creative intelligences that go beyond visual and spatial creative modalities, because those are often overlooked!

Three Big Ways We Create

Margaret A. Boden came up with three specific categories of how we create, which is a very easy way to think about creativity. These categories translate into all other categories, including the eight creative intelligences, eight play personalities, and the four categories of what creativity is we just learned in the last section.

The categories of how we create are Combinational, Exploratory, and Transformational.

Combinational creativity is when we create by combining a bunch of old ideas together.

This is the most common type. An example would be how Instagram went from being a photo feed and then borrowed from Snapchat for Stories and then TikTok for Reels and now have a bunch of features simultaneously. They didn't create all their features, but they are using them to deliver a service.

Creative solutions can easily be drawn from combinational creativity, like accidentally bringing a sewing kit on a boat instead of a tackle kit. You could go home, or you could realize that the string could be used as fishing wire!

Exploratory creativity is when we experiment for curiosity's sake, not knowing what our result is going to be.

An example could be using different mediums with no particular outcome in mind, playing, experimenting with different chemicals, or running a social experiment.

Exploratory creativity is how penicillin and cheese was made!

Transformational creativity is when we create a totally new theory or idea.

This is the least common. An example would be Einstein's theory of relativity. This is how inventions can happen, and also how our worlds can be totally rocked like when we find out the earth isn't actually flat!

Can you think of examples of when you used all three types of creativity in your life?

Creativity Exposes Us

Now that we can wrap our minds a little more tangibly around this omnipresent, abstract concept of creativity, let's talk about why we're so afraid of it.

We already acknowledged there's a sense of pride which comes along with our understanding and sense of creativity, which in itself is a fear, but there's more than that.

When we live in tandem with our creative dreams, we are exposed. Being creative means being vulnerable.

It doesn't matter if you're sharing your creative endeavors online or if you become famous for them. There's still elements of your life that will naturally become exposed when we engage in creativity so we hide. We hide from our dreams.

Think about your big scary dream. The one you're afraid to say out loud. Even a talent or skill that you wish you had. The thing that's "embarrassing" or "too big" or "too late" to do.

It's creative.

It's fucking creative.

It's CREATIVE.

Isn't it?

I don't need to hear it.

It's creative.

Because life is creative.

Dreams are creative.

No one's crazy-big-scary-embarrassing-I-think-it's-too-late dream is, "Well I was hoping I could work double shifts at a call center until I'm 72". That's not your dream.

People's big dreams are wanting to sing on stage, dance on a bar, host a talk show, change someone's life, climb to the top of a mountain, solve a Rubix's cube, win the World Cup, meditate with the Dalai Lama, do stand up comedy, belly dance, visit Hawaii, practice witchcraft, go surfing. I don't know. What's your dream?

I'll tell you what, all the things I listed are things people have done and continue to do every day. Well maybe not the World Cup. That's whenever soccer happens.

Creativity is connected to your dreams. It's embedded in them. It IS them.

So if you're not invoking your creativity, you're not fulfilling your dreams. It's that simple. One depends on the other and back and forth. Forever.

So if you're worried about small ways your creativity will expose you because you'll have to go buy supplies and ask the salesperson questions or answer questions you don't know the answers to, if you're worried about what people are going to ask when they see your supplies or unfinished projects, if you're worried about what to 'call yourself', if you're worried about messing up, if you're worried about failing, if you're worried about giving up, if you're worried about scheduling, if you're worried about any logistic, then this is what I have to say to you:

Breathe. Use all the tools you've learned so far in this book to help you. Everything has been leading you here!

We've talked about the logistics within passion and purpose. We know how to motivate ourselves. We know how to love ourselves. We know how to forgive ourselves. We know all these things both theoretically and tangibly.

But if you need some concrete advice, make the store as easy as possible. Write down your questions. Bring someone with you who doesn't mind talking. Ask a friend. Buy online. Break things down into chunks. Batch your time. Failing is a part of everything. The people who are successful have failed the most. Give up when you are done and not interested, not because you are frustrated or scared. Tell people you're "excited" and "a beginner" when they ask what you're doing or why.

Be excited to be a beginner. How delightful. Think back to when you were a beginner at something you're an expert at now. Owning a house, being in a relationship, being an adult. Oh the fondness of when you first met that thing. What a beautiful damn thing to be a beginner. Why should that not be celebrated? And so too, should the messy, messy middles.

What Creative Blocks Really Are

Are you thinking that's great, but I actually already know what I like to do and I need help starting again? I got you.

Creative blocks. Blocks. There's that word again. Block. Where have we seen that over and over before in this book? Oh right! Fear Blocks!

So if we replace Creative Blocks with Creative Fears then how does that immediately change your mindset? You can even swap out "Creative" for your specific creative venture and then it would say "Merriment Making Fears" and it gets super real.

Everything I said in the last section still applies here. Creativity exposes who we are, it is connected deeply to our dreams, it pulls our vulnerability out and puts it on display.

So first, please make sure you've really examined that and be honest that there are no fears in these areas of exposure, future dreams, or vulnerability that seem to be holding you back from starting or continuing.

Next, I want you to look at perfectionism, procrastination, and toxic productivity from Chapter 5 on Merry Motivation as it relates to your creativity. Are either or any of these infiltrating your mind and cluttering it from allowing you to feel in flow?

If you're still coming up dry, look at Chapter 6 and see how your creative projects connect to your life purpose. Does it feel like it actually connects to something bigger than yourself? Is it feeling like it's serving something outside of you?

Still nothing? Okay, now let's look at overwhelm. Overwhelm can show up in our minds and in our space.

First up, the immediate mind and body. Put your hands on your heart, close your eyes, breathe in and sigh out. Ask yourself what you need right now.

What is weighing on you so much that you need to scream and cry and deal with it right now? Truly. Do you need to make a phone call? Are you scared about something? Are you fucking hungry and need to pee? What can you not get out of your mind? What does your body need?

Go deal with that now. First. Honestly you need to do this a couple times a day. Check in with yourself often. But you *certainly* can't create if these basic needs aren't addressed. Are you *kidding*? Do you want art from someone who was so tense because their tampon was dripping down their body and they were doing the I have to pee dance? You want art from someone who is in an inflow state. So *make it in that state as well.*

Next up is your physical space. Clear that shit out. Specifically where you create or where your supplies are kept. Your creation station. It doesn't need to be an "art studio". It's wherever the stuff for your creative ventures goes. Put music on. Dump it out, clean it, organize it, put it back.

This is a time where you're going to find supplies, clothes, and old half-finished projects that will inspire you! Let them! Just try to not get distracted by them and stop the cleanse and purge, so have a notepad nearby so you can make notes of things to complete, project ideas, etc. so you can refer back later!

Having a space that you don't feel physically overwhelmed or stressed out by to come to create or get supplies from is a game changer. Walking into an office or studio or closet or backyard to start to create and seeing nothing but trash and clutter is a buzzkill beyond belief. So take some time for actually organizing and cleaning how and where you create.

Don't forget this applies to all spaces of your home, not just the creation station!

You'll feel more inspired and happy to be in all rooms if they aren't dirty and cluttered! That said, this is not an excuse to not create! You can create while things are cluttered, especially in other rooms. Don't start saying you can't create because the hall closet isn't perfect! That's just a block you're placing on yourself. Schedule the hall closet for another day.

If you're still noticing that sense of overwhelm is in your body after you're satisfied with an orderly creation station, come back to your mind and body. Check in there, and know that this is a personal fear with a secondary gain. Go to your journal and use the Secondary Gains Worksheet to discover what you think the benefit is from not creating is giving you. Tap through it using EFT!

Don't Sell Your Unused Creativity At Your Estate Sale

Estate sales are always a little humbling because you see someone's life in terms of physical belongings being sold, usually for very cheap, to a lot of different people. You don't know what the buyer's intention with that item is. Will it be sold on eBay? Will it be turned into art? Will it set up someone in their first apartment? Either way, it often confronts us with our own mortality, if only for a second. We think, "Oh yeah. When I die, my stuff is going to have to go somewhere".

Once, I was at an estate sale and as I walked in, the women looked at me softly. I felt like I knew this house. They told me to go to the basement first. I could immediately tell the person whose house this was had the same aesthetic preference as I do. 90's and 70's patterns were everywhere. Bright solid color blocking. If something was plain, it was on purpose.

As I made my way to the basement, I realized why they told me to go there first. The entire basement was an art studio. Wall to wall supplies for everything from jewelry to stamping to painting. It was a treasure trove. I shrieked.

Everything was the same as I would have done it. The labeling, the order, the flow, the colors, the vibe. It was like I was going through my own things.

Then I realized, it was like going through my own things.

There's a bit of a disconnect having the mortality moment at an estate sale where the aesthetic is completely different than yours. You might find one or two cool things, but when the entire basement is something you want to fold up in one box and take home, you realize a lot of things at once.

Not only have you missed an amazing relationship with someone you had a lot in common with, but they have missed out on a lot of projects they wanted to create. I can see things they had intention to make or finish here and there. They left the world before they got to finish. They left the world before they got to share it.

It was one of the biggest wake up calls I've ever had to not hoard my supplies. To make things. To create. And I'm passing this along to you.

You don't need to go through the basement of someone similar to you to have the same realization. Let mine be yours.

Do the people who live after you a favor by giving them less to divide when you're gone because you turned supplies into creations.

Do the people who live while you're alive (and after) a favor by giving them creations to enjoy.

Do yourself a favor while you're alive by seeing your creations become real instead of seeing regrets become real.

Create When Emotions Are Raw

When emotions are in a heightened state, most of us are less likely to have the desire to create. Emotions can be totally overwhelming and cumbersome. And honestly, we *need* to feel them!

The thing is, though, that we also need to process them. I feel like there is a big disconnect between the idea we've been fed of "Go feel your emotions" and what that actually means and looks like.

"Go feel it". Okay. How? That's usually said when we're sad, grieved, or angry right? The emotions that feel crunchy. The ones we're more likely to complain about feeling or navigating.

I imagine someone getting the advice of "go feel it" and retreating to their bed, curling up in a blanket, crying, eating, taking some ZZZquil, and binge watching TV. There's no shame in any of that, but the thing is, most of that is actually avoiding not feeling. We haven't been given tangible ideas or examples on how to "go feel it" so we go to be alone, possibly because it's not "appropriate" to feel in public, and we shove our emotions down until we're not actively leaking water from our face.

Watching TV and escaping reality with food, social media, and substances isn't "feeling it". That's actively avoiding "it".

My, admittedly tough, advice to you is when you feel a heightened emotion that feels overwhelming is to:

- 1) Breathe
- 2) Say out loud what the emotion is. "I feel ____."
- 3) Close your eyes, put your hands on your heart, and ask your body what/how it would feel good to make/do/play right now
- 4) Get water, but put down all other distractions and avoidance tactics
- 5) Make/do the thing from #3

This is where your play personalities from the last chapter come into play, pun intended. You can also use the creative intelligences you identify with in the upcoming sections as inspiration and understanding for how you like to use your mind and body to make and play. Remember, playing is creating! Creating is playing! It's all Merriment Making!

The goal here is to use the emotion you're feeling to put into your creation. Earlier I joked that you probably wouldn't want to buy art from someone who was doing the pee dance with their tampon about to burst, but guess what? Maybe you DO! Maybe that's a very specific mood you're trying to cultivate and channel. Maybe when faced with adversity, challenges, or crunchy moods we can use that moment to turn to creativity and play and feel it out through that process.

Maybe the only way to feel is to play, create, and move. Feeling isn't sitting still and sleeping, it's living.

Take a walk when you're feeling anxious. Write a poem when you're feeling sad. Spray paint when you're feeling angsty. Box when you're feeling angry. Tell jokes when you're feeling manic. Twirl when you're feeling romantic. Take photos when you're feeling ugly. Take photos when you're feeling gorgeous.

Let the mood inspire the action. Create when you're raw and real!

Some of the most profound creations have come from being emotionally charged. Sometimes art is what saves you.

Eight Creative Intelligences

Howard Gardner identifies the importance of acknowledging multiple types of creative intelligences. You might find that you connect with multiple categories.

This list is here to remind you that creativity is in all aspects of our lives, and whenever someone says, "I'm not creative", they're wrong! We are all born creative, and the more traditional connection of creativity being spatial related is only one of eight types!

Below I'll give you a brief overview of what each creative intelligence excels at, and in the next section, check out ideas for section(s)!

Social + Interpersonal - This focuses on the way you interact with other people. This includes the way you build relationships, have conversations, share ideas. People who excel in this type of intelligence are great at learning about other cultures and have awesome communication skills.

Job ideas include: psychologist, social worker, administrator, actor, waiter, religious leader, nurse, trainer, and mediator.

Musical - This focuses on your sensitivity to anything musical. They are good with rhythm, sound, pitches, and tones. They might excel at performing, composing, or teaching others all types of music. They're likely to incorporate music into as many things as possible, even if it's just having something on in the background.

Job ideas include: musician, DJ, songwriter, singer, voice actor or instructor, orchestra conductor, instrument tuner, recording engineer, speech pathologist, and anything related to music including a musical critic, publisher, teacher, therapist, or retailer.

Spatial - This focuses on the way you use physical space. These people aren't good at staying in confined areas because they want to utilize the world around them in a way that feels beautiful to them. They're aware of their environment and generally excel at creating tangible beauty, likely in the form of art.

Job ideas include: artist, pilot, photographer, engineer, graphic designer, architect, mechanic, sculptor, and interior decorator.

Bodily/Kinesthetic - This focuses on the way you're able to use your physical body. That might be using just a part of your body to solve a problem or using the entire thing to create art. They're good at hands-on learning, reading body language, and using three-dimensional tools.

Job ideas include: carpenter, surgeon, yoga instructor, athlete, firefighter, dancer, physical therapist, and surgeon.

Logic/Mathematical - This focuses on the way you're able to think. This includes the way you calculate and reason things. These people are able to find patterns, experiment, and use logic to their advantage. They start with larger concepts and work their way down to the nitty gritty.

Job ideas include: researcher, scientist, analyst, pharmacist, doctor, auditor, technician, and detective.

Intrapersonal - This focuses on understanding who you are as an individual. They are in touch with their own feelings, fears, and motivation. They usually have strong opinions and levels of self confidence. They're likely independent learners and good at keeping diaries and being introspective.

Job ideas include: energy healer, artist, therapist, counselor, entrepreneur, philosopher, and consultant.

Naturalism - This focuses on the way you observe and interact with the natural environment. They're inclined to be very good with plants and animals and care very much about their environment and ecosystem. They love being outside.

Job ideas include: botanist, meteorologist, park ranger, dog trainer, geologist, ecologist, biologist, astronomer, veterinarian, and landscaper.

Verbal/Linguistic - This focuses on the way you're able to utilize words, both with spoken and written language. They're able to use language effectively and excel at things like telling stories, giving speeches, and writing everything from poetry to jokes.

Job ideas include: comedian, librarian, politician, newscaster, journalist, lawyer, teacher, and translator.

Activity Ideas Based On Your Creative Intelligence

Remember that any activity can go in a multitude of categories depending on why you're doing it. For example, cooking could be under Bodily because you're using your body to cook and the food feeds your body. It could also go under Social + Interpersonal because you could be taking a cooking class and feeding your whole family at a meal. It could go under Spatial because you could be more concerned with plating or making beautiful baked goods. It could also be Naturalism because your connection to cooking could be based on growing your own food.

This list is just to get you inspired that if you don't feel creative, you have a bunch of ideas!

