

Find Your “Self-Culture”
Moving from Depression and Anxiety to Monumental Self-
Acceptance

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Author's note: The case studies in this book are amalgams of several people and do not pertain to any one person. In addition, all names are fictitious, and other features, such as sex and occupation, have been changed to protect the subjects' identities.

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“Everything is energy and that’s all there is to it. Match the frequency of the reality you want and you cannot help but get that reality. It can be no other way. This is not philosophy. This is physics.”

~ Albert Einstein

Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: Finding Your “Self-Culture” <#>

Chapter Two: Beginning the Journey <#>

Chapter Three: Understanding Change <#>

Chapter Four: Family-Culture Challenges <#>

Chapter Five: Family Culture: Guilt and Anger <#>

Chapter Six: Shame, Shame, Shame! <#>

Chapter Seven: The Hurt Child and the Critical Parent <#>

Chapter Eight: The Bully versus the Coach <#>

Chapter Nine: Getting in “Right” Relationship with Self and Life <#>

Chapter Ten: Listening to the Hidden Messages in Negative-Pattern Behavior
<#>

Chapter Eleven: Categorizing Friendships: Put People Where They Belong <#>

Chapter Twelve: Mastering the Art of Healthy Love Relationships <#>

Chapter Thirteen: Commitment Phobia <#>

Chapter Fourteen: The Codependent Life <#>

Chapter Fifteen: Anxiety: Coping with a Goliath of Our Time <#>

Chapter Sixteen: The Power of Forgiveness <#>

Chapter Seventeen: What Is Your Relationship with Money? <#>

Chapter Eighteen: Your Two Voices Within <#>

Chapter Nineteen: Breaking the Cycle of Dysfunction <#>

Appendix I: Deep Relaxation Exercise <#>

Appendix II: Reparenting Yourself <#>

Appendix III: Exercise for Developing Your Self-Culture <#>

Appendix IV: Exercise for Anchoring New Neural Pathways <#>

Appendix V: Visualization to Transform Your Inner Bully into a Supportive Coach
<#>

Appendix VI: Self-Comforting Hugging Exercise <#>

Appendix VII: Dialogue with Self While Eating Exercise <#>

Appendix VIII: Grounding Exercise <#>

Appendix IX: The White-Light Exercise <#>

Suggested Reading <#>

Index <#>

Introduction

I have been a holistic psychotherapist for over twenty-two years. I often joked that I might as well have had a machete in my hand as I carved a previously uncharted path in my career and in my city. The holistic way was not at all mainstream in Toronto in 1990. But deep in my soul, I knew this was the way for me. To follow the mainstream path would have been to betray my very instincts. I could not lie to myself; my being would not have tolerated that.

I did study and get a master's degree to assuage the part of me that needed to feel I had some academic support from the mainstream, and at the same time, I felt that it honored the side of me that loves to learn and to grow. I also spent eight years studying Eastern body-centered healing modalities, including my beloved *polarity therapy*, which I fondly call the "Rolls Royce of bodywork." I am also a reiki master, and I use visualization, focusing and craniosacral therapy in the psychotherapy work that I offer.

Over the past twenty-plus years, I have learned that talking alone does not work in transforming a mind and its emotions, or a life. I asked myself why people continue for years to undergo psychoanalysis or psychotherapy when nothing changes. What is missing? In my opinion, it is the multidimensional and multisensorial way of addressing the various emotional blockages that people may have. They may talk and talk about how they do not feel fulfilled or able to be their authentic selves, but nothing can change without creating new belief systems. In my practice, I help people find their true power through a multilayered approach, not just through the mind, but the body and spirit as well. It is not about throwing away what is there already, but adding to it.

Almost every person with anxiety or depression who walks into my office benefits from going through a process of learning who they really are—that is, identifying the motivations, patterns, thoughts and experiences that they are living. Through this process they lucidly are able to see what has prevented them from finding their *self-culture*, and thus they are able to bring forth their authentic

voice and self-empowerment. The concept of self-culture is not complicated, and, in my opinion, it is infinitely necessary to experience true joy in life. I believe that we were put on the planet to experience joy and fulfillment ourselves—and then to give to others. From here we can affect the planet in positive ways.

