

YOU ARE THE LOVE

Living With Self-Confidence, Self-Respect, and Self-Esteem

by Juriaan Galavazi

We are all different
in many ways.

But at the core, we are all exactly the same.

We all know what it's like
to feel angry, scared, sad, alone, or insecure.

And we all have the same desires:
the desire to be seen, acknowledged, and appreciated.

To be able to give love and to receive love.

We are all exactly the same in that sense.

The question is if we can meet each other,
but especially ourselves in that place.

In the end, you come from one place.

It is a loving place.

A place of
love and compassion.

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You Are The Love

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The emptiness

The infinite nothing

That unlimited love

You are the love

The light

and the darkness

The fear

and the trust

You are the love

Don't keep chasing

for a connection

Invite

the loneliness

Welcome rejection

and insecurity

You are the love

Notice her

Observe her

and feel the love

that flows

through the richness

of your imperfections

You are the love

FREE FALLING

26 December 2012, Boxing Day. I left my mother's house, where I have been staying for a week, at 9 am. 'Staying', because I wouldn't want to say that I live there. I sleep in a small room that has just enough space for a bed and a closet. The rest of the room is taken up by clothing, bags, sports shoes, and sportswear. It is my mother's house, not the house that I grew up in. But the love with which I have been welcomed easily makes up for the small size of the room. I walked out of the front door for a short endurance run. Through the streets where I spent my days as a small boy, past the pond where I spent many hours ice skating, along the alley besides the house that I grew up in, through the next neighborhood... I know this area very well, I have walked here endlessly. Wide lanes with comfortable houses, built in the 1930's. I could find my way in my sleep. If I would close my eyes, my feet would find their way by themselves.

My head is occupied with everything that is going on right now and my feet take their familiar route. Left here, straight on for a while, across the intersection. Boxing Day, so the streets are empty. Cross the road here, over the bridge and over the highway, through the gate and into the woods... I am free. At least for a little while. Then my thought intrude my flow again, where the hell have I ended up? No, no, enjoy the moment, focus on your breathing... Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out... I hear my footsteps on the fallen leaves... Breathe in, breathe out... Free from everything for a moment, but then the next thought again... concentrate. Savor the here and now. Stay in the moment. Free... from everything.

It is so beautiful here. The weather is mild. I have walked and trained here for years. In the winter. Winters as mild as the weather today, but sometimes

in the cold, rain, hail, snow. In spring, when the days lengthen, perceived by all your senses. You can feel the warmth approaching, you see the small bits of green sprouting from the trees, and you smell that typical smell of spring. Summer, sweltering, shorts, summer evenings. Autumn, that you can also smell, the wide range of colors in the forest, the rain, the mud... Feeling that you are alive. I ran here a week ago, when everything was covered in fairytale white. Snow had fallen and the sun was shining... a moment of pure bliss.

And when I think I need to commit my thoughts on paper, it starts to rain. Raindrops fall on my face, I don't mind. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out... My feet carry me further. I love it... I am alive. And at the same time sunlight shines through the clouds. Is this a coincidence? I am close to the old fortress. Just a little further, past the petting zoo, and then ten minutes before I am 'home' again. I am touched by the rainbow that becomes more clear over the fortress. I am fully aware of this moment. How beautiful is this? It rains, the sun shines, and there is a beautiful rainbow. Is this a symbol of luck? A sign of the moment that I am in my life right now? I don't know. Something will develop in my feeling in the next few weeks, I will make a decision that will define my life. But back to the moment of now, I do not have to choose yet.

Back then, I didn't know yet that I stood on the eve of a personal process that would take eight years. A process in which I would cut the chords with everything that gave me certainty in life: my family, my work, my home, my father, all my socially acquired assumptions I never doubted. A process in which I was able to reconnect with myself. A path towards self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. A path where I could discover that fairytales do exist and I could make connections with people that gave me energy, instead

of people that sucked all my energy out of me. That through this path I would express the preciousness I represent, and that I would become the biggest gift I could be, for the world and the people around me.