Social + Interpersonal

- Playing bingo
- Playing team sports
- Joining a book club
- Ghost hunting
- Going to flea markets
- Bowling
- Wine tasting
- LARPing
- Networking events
- Conversation dates
- Cultural parades
- Joining an improv group
- Traveling
- Playing board games
- Playing video games

Musical

Humming
Rapping
Singing
Being a backup singer
Line dancing
Beatboxing
Drum circles
Joining a theater group
Being a part of an orchestra
Playing musical chairs
Going to concerts
Wearing tambourines on your shoes
Writing songs
Caroling
Clapping
Make playlists for moods
Collecting vinyl or other music memorabilia
Making jingles
Watching/being a part of parades
Installing lights triggered by sound

Spatial

Quilting
Flower arranging
Learning calligraphy
Making paper
3D printing
Making origami
Taking photos
Playing 'Minecraft' (video game)
Designing logos
Painting murals

Designing web pages
Puppetry
Designing homes
Making vision boards
Designing fireworks
Doing escape rooms
Learning graphic design
Tree shaping
Extreme ironing
Soap carving
Whittling

Bodily/Kinesthetic

Cooking
Juggling
Swimming
Going to a pool
Riding roller coasters
Going to water parks or amusement parks
Playing in arcades
Playing air hockey
Learning archery
Playing frisbee
Surfing
LARPing
Bungee jumping/extreme sports
Yoga
Dancing
Metal detecting
Playing paintball
Playing kickball
Learning sign language
Spelunking
Making a silent film

Studying body language

Flying a kite

Doing pilates

Doing parkour

Stone skipping

Doing Tai Chi

Logic/Mathematical

Doing Sudoku

Making/developing apps

Tracking genealogy

Learning trivia

Learning robotics

Doing brain teasers

Organizing planners

Color coding schedules

Practicing cartography

Organizing

Making models

Labeling

Making budgets

Noticing patterns

Analyzing

Doing escape rooms

Playing 'The Witness' (video game)

Picking locks

Playing fantasy sports

Solving rubik's cubes

Coding

Doing crossword puzzles

Intrapersonal

Journaling

Reading

Meditating

Learning personal development tools

Tapping

Facing fears

Learning new tasks

Practicing witchcraft

Practicing spirituality

Playing solitaire

Cooking

Studying Philosophy

Studying Psychology

Studying Theology

Doing mindfulness techniques

Scrapbooking

Visiting libraries

Skipping stones

Writing poetry

Camping

Making goals

Inventing

Going to therapy

Practicing self-evaluation and analysis

Loving yourself radically

Gardening

Stargazing

Naturalism

Collecting mushrooms
Studying Entomology
Gardening
Faery gardening
Vegetables/fruit gardening
Leaf/flower pressing
Flower arranging
Keeping aquariums
Tracking animal footprints
Boating
Being a cat socializer
Having pets
Being a foster pet owner
Traveling
Scuba diving or snorkeling
Equestrianism
Photographing nature
Hiking
Training dogs
Foraging
Practicing taxidermy
Grounding/going barefoot
Picnicking
Geocaching
Parasailing
Camping
Going to dog shows

Verbal/Linguistic

Telling stories
Doing stand up comedy
Making up jokes
Writing essays
Writing captions
Writing copy
Writing books
Being interviewed
Hosting a talk show
Recreating Wayne's World
Using metaphors
Doing spoken poetry
Learning a foreign language
Learning an accent
Joining toastmasters
Hosting a podcast
Starting a YouTube channel
Becoming an actor

Start, Continue, and Keep Creating

Challenge where you see judgment in other's creations. Go through your Creative Blocks and Fears with a fine tooth comb for any worries about how your creative ventures will expose your vulnerabilities. Clear your physical space in your creation station. Take pride in your creative intelligences and lean into them. Create when your emotions are heightened and raw. Schedule time for creating every day and week.

When we look back in history, we see things become "things of the past". We miss record stores, malls, and a lot of in person experiences that have all too quickly become boarded up buildings and history because we didn't use them! We didn't appreciate them while we had them, so they didn't survive. Don't let your ideas and creativity suffer the same consequences. Appreciate your creativity while it's here with you. You'll thank yourself later.

Chapter 10: Magic

“Everything is interwoven, and the web is holy.”

- Marcus Aurelius

Magic Is New Action

And so we arrive here, to the topic of magic. That juicy, juicy subject. That sensitive subject. The one we can't wait to discuss and sometimes can't wait to get past.

There is so much wrapped up in magic. Stigma, expectation, resentment, hope, love, and life. It is everything all at once. We enter the world because of it, but we don't always leave still holding onto it. When beauty exists, we attribute it to magic.

When our expectations are shattered, we blame the absence of magic.

Magic is when we are open to a new idea or when we allow ourselves to see something from a new perspective. *That's all it is.* It's when you're compassionate by putting yourself in someone else's shoes. It's when you allow yourself to play instead of grind for the first time. It's when you finally listen to your instincts.

Here's the trick. Something cool happens in *conjunction* with that new thing. That's how you notice it's magic. There will be a combined result with the new idea, perspective, or action.

For example, when you put yourself in someone else's shoes, maybe you see them get a job that day! When you allow yourself to play instead of grind, maybe you come back and your inbox has a job offer you're really excited about! When you finally listen to your instincts, you find out you avoided a death defying experience!

It might sound like a lot of pressure to have a new action *and* a new result, but here's the thing: new actions *create* new results. Magic creates more magic. Remember that sometimes having a new idea or looking at something from a new perspective really might be magic in and of itself. You might blow your own mind by playing 'devil's advocate' and the knowledge you get from that thought exercise might be the magic in that moment! Very often, though, the only reason you'll notice that magic is happening is *because* you got the new result!

For example, if you came home to the really exciting email in your inbox after an afternoon of playing, your thought process might be, "Holy crap, I never get these kinds of emails when I'm sitting at my computer all day! Maybe I should go out and play more!" Here you're actually letting the magical action speak for the result in a retroactive way. Your body told you to go play, and now your mind is reinforcing why this was a great idea because you received a magical result.

It doesn't matter what order things happen or how you understand them. All that matters is once you notice magic is happening, you continue to open yourself up to it.

My goal with this chapter is to show you how simple magic is. Please keep in mind this chapter is not as steps 1-2-3 as the others. Magic is very intuitive and personal.

Magic: Can't Exist With You, Can't Exist Without You

Magic exists with or without you believing in it, and at the same time, it can only exist in your life when you acknowledge it. To explain, I must tell you what and how I believe.

I have personally never believed in one religious deity; an anthropomorphic all seeing god in the form of one organized religion. Instead, I enjoy all of them because as soon as I understood what religion was, I knew in my bones they were all attempting to achieve the same goal. To congregate, commune, and believe in something bigger. I adore worship and prayer because it's a group of people with a common goal, doing what they believe is helping something else.

To me it's no different than a group of people signing the same birthday card for one person, pitching in to build a fence, or laughing in an audience together. It's a connection for good.

I also naturally view things in dualities, spectrums, and extremes. I believe I've been gifted with the ability to see things from multiple perspectives all at once. To play my own devil's advocate. I believe simultaneously that everything is sacred and nothing is sacred all at once. I believe that someone dying in the woods alone who had no family is no different than a famous person dying, and a sunflower seed is the same energy as a galaxy. I believe either everything is offensive or nothing is and the same way everything matters, that inherently means nothing does as well. If everything is of equal value, that means it all means nothing, too. It cancels out.

This, when we speak of a god in my mind, means there can be no anthropomorphic entity that speaks and acts as god. That everything we see, know, and understand in and of itself *is* god. That god is everything and nothing. That there is no god and that we are *all* god. That all deities, religions, gods, and goddesses are all beautiful and accurate as well, because they are simply a new vessel created by god to activate the same energy. It is an infinity sign. We are all nature, nature is god, we are god, we are making more nature, and we are making more of ourselves. It goes round and round again. It all has meaning. It all means nothing.

It can be viewed as nihilism, but I prefer it as an optimistic nihilism. I believe that if "nothing matters", then we must do what makes us happy. I believe there is beauty in everything.

I've known this to be true for me as young as I can remember. When I found out in my thirties there was a term for this theology (it's called Pantheism if that helps you), I felt like I had witnessed a miracle! The truth is I had.

A miracle is simply a change in perspective. So is magic! Magic is being open to a miracle. Being open to a change in perspective. Being open to opportunities, invitations, and muses. Those are the definitions. I'm not messing with you, it's that simple.

When I said magic exists without you, I meant it. When I said magic needs you to acknowledge it to exist, I meant that too. Imagine magic as little invisible energy bubbles floating around the world constantly. They're there, but you can't see them unless you acknowledge them because they're invisible.

As soon as you acknowledge you're open to the idea of magic, they get a little more opaque. They're still pretty clear, but you can see them a bit if you squint your eyes. When you catch one, you open it and see the treasure inside. You're stunned by how incredible the treasure is and this declaration of faith is enough to turn the bubbles a bit more opaque. It's kind of like when you believe in Santa his sleigh flies, or when you clap Tinkerbell can fly.

Every time you open yourself to the possibility of magic and allow yourself to be taken over by how beautiful it can be, the bubbles get easier to see. Every time you blame magic (or the lack thereof) for you not getting what you want, someone else's behavior, or something going wrong, the bubbles become more clear and harder to catch.

Remember that if everything is magic and nothing is magic at the same time, you can always choose to say "everything is magic" and treat *every organism as magic*. This is not about denying magic, it is about embracing it. It's simply to expand the magic to everything everywhere instead of qualifying that only some things deserve magic and others don't.

Magic Comes From The Body

Let's think back to the example of going out to play for the day and coming back to receive an exciting email with a work opportunity. Why did this new magical action start in the first place? They had to decide to go out to play earlier in the day. But why?

It seems simple, right? They were probably overworked and needed to play.

Okay, but what does that mean? What is "overworked"? What does "needed to play" mean?

I want you to think about that for a moment. We say a lot of nonsense throughout the day. I mean that. Nonsense. Phrases we have popularized and allowed to become common. I want you to explain “overworked” and “needed to play” to a five-year-old. Not just any five-year-old. Your five-year-old self.

Here’s how mine would go:

Adult Mary: “Well, Mary. When you’re overworked as an adult it’s because you have to go to your job so many hours a day that you get really tired.”

Child Mary: “Oh that sucks. Why don’t you take a nap?”

Adult Mary: “Because they can’t.”

Child Mary: “Why not?”

Adult Mary: “Because they have a lot to do and they need money.”

Child Mary: “Why do they need more money?”

Adult Mary: “Well remember when you saw Dad divide up his paycheck for all the bills? They raised all the prices for things since then, but they kind of still pay the same amount in paychecks.”

Child Mary: “Who is they?”

Adult Mary: “I don’t know. The government, like the president?”

Child Mary: “Oh. Dad gets off at 5. When do you come home?”

Adult Mary: “I actually work at home.”

Child Mary: “REALLY? That’s cool! So you play with stickers all day?”

Adult Mary: “Actually I sell stickers!”

Child Mary: “That’s so cool. So why are you overworked?”

Adult Mary: “I guess because I need to play.”

Child Mary: “Oh, let’s go play! I have chalk outside.”

Adult Mary: “I can’t right now, I have to work.”

Child Mary: “~~Oh okay, I’ll~~ go get my stickers and we can work together.”

My five-year-old self is a baller. She doesn’t care about this stuff. If your five-year-old self doesn’t care about something or you can’t easily explain it to them without getting exasperated, I’m going to bet you it’s not magical, just an easy rule of thumb.

Terms like 'overworked' are created to describe a state of physicality that honestly shouldn't really exist. We should all be listening to our bodies and our inner five-year-olds way more often. If you're burned out enough to use the term "overworked", just stop if you can. With the exception of being a parent, healthcare, or emergency services, there are very few jobs that can't handle calling out or an auto-reply here or there.

However, you'll only really know if you're 'overworked', tired, hungry, or twirly (my word for horny) if you check in with your body! If you're totally checked out from your body, you can go for hours holding in your pee without even realizing it.

This is why the example of going out to play for the afternoon had to start with the body! To understand they were overworked and wanted to compensate with play had to start with a body check. Any big decision starts with the body, so we must not forget the body, ever.

Your body includes your mind, emotions, and intuition. Placing your hands on your heart, gut, or center, closing your eyes, breathing in deeply three times, and asking yourself, "What does my body want more of right now? What does my body want less of right now? What would make this situation even better?" is imperative to do at least twice a day.

You're going to find lots of the time, especially at the beginning, you simply need to address bodily functions. If you're out of touch with your body and have been for a while, you might not realize how long you've gone without physical touch. How twirly you really are. How damn dehydrated you are. How much you're really craving strawberries. How much you need to get out of fluorescent lights. How much you need to wash your face.

Whatever answers your body tells you, go take care of it! It's not telling you ideas for the fun of it! It needs some stuff, so please take care of it! If your cat started speaking for the first time and it said, "Mom, I'm dying of thirst", you would stop everything and try all the ways to get your cat to hydrate. So listen to your body.

Your body is magic. The same way magic doesn't need you to exist but is always there, your body is actually always speaking. You're just always surrounded by noise so it's difficult to hear it! It has messages and requests for you very often, but whether it's street traffic, your boss's emails, your own spiraling thoughts, or the television, you can't hear it. So if you're taking the time to listen, then do something with the information!

Don't let your body say, "I NEED TO PEE!" and you say, "IN A MINUTE!" What is that? That's an abusive relationship you're creating with *yourself*. Don't do that. Don't shut yourself up.

Once you take care of those bodily needs, you'll create a much safer, stronger foundation and better relationship with your body! That's when new kinds of messages come in. Some people call these "downloads". It doesn't matter what you call them, these are the magic messages. They're creative. They're fun. They're incredible. They're the ideas for new actions, new opportunities, and new perspectives.

You're not getting a new opportunity message if your body needs to waste that time shouting at you to please feed it and take it to the bathroom, though. Make sure you create a good system where you're being good to your body with the basics.

Your body is magic. All messages for magic start within your own body. Create some quiet so you can hear them. Then listen in the form of action.

Playing

Yes, play had its own chapter in this book, but it's not nearly enough. The more I embody being a Merriment Maker, the more I deeply understand the power of play not in my brain, but in my soul.

I can tell you all about the Play Personalities, I can back up my reasoning for why we need to play with my psychology degrees and statistics, and honestly it's nice to do that, but I'm no longer interested in needing to prove play, fun, joy, kindness, love, or Merriment to anyone. It speaks for itself, and I've hidden behind numbers to back up my truth for way too long. Play is energy, and it's a magical vibration.

I truly believe playing twenty minutes a day will improve your life exponentially more than meditating for twenty minutes will. I don't care if there is or isn't a study.

I know this is true for me, and I believe it can be true for you, too.

Play the way your five-year-old self would play with you to cheer you up. Play like no one is watching. It's not "adult play", it's play. We are all children; children of magic. We are children who stopped playing! Merriment Making is defined as embodying, creating, and spreading joy. You can't do any of these without your version of play.

When you play, you are in flow. When you play it becomes easier to hear your body's messages. When you play the magic bubbles become easier to see. Playing creates a portal for magic.

Scarcity + Desperation

One of the biggest lessons I've had to learn (and am still learning) around magic is about scarcity, desperation, and manipulating magic.

Something I didn't mention is you can fully believe and know that those magic bubbles exist, but they still might seem invisible to you.

It could be because of resentment and/or entitlement. You could see other people believing and invoking magic around you, and wonder where *your* magical bubbles are. This makes the bubbles go back to clear very quickly.