I feel so blessed to live in a time and place that does not condemn me for being myself, while I forge a path that is all my own. In the past, so many were tortured, imprisoned, maligned, shut down, rejected and ostracized for daring to be original, authentic, unique, empowered and vocal. In some parts of the planet, this is still happening. I feel deeply in my heart for those who are suffering right now for speaking their truth and for being themselves. May we all support those who are on the path to selfhood. May all those who suffer due to a quest to be authentic be protected and freed from any prison they are in, even if it is a prison of their own making.

Through this book, I hope to bring the transformational work that I do in my office to a wider audience. One of the key laws of the universe is the Law of Attraction, in which like attracts like. I see this law in action in my life every day; for example, the clients who walk through my door are those who are attracted to my holistic approach and are ready for change and to step into their greatness. Similarly, if you have been drawn to read this book, you are ready to embrace the vibration of transformation. In this book you will find many tools to work with, and if you choose to use them consistently, the change you seek will occur. You will find the validation that will encourage you to begin your quest to find and be yourself, and to embrace your uniqueness: your *self-culture*!

Chapter One

Finding Your “Self-Culture”

If you have not yet found your *self-culture*—your authentic, instinctive self—you are not living the life the universe intends for you. The planet needs the real you, and it is time that you began the journey! The pursuit of self-culture is a hard one for many of us, and I have unlimited compassion for those who embark on this path.

What is your inner voice saying? What makes your heart happy? What brings you joy? Who is your real self? What path are you on? And what do you want out of your life? You need to know the answers to these questions to live your life in the best way you can. The quest for your self-culture is not a narcissistic, futile, self-indulgent pursuit. It is vital to your well-being. You can serve those you love and the planet better when you know who you are and are at peace with yourself. This peace does not come without the “spiritual warrior” part of you doing its finest battle on your behalf. The journey is a profound, and at times arduous, look within. The result will be an emerging self that you will treasure, savor and protect because you know you fought for it and won!

Whatever ails you, whether it be depression, anxiety, addiction, unhappiness, relationship issues or any other emotional disharmony, finding your self-culture is key to healing. There is no doubt that brain chemistry, nutrition, spirituality, support, cognitive changes and discipline are part of the recipe for success in the reversal of chronic mental disharmony, but the journey to find and live your self-culture is essential to being a balanced adult.

There is no way around the mountain; you must go through it on all levels: body, mind and spirit. There will be pain and discomfort when defining your own “culture” in the face of the strong and imposing cultures of your society and family and their long-held belief systems. This does not at all mean total amputation of your *family culture* or society. But you will need a period of adjustment for your new normal to surface and stick. The joy you derive from living your own self-cultural truth will be matched, to be sure, by the conflict that can ensue during the process. But the thing to hold onto at

every turn is the fact that you, and only you, are the one living your life. No one else is. True joy comes from unearthing your true self from the depths of your soul.

Self-Culture versus Family Culture

Before we can define *self-culture*, we need to look at what *culture* is. Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor wrote that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹ Culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns, such as ritual, habits and customs. Culture is a powerful tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon, constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds.

Your family culture is all you know in the beginning. It influences all aspects of your life. This is something you engage in without thinking. It is something that gives you a sense of community, belonging and family—when it is working for you. When it is not, it may cause you to feel unhappy. It can exert undue pressure on you to conform and fit into what your family knows and has done for generations. To define yourself, or your self-culture, in the midst of this pressure is very difficult, and if you find you are not able to be free to be yourself, a feeling of unhappiness can permeate your life. Even if you are happy within the construct of your family culture, the journey to knowing yourself better and defining who you are is a worthy endeavor. Finding one’s self-culture is valuable for all who walk the planet, especially for those who feel like an alien in their own homes.