INTRODUCTION

You adapt, you stick to your obligations the best you can, and you fulfill your responsibilities, hoping that you meet all the expectations. We all want to be acknowledged and appreciated for who we are deep down, so we reach out to the other, hoping that we will really be seen and perceived. The painful consequence is that your desire to be seen, makes you adapt and adjust, making you blend in with the crowd, become invisible, and slowly 'disappear'. Then you have lost the connection with yourself and you will not meet the expectations of the outside world. Which is an illusion anyway, the demands of the outside world are too great. There will always be people who have an opinion about you, who will dismiss you, who will not value you, and who feel that you should react differently anyway. You will never meet these expectations.

And still we often have the urge to put our sense of trust and wellbeing outside of ourselves, placing this with something or someone else. Why do we do this? Simply because it is easier. There is no need to feel guilty about this, but it is valuable to recognize this mechanism in yourself, enabling you to make different choices in the future. We often choose subconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to remain blind and avert our gaze to reality—a wrong job, a toxic relationship, a harmful diet, destructive beliefs and choices... We cover them or replace the discomfort with distractions, anything to avoid the confrontation with reality. We would rather choose to pay a high price for this illusional theater, than face the harsh reality. And we don't realize that we are paying a high price, in the form of stress, tensions, mental and physical complaints. Our coping strategy is to become even tougher on ourselves, step on the accelerator even further, and try even

harder. If that fails, we fall back on self-blame, disapproval, and self-rejection. Or we blame external factors for the situation in which we are: the outside world or maybe even life itself.

In the first part of this book I show you how we are able to deceive ourselves: we think we are doing well and are working hard, while we are actually handing over the helm completely. We run away from our responsibilities out of fear for what could happen if we start making sincere choices, if we really start to do what we preach, and if we start expressing our opinions and share what we feel and experience deep inside.

In parts two, three, and four I present twelve pillars, twelve perspectives with which you get the insights and tools to build a solid foundation of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.

In the fifth and final part of the book I tell you how you can make further steps after reading this book to integrate all the insights into your life, and can continue to learn, grow, and develop.

How do you wish to look back?

If you fast-forward your film to the end and you look back on your life, what is the feeling you want to experience when you watch it? Do you want to see how you have adapted your whole life, hoping to meet expectations and be a 'good' person in the eyes of others, leading to the conclusion that you have mostly lived someone else's life? Or do you want to be able to say that you have remained faithful to at least one person in your life—yourself? And that that was the basis for valuable connections with the people that wanted to meet you like the person you were and still are deep inside of you. Connections that have nurtured you, instead of connections that slowly

sucked the energy and life right out of you. People who could appreciate you, with all your pros and cons, ifs and buts, because they were truly interested in you. In the end you are valued for the person you really are, not for the person you should be according to your environment and society.

You are precious and you are allowed to receive. You have been given the right to exist from the moment you were born. You didn't have to do anything for this. Somewhere in life, you were taught that you first had to do something, had to deliver an achievement, had to have success, that you had to behave in order to be accepted. But this is a concept you have been taught and taken for granted. It is a fact you already had the right to exist without preconditions, that you are precious and that you are allowed to receive.

I presume there wasn't anyone standing next to your cradle, saying: "Let's see... When you grow up, what do people expect from you? The obligations you have to meet in your life are the following," after which a long list of items would be proclaimed. That probably didn't happen. And I guess (okay, you're never completely sure) that there will not be someone standing at the gates of heaven (if they do exist), saying: "Ah, let's see. Which obligations did you have to meet in life?" There is just one person giving you all these obligations, and that person is you. Motivated by your education, your teachers, and society.

In your quest for love, recognition, and appreciation you have started to adapt to the wishes and desires of others. You have blindly accepted the stories that they taught you and their programs to be true. Perhaps somewhere deep inside, you felt that it wasn't true. But what can you do? You are still young and the world around you seems to function, so you are probably the problem, right? And everybody does it like this, so there must be some truth to it. Back then, you were unaware that everybody is caught

up in the same story, the same illusion, and the same myth. So you continue on the road you chose. You suppress feelings of doubt, anxiety, and insecurity, out of fear to divert too much from the rest of the group, being rejected, and being left behind. A slowly you became the machine you are today.