It could be because you have a lack of self-worth and/or scarcity thinking. You could believe you're uniquely unspecial, unlucky, and unworthy therefore your "luck" with magic will never come. Or maybe there simply just "isn't enough magic" to go around. This can also be associated with insisting you have "bad karma".

It could be because of desperation. You could be running around with a net all day long trying to catch bubbles, but it turns out that the net is actually sprayed with some sort of repellent. The bubbles dodge the net, and even if you happen to catch one, you're out of breath by the time you do, and you wasted all day doing it when you could have been listening to your body, playing, and taking new magical action steps.

I've been a combination of all of these limitations at some point in my life, sometimes all at once. They are all so off putting to magic bubbles! You just end up with no results, you'll become even more resentful!

This becomes very tricky, because magic isn't here to be a faith system for you. Let me say that again. Magic is not here to save you, or be the only reason you have hope. In that same way, magic is not here for you to blame when things go poorly. Magic simply is. It is a tool. It is information. It is an energy. It is not good or bad. Magic is not your scapegoat or your savior.

We don't look at enough systems (theories, ideologies, educations, tools, machines) as neutral and as the operators (us) as the magicians. Astrology is an informative tool for us to understand things if we so choose. You can have patterns that lead you to understand what is likely to happen during Mercury Retrograde, but that doesn't mean you blame astrology for when you get a parking ticket or praise astrology when you win an award at work. Things must be consistent or consistently absent. If you blame it for something negative, you must also 'blame' it for something positive. This is true for all systems.

This is why at the beginning of this chapter I said, "When beauty exists, we attribute it to magic. When our expectations are shattered, we blame the absence of magic". I want to bring this back to the duality of allowing ourselves to believe in multiple seemingly 'conflicting' ideologies at once, as is true with Pantheism: what if magic is everything and also nothing?

What if beautiful and negative consequences are independent of magic? While at the same time what if every experience we have, both beautiful and negative consequences, are so unbelievably intertwined with magic they essentially are the exact same thing?

We see one side of the spectrum to say that it's okay to live our life knowing magic exists and also that magic isn't to be blamed or praised for it because we don't owe it anything. It isn't good or bad. We also see the other side of the spectrum that says magic touches everything we see and experiences so deeply they can't exist without each other. That being said, if it touches everything then it cancels out, still meaning it is neither good nor bad. It still isn't our scapegoat or savior.

Do you see how with this theology we end up at the same place through a slightly different lens? Magic is nothing *and* everything.

Knowing this frees us to act in an informed way towards it. We are able to become less clingy. Use whatever side of the spectrum helps your brain to free your limitations of scarcity, codependence, desperation, or resentment towards and around magic.

I recommend using EFT/Tapping, journaling, affirmations, mirror work, and/or meditating on "abundance" topics, and simply replace "abundance" with magic! The ideology is very similar. The looser your grip with abundance, the more money comes. The looser you cling to magic, the more sparkly your world becomes.

Quiet + Effective Magic

As much as I believe the tools I listed above are very helpful, I want to be honest with you. The deeper and deeper I go with Merriment Making, the more I realize I've been making it more complicated than it needed to be.

About halfway through this book I had a total reckoning with self-help and my own rituals. I used to have a two hour morning ritual, and it's barely existent now. It's not out of lack of discipline, it's out of lack of desire and necessity. I journal, tap, and speak affirmations when I need to. I am in touch with my body enough to know when I need a "tune up" so to speak. Tapping every day turned into a subconscious way for me to make sure I was always on top of "fixing" myself. I would much rather use that time to play, create, or rest now.

Don't get me wrong, setting an intention every day is important. There is a space between rushing out of bed and running out of the house with a granola bar in my hand and a decadent two hour ritual. Now it mostly looks like rolling over in my bed to look at how beautiful my boyfriend is, saying three things I'm thankful for and wishing Jenny Slate a good day in my head (I just really like her), wiggling my toes on the rug, and lighting a candle. I eat breakfast, take my medicine, stretch a little, plan my day, and touch the cats. It's super chill. If I want to tap, journal, etc. I do, but I also don't berate myself for not doing it.

Recognizing I didn't need to do an elaborate morning ritual was a miracle, by the way. I hope you see that by now. My body told me I was essentially wasting my time and focusing on fixing myself instead of loving myself, so I listened and took a magical action that created room in my life for more magic!

Another realization I've had while writing this book has been how much I want to keep to myself. My level of sharing with the public world is probably at a much higher percentage than most people's even when it's toned down, but I've always considered myself someone who needed to be loud to be effective. I was a siren for a long time. I would do naked photoshoots with balloons just so I could draw strangers in with the caption and we could talk about mental health issues and civil rights. In all fairness, it was effective, but now I feel and act differently (sometimes).

Most of the time, I'm still loud. My clothes are bright, my opinions are bold, I bring way too many suitcases, I have a big body, and my voice carries. I recently realized these choices were actually all a deliberate shield from a young age.

Having Tourette's, you have at least two vocal tics. Those were the most disruptive for me. You can attempt to shield your face with a Lisa Frank folder in Mrs. Johnson's class from facial tics, but that rainbow dolphin collage isn't doing very much to cover up those bizarre sounds coming from your throat you have no explanation for or control over.

When I was about eight, I tried out a bunch of ways to cover up the sounds. I tried really loud laughing, raising my voice, some comedy bits, etc. I found it was easier to kind of “sneak” the noises in if I was already being loud with a laugh or something. I don’t know how stealthy it *actually* was, but it made me feel a bit better. I guess the loudness kind of stuck around forever.

I think staying fat has been a way for me to stay guarded. I feel like I’ve known if someone loves me they love the “real” me. When I bring too many suitcases on a three day vacation it’s so I don’t have to really ‘deal with resting’. I have so many loud clothes and flower crowns because I want people to know I’m fun up front, and I don’t really always have something to say even though I want to be friends so I let my clothing speak for me.

I think I’m naturally loud and bright, but I’ve created a prototype for myself and any pressure I feel to live up to this loudness is self-internalized. It came from a place of insecurity, and as I’m growing I’m shedding. I only need one bag at the beach. I don’t care if you see me in dark colors. I’d be happy being thin. I don’t force my voice to be loud when it doesn’t feel right. I let people come to me instead of forcing interactions. I’m getting better at apologizing. I’m getting better at forgiving. I’m removing the metaphorical make-up I never really needed. I’m remembering who I was. I’m seeing who I am in you. I’m seeing who you are in me.

As I’ve become a little more quiet here and there, I’ve seen the most magic in my life. The time since I’ve been writing this book has been the most magical time of my life hands down. I don’t think you need to be quiet to be effective, but I used to not believe you *could* be quiet and effective, or at least that *I* couldn’t.

Now I know it wasn’t ever about the volume or brightness. It was about the truth. It was about letting myself be who felt natural. It’s not like I was living a lie. It’s that there was another part of me that was begging to live, too, and I kept whack-a-moling them back down. Now they both play, and I’m so happy for them both.

If you're worried you can't make magic without being big, fancy, rich, perfect, or whatever thing you think someone else is doing that you're not, you're wrong. Someone else's magic isn't for you. Your magic is for you.

However, if you're trying to get messages from a body who is constantly whack-a-moling back down a part of you who is desperate to come out and play, your messages aren't going to be very accurate or well-informed. If your messages aren't well-informed, the kind of magic you make and experience isn't going to be the best you can have. In fact, it might not be your magic at all.

My Momma Showed Me Magic

A few months before I started this book, I had the worst break up of my life, met the man of my dreams, and hurt my knee worse than I ever had before in a month's time.

I watched the police outside of my home taking away someone who I would later find out didn't even have the same identity I thought I knew during the past three years. I accidentally met someone way before I was ready who made me feel like I was moving in slow motion. I slipped and tore my MCL, Meniscus, and fractured my Tibia.

As if my world wasn't shaken up already with what I was doing with my heart, home, and security, I now didn't know how I was going to even get downstairs to the kitchen or take care of my cats. My dad has absolutely always been there for me, but he was also experiencing something and wasn't able to be physically present. My new partner, Matt, could only be there for me about two days a week. Realistically, I didn't know what I was going to do. I needed help and I cried and cried as I got out my phone to text what I believed was still my mother's cell phone number.

If you've followed me for a long time, you might know I've had a sorted relationship with my mother. I left my childhood home after my parents divorced when I was a teenager. I was angry at both of my parents, but I was able to make excuses as to why my dad did things that angered me and I wasn't able to do the same with my mom. I didn't speak to her for a very long time, and resentment built up. I only heard stories about her, which made her seem crazy. That reinforced and validated my anger.

There were times when I tried to reconnect with her in my twenties, but it always ended in flames. Looking back, I can see this is because we are so similar. I never took any responsibility for how things ended and insisted it was 100% her fault which is almost never the case with anything! The parts of me that were activated by her didn't let me see straight, and I wasn't letting myself calm down to even attempt a resolution before storming off.

I did that so-very-not-cute block-and-delete thing again and again. With my mother. I've done it with best friends, with lovers, and my family. I only wanted to teach, I never wanted to be taught. When things got rough, I bounced. But the happiness was fleeting and superficial. There was a hole in me that missed the connections and what could have been.

So I texted my mom. I told her I needed help. Please help me. I selfishly reached out in need, like someone who only prays when they're in trouble. I didn't deserve her help. I didn't even deserve for her to text me back. But she did. And it changed me.

She showed up. Without question. Without fucking *question*. She took care of me when I needed it physically. And as I've healed and learned how to walk again physically, I've learned how to walk again with magic.

All those crazy stories I heard and believed about my mother made me fear becoming her. I had this idea in my head that my mom "used to be good" and "turned bad". I was worried that would happen to me. I was worried about becoming my mom. I'll tell you something now. If I turn out like my mom, I'll be lucky.

I've been one of the most judgmental people I've ever known. I'm so good at loving, but it's been conditional. If I wanted something a certain way and someone didn't do it, I believed it was an affront against me. It became personal. I focused too much on boundaries as a form of self-love instead of empathy as a form of human acceptance.

I had to hurt my leg to get my mom back, and I'd do it again.
But I don't want you to have to hurt your leg to reach out to yours.

Having my mom back in my life while simultaneously learning and loving my Matt have been the two best things that have ever happened to me. Both of these people have demonstrated magical unconditional love to me in a way I didn't know was possible.

Matt is one of the purest entities I've experienced. You know how a cat loves you? A cat simply is. They are in touch with their body, do what they need to do, and love you in their exact unique way; a way that is so one on one piercing you want to cry happy tears. That's how Matt is.

Matt is devoted, pure, and all-knowing. He is easy. It doesn't need to be complicated, and it never did. He loved me the night he met me and he never stopped. Not when I'm a disaster and not when I couldn't walk a week into our relationship. He sees something different than I see, but he likes what I see, too. Watching him exist is my ASMR. Him demonstrating unconditional love to me has been a big test for me. It has challenged where I am stingy with love in a conditional way, and I'm grateful for it.

Speaking of unconditional love, showing up for someone who has shot you down, talked shit about you publicly, screamed at you, and worse without a question is one of the most humbling things I can share. My mom is not just here for my knee, to be clear. She's here. We're making up for lost time. We talk and laugh now. I love that I can hear her before she enters a building because she's loudly "ooing" at something outside, I love how intuitive she is, and I love the way I don't have to finish sentences when I don't have the words because she knows. Sometimes she knows because she's my mom, and sometimes she knows because she's a sage.

She also taught me how to be a mom. I won't ever have children to mother, but I have cats and I consider the people I coach to be my children in the way of teaching, loving, and nourishing.

When I accidentally clipped my cat's nail a little too close for the first time, she bled a little and I lost my mind. I immediately screamed and cried. I couldn't believe how I could have hurt this poor baby. I didn't stop to deny, get angry or bargain, blaming it on the nail clipper or how I 'always do it this way' like I might have in the past. I simultaneously felt immense grief for the potential pain she was in and a huge surge of protection and energy for solutions.

Later that week, I had a remarkably huge day. Out of nowhere I began sobbing uncontrollably. I punched the pillow and grieved the relationship that ended right before I hurt my knee. I punched, screamed, cried, and spoke until I got it all out. I even vomited. I forgave him. I understood more than anything I was mad at myself than him.

I had this wave of understanding that felt like someone had just installed a microchip in my brain. I understood all at once that *sometimes shit happens*. I had been holding all this resentment for my parents who "didn't do enough" when I was a sick kid. I felt like it was so obvious I needed help, but I didn't even notice a bleeding cat nail! I've been ignorant to worse things, and if I can do it, so can everyone. Including my parents. It was time to forgive them, too, for being human beings managing two kids, jobs, school, lawns, cars, bills, relationships, and everything else.

I understood I've often been the villain in other people's stories. I've been judgmental, callous, and harsh. I've cut the rip cord way too early. I've blamed people for doing the same thing I've also done or would later do. I've forgotten things, not followed through, and been inconsiderate. I've let addiction rule my life. I haven't listened when people just wanted to support me. I've been unconditional with my love.

If I ever did any of these things to you personally, I am truly very sorry.

When I stopped running away from unconditional love, I opened myself up to more magic. When I stopped blaming my mom for being the villain, being angry by other people's preferences for doing things differently than me, and really remembered that we are actually all trying our best (not just in a theoretical sense or with people who aren't directly influencing me), I opened myself up to more magic.

The perspective shifts are magic in and of themselves.

Let people in your lives teach you magic. Compassion, empathy, and unconditional love are some of the most magical bubbles you'll ever find.

From Magical To Mediocre

One of my biggest goals with Merriment Making has been to transform the mediocre into something magical. I want to help you to not feel bored with the "mundane" by adding some zest to it! That's what a lot of this book has been about. When we celebrate, play, and add pleasure to our daily lives we get that succulent effect we've been striving for.

Truth be told, coming up with ways to make your trip to the grocery store silly, playful, and fun is a great talent of mine, and I'll probably never stop making lists or coming up with ideas.

However, I want to introduce you to a potentially radical notion. Does the grocery store trip actually *need* zest? Can the trip to the grocery store be magical on its own?

I'm obviously not saying to not dance in the aisles or to stop organizing your carts by rainbow color. I'm not saying there is no place for fun, silliness, and Merriment Making in the grocery store, don't worry. I haven't totally lost my mind! I'm proposing a cognitive shift. Where we remove "mediocre" from our vocabulary, and not just because it's difficult to spell.

What makes something mediocre? It's defined as being of regular quality or just *not being that good*. So we've decided it's ordinary and we just kind of don't like it. Alright, well for someone helicopter shopping is mediocre by definition then, right? It's very subjective based on your lifestyle and routines. What's mediocre to one person is not to another.

We know our motivation thrives with mixing things up. We know silliness, fun, and play are core principles for how to mix things up. What I'm suggesting is we cease to look at what needs to be mixed up as standard. We have almost been brainwashed to believe that any errands, chores, and work have to suck the life out of us. If we go into the activity with that decision made up in our minds, it's not only going to suck, but it's going to get old and mediocre quicker than you can spell check "mediocre" (it should be spelled like 'core', right? Honestly...)

Let's apply Pantheism to mediocrity. Everything is mediocre and simultaneously, nothing is mediocre. We also know everything is magic and nothing is. Look at this however helps your brain, the whole point is it cancels everything out so we stop qualifying and ranking things because we've been programmed to do so.

It's not to take away the power of your life purpose or passion. It's not to dismantle the beauty of your preferences. It's not to make everything beige. It's to know that no matter what room you find yourself in, you'll be content. If everywhere is uncomfortable, then everywhere is also comfortable. You can find happiness in any corner of the world because you'll find the value in every microcosm. It's liberating.