When we do not look inside to hear the voice that is truly our own, we are actually living an amalgam of our family culture and our societal culture rather unconsciously. This can either work for us or betray us. If it is betraying us, we can become depressed and anxious. I have seen deeply unhappy people who appear to be happy on the outside, but inside, in the quiet of their lives, that happiness is not there. It is a facade that is masking deep unhappiness. Through the case studies and exercises in this book, you can work to unearth your true self-culture, which is lying in your

¹ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.

subconscious or unconscious, and with new realizations and awareness, uncover the authentic you that is longing to get out.

Total self-sacrifice in favor of the well-being of your family culture will not lead you to feelings of joy. Instead, it will result in depression, resentment and eventual embitterment. It is important to be true to yourself as a means to create joy. You need to fill your own cup first and give to others from the overflow. When I refer to your family culture, I do not mean your country of origin or religion, although these do play a part. Family culture is the emotional baggage handed down through generations that profoundly affects the life of any given family. The relationships, such as between parents and children, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren, are the real meat of the issue, and from where a family culture derives. These relationships influence how a person turns out. If individual needs and wants are constantly subjugated in favor of the group, that person's well-being will be negatively affected, or if the emotional needs of all in the family are silenced in the face of one overbearing family member, things will turn out badly for those who have learned to silence their own authenticity just to survive this type of family minefield.

I see many people who are not living authentically and, therefore, are suffering terribly. They are struggling within, wanting to be who they truly are, yet having to contend with their beloved family, who puts so much pressure on them to conform with the family culture. They mistakenly believe that guilt can be avoided by obeying the rules and not disappointing or displeasing the family. But this leads to self-sabotage, which is profoundly self-destructive.

It is important to remember that uncovering your true self brings with it responsibility as well. This quest is not permission to wage a full-scale rebellion against your parental culture. That would indicate that you are coming from your hurt child/teenage self, who feels the need to revolt in order to establish boundaries and preferences. Instead, when you are coming from your adult self, you know that you do not need to be aggressive or arrogant in your bid for selfhood. You accept it as fact that you must act in peaceful, nondefensive ways to establish the new normal of your own self-culture. In addition, I advise that you do your own inner work before announcing

your plans to anyone. I firmly believe that doing versus telling is the best way to engage in new ways of behaving.

Most parents and loved ones truly want what is best for their children and relatives, so trust that your journey will eventually be accepted by the old guard. Be mindful that finding and living your self-culture may not occur very quickly or very easily. But time has a way of doing its healing work. Soon, with practice and diligence, you will be living the life of your choosing, in which you are on the top of your own priority list, and your family is still a blessed part of your life—but not the main show. This balancing act is necessary for your development as a reasonable and balanced adult who is facing the world on your own terms.

Getting to Work

So grab your shovels! You will be digging—excavating into the self—and at the same time creating a little necessary perturbation as you begin your journey to self-culture. It is profoundly important to do some deep emotional mining. You need to see if you are feeling any resentment about your present situation. Ask yourself these questions: Do you feel deprived of your authentic truth while living within your family culture, your job, your community, your marriage or your society at large? Are you giving all of yourself to others and leaving very little for yourself? Have you been ignoring your true feelings about the state of your life? Are you living your life in your own way, or as someone else's version of what is best for you?

If you answered yes to some or all of these questions, then you have some work to do. No one else is going to save you. *You* have to do the work of finding your self-culture. You, and you alone, are responsible for your life. You cannot blame others for your life situation; you have to do the work to have the life you want for yourself.

As you seek your authentic self, you may feel guilty for defining your own self-culture and establishing your empowered voice. We will tackle this in various sections in this book so that you can conquer your feelings of guilt. But the first thing you have to do to overcome guilt is to give yourself permission to be different from your family. Tell yourself that it is healthy and normal to establish your own way of being and distinguish

yourself from others; that is, to “individuate.” Many spiritual texts also expound on the benefits of being true to oneself.

Another way to help you alleviate your guilt is to establish what you are reasonably able to commit to regarding your dedication to your family and its culture. Be brutally honest with yourself. If you give more than you truly want to, resentment will creep in once again. Similarly, if you don’t give anything at all, guilt will do its damage. Thus, the course of your journey is a dance between guilt and self-culture that you will need to analyze often and honestly.