Occasionally there is a tear in the mechanical armor you have built around you, in the form of pain, sadness, or anger. That is the moment in which you briefly make contact with that person, that preciousness you really are. Tears are a messenger from the soul, pain makes you aware and alert that something needs to change in your life, and anger is there to serve you. It shows you and makes you feel that you have a deep longing, something that is denied the opportunity to be expressed. So it is valuable to come on contact with it and pay attention to it. But these feelings are perceived as uncomfortable, making us want to avoid them as quickly as possible. And our current society has countless ways to divert this inconvenience.

We live in an environment in which food is always available and you always have the possibility to do something 'useful', like housekeeping or taking care of the garden. Or you can work, stay in touch with friends, and of course we have Netflix and our smartphones to quickly fill the void and provide a happy feeling. Even activities with a positive label can act as an escape from the confrontation with ourselves. Things like sports, guided meditations, and yoga: all very valuable, but at the same time an ideal cover to avoid a confrontation with a certain emptiness or difficulty in ourselves. I too can sometimes feel the unrest in myself and choose to work on my to-do-list, exercise, or grab my yoga mat, in stead of sitting down, turn my attention inwards, and feel what is presented in that moment what really needs to be seen and felt. It is not a matter of right or wrong, but you need to be aware of this process, giving you the opportunity to adjust your actions.

When we feel comfortable, when we are full of energy and happiness, if our bodies are healthy, and if the circumstances—in our work and in our private lives—are for the most part aligned with our wishes, then we feel that it is nice to connect with our bodies and who we really are. Though you can wonder if you are in touch with yourself or with the favorable external factors at that moment. But in the moments that life feels less wonderful, things start to become more difficult. When you experience physical pain, when you are insecure, tensed, angry, or just sad, something awakens inside of us and you want to get away from it as soon as possible. Which is understandable. But if you want to be more connected with yourself, and something inside of you is sad, angry, or insecure, when will you be more connected with yourself? By fleeing from these feelings as soon as possible and saying to yourself that you don't want to experience those feelings? Or by moving towards these feelings and connect with them, and possibly even be curious to hear what they have to tell you?

When something feels uncomfortable inside of you, and you have the desire to be more connected with who you are, there is only one option: get in touch with those feelings. There is no other way. The difficult thoughts and feelings are exactly the means with which you can learn more about who you are. Enabling you to express your preciousness to its fullest. The question is if you wish to accept the invitation for this from everything that you encounter...

I believe that each and everyone of us is meant to add his or her own unique value to this world. At the same time I realize that this too is a narrative. Whether this is true or not for you is not the issue, what counts is whether this thought contributes to the relationship you have with yourself. Don't believe everything I say, but investigate if they feel right to you. Stay curious and alert.

To live a 'good' life you need more than happiness and health, you also need a sense of fulfillment and the feeling that you add value. You can express your unique value the most when you can completely be yourself. Not for seventy, eighty, or ninety percent—even though that is a very high percentage. No, you can express your preciousness the most if you can be yourself for one hundred percent. Then you will be the biggest gift to the other. So it is valuable to put the relationship between you and yourself first, and create an optimal connection with yourself. This not only benefits you, but the whole world around you too.

PART I

**STOP SEARCHING
AND START LOOKING**

Can you meet
this moment
without a perspective of time?
Without measuring her
and compare her with words and thoughts?

These words, burdened
with emotions and memories
from a recent or a distant past
with which you subconsciously disprove
the magic of this moment, the present

Can you meet
this moment
like a newborn baby?
Without burdening her with a future
in which you think everything will be better?

Can you stand still
in the timelessness of the experience
at exactly this moment?
Curious to what will unfold
and of which you don't yet know the ending...

1. WE SUFFER THE MOST BY TRYING TO BE A GOOD PERSON

A large part of our suffering is caused by our desire to be a good person.

In our desire to be good, we change our behavior and adapt. Then we fulfill the assumed responsibilities and obligations that we impose on ourselves or think that others impose on us. In the hope that we meet the expectations, and be good and possibly even happy. You are prepared to cross your own boundaries to do this, and go far beyond your boundaries... But the fact is that you are not perfect. You don't need to be. There is only one you and nobody takes exactly the same path as you. You are whole in that sense. One of one, so one hundred percent. With all your pros and cons, ifs and buts. And can this be true? The continuous comparison and the pursuit of perfection is like striving for an illusion. Not saying that perfectionism is a bad quality. It can enable you to get the best out of yourself. Unless you need perfection to feel good about yourself. It may feel like you are in control—which you are, but the strings you pull are attached to the wrong aspects. Perfection is leading you, instead of you leading your perfection.