With this in mind, release mediocrity from your brain. Your life can't be mediocre, nor can any of the activities inside of it! Zest isn't here to cure mediocrity, it's here to BE zest!

Why Merriment Is Magic

Merriment Making is Magic. The principles, the theories, and in action. You, as a Merriment Maker, are magic.

Merriment Making is something I created or simply observed, recognized, and named. The existence of Merriment Making implies Magic. One does not exist without the other.

I live for words and thought processes, I do. And at the same time, I reject all labels.

Whether you believe in the stars, a sacred text, or the ability to shift perspective, this is all magic.

When you embody, create, and spread joy, this is all magic.

We are all Merriment Makers. Merriment Makers are one with Magic. Magic is Merriment Making. Merriment Making is Magic.

If I am one, I am both. If I am both, I have succeeded.

Chapter 11: Embodiment

“It’s a helluva start, being able to recognize what makes you happy.”

Lucille Ball

When I started writing this book, I was an emotional wreck in most areas of my life. When I told you that I was here to go on this journey of reconnecting to my sense of joy alongside you, I meant that. In fact, this process had to be for me so it could be for you.

I’ve done the work as we’ve gone through each chapter and seen results, the same way I hope you have and know you can. However, when it was time to release this chapter, my life hit a brick wall of explosions and there wasn’t much I could do about it. I kind of just had to be there for it.

I could have pushed through and written the last two chapters on time, but I knew that what I had to say at that moment was going to be slanted at best and unhelpful at worst. Everything in my body told me to wait and process what was happening before I wrote about it, and I was right. The answer came in a way I didn’t expect, but at this point I know to expect the unexpected.

If you’re reading this as part of the live program, thank you for your patience.
Without further ado, Chapter 11.

Autism

A lot of people say they “always knew they were different” or identify proudly as being “weird”. Sometimes I think this idea gets oversaturated because the people we see in popular culture are entertainers, artists, comedians and this showcases one specific type of “weird”.

As a culture, we enjoy consuming what artists create and are interested in what they have to say. What they have to say often is similar to what another artist says because they both have similar thought patterns or even backgrounds.

This doesn't mean that any trait you see being commonly represented among artists is representative of the overall population. It means artists are more likely to know other people with traits similar to them because they are surrounded by people like them. This is true of all micro and subcultures.

I knew some things were different about me from a very early age. I was able to tell those things were different about me because I saw no one else doing those things. Things like making faces and sounds which I later found out was a part of having Tourette's Syndrome, or doing repetitive rituals which I later found out was a part of having Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

There are some additional traits and behaviors I've known about myself to be true since even before the tics and rituals started that I've never questioned as "abnormal" on par with a disorder or syndrome, I simply thought that's how I was.

People have still commented on my behavior and told me I was weird, bizarre, inappropriate, rude, and frivolous my whole life, but it was never specific to one acute behavior, the way I could identify that the way I blinked really hard was clearly something everyone thought was bad, weird, and wrong.

I was conditioned to hide the blinking and rituals, but everything else seemed to be the world's opinion at large. Someone would tell me I was too sensitive about ambulance sounds and another person would tell me it didn't make any sense that I wanted to copy every single word out of a book about animals into my own notebook on my summer vacation. All I knew was that the ambulance sound felt *bad* and rewriting about seals in my notebook on the blanket in Nannie's backyard felt *good*.

A week before I turned 34-years-old, my good friend, Laura and I met up after a year of not speaking. We had parted ways literally the day before the book you're reading went on sale.

I had recently reached out to her to apologize for my part in our separation and we reconnected. During that first visit, she introduced the idea to me that I might have Autism after discovering she did, too.

The signs and symptoms felt like we were just sharing parts of our personality with each other and I kept deflecting in denial. Being hyper fixated on things, isn't that just being interested? Having few and intense interests, isn't that just being passionate?

The interesting and beautiful reality is that a lot of the parts of me that fall under the umbrella of Autism are things I actually really like about myself, so I didn't think to question them as "disordered". I love eccentric people, and it turns out a lot of eccentric people actually have Autism!

So I have essentially just attracted more of what I love. That said, I have created a group of people in my life that isn't the most objective focus group to measure a behavior "against" in a controlled experiment. For example, if everyone in my third grade class had Tourette's, I wouldn't have been the weird one, it would have been weird to *not* have Tourette's.

In this case, I simultaneously felt like I was surrounded by a lot of people on the spectrum, I didn't mind how it represented in me or others, and I actually kind of loved it.

I still had to grieve it, though. Finding out I had Autism knocked me down hard. There was a bunch of fear, sadness, and anger that comes with any diagnosis, especially this late in life.

I couldn't sleep for days. It was at the tail end of six weeks of other personal grief-filled life events. Old trauma came up. I was worried I'd have to hide this from the world to still do my job. I was angry I was just finding this out now. I was pissed I had "another" diagnosis. I was scared I was being conned. It was a lot. All that said, though, somehow I worked through this process of grief faster than anything else I ever have. And while there's no race to the finish line, if there even is one, I think I understand why it was easier to release.

Autism is the center of me.

In the Venn Diagram of my personality, there is Autism. There are dozens of other circles that intersect it. Some of them are the names of disorders, like Tourette's, and we can see how they overlap and make sense together for educational purposes. Some of them are kindness and Merriment Making. But everything that I am, whether it feels good or bad, can be made sense of from Autism.

This felt bittersweet for me because I have been trying to run from labels for a few years now. I felt like I "had" all my diagnoses already and wanted to move past the words. When I found out there was a word for OCD, I knew I wasn't crazy. Or at least other people were crazy *like* me. I understand what it's like to come home to a word. But there becomes a point where we live and hide behind the words, and I've been doing my best to move beyond them.

I use labels to find resources, community, education, treatment, medication, and discuss things in a more concise way, but I really dislike the idea of needing to frontload who I am with a list of "identities", whether that's the fact that I have a dozen disorders, multiple psych degrees, am queer, have a partner, am a daughter, live in Baltimore, am fat, am Polish and German, am a Gemini Stellium, etc.

I don't like listing them up front like a resume rap sheet. I think it's dehumanizing, and quite frankly a way to make ourselves sound more interesting, not need to be present in our bodies, and an excuse to hide behind who we really are and how we're feeling. Are those labels really who you are? I don't think they're who I am. I had to make up a word for who I am. I'm a Merriment Maker. I'm Uncustomary.

That said, there was something different about Autism. I've found out I had ADHD, C-PTSD, and Bipolar as an adult, so it wasn't even the timing. It was the fact that it wasn't acute. I can pinpoint the thing that's happening with all the other symptoms of my disorders. Autism, though, is so ingrained in who I am that I was unable to even believe it was something 'abnormal'. It's just who I am (spoiler alert: so are all the other disorders and every other part of me). And the way this represents for me specifically all comes down to *pleasure*.

Understanding this unlocked something in me, and I believe it can for you, too.

In researching about Autism, I've learned about the concept of "masking", which is basically when you are told something is weird or wrong and you're conditioned to hide, cover up, or "mask" that behavior. It's not that you don't have the desire to still do that thing, it's that it was kind of kicked out of you.

Think back to my example with copying the words out of a book word for word into my notebook. I wasn't hurting anyone doing that. I have really heightened memories of pleasure and joy with the breeze on my face and the pages of that book. I loved practicing my handwriting over and over again. I remember getting this bump on my middle finger and showing my mom. She told me it was a callus called a "writer's bump" and I was going to be a writer. I was so proud of that bump because I wanted to be a writer so I kept writing every day.

Then someone told me what I was doing was 'stupid and a waste of time, and I should be out playing'. 'Books were for the school year', they said, and I was 'wasting my notebook'. The 'book was already written, what was the point'? I hadn't thought about it like that. All I knew is it felt good. And I thought they knew better. So I stopped. My writer's bump eventually went away, and so did a part of my joy.

That happened to you, too. Something *like* that. Maybe and likely multiple things like that. And I want you to think about what it was.

Understanding Autism for me has been a permission slip in realizing that the way I do things was never actually wrong.

I don't need to ask for help in relearning how to keep my ledger system and do it over from scratch, I need help with making the ledger system that I already use and feels good to me be as good as it can be now for how my brain works.

I don't need to trust the doctor's opinion, I don't have to stay in this building, I can hang up the phone in the middle of a conversation, I can exit in the middle of a meeting, I don't have to reply to the text, I can pick up dirty flowers from the middle of the street, I can wear crop tops without bras, I can never cut my hair,

I can call and ask for a refund, I don't have to give refunds, I don't have to do the survey, I can put my hands over my ears when the ambulance goes by, I can pull over on the shoulder of the road, I can sit in my car for twenty minutes before I come inside, I can take ninety minutes to get ready, I don't have to wear make-up, I can ask why when someone asks me to do something, I can raise my prices, I can speak loudly, I don't have to change my caption because someone is offended, I can go to sleep without washing my hair after I swam in a lake, I can let it be okay that I need my office to be clean before I start working, I can turn my phone off, I can have rules for the guests in my house, I can make as much art as I want, I don't have to be a Democrat or Republican, I can be a burner without going to burns, I can wait till the entire theater clears out because I'd prefer not to walk out with a crowd, I can plan my whole trip down to the minute because it makes me feel better, I can repeat words out loud because it eases my anxiety, I can ask for help carrying things, I can ask for someone to be present in the room so I'm more likely to do my laundry and change my decorations, I can label everything, I can scream, I can change my mind every single day, I can like the way something tastes but not eat it because the texture is gross, I can keep chapsticks and lollipops in every room of the house, I can buckle in inanimate objects with a seat belt, I can listen to the same playlist every day for the rest of my life, I can cry at bloopers.

The point is I can do anything and I don't have to do anything. This has always been true, but for some reason my truth has clicked on in a bigger and deeper way, and I want to empower you to know this for yourself in the biggest way you can.

More than the fact that you can do anything and don't have to do anything, you don't have to explain *why* to anyone. That's the biggest release for me.

It's ironic, I guess, because now that I actually have an explanation of Autism) I don't feel the need to give it. My whole life, people have told me I've been off, odd, rude, blunt, and a weirdo and now I understand why they think that more than ever. I get that there are way less people who think and act like me on a statistical level. It's only about 1% of the population (probably more in terms of a vast underdiagnosis, but that's a whole other thing). That's really small, though! I am quite literally weird.

It's not a theory, it's science.

The couple weeks after the diagnosis have been some of the most expansive in terms of asking what I want in my entire life, and it's all because I stopped clarifying *why* I wanted something. I stopped feeling guilty about why. There were no more qualifiers.

One night, very soon after, I went to see Nick Kroll perform his Netflix taping special at a fancy theater in DC. It was expensive, so I got the super cheap way-up-high balcony seats. When Matt and I got to our row, though, it was the worst possible situation for us. It was up against this weird pillar and not only could we not see, but it was a very claustrophobic situation for both of us.

I sat there for a second, and my brain had two parts that spoke up. One wanted to complain and commiserate. The other was my grandfather, Da's, voice. He said, "You don't know unless you ask. The worst thing they can say is no". There were five minutes until showtime and I noticed the theater wasn't full. I jumped up, crawled on top of my seat, and shimmied out of the row without explaining what I was doing to Matt.

I found a woman with a headset and asked if the show was sold out. She said no and asked why. I told her where I was sitting and why I didn't like it. I was super honest, blunt, and nice. I pointed to two rows of seats that were just slightly in front of us that were totally empty. I said, "Honestly anything would be better if it's possible". She said, "Those are actually taken, but, how do you feel about that?" She pointed to the fancy balcony box directly overlooking the stage (think Abe Lincoln but we lived through it).

It was so expensive that no one bought it, so we had it all to ourselves. There was so much foot room, velvet seats, and a shelf for our drinks. It also probably helped the taping because it filled the seats and gave the appearance of a sold out theater, and we might even be in the recording! It didn't hurt anyone's night because I didn't make anyone move and actually gave the people we originally sat next to more room. We felt like royalty and magic.

All because I asked for what I wanted.

You don't need an Autism diagnosis to do this. This was my journey to get here and it took 34 years. I don't want or need you to take this long to crack this code. That's the point of my job and this book. To learn from me. I want you to use this chapter to release the attachment to what you think you *should* be doing, the *guilt* of what might happen if you ask for what you want *and get it*, and then go do it.

Blame, Shoulds, + Supposed To's

This chapter is all about embodiment, which to me at this point, is the ultimate expression and state of self-love and Merriment Making. This is why the chapter is so far towards the end of the book, because we needed to cover a lot to get here.

Right now, all you need to know is that embodiment is saying 'yes please' to what feels good and saying 'no thank you' to what doesn't feel good and letting *what* you say yes to run through your whole body in a physical sensory experience.

That's why I brought up my experience with Autism and masking. We have all been conditioned to say 'yes please' to things that *don't* feel good and 'no thank you' to things that do feel good instead of the other way around.

You've been masking your whole life, it just was through a variety of other experiences. Maybe it was a neurodivergent mind, maybe it was people pleasing, maybe it was a response to trauma, maybe it's because that's what someone you trusted told you was right or you were "supposed" to do.

A hot buzz word in the personal development world is "limiting beliefs". Limiting beliefs are simply how you would end the sentence "I should..." with. What you believe you're somehow supposed to be, feel, or do. If we look back to the things you were told, taught, or shown that deviated from what felt natural and good to you, you'll realize they drastically overlap with those "I should" sentences. They were things you ended up saying 'yes please' to out of obligation instead of desire.

When we have this realization, we're likely to go through stages of grief. It's natural and necessary. Grief must occur *whenever your understanding of the truth and/or reality changes state.*

The problem occurs when we become stagnant within a *state* of grief, such as bargaining or anger, and this is the reality for many of us when we understand external sources had an influence on our internal state.

We might become obsessed with researching the parent-child dynamic or how they influence what are called Attachment Styles in relationships further down the road.

We might become angry at our caregivers, circumstances, and culture for contributing to the thoughts we heard, internalized, and ended up believing.

Educating yourself and expressing emotions are never a bad thing. What happens is we can sometimes use these as a new defense mechanism for pausing our development and evolution. We use these as a new safeguard for feeling what we don't want to feel. It becomes easier to blame a new label for why we're at dis-ease with something, so we do.

You can blame your Attachment Style, your Dad, or your Moon Sign, but I promise you it will only get you so far. In fact, it's not going to get you far at all, the same way getting a diagnosis is only a vehicle to grant you access to resources, education, community, and treatment. Nothing outside of you can evolve or heal you the way *you* want.

In fact, when we blame other things for something in our own lives, it becomes true. It amplifies. When you decide there is blame and misery, you will find more evidence of that. When you decide there is love and Merriment, you will find more evidence of that.

This does not mean other people and sources did *not* influence your thoughts and experience. This should go without saying at this point. Two things can be true at once, Merriment Maker. You can know something happened and also choose how to hold it, dance with it, and mold it as best as you can in a way that works for you.

One of the most helpful things I ever saw Louise Hay say was, "We are all victims of victims". This helped me to understand that in order to expand my own healing, I needed to be able to hold two ideas in place at the same time the way I can with all other topics.

It can be true that I was hurt and someone hurt me; it sucked deeply and had horrible consequences. Also, the person who hurt me was hurt by someone else and had circumstances that made it possible for them to hurt me.