With all your imperfections, you are exactly who you should be. Your imperfections enable you to grow and develop. Everything in life is aimed for growth and development. Nothing is created to be destructive in itself. Even the most fierce forest fire offers the opportunity for new growth and new life that would not have the same chances to come to the surface without it. There is an art in learning to see your own imperfections. And not just see them, but learn how to appreciate and accept them—with kindness and love.

You can take this position when you have made it clear for yourself from which situation you wish to come. And when you realize that that is the best place for you. Like a place of love and compassion. And if you think that you

don't have such a place, that you don't come from 'love and compassion', no worries, there is nothing wrong with you. Continue reading. We can suffice for now with the thought that something inside of you wants nothing more than receive and giving love. When you wake up in the morning and—perhaps literally—look at yourself in the mirror, you know, feel, and experience deep inside that this is the intention with which you start the day (or you allow the possibility that this is an option), then it will have a profound effect on your day.

You can still encounter someone who lashes out at you, thinks that you are doing something wrong, or perhaps you will make a terrible mistake. And this can still affect you. But you can rest assured that you will be able to adjust your feeling more easily and think: even though this happened, I come from one place and that place is good. I come from love and compassion. If the other feels and experiences it like this, it has nothing to do with me personally.

Perhaps you can examine what your part is in this and what you could possibly change. And acknowledge that even though you might be the cause of the other's feelings, you are not responsible for them and most certainly not guilty for your actions.

You can honestly say to your partner, child, or friend: "I have been completely unreasonable to you, you did not deserve this". But you don't have to feel guilty. Why not? Because you are imperfect and come from the best place, the place of love and compassion. You are human, what more can you do? You are not perfect. You are allowed to make mistakes. You can be you with all your imperfections.

Can you meet all these imperfections, exactly how they are, without feeling the need to correct them immediately? Are you truly prepared to pay

attention to this, observe them, feel them, and examine them? To be with them, without any inconvenience that could be associated with it, without feeling the urge to run away from it as soon as possible towards acceptance of the other and a continues adaptation in the hope to receive love, acknowledgement, and appreciation? By learning to see your own good and appreciate it despite all your imperfections—perhaps even thanks to your imperfections—you release the other from their duty to have to like and love you, but you particularly free yourself from one of the most important reasons of your suffering.

Made vulnerable in a welfare state

The most of us are being driven by old and assumed beliefs we picked up in the past and have elevated to being true, in a world in which we have to behave and we are weighed by society, based upon the achievements and successes that are considered valuable. You risk that you don't matter and you loose your right to exist.

Some of these programs work and are very useful. Some don't. But we have lost our ability to know the difference, because we have been cut off from our bodies and our feelings. Our body (and our head) is welcome when it is labeled like nice, calm, and positive, but it is marked difficult and frightening when life is rough and painful. Perseverance, determination, and the need to understand the situation takes over. You are a machine, molded in a socially acceptable form, made vulnerable by the welfare state that comes from the best possible place, but it's consequences can be destructive.

You are taken care of, which makes you vulnerable and dependent before you know it. You are being silenced out of 'the love of the other' and this love is

being misused to keep you in check. This isn't love in my opinion, it's manipulation.

But rather than blame your environment, society, or life when things are hard, you could ask yourself what you can do or stop doing to build your character. Choosing to confront your own truth and imperfections, recognize and change them, instead of remaining consciously blind and holding the outside world responsible for your wellbeing and health.

As long as the underlying program won't change, everything else you try is a form of symptom relief. You continuously paint the window frames while the wood underneath has rotten.

Build your character. Try wanting to be an honest person. You will add value to your health, to your own life, and to the lives of others.