When the adverse situation doesn't affect me personally, whether the situation is in a history book, text book, podcast, or even a friend's personal life, I can absolutely feel upset and empathetic about it, but I can also find it much easier to find perspective for it. I can use what I understand about human psychology and the way life works to say, well yeah that sucks, but as terrible as it is it makes sense.

When something affects us, we lose objectivity. If we can look at a situation with objectivity, we are able to find perspective. This works for finding advice and gratitude, and it also works with processing grief. It works pretty much everywhere in life.

If you know you have the option to shift your perspective and choose not to try, you are purposefully staying in the same spot, which is self-sabotaging behavior. This is when we know what we want, and we might even know how to get there, but we start putting stuff in front of us that will specifically derail the journey.

It's like if you knew you were going to be a passenger on a bus later that day, and you purposefully went out and created potholes, caused accidents, and then didn't tell the bus driver to take a detour even though you knew those things that were going to impede the bus's journey. Not only were you out there causing your own impediments, you didn't do anything to go around them once they existed. That's self-sabotage.

To take it a step further, blaming the bus driver, the bus, the potholes, and the accidents is victimhood. It's not taking any responsibility for the fact that these things existed on their own or acknowledging the part we played in the impediments, even if it was 1% or subconscious as a way of our body thinking it would protect us.

To put it simply, if you're upset about something, why create more upsetting situations for yourself? And then, why blame those situations you created for how you feel?

Another way to look at creating more work for yourself is creating your own burnout.

If you're feeling burned out from politics, is the best thing for you to do to throw yourself into three more separate activist groups? On paper, maybe. To take action and find solutions is admirable, but to what end? But what about the solution of embodying joy first?

If you're burned out from your life at home and want a vacation, is the best thing for you to do to visit your grandparents in another state who you always fight with? On paper, maybe. Maybe you're wanting to see them "before they die". Maybe the idea of being "anywhere but here" is a vacation.

Remember that a vacation isn't a vacation simply because it's *not here*. People come to the hospital down the street from me from all over the world for medical care, and just because it's outstanding medical care in comparison to the rest of the world doesn't make that procedure feel good to the patient. Just because something is far from where you live doesn't make it a vacation.

Notice all the "on paper" ideals, obligations, shoulds, and supposed tos. These aren't embodied decisions. Embody joy first. You will find more joy down the street with something you love than by going to a different part of the country with something you dislike.

I believe true foolishness relies on the shoulds and supposed to's which limit what we are and where we can be.

You don't owe anyone, including yourself, a 'should' or a 'supposed to'.

A limiting belief implies the existence of an expanding belief. So I want to ask you now, instead of what should you do, what can you do? What is possible for you? What is the best case scenario?

The spectrum of love and fear in this chapter is embodiment and attachment. In order to embody what feels good to *you*, you can't rely on blaming others for why you don't feel good. You can't expect others to make you feel good. You can't ask others what makes you feel good. You can't hope the world tells you the trend of what feels good. You find it from within, feel it there, and radiate it outwards.

Create your own trend, even if you're the only one following along.

Coming Back To Self-Love

So how do we figure out what feels good without outside influence? We first come back to self-love.

I don't mean self-care. Not just baths, rituals, and morning routines. Yes, do those things, but I mean having a *relationship* with yourself.

We talk about loving yourself in this theoretical way, and the examples we give all seem to be activity based. How can we love ourselves? Put on a face mask! I mean, okay, but is that how you love your partner, your kid, or your cat? If I went up to my boyfriend and put a face mask on him to show him I loved him he would be like what is happening...?

You know how people know you love them? You spend time with them. You listen to them. You talk to them. You demonstrate you know who they are with jokes, memes, and gifts. You act out the five love languages in real time with them.

Are you doing those things with yourself? Or are you disembodied from yourself and just floating around from one activity to the next, taking photos of it to prove you were there like a shitty piece of graffiti on cement that says "Josh wuz here"?

Okay Josh, we get it. But did it *feel good* when you wuz there?

I want you to ask yourself if you're spending time with yourself. If your reaction is 'that's silly' because you can't get away from yourself, then that's a sign (or maybe a red flag). Of course you're always physically in your body, but are you mentally and emotionally there? Are you even physically there?

I want you to ask yourself if you're *spending time* with yourself. If your reaction is 'that's silly' because you can't get away from yourself, then that's a sign (or maybe a red flag). Of course you're always physically in your body, but are you mentally and emotionally there? Are you even physically there?

How many times during the day do you ask yourself, "How are you?" How many times a week do you realize you've been holding in your pee or you forgot to eat?

How many times a week do you ask other people how they are and think about other people's bodily needs before you think about your own?

How would you feel if you were spending a day with someone and they were the one with the key to the bathroom, refrigerator, car, and all the stuff you needed and they *never* asked you if you needed anything? That would suck. Are you doing that to yourself every single day? You're keeping yourself locked out of the bathroom, refrigerator, and joy by not checking in with yourself. Stop that shit.

More than that, are you *emotionally available* for yourself? Are you talking out your feelings, not with someone else but with yourself? Are you journaling, meditating, or talking to yourself in the shower? Are you crying, emoting, and giving yourself time to scream? How would you feel if the person you lived with or were in a relationship with never spoke or emoted?

If you're thinking to yourself, "Of course I'm emotionally available to myself because I feel *upset* all the time", I want you to think about that for a second (hot tip: it's another red flag). If anger, sadness, and frustration are the only emotions you're ever feeling there is an imbalance in your body, mind, and world. Yes, they're necessary to feel, and we all do, but if you're continuing to feel them all the time, you're not *actually* processing them. They're stagnant.

Are you emotionally available for joy, surprise, and pleasure? *What is your relationship with happiness?* Are you present for it? Have you blocked it off? Do you not believe in it? Do you need to clap for it like Tinkerbell so she doesn't die?

You have a relationship with yourself, and you also have a relationship with every emotion you feel. The same way you're allowed to take a break from a relationship with a person or a job, you're allowed to take a break from your relationship with jealousy or frustration, and you can start up a relationship with happiness.

When you start a relationship with yourself and/or happiness, it's just like dating. It's anxious, awkward, and superficial at first and builds over time. Or maybe it's deep, passionate and heavy and fizzles out and you need to keep the magic alive. Or both. Start thinking about your connection to everything in life like a romantic relationship. To yourself, to joy, to Merriment, to your passions, to everything.

As far as joy goes, there is a lot of pressure from society and social media to "show" your happiness. If you don't sign the wall "Josh wuz here" it "didn't happen".
This is bullshit.

If a bear shits in the woods or Josh went to the cement wall and no one was there to see it or sign it, they were still there. I promise you. And if you enjoy something without making a 60 second video to an AJR song I promise you it still counts. In fact, it might count more. It certainly doesn't count for less.

Part of self-love is not needing to explain what feels good, why it feels good, prove that you were there or that it matters if it doesn't make sense to them.

Your life, choices, and interests aren't going to make sense to almost 8 billion people. That is so many people. If you are constantly validating, explaining, or defending yourself that is all you will do.

Having a relationship with yourself is knowing your truth. It's being connected with what makes sense to you. It's being adventurous within yourself, body, and life. It's being honest about what you never want to do or try again or ever in the first place. It's being willing to change your mind. It's letting it be okay if you don't have the words for something, shrugging, and saying, "I don't know, it just feels good".

Embodiment Practice

Most people will equate embodiment practices to what is called “feminine embodiment”, and that is absolutely an option. Specifically, there is a type of practice that involves deep breathing, releasing sounds, and moving your body (specifically your hips) while lying down or on all fours. I love this practice and even teach guided sessions, but this is a specific practice and container that I believe is meant to help you release pent up emotions and get you in touch with your sensuality.

The term “feminine embodiment” is also getting attached to all types of movement and breathing including dancing, pole, and breathwork. These are all amazing types of embodiment practices if that’s what feels good to *you*.

Here’s the difference between what and how I teach and what you’ll see on Instagram: on Instagram the options you’ll see for “embodiment” will be pretty limited to movement and things that are more flowy, delicate, and sensitive. On the spectrum of feminine and masculine energy (not meant to indicate gender, but energy), feminine energy is indicating creativity, flow, and softness among many other things. I believe that feminine energy and embodiment includes play, and more than that, if you dislike or are unable to participate in dancing or specific breathwork practices, you can *absolutely* access embodiment and joy through a multitude of a million other specific options.

Finding what feels good was easy as a kid, and it can be a little trickier as an adult. I want you to realize the only reason it is trickier as an adult is your mind. Your body still wants and loves to feel good. In fact, it’s crying out for it.

Your mind just has a bunch of ‘limiting beliefs’ it would love to expand. Some of those are guilt, judgment, and criticism that you’ve received around saying ‘yes please’ to what feels good. Tapping, journaling, and working through your Secondary Gains worksheet on releasing these limiting beliefs will help clear some space for your body to be ready to receive pleasure. You can do that first, or continually over time as you come up against new Fear Blocks.

Next you're going to do something I call "stacking interests". Pick four things randomly from the list. Let's say I picked out mirrors, fringe, karaoke, and balloons. Your task is to figure out a way to enjoy these things together. My first thought is to cover my basement in mirrors, turn it into a karaoke bar, decorate the microphones so the fringe dangles off the bottom, and every time you sing you have to inhale helium.

If I told those four items to someone else, they would come up with a completely different way to use them altogether. It's a fun thought exercise and you can change your items up every day or every time to find new ways to combine your favorite things. You can even keep your list by category so every day you pick a food, a texture, a flower, a place, etc. However you want to do it!

Another way to find things that feel good to you is to continue to build off the relationship you're building with yourself and ask yourself every day, "What would feel good right now?" Then you do that thing.

You can make the questions really specific if it helps. "What would feel good to my skin right now?" "What would feel good to eat right now?" "What would feel good inside my body right now?" "What would feel good to release right now?" "What would make this more fun right now?" "What do I wish I was doing right now?"

If you ask yourself that every day, you'll start to get more in touch with how to answer the question. You'll start to feel less nervous about answering your own question. You'll start to feel less guilty about having an answer.

You'll also start to notice patterns. I've noticed I feel better when I'm writing if I'm in a crop top sucking on a rootbeer lollipop. So guess what I'm doing and wearing right now? Once you notice patterns you can start to prepare for them and create feel good kits and supplies.

Another way to explore potential embodiment practices is to try new things. Not everything you did as a child or things you've already tried are the only things your body likes. There are plenty of things you've never experienced that your body would love to feel. That means risking the idea of needing to say 'no thank you' if you go out to try something and you don't like it for the potential reward of finding your new favorite thing and getting to say 'yes please' to it over and over again for the rest of your life.

The amount of new things you can try is enormous both on and offline. Go outside, though, if you can. Engage in your community and city. Check out events and nature. Do Merriment Missions. Find art. Move your body. Say 'yes please' until you know it's a 'no thank you'. You can change your mind at any time.

The whole point of an embodiment practice is to be present in your body while you're doing something that feels good. That's it. We're building on loving yourself to believe you're worth it enough that this is worth your time, the motivation to prioritize the practice, the importance of celebration and pleasure, and your ability to be mindful from previous chapters in this book. This has all been leading here.

Embodiment isn't a fancy new age concept only available to people in a studio paying hundreds of dollars for a class or hypnosis or something. It can be that, but if what gets you feeling good in your body, present in joy, and feeling good is sitting outside and looking at birds as they go from one tree to another, that is your embodiment practice, my friend.

Feeling good in your body is something only you know. It's something that can expand and build over time. It's something you can find out you were only at a 5 on a scale of 1-10 because one day you finally feel what a 10 of pleasure actually is the same way you can experience pain.

Feeling good is when what is happening in front of you, and more importantly, inside of you, feels *free*. It's okay if your mind drifts, the same way it might in a meditation. The idea is you feel *good*. If you don't know if you feel good, keep trying different things until you know you do. It's like an orgasm. You'll know.

How Can You Be More Turned On

Speaking of orgasms, I believe the way we embody something has a lot to do with our sensuality.

Now, sensuality is actually not necessarily an orgasm. Sensuality to me is an all day thing. It's everything but (and including) the genitals. The idea is that having an orgasm is sensual *and* sexual, but brushing a feather on my skin is sensual *not* sexual (to most).

Sensuality is the opposite of a quickie to rush to orgasm. Sensuality doesn't have to lead to sex and it doesn't even need to be connected to sex. For many of us, we have a whole period of our lives of being turned on and being and feeling sensual without being sexual or even knowing what sex is.

That's the energy I want us to cultivate with embodiment. I want you to be able to feel good in your body the way you do when you need to close your eyes to take something in. You know how you close your eyes to feel a kiss or if someone rubs your feet and you need to feel it deeply? Closing your eyes is your body's way of shutting off unnecessary stimulus so you can focus on the stimulus that feels good. It doesn't need eyes to feel the massage, so it closes them.

What feels good enough to you that you can close your eyes?

Even if you have the ability to see and there are things in this world that you enjoy seeing that can be part of your embodiment practice, that's great. This is just the energy I want you to think about.

The idea of feeling so deeply in pleasure and at peace that you only need to focus on one sense at a time. To stop in your tracks and smell a flower or candle. To take a sip of a drink and say, "ahhhh". It's the mmms, ahhs, and oohhhs that cultivate true embodiment.

What turns you on out there in the world? Not necessarily sexually or kink wise, but when you feel alive? When you feel free? When you feel light and excited?

Is it being on the open road? Is it seeing your plants bloom? Is it finishing a surgery and knowing the patient is going to be okay?

What makes you feel turned on by life? Talk about it with yourself. Why does that do it for you? Do you know? If you do know, think about more ways you can find that thing in the world. If you don't know, say that's okay because it just feels good and you don't need to explain yourself to anyone, including yourself.

Relationship Dynamics + Polarities

In the next few sections I'm going to discuss relationship dynamics with romantic relationships in mind. You don't need to be in a romantic relationship to benefit from this advice. Almost all of this can transfer to platonic friendships as well as the relationship you have with yourself.

One of the expressions we've repeated so much it almost feels meaningless and trite is, "You can't love someone unless you love yourself first". The same is true of, "You can't help someone unless you help yourself first", yet we've spent most of this book talking about ways to prove the latter is true in a tangible way so we can do both.

The thing about trite and repeated phrases is they get repeated over and over because we don't *listen*. They don't get rephrased, so we are uninspired by them. The same way the same visual aesthetic stops to lose its mojo, a phrase begins to go in one ear and out the other without having the chance to stick, let alone have the opportunity to get us to do something with it.

It's not that we can't help someone unless we help ourselves first. We know that's not true. You can do whatever you want. You can eat a poisonous berry, even if it's one time and the last thing you do. The point of Merriment Making is to create a quality of life that creates cause for wondering what *would* happen if you questioned the toxicity of the berry before you ingested it.

In this way, you can absolutely love someone without loving yourself first or at all. In fact, people do it all the time and they will continue to do it until the day they die. It's not impossible. The difference between loving someone without loving yourself first is it is a much slower burnout and death than caring for someone else before you care for yourself, even though it's kind of the same dance in a different costume.

I've been in love with romantic partners more times than many people will get the opportunity to experience in their lifetime. I knew the first time at a dolphin show at an aquarium when I was 15-years-old, and he knew too, because he told me in a stairwell in the parking garage on the way back to the car.

Even though something turned on in my gut that night and I knew for sure that's what this feeling was, when he told me, I ran. I literally ran away. I got lost in the parking garage on the floor labeled "Octopus". I ran from him, from love, and my feelings because I didn't love *myself*.

That was one of the darkest years of self-loathing in my entire life, and even though there was this tunnel vision of something that felt good, I almost couldn't distinguish it from pain because everything else in my body felt bad. I hated myself and it made me question everything else.