2. WALKING THROUGH LIFE ON THIN ICE

Being present with all of your imperfections and regarding them with a mild look is not the same as accepting everything and covering it with a blanket of 'self-love'. It takes practice to look at your own imperfections, having the courage to see which price you are paying for them, and then taking the decision to change it. When we connect with our discomfort and are prepared to look at what it means to us (with a mild look!), it becomes scary again. If you see what could change in your life in a way that's true and right for you, you will often conclude that these are exactly the things that provide you most of your trust and security in life. And you can count that something inside you will protest when you come to this conclusion. Something inside of you—something inside all of us—that would like most of all for things to stay how they are. Why? Simply, because we know it and feels safe.

For the most part we gain confidence from the world around us. You are a part of a network. A network built from relations with your parents, your family, your friends, and colleagues. But also with material things. You are, after all, also connected to your home and the place where you live, the car you drive, the holidays you take. Something inside of you wants to keep that network exactly how it is now. Because it gives you structure, support, and security. And you are not alone in this desire, your surroundings feel the same. When you change, it has an effect on your network. And if the change is small it won't create a problem. When you come home and say to your family that you're thinking about spending a weekend with some friends, they will probably say: "Good for you! Great idea. Get out and enjoy some time with friends!" But if you come home with the announcement that you consider stopping with work and traveling through Europe by yourself for

six months, chances are that your surroundings think that this is not such a good idea. Inside of you, with the requirements you think you should meet as a good partner, parents, son, or daughter, you will have an internal struggle. In other words: if you start changing with great consequences for the connections with your network, you can rest assured that it will be met with resistance from outside and within. It can lead to so much tension, that some connections will be disconnected. And when something is cut it can lead to pain. Which triggers a reflex, making you think: "Wow, this is too painful, too dangerous, too threatening! Let's get out of here!" Which closes your gateway to change.

There are few things in life you NEED to do, in my opinion, but in this case you must be prepared to endure the pain and discomfort when that is the price to pay for fulfilling your desires. It is about your willingness, you don't even have to do anything at this point yet. And if that willingness isn't there, no problem. Something inside of you still has resistance on the change and finds it too simply too exiting to confront it. If that is the case, it is valuable to work with that resistance. Even this wants the best for you. It wants nothing more than that you are doing well and it gets its confidence from the stability of the well-known network around you. But while this facet might want the best for you, that doesn't mean that it also is the best for you. Which is a subtle, but essential difference.

When we let our desires grow, we connect with them, and we make them tangible by writing them down, speak them out loud, or even share them with our network, you run a great risk. Imagine that you would really make the desires, that you perhaps have had for years and dreamt of as a little child, come true. You share it enthusiastically with your surroundings and you may have started taking the first steps in that direction... What is the risk you are taking? The risk that you will fail... That things will not go as you imagined,

hoped, and expected them to go and that you had looked forward to for so long. How do you think you will feel? Yes: painful, miserable, extremely disappointed, and sad...

To prevent this, we have designed a very successful strategy. We think: "You know what, forget about it. Things are fine right now, right? See, I have a beautiful home, a nice relationship, wonderful kids, a good job, we can go on vacation... What am I complaining about?" This strategy works well. Very well. It prevents that you are hurt when your dreams should fail... But this ignores the fact that you are already hurt every day because you are not making your dreams come true. Again, you need a willingness to be hurt and to fail, be judged, possible even be condemned, if that is the sacrifice you need to make in order to fulfill your desires.

We tend to make choices based upon the wish not to lose anything, instead of from our desire to receive something. It is a pattern you don't have to change in my opinion. But it is valuable to see and know that this pattern works inside of you as well. Perhaps your deep desire to live slowly shifts towards the fear of dying. We are so attached to living that we will do almost anything to avoid dying. We set up safety nets, avoid risks, make our wellbeing dependent on external factors, and create an illusion of security and die a slow death while we are still living. In stead of acknowledging death as a part of life, accept our vulnerability and insecurities, and have the courage to confront these facts, giving us the opportunity to experience life to the fullest.

Tip-toeing through life

Most of us tip-toe through life, hoping to reach the finish line unscathed. That will never happen. You will always get some scars in your life. It is not a

matter of avoiding getting scarred, it is more valuable to ask yourself the question: what scars do I want to receive? What price am I willing to pay? Because you will pay a price anyway.