There have been many other times where I've fallen in love in the past twenty years. Some over many weeks in a slow burn, and some in as little as a night that felt like a visceral button being clicked without my approval.

The difference between the night on the Octopus floor of the parking garage and the most recent time I knew I was in love wasn't the signal from my gut saying, "This is it!", it was the connection between my body, mind, soul, and intuition. It was the years of relationship I had built with myself. It was the *lack* of guilt that this was 'too soon' or 'weird'. It was the *lack* of judgment that "this" was the person I loved. It was the belief I was *right* about the instinct. It was the belief that I *deserved* to be loved in return.

I'd like to say that every relationship I've been in I've loved myself a little more, but that's untrue. Due to trauma and trust issues, my relationship with myself hasn't been linear, and that has reflected itself in my romantic relationships as well. The less I love myself, the less amazing and expansive my romantic relationships are.

This will be true for you, too.

If there is an issue in your life that is disturbing or disruptive to *you*, it connects to a call to action of needing to cultivate more self-love. This is true for relationships, money, health, everything.

If you're noticing that romantic relationships don't feel right for whatever reason to *you*, I'm going to make a bet that there is a lack of enthusiasm and excitement. You might feel the other person is not feeling excited about you or your relationship. This might be true, it might not be, but if you are feeling this it always means that *you* are *also* not excited about you or your relationship.

My advice is to not start with bringing excitement directly to your relationship. Start with yourself. As always!

Think about a class you've taken and how that teacher influenced your interest in the class. You could have taken that exact class with three different teachers and had a radically different experience. Teachers make or break a class because of the tone they set for the material.

If the teacher is bored, the class will be boring. If they are having a bad day, it's easy for it to come out in the class or even directly at a student.

You are the teacher in your relationship. Ultimately, the material you have to work with is kind of already set up within the container of the relationship. So how are you going to make it *interesting*?

How are you going to make sure you, the teacher, has a good day before you get to class (the relationship)? This is about making joy your job and embodying joy first!

How can you make sure you're not bored so the class (the relationship) isn't boring? This is about creating containers for Merriment so you're excited and enthusiastic about life on your own!

Remember there's a reason your partner(s) is attracted to you, the same way you're attracted to them. There was something about them that made you excited about the way they were out there, living in the world, before you became a part of their world. If they totally stop being that person, it's kind of a drag, right? It's not attractive.

Are you doing that? Have you abandoned the things you love about yourself and your life that you were participating in before you became a part of a relationship?

Do you have a limiting belief that you need to fully do everything together as a partnership in order to be a healthy, functioning couple? Are you scared that if you don't do everything together or know where each other are that you'll break up and fall apart?

What if the opposite is true? What if you actually need to maintain independence and enthusiasm for who you are as a singular polarity of attraction so you can come together with excitement on purpose?

You never want someone who needs you, you always want someone who chooses to be with you because they love you but would be absolutely okay if you weren't there, and vice versa. Life is the ice cream and love is the hot fudge. And sprinkles. And cherries. It's delicious. But ice cream is great on its own, too.

Creating Connection + Maintaining Depth

- 1) To keep a relationship with more than one person happy and active, you want to make sure the relationships with each person's self are happy and active.
- 2) The next thing is to create your own rules and routines. You'll find a lot of lists online about how this sex move will drive them wild or how important it is to maintain eye contact for a deep relationship. I reject those lists as gospel or even accurate.

I think lists are a great place to get inspiration, but if you think lists or even this book is a place where you *have* to do everything someone else says, you haven't been listening. Reject what doesn't work, especially what doesn't feel good.

A great example is eye contact. For my whole life, I've found it extremely difficult to make eye contact with people while I speak. It was one of the main reasons my parents submitted to taking me to therapy when they realized how "bizarre" that behavior was (which to me is fascinating compared to the abnormality of the behavior of my other disorders).

When I read Tim Ferriss' Four Hour Workweek, I began getting a lot of results from the homework assignments, and I started treating it like a sacred text. I stalled out, though, when I hit the assignment that said to go for a week making eye contact with everyone you speak to.

I physically couldn't do it, even with Matt. I thought it meant I wasn't confident enough. I put the book down and didn't return to it.

It was extra upsetting to me because when Matt and I first met, we locked eyes and were able to make eye contact for hours. We both kept commenting on how weird it felt because we can never make eye contact with anyone else. It felt weird that we were able to do it for the first time, and it actually felt *good*.

Not being able to make eye contact during regular conversation made me question if I was even in love with Matt. It spiraled me because of one page of a book.

Turns out, I have Autism and that's why I have trouble making eye contact! That's just another example of how this diagnosis has helped me, but the bigger lesson is Tim Ferriss' book and *all* other resources (including this one) are going to help a lot of people, but there are always going to be things that don't mesh with you.

I want to empower you to not spiral and question your worth when something doesn't mesh. It's not you, it's not me, and it's not Tim Ferriss. It's that some people like pink and some people hate pink. It's that simple.

So if you as a couple both agree that eye contact is great, then incorporate that into your lives and the container of your relationship. Make it an overt agreement (meaning saying it out loud and not hidden or subtly expected without explaining what you want in clear terms) and agree to prioritize it. If you both hate eye contact, then it doesn't matter how many people say eye contact will make an experience "better", it won't be better for *you*.

3) Taking that further, you need to ask for what *you* want in a routine. All parties in a relationship aren't going to agree on everything, and no one is a mind reader, so if you don't state what your desires are, they can not meet your needs or expectations. You'll be surprised how likely they are to help make you happy if you just say what you want.

This isn't as simple as a sit down conversation one and done. Things will come up as you think of them and they become relevant. Let this be an ongoing conversation.

4) When you're having a conversation, state up front if you are venting or want to find solutions.

This saves so much time. When you're experiencing something upsetting and you share it with your partner, especially through a written medium, they're likely to want to make you feel better. To them, that might be solution based thinking. To you, that might feel patronizing.

If you just say, "I just need to vent, I don't want solutions" or, "Do you have any ideas?", at the beginning or end of your message, they'll know to say, "That sucks, babe, I'm so sorry" instead of responding with five paragraphs asking you if you know the difference between regular blood and period blood when you thought you were just informing them you were in pain.

This also helps clarify if you're coming to commiserate or find a solution and how often you're doing either of those things.

5) Express gratitude for your partner on a regular basis.

There are a bunch of modalities and innovative ways for how to show your partner you love them and are grateful for what they do and who they are, but it needs to be done regularly. When I say regularly, I mean weekly ideally and monthly at an absolute minimum.

Think about what your partner's love languages are and share your gratitude through that medium. When in doubt, writing it down always works.

Think about things they do in terms of the five love languages as it applies to your relationship and you! What are you grateful they do that makes you feel good or that they take off your plate? What about who they are as a person?

You can even do this on a daily basis. That way it becomes an ingrained ritual and you're more likely to remember "smaller" things like paying for a meal, taking out the cat litter, opening the door, helping you talk out a problem, and complimenting your outfit.

You don't need to live together to be able to do this. I did this in a nightly text when I was long distance!

6) Experience things together.

There are some circumstances that would make going outside together something that wouldn't be an option, and if that's the case, you can still experience new things together from inside the house especially with the option of the internet and virtual reality.

However, if you are able to go outside in any capacity with your partner, please do. There is so much to experience beyond the walls of where you sleep, and if you can see the world through the eyes of your partner, you will understand and love them more deeply.

The options for activities open up immensely when you exit the home and it's an incredible bonding experience. This doesn't mean you have to sacrifice your safety or increase your anxiety by going in a crowd. You can go for a drive or walk. It's about changing the stimulus you're taking in, but doing it together.

7) Make things novel.

If you feel like things are getting stale, use your Merriment Making tactics to add novelty to them. Stack your interests, use novelty items, get silly, ask them what they want to do or what's missing.

Notice where the formula is the same/stale and substitute one thing that's different. If you always go for a drive at night listening to the same playlist in the city, switch it to daytime. Go to the country. Listen to showtunes instead of metal. Have the other person drive. You just need one element to be different to make it feel a little different.

Try out each other's interests. Take turns planning dates and go all in with enthusiasm and an open mind the same way you want them to be for your date. They have to be open to the idea that you won't want to ever do it again and you have to be open to the idea that you might love it.

8) Ask questions.

I don't care how long you've been with someone, you don't know everything about them. There are more questions to ask.

Get a conversation starter pack or download a list of questions online and start asking. There are even apps for this.

You can ask one thing a day or have a deep session every month.

9) Keep it romantic.

Your version of romance is different from mine, the same way your version of what's sexy is different.

Maybe it's long handwritten letters, candlelit dinners, spa resorts, blindfolds, hand cooked meals, doing all your chores, surprising you with a balloon, finding where the WeinerMobile is on the map and taking you there.

So figure out what's romantic for you, what's romantic for them, and what's romantic for both of you. Then schedule it, add it to your to do list, and do it.

There needs to be a date type day/celebration once a month at minimum. It can be a day trip, an activity you do together, a day you get a babysitter, a locked door sex romp, whatever you want. This can also be a day when you express gratitude.

Schedule it and stick to it. It can be the same weekend of the month or the same number of the month (maybe the same as your anniversary?). Prioritize your love.

From Blame To Forgiveness To Power

Whenever we enter a relationship, we put ourselves in a vulnerable position. We set ourselves up for pain. The best case scenario is the relationship is something you both love and want to keep for the rest of your lives, but then one of you still dies.

This means you're still setting one of you up for an intense amount of grief.

More realistically, the relationship will end while both of you are still alive and it will end more tumultuously. You'll both grieve the relationship's death, not the death of your partner.

Yeah. Shit just got real. That's a big ass bummer. Don't kill the messenger, though, you knew that already.

What's more, on the path to grief, you're going to hurt each other. Over and over again. When you love someone so much, they're able to hurt you more than someone you don't love. It might be fights, disagreements, big betrayals or worse.

That's also real.

We walk into love over and over again knowing we're going to be hurt in these more micro hurts on the path to grief either in the death of a person or the relationship or both. Dear goddess, why on earth are we doing this?

Oh, because it's beautiful! The same reason that when I'm having Bipolar episodes and I'm all over the map of emotions like a literal rollercoaster, I think this is the worst and it would be better to not feel like this... but then I think about the alternative of mediocrity. I think about what it would be like to feel beige; to ride the monorail without ever feeling my stomach dip, and I know that I would much rather feel "emotional dysregulation" than the alternative.

Some people don't agree. Some people won't ever make a mess because the idea of cleaning it up is too overwhelming to warrant the art they'll make in the process. That's their right. I can't help but make the mess. I simply don't know how to exist quietly, and I imagine you understand what that feels like.

So that's why we continue to enter into love and other things that might potentially destroy us because we know that it's worth it. And most of the time, the destruction is just a very, very big mess that can be cleaned. And you can love again and again in paint stained leggings.

When you do get hurt, though, you need to address it and to explain why you're hurt as soon as possible. This is so the person who hurt you has a chance to help, apologize, and not do that again. Otherwise your hurt feelings will sit inside a bottle being shaken up until they explode, and they're likely going to explode on something that wasn't relevant after you had a long opportunity to deal with them in a more helpful way. (Don't create your own burnout and road blocks.)

Sometimes getting hurt creates a mess too big or the mess has been created over and over again, and you need to leave the relationship.

In any situation when we are hurt, we blame someone else for why we hurt, and in my experience in order to get our power back for our own lives we need to invoke forgiveness if only at 1% capacity. Forgiveness cannot exist if we don't acknowledge that blame has been placed in the first place.

I'm going to walk you through the steps of moving from Blame to getting your Power back.

This is not to disrespect anyone's individual experience or condescend trauma or the mental and physical after effects including disorders and diseases of trauma (if it helps to remind you that I have C-PTSD and flashbacks, go for it, but it's irrelevant, I'm on your side regardless). This is a thought exercise meant to assist you in providing perspective that can assist you in letting go of holding onto what you feel is no longer supporting you based on what has worked for *me*. Anything that doesn't work for you doesn't need to be used.

1) **Judgment** - There are always two sides of a street. We can disagree on everything. This includes humanity and human rights (100% of the world is never going to agree on everything). When we decide that someone has done something "wrong", this is fundamentally a disagreement.

It is possible that someone did something not because they knew it to be wrong and did it anyway, but because *they* thought it was right.

2) **Blame** - By definition, when we are even considering that someone *could* be forgiven or not forgiven for something, that means we have blamed them for something that has occurred. We have established guilt, judgment, and that they should possibly even be punished for their behavior.

Keep in mind that the blame is also directed at ourselves. We often feel that we "should" have done something sooner, known better, etc. We blame ourselves, even subconsciously. (Notice all the shoulds.)

3) **Victimhood** - When we feel we were wronged, or even if we were objectively wronged, we can say we are a "victim" to define the difference between the person who wronged and the person being wronged which can be helpful.

The difference between victim and victimhood happens when we use what happened as an excuse to live to the fullest extent that we possibly could. There is a difference between what your body can do, even in its new state, versus what we are willing to do within that state.

Are we willing to look at the original scenario of pain and think about why this could have happened?

We can acknowledge what our limitations are and still live in and around those things. There is a space where we can't and there's a space where we can and we choose not to. When we choose to make a shift, we step into more power, even if it's a very small one with support, resources, or a 1% change.

This is another example of finding a reason or an excuse of staying in the comfort zone of our new reality outweighing the fear of our future reality (see Secondary Gains).

4) **Self-Sabotage** - Something confronts us, even internally, and we realize that we might be ready on some level to make a change. We experience a dissonance between what we feel and believe. Maybe after years we're ready to do something we weren't able to do before but don't want to because we're scared. The change is scary though, so we sabotage ourselves.

We begin digging deeper into victimhood and blaming why we can't make that change. We make potholes on the road the bus we're riding on is going down, then act surprised as to why the bus got a flat tire. Secretly we're relieved the bus had to stop, though, because we're terrified of what would happen if the bus got there in time and we had to try to move the needle that 1% to change.

5) **Perspective/Logic** - Self-Sabotage can go really deep and last a while. It's the deepest dip on the timeline, and sometimes it takes hitting a rock bottom point to realize just how bad things got. We might need someone else to point it out to us, we might need to see how many obstacles we put in front of our own bus, or we might need a third party perspective shift.

If we are ready to have our perspective shifted, we can look at this logically. The hurt this is stemming from is creating a variety of unpleasantness in our lives and the way we've been handling it so far has worked up until this point, but it doesn't seem to be working anymore. Are we willing to continue doing what doesn't work for six more months and feel as bad or worse than we're feeling now? Or are we willing to try this new thing?

Instead of judging the circumstances, scenario, parties involved, and ourselves, are we willing to try a different approach for why this adversity happened?

In order to do this, we start looking at this as if the person who did the wrong was a child and we are a doctor/defense attorney. We are building a case in court to explain what happened. What are the reasons? Were they hungry, did they not have a parent growing up who showed them how this worked? What reasonable extent of doubt could be given?

We don't need to agree with this case. We just need to create a hypothetical case as a devil's advocate. Ask questions. Be outlandish if necessary. Maybe if they were scared of bats and they saw bats earlier that day and their gas tank was empty and they have no reward center active in their brain.

In this stage we are allowing our minds to move from judgment and blame to a "Hmmm?" "I wonder if?" state. It's a thought exercise.

We also need to do this for ourselves. We need to give ourselves a benefit of the doubt scenario hypothetical and objective case and treat ourselves as a child with a defense attorney. Why did we not leave earlier and not "know better", etc.? Lay down an objective case. (Notice the shoulds.)

6) **Compassion** - Through this thought exercise, we are allowing our body to potentially possess some compassion.

All we need for compassion is just a question of possibility and then to believe it with just a *little bit* of ourselves. We don't need to see proof and evidence to believe everything in the world. We don't need to be part of a marginalized group to believe they deserve equal rights. We don't need to be at the park to believe our best friend's story about what happened there.

This step is where we move from a more clinical stage of a dissociated defense attorney and devil's advocate role to embodying ourselves as a compassionate and unique person.

This looks like entering our body and seeing the facts we've laid out as the defense attorney from our own point of view and saying, "Okay out of the 100 facts 95 of these are likely bullshit, but honestly 5 of these are kind of possible, and probable even".

We can say these remaining probable scenarios out loud. This is our compassionate potential.

7) **Forgiveness** is different for everyone. I believe it is a state of the stages of grief we don't discuss that comes after anger and before acceptance.

Forgiveness is to say to the circumstance, to the situation, and the other parties involved, "As much as I can, I get it. I'm mad that you did this. It sucks. I am pissed still. I am sad still. I don't like the way this affect my life, or my body. I don't like it. I don't have to like it. I am doing my very best with it. I am doing all the things that I can. To be the best person that I can still. And honestly I'm really fucking proud of myself that I'm doing that. And I'm still angry, and I'm still sad. And that's okay. And I'm thinking here about all the things you did and why, and I kind of get it. A little bit. Maybe 1%. Maybe 1% of me gets a little bit about why you might have done it. And you know what? I'm never really going to get it. And honestly even if you came here and told me exactly why and I had no other reason than to believe you fully, it's still not going to make sense to me. But that is what I have. And it doesn't help me to hold onto this. It doesn't help me to wonder why anymore. It doesn't help me to blame you. It doesn't help me to judge you. It doesn't help me to stay here and say that you're wrong and I'm right. Because I believe that I'm right. I believe I wasn't meant to be hurt. And I believe that I'm not meant to continue to stay hurt. I believe that I'm deserving to have compassion for myself. And that's what I'm doing for myself . And that's what I'm doing right now. I deserve to have my power back. And you don't have any power over me. And I release you. I've been carrying you around. With me. For far too long. And this forgiveness honestly isn't even really for you, it's for me. And maybe that's selfish, but it's okay. And I'm done. And honestly, I forgive myself, too. Because I'm tired of blaming myself like this. I'm tired. I did the best I could with what I knew. And I'm sorry. And I love myself. And I accept myself. And I forgive myself. And I'm moving on."

It isn't about giving someone else a huge pass. It's about releasing something else *from us*.

8) **Lesson** - Can we find the good from the experience? It doesn't need to be from the specific situation that caused the hurt or wound, but what about the whole experience? For example if it was a relationship, there was more to the relationship than the wound. Was there any good in the whole relationship?

Or the wound itself. Can we find the good? Can we find the thing we learned about ourselves? The thing we can teach other people about? Can we? We don't have to. We don't have to do jack shit. But we can.

If we want to, we are able. We *can* find gratitude, we can find the sparkly linings, we can find the perspective shift, we can remember the good. We can. I believe gratitude is part of forgiveness on the stages of grief, or maybe it's its own stage.

9) **Responsibility** - We must be responsible for ourselves, and we can't do that if we are carrying around someone else that we harbor resentment for. This is why forgiveness is a part of this process.

It's just us. We're the person we're going to spend the rest of our lives with. And we get to! We get to choose to be victims, not of others, but of ourselves. We get to choose to self-sabotage our own shit. We get to feel good when we want to feel good and say no to what doesn't feel good as much as we possibly can.

We have to remember no one is going to do any of this for us. People can give us tools and prompts to help us, but we can also choose to put them on the shelf. We can choose to not change, look for gratitude, or do things that feel good.

When people say we can be anything we want to be and do anything we want to do, that also applies to doing shitty stuff that doesn't feel good. We have the right to do a lot of things. If we want to live a certain way, we have the responsibility to do that.

10) **Action** - Once we know who we want to be and how we want to be, we have to turn those things into actionable steps and put them on our to do list. Whether it's a monthly date with our partner, seeing a comedian live, or standing in a field of sunflowers.

11) **Power** - Going through these ten steps is no joke. When you realize how incredible this is, you'll understand how strong the human spirit is. We can do difficult things. Honestly, even making it this far down the list or in the book is incredible. Being able to mentally imagine it means we can do it.

Being in a wounded state is totally natural and normal. But living inside of a wound means that we won't live in our power, and I want us all to live in our power.

So take responsibility for living in your power, take action, and your powers will continue to expand.

You Weren't Made To Be Wallpaper

The inventors of Bubble Wrap actually wanted to make a wallpaper. They put two shower curtains through a heated sealing machine and it came out with air pockets. They made something, but it wasn't wallpaper. In fact, they had no idea what it was.

They tried using it as insulation, but it wasn't effective. Years went by, and the technology company IBM had launched a new giant computer (one that took up the whole room because it was 1960), and they needed something that would protect it during shipping. Enter Bubble Wrap.

The inventors could have seen the result coming out of that heat sealing machine and said, "This is not what I wanted or expected, this is not what it was supposed to be", thrown it out, and given up. Instead, they were fascinated by what had occurred and instead of forcing it to be something it wasn't, they tried to find a place for it in the world as it already was.

Maybe you've always felt like you were supposed to be a wallpaper. People have told you this is the pattern, design, and name you're supposed to do and follow and adhere to. This is how we do it, stop asking questions. You went along and did your best to be a wallpaper, but it never felt right.

I'm here to tell you that only some people are wallpapers. If you come out of the machine, into this world, with air bubbles, or crystals, or glitter, or stripes, or a hole, or whatever interesting function that makes you interesting and weird, I want to empower you to be your own inventor. Don't ask how you can figure out a way to be a wallpaper even though you clearly aren't. Ask how you're needed in a different way.

It might take years to figure out the perfect fit for you, but it exists. And maybe, most likely, it will be even more exciting and memorable to you than being a wallpaper. It will be like the thrill of popping a sheet of Bubble Wrap, because that's what you were made to do.

Chapter 12: Adventures, Altruism, + Acts Of Merriment

“If you have kindness in your heart, you offer acts of kindness to touch the hearts of others wherever you go whether they are random or planned.

Kindness becomes a way of life.”

- Roy Bennett

Are Adventures Accessible?

When I say, “I want you to have adventures”, what do you imagine? What actions, visuals, or ideas come to mind?

Do you think of traveling, doing something extreme, or crossing off “big life” goals related to jobs, family, money, health, and love? Do you visualize a plane, hang gliding over an ocean, or that you must have someone to share these experiences with? Are these experiences expensive or at least more expensive than your current budget?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, let’s take a look at why our concept of “adventure” has become synonymous with something outside of our immediate reach.

There is nothing wrong or bad if something you desire requires travel, a “risky” behavior like heights, or a larger budget. As we’ve established, there is no bad or good when it comes to your life and goals. What we need to be clear about is why we can’t make adventures more accessible today, and everyday.

The only thing between having an adventure today and next year is what we’ve decided is an adventure and our action towards making that happen. This is also true for Magic, Miracles, and Merriment.

So what is an adventure at its core? An experience needs to have at least one element from each of the following three categories to qualify as an adventure:

1 - Is It Uncustomary?

Unusual - not common, habitual, or regular; different or better than others

Rare - doesn't happen often; inconsistent; unusually good

Exotic - originating from details of a foreign land or concept

Remarkable - striking; worthy of attention

2 - Is It Engaging?

Exploration - traveling to a new area to learn more about it; searching through something in a detailed way; familiarizing yourself with something new

Experience - tangible contact with an event, object, or occurrence; observing or undergoing something

3 - Is It Beneficial?

Exciting - bringing about much enthusiasm and eagerness

Risk - a circumstance involving exposure to (perceived) danger

Unknown - not familiar

If you do something that checks off something from each of these categories, you have had an adventure, my friend!

So yes, get on planes and see the world. Save your money and buy a movie theater. Learn how to water ski. If that's what you want. And also, understand that if you make a new pasta dish for lunch that feels outside of your comfort zone and you enjoy it, you have had an adventure.

Please notice there is *nothing* within these categories that stipulates that you must have an adventure with a family, partner, or friend! There is so much joy to be shared in life, but often we stop ourselves from living our lives if we are "in between relationships" or don't have "the perfect family" yet.

You can have an adventure of any kind alone or with anyone else. You do not need to put your life on hold to wait for a lover or baby. In fact, the more you live your life, the more your life will feel fulfilled while you easily attract whatever it is you desire.

You can't control what or who doesn't exist yet, but you can control what you can create in this moment for you. So go have the adventure, and if you have a new relationship in the future, you can repeat the adventure again with them.

Society raised the bar for an adventure a long time ago. We've been told that an adventure needed to be risking our life climbing Mount Everest.

Well guess what? These are ways to monetize and capitalize our adventures and play. You don't need to "prove" your worth with the "vacations" and activities society has deemed "adventurous". It's just another way to pressure us into having \$65,000 and the physical ability to climb the tallest mountain in the world (it's only the tallest by 781 feet by the way).

What I'm saying is I don't know how many people would genuinely want to climb Mount Everest if it wasn't promoted the way it has been. I want us to always come back to our why for everything. For passion, play, and purpose. This includes adventure. Don't ever let anyone influence the reason you spend your time. Do you actually care that Mount Everest is tall and want to climb it or did someone just tell you you should? Your Mount Everest might not be a literal mountain. It could be any adventure you think you're supposed to have.

Instead of having adventures you're supposed to have, we're going to focus on having adventures you naturally desire. To get your mind active, I want you to take a look at the three categories above (Is It Uncustomary?, Is It Engaging?, Is It Beneficial?) and go through each point (eight points total between three categories) and ask yourself the following three questions about each point (for a total of 24 questions).

What have you done in the past that is ___?

What do you currently like to do that is ___?

What do you want to do that is ___?

Avoiding Adventures

There will always be some adventures that we never want to repeat. When I went on a road trip to New Jersey, lost my wallet, accidentally checked into the third highest drug trafficking motel on the east coast, and got pulled over by a cop for suspicion, I would call that an adventure. I also don't want to repeat that experience, but it was still beneficial because I learned something.

However, many adventures are magical gateways to our new favorite things. I can't tell you how many times I told people who know and love me, "No way, I don't want to" before I finally tried out things I ended up loving deeply. Movies with subtitles, The Sopranos, brussel sprouts, chai tea, cheese on chicken sandwiches, burner events, drugs, yoga, releasing control, sturdy furniture, tapping, meditating, cooking. The list is super long.

Even though we understand logically that adventures can happen without airplanes, there is still a part of us that will continue to resist them for our whole lives, because an adventure is ultimately any new experience out of our Comfort Zone.

Your Comfort Zone is beautiful and it is for self-care, nourishment, and safety. You must be inside of it often. All growth, expansion, and opportunity happens outside of it, though. We can call this the Adventure Zone.

Adventure is a way we purposefully seek discomfort with the intent to learn, grow, and expand as people. This is true for trying a new movie or crossing a big scary goal off your bucket list. The truth is the discomfort we experience is rarely about the moment when we can officially cross that item off your list, it's about what happened on the way to get there.

If an adventure is something outside our Comfort Zone, that means it's difficult. Otherwise it would be something we were already doing because it was natural to us. For some people, it's easy to exercise and the goal or adventure of moving their body isn't foreign or exciting to them. For someone else, it might be the most foreign thing they could do.

The decisions you have to make in order to begin exercising as a person who never exercises are the uncomfortable ones. These are the decisions that actually expand us. It's not really the exercise, which of course has additional benefits for the physical body, but the fact that the person decided to start exercising. It's the decision to buy the workout clothing, put on the shoes, get the gym membership, leave the house, make a goal, go back again, push through when it felt like they were out of breath, not get defeated when it felt impossible, and not fall into old habits. That is the adventure.

That's what they mean when they say it's the journey not the destination. Most people who have a radical adventure will tell you the original goal they set out to achieve (in this case maybe losing X pounds) ended up being superfluous. They'll tell you it ended up being more about what they learned about themselves in the process. It's about how scared they were to face the part of themselves they were avoiding.

The general rule of thumb is to notice where and when you're saying no to an experience. There are a couple reasons why we say no. One is because we genuinely don't want to and the other is because we see it as a dangerous threat. The tricky part is the many dangerous threats are actually us being scared to try something new because we feel safer in our comfort zone. There are some threats that are actually dangerous and some that we have generalized to be dangerous through any risky behavior equating to fear from our amygdalas (fear center in our brain).

This is extra tricky when we have trauma because seemingly innocuous stimuli from our past overlap with an intense fear of danger (like how every time I see shamrocks I want to run). The logical part of my brain knows shamrocks on their own aren't dangerous, but I connect them to something that is dangerous because they were around when something traumatic happened. You are absolutely allowed to decide that shamrocks, or whatever stimulus, is dangerous, at least for now, and that isn't a part of your world. Your brain can literally only handle so much.

Obviously without therapy and other medical assistance for trauma, it can be very complicated and dangerous to try to distinguish a dangerous threat from a non-dangerous one and as someone with C-PTSD, I recommend trauma therapy from a trained practitioner with my whole heart.

For our purposes, my best advice is to use your Secondary Gains worksheet, tapping, and your other shadow work tools to examine your fears around why you might feel resistance towards saying yes to an opportunity for an adventure, or even afterwards after you've already said no.

The ultimate goal is for you to find a baseline for you of if you were avoiding this adventure for a reason that makes sense for you or if trying it next time could be beneficial and the rewards could outweigh the risks.

RSVPing To Your Adventure Zone

Not all adventures require repeat rituals like exercising or saving money. There are always Microadventures everywhere for you to take advantage of.

Life is constantly handing you invitations to come to parties in your Adventure Zone.

You just need to realize most of them are super subtle. Some of them will literally come in your inbox like my newsletter with a direct message saying, 'I'm hosting the Bubble Parade or releasing a new book, please come'!. Some will be a purple door you're driving past and feel a sense of curiosity about for half a second.

That sense of curiosity is an invitation. You have the opportunity to keep driving and forget about the purple door, field of daffodils, or weiner dog on the street or to make an inconvenient U-turn, double back, and have an experience. Maybe you'll be five minutes late, but I doubt you'll regret it.

The more U-turns you make to RSVP to invitations from your Adventure Zone, the more you'll realize invitations are everywhere all the time. In fact, the amount of invitations are overwhelming and there's literally no way you could say yes to all of them. There are an endless amount of doors, dogs, and daffodils in the world and you are always allowed to say, "No thank you".

Sometimes invitations aren't fun, or healthy either! You can RSVP yes to heroin, not wearing your seatbelt, and committing crimes just as easily as you can to anything else. Learn what invitations you actually desire and align with your passions and values.

You are also allowed to ignore the invitation completely. It's unrealistic to constantly be open and always looking for invitations, but don't forget they exist. You always have options and opportunities. Your Adventure Zone will never forsake you. You can show up as you are at 3:33 AM and your invitations will all be waiting for you, with no judgments or explanation required.

Spreading Joy

The chapters in this book have all been about ways to assist you with embodying joy. Through the process of first acknowledging how important our personal fears are, we then looked at the spectrum of light and dark, love and fear in self-love, optimism, motivation, passion, mindfulness, celebration, play, creativity, magic, embodiment, relationships, and adventure.

The goal of these chapters was to give you the tools to feel as good as you can. Feeling good isn't easy, remember. If it was, we'd all feel great and this book wouldn't be necessary.

The theory of Merriment Making is to embody, create, and spread joy. In that order. Embodying joy is the most important and difficult part, so we spent the majority of our time in that space. I believe this time was well spent, because if you have gone in order, done the work, done the play, and experienced a shift in Magic, Miracles, and Merriment, you will find it more than easy to spread joy.

People often mistake Merriment Making as something that is constantly focused on others. These people only read the headlines. However, I do believe my theory and practice differs from other self-love and personal development practices because the act of spreading joy is a significant pillar which I feel is often overlooked.

This doesn't mean if you take a day or six months off, get sick, or something else that you're not a Merriment Maker. I lose my faith, stay in bed for 3 days, and don't do my own missions or take my own advice all the damn time. I'm still a Merriment Maker. It's not about firing you from Merriment Making or stripping you of a badge.

It's about acknowledging that if you can help and you don't, you have made a choice to not be a Merriment Maker at that moment.

If you can help yourself and you choose not to, you're not embodying joy. If you can help others and you choose not to, you're not spreading joy. The reasons for not doing either are likely that you're not confronting your fears, so back to Chapter 2 you go to check in with why you're feeling scared to leave your comfort zone.

Otherwise, when we have filled our cups, as Merriment Makers, we are here to be of service. We are here to spread joy. If you choose to accept this mission, the rest of this chapter is here to support you out in the field.

The Science Of Selfishness

There is an age-old philosophical debate that asks if humans are ultimately "good" or "bad". While the question can be phrased in many ways, at the end of the day we're actually equating "good" with being selfless, kind, and compassionate and "bad" with being selfish, manipulative, and malicious.

I believe at an individual level, your answer to this question demonstrates your worldview (at least on that day). If you answer that people are ultimately good, selfless, and kind, you are (feeling) optimistic and hopeful for yourself, humanity, and the future. You can find sparkly linings and gratitude in situations that aren't ideal or flat out suck.

Whereas, if you answer that people are ultimately bad, selfish, and malicious, you are (feeling) pessimistic and helpless for yourself, humanity, and the future. You find it difficult to find the blessings in the bullshit.

We can make arguments for why someone might feel more in an optimistic or pessimistic mindset on a given day or throughout their life based on their set of experiences. If we make assumptions that if someone has “never experienced trauma” it would be “easier” to have an optimistic worldview, whereas someone with “serious trauma” would have a “justified” reason to have a pessimistic worldview.

We can also argue that it’s “surprising” and “brave” for someone who has “serious trauma” to “still have” an optimistic worldview, whereas someone we assume has “never experienced trauma” has a pessimistic worldview “should count their blessings because it could be worse”.

I point this out because I believe this ancient argument of whether humans are innately selfish or selfless serves no purpose except to perform a personal gut check for where you’re at in this moment. If you answer the question and observe your needle has moved more towards one end of the spectrum, that’s something to notice. The needle didn’t move because your DNA changed. It moved because you had an experience and it impacted you. You can be jaded by benevolence or malevolence. Which do you want to let impact you?

Scientifically speaking, your brain is equally hardwired to behave selfishly and selflessly. You are set up as a regular run of the mill human to choose both. Imagine there are two buckets of behavior in your brain and they are both equally empty every day. You get to fill them both up as much as you want. You can choose to put yourself first, lie, cheat, steal, and manipulate and that’s going to fill up that selfish bucket. However, even after all those actions the selfless bucket is still empty. If you have any energy or desire, you can absolutely still give compliments, give gifts, open doors, and give back to the community.

It’s obviously not as simple as two buckets in your brain, but the point is you are equally equipped to behave either way. We are not ultimately good or bad as a species. We possess a spectrum of potential as individuals. Sometimes an individual acts selfishly out of malice and sometimes they act selfishly because they need to survive. Sometimes an individual acts selflessly because they genuinely want to help someone and sometimes they behave in a way that appears selfless but it’s actually rooted in selfish motives

If you believe people are “good”, then believe it. Look for it. You will find the evidence. If you believe people are “bad”, you will find the evidence for this as well.

If you insist you believe people are good and you simply just can not find the evidence for it, I’m going to suggest that you have some subconscious beliefs that people are actually acting maliciously, and your subconscious is out looking for evidence of people being bad, selfish, and malicious.

Are you actively looking for the helpers? Or are you putting yourself in situations where you’re surrounding yourself with people you know will disappoint you and then being surprised when they behave the way they always behave and then generalizing their actions to an entire species?

If this is the case, go back to your Secondary Gains worksheet and look for what fears you have around people being good. Are you scared from a past experience where someone was untrustworthy and now you project this towards every new person and experience?

Don’t get me wrong, it’s a natural thing. I do it, too. I was in relationships with two men in a row who weren’t who they said they were. Full on con artists. Second lives and identities. (I guess I have a type, but that’s for another book.) And you can bet your butt after that it’s hard to believe that everyone isn’t just lying to me 100% of the time. But what is my other option? To never trust anyone ever again?

It is an option, actually. But I can’t do it. My guard is up when I meet new people, and I know more things that I wish I didn’t, but Pandora is out of the box. And your past experience is also out of the box. So you get to decide if you want to try to do things that will make you feel more safe and trust situations and people in the future to make it as good as it can be, or if you’re going to write humanity and your own future off as a whole.

As is the case with failure and success, we’re not usually scared of failure, we’re scared of success. So is true with trust. We’re scared of what happens when we relinquish control and become vulnerable with someone else.

Trusting is like seeing there's a hammock below us and we're falling towards it, but we're scared it's not going to hold our weight. Or worse that someone is going to pull it out from under us on the way down to trick us.

But what if you fell down into the hammock and it actually felt really cozy? No tricks, just sturdy and dependable. What if the person you loved laid in the hammock with you? What if the person was just like you and just wants a chance to not have to constantly prove their existence to you the way you don't want to have to prove yourself to them?

Trust is a complicated thing once it's been broken. But all we can do is try again. The same way we grieve and love again.

I will explain later why all of this is relevant for spreading joy.

Altruism

The word "altruism" means having no interest in yourself and being concerned about others, or benefiting another at the expense of yourself.

We've kind of colloquialized this term to mean being kind, charitable, and believing in the goodness of humanity, but I want you to think about if the actual definition is a theory you want to live your life by all the time.

We absolutely need activists, charity, kindness, and putting ourselves up and out for things we're passionate about. However, I don't think we need millions of martyrs. If you are doing everything at the expense of yourself, I don't think you'll get very far. What's the point of having a cause you want to expand if you're sick or dead?

Enough with the romanticizing of martyrization and romanticizing of altruism. Be kind and helpful, not exploitative of your own needs. To believe in self-love and self-care on one hand and then actively believe in constantly benefiting others at the expense of yourself is antithetical, out of alignment, and will burn you out before you get started.

Spoiler alert: you and no one else have never been 100% selfless and that doesn't make you a bad person. Sometimes you do things that create change and support and it makes you feel good. Is that selfish? I say who cares.

If someone needs clothing and you're helping them get clothing and in the process you also get to promote your clothing company, feel confident, and make friends, where is the loss? Seriously? Why can't we accept that feeling good is selfish in and of itself? Why can't we accept that something can be mutually beneficial without being gross? Why can't we realize that self-love is selfish?

Kindness helps us as creatures. It helps us connect and foster relationships. It releases dopamine and lifts our mood (called a "Helper's High"). It also releases oxytocin which expand your blood vessels, lowers your blood pressure, keeps your heart healthy, and slows down aging. Those are some selfish benefits, and they sound great to me.

Charles Darwin was talking about selfish selflessness using the term "benevolence" and "sympathy". Scientific findings support that people show a part of their brain (pleasure center) light up when they are being kind to someone else!

The last chapter was all about Embodying Joy, and if you're feeling good, your pleasure center will be lighting up like fireworks. It will also light up if you're being kind to others. Really Merriment Making is just here to light up your pleasure center.

Ways To Spread Joy

There are an infinite number of ways for you to spread joy out in the field, AKA the world. My hope is through reading this book you will have become more in touch with your sense of self, play, passion, and joy which will make your decisions on how to proceed as a Merriment Maker in the streets, secret spaces, and with special someones particularly easy.

Spreading joy is unique to each Merriment Maker's DNA, astrology, psychology, past, desires, geography, and so much more. You might find the way you enjoy spreading joy is through your passion that we explored in Chapter 6. This could come to you through the lens of an occupation, project, or mission statement.

Do you spread joy through telling jokes as a comedian? Through fighting for rights for marginalized groups as an activist? By spreading knowledge to curious students as a teacher? Do you keep employees safe with a recurring income by being a successful entrepreneur? Are you there to hold space for people who are struggling with emotional turbulence and nourish them back to life? Do you give hope for current and future generations with radical ideas? Are you promoting health and healing as a nurse?

We need storytellers, students, and scientists. We need entertainers, entrepreneurs, and environmentalists. Each option leads to joy for others. Some are immediate, some are delayed. The result is still joy.

Your ability to be multi-passionate is beautiful, and it is also okay to not dedicate your ability to spread joy to more than one modality. Even if we spent every day for our whole lives in devotion to one modality, we still wouldn't "master" it.

While none of the above examples of passions need to be intertwined with a job, they often will overlap with a monetary exchange. All passions and jobs are in response to fulfilling a service and need. At the end of the day, fulfilling a need fosters the opportunity for someone or something to feel happier. So allow yourself to let the way you enjoy spreading joy be beautiful and enough.

You might also find the way you play is the way you enjoy spreading joy. Through the practice of Embodying Joy outlined in Chapter 11, you might learn more about yourself and be called to replicate that state of play for others so they can join in. You might also feel called to create a new modality entirely. I'm doing a little bit of both here with Merriment Making.

If you're still confused, ask yourself: What population of people/animals/environment do you feel the most empathy for? What group do you understand the most because you get what they've gone through? Who deserves more?

Once you've identified the group/area of the world you're passionate about spreading joy to, ask yourself: What do they deserve? If you had everything you needed taken care of and 1,000 extra dollars, how would I use my money to help them? What would make them feel good? If I were them, what would make me the happiest? What's the most immediate sense of joy I could spread? What's the most long-term sense of joy I could invest in?

The ways I spread joy are through writing, dressing and living colorfully, taking photos and videos, recording podcasts, celebrating unusual holidays, making guerrilla art, sending snail mail, giving gifts, sharing fun and whimsical knowledge, advocating for issues I believe in like mental illness, and teaching information I learn about life that I hope can be helpful to others who don't have to repeat my mistakes.

That's a bunch of things at once. You can pick one thing and spread joy. You can pick a bunch of things and spread joy and give it a new label. It truly doesn't matter.

What matters is you always make sure you embody joy first so your cup is full before you go out and spread it. No martyring, only Merriment Making.

Resistance From The World

Earlier, I mentioned the importance of acknowledging the complexity of human nature. This is because if you want to spread joy as a Merriment Maker, you're going to come up against friction where recipients appear ungrateful, angry, or worse. As you spread joy in any way, people will question you. People will disagree with every aspect of your existence, opinion, and behavior for your whole life. Something you consider to be completely fun, kind, and benevolent can and will be questioned, mocked, and vandalized.

I don't say this to deter you, I say it to prepare you. This isn't exclusive to art, it includes activism, stand up comedy, and scientific research. Everything. This is why you need to *care* about what you're doing and why you're doing it. You don't owe anyone an explanation for why you "wasted your time" on this, why you believe this, or why you're acting "this way".

You're still a human, though, and when you're met with comments, you might have judgmental feelings kick in that you don't know "why you bother" and feel disappointed and defeated.

If you are feeling angry, disappointed, or defeated your cup is *not* full and you are not in a place to be spreading joy. It's time to take a break and *embody* joy for yourself. Once you're feeling a little more nourished, you can ask yourself some questions about why you're doing this in the first place.

Why do you like spreading joy? What's the worst case scenario that person could have had that day that would have made them behave that way? Have you ever had a bad day and acted poorly towards someone you wish you could take back? Even if that person maliciously acted that way, does the future of your play, passion, and Merriment Making deserve to be fully deterred by this interaction?

You can always decide you want to do something *differently* to cause yourself less stress. I've added, edited, cropped, and deleted from my Merriment Making practice so many times. But what's stayed the same is my desire to do it.

Random Acts Of Merriment

You've probably heard the term "Random Acts Of Kindness". Well, in Merriment Making, I've adapted the phrase to include all aspects of joy, play, and fun.

What's the difference between a Random Act Of Kindness (RAOK) and a Random Act Of Merriment (RAOM)?

When we think of a customary RAOK, we might imagine someone helping someone else pick up a pile of papers they dropped, complimenting a stranger, or putting some change in a parking meter that's about to expire.

What traditionally connects a RAOK is the motivation of demonstrating selflessness, compassion, and helping another person when they need support.

There also seems to be a relatively new connection with RAOKs where the act is done between strangers. This has benefits for “restoring faith in humanity” and encouraging new connections. However, I worry we’re too often looking for a restoration in our faith in humanity instead of creating our own good news.

ROAMs are motivated by fun, silliness, celebration, and joy. The point of the act is to appeal to someone through another lens besides kindness.

For example, if someone needed groceries because they didn’t have any money, picking up food for them, ordering delivery, or sending them a gift card would be a RAOK.

Taking it a step further to make it fun, silly, celebratory, or joyful would make it a RAOM. This could look like making a bouquet of food organized by rainbow order or taking them to the grocery store and telling them they can get everything they want game show style in under 10 minutes.

However, RAOMs don’t need to be mixed with RAOKs. You can perform a RAOM with no angle of kindness, although you’ll probably notice that anything you do for someone else that creates it more fun or joyful for them will feel kind to both you and them.

A RAOM might be bringing someone a silly hat to wear for a road trip, putting a bubble machine outside your house so bubbles float down the street, or drawing a themed disco bath for your roommate.

Your RAOMs don’t need to involve another person directly. You can create art to share that can reach a lot of people at once, be it online, in a gallery, a magazine, or the side of a wall. You can perform on a stage or wear a weird outfit on the side of the road, creating a scene for someone to enjoy and take with them. Your photos, videos, sculptures, and relics are all RAOMS to be enjoyed by others.

I've also created a specific place for people who are interested in spreading Random Acts Of Merriment called "Operation Merriment".

Every week, I base the lesson off an unusual holiday and share a talk with history, trivia, and pep talks about that week's topic. I make a mood board and come up with a five step (or less) tutorial of something easy to make that can be enjoyed and/or shared in the world.

It's my current favorite thing, and I'm so excited for it to catch on. It's the thing I was meant to do, and it wouldn't have been created if I didn't write this book. It's even slightly evolved as this book is coming to a close because I've become even more true to myself and what I want to do.

If you're interested in getting weekly missions for Random Acts Of Merriment, come join us over in Operation Merriment! Uncustomary.org/OperationMerriment to get never ending inspiration on how to create your own good news.

You Are A Merriment Maker

I believe what you and I have in common is our desire to feel good and help others feel good, too. It doesn't matter how you feel good and it doesn't matter how you help others feel good.

It just matters that you start with yourself and do your best to feel good as best as you can over and over again. Keep seeking out the mmms, ahhs, and oohs of the world. Acknowledge your fears and let them know they're not going to control you. Remember that fear is powerful and real, but you are more powerful and real.

And when you get an invitation from your Adventure Zone to feel good, try something, help someone, change course, double back, start a movement, or spread joy then RSVP "Yes Please".