We are taught at an early age to chase certainty and don't take too many risks. Fear, doubt, and worries are areas you should avoid as much as possible. That means that you get a good education and do your homework, get a good job, and achieve a respectable position on the social ladder. Take care of the people around you, behave yourself, fulfill your obligations, and don't take any rash decisions: imagine what that would do to the people around you. You will burden others when you express your fears and doubts. So we are taught to strive for certainty and control: "Be careful, don't go crazy!"

With this, we keep each other hostage in a network of fear, covered with a blanket of carefulness, certainty, and control. In the meanwhile you are scared to death for the consequences of your decisions if you really would strive (or ignore) what is right and true for you. And to avoid feeling that pain, you blame external factors for your current situation. This seems like a successful strategy to avoid the pain. But you are hurt every day, you don't live the life you would like to lead deep inside.

The price you're paying is that you're playing a role and don't do what fits with you each and every day. Gradually you will lose the connection with yourself, and you will begin to feel it anyhow.

Are you prepared to confront your doubts, fears, and insecurities, if that is the price you have to pay to fully express your preciousness, and strive for doing what you were meant to do on Earth?

3. TOXIC LOYALTY

Once you start making different decisions and doing what feels right for you, it can happen that people around you start to rebel (they will), are unable to follow you, and cut ties. Being cut off from connections feels hurtful. This allows us to make the connections with others more important than the connection with ourselves. To soothe the discomfort and avoid a confrontation with the inconvenience we cover it with a blanket of 'loyalty'. We are often told to be loyal. Loyal to your family, to your friends, to your work... If you are loyal and trustworthy you will be valued and appreciated by those around you. The feeling of self-worth then depends on the judgment and reaction of others. This way, you will cling onto adjusting and fitting in far beyond your own limits out of the fear to be rejected and not being good enough.

But you can also choose to come from a place of integrity and authenticity. This is a much more valuable source, but it isn't easy. You are sincere when you practice what you preach. That your mouth talks in the same direction that your feet are walking in. And this is a daunting place to come from, because your surroundings will probably have an opinion on this. That people will have a verdict on what you say, do, or think—and perhaps even condemns it.

If you are sincere, loyalty will follow naturally. But if you prioritize loyalty it could harm your integrity. Do you really choose a connection with the other, your partner, friend, father, mother, or colleague because you want to, or are you actually choosing out of fear for the consequences if you would lose that connection? How sincere are you really? Do you say what you mean, think, and feel, or do you hold back in order to keep the connection? Are you really

sincere and do you cover your decisions with the blankets of 'loyalty' and being 'faithful to the other'? Think back to the moments that you met the other's expectations, when you went to that birthday party, or that Christmas dinner. The times you decided to keep your mouth shut to keep the peace, when you told yourself wonderful stories to cover up your own 'mistakes' about why you were late or couldn't come. How reliable are the things you say?

All too often keeping the connections intact results in adaptation and looking for compromise. But how sincere are you really?

Do you choose for an honest connection and say what you think and feel, or do you choose out of fear for confrontation and the possibility of rejection, perhaps even out of fear for loneliness? Hoping that you will be loved and liked. But the result is that you will gradually lose the connection with yourself, play a role, stop coming from a sincere place—become unreliable in the end. This damages not just the connection with yourself, but also the connection with the other. And with the best intentions, which is actually the saddest of this story.

Loyalty comes from integrity, not the other way around. To be sincere you have to deal with the risk of rejection. The risk that people disagree with you and distance themselves from you. If you are not willing to take that risk chances are that you prioritize loyalty over integrity. Thus killing your own reliability and true love.

You will not receive love by continue to search for it and wanting to be appreciated. You will experience love by accepting the chance of rejection. And by being brave enough to put your own integrity above your loyalty.

4. THE GIFT DOESN'T ALWAYS COME IN THE DESIRED WRAPPING PAPER

I see a big black hole before me. The street is lit by the last lamp post. Just beyond where the light shines is the border of the meadow, which becomes a protected lake further on. I know where the lake is, but it is completely covered in darkness now. The year is 1988 and I am fifteen years old. It is late in the evening. I am standing there with my mother and sister. Shortly before, my mother had ran away from home, suddenly and upset.

My mother was sad and depressed. It wasn't her nature, the circumstances made her sad and depressed. Caught in a marriage built on a web of acquired assumptions, woven both by my father and mother. The despair and feeling powerless could drive her mad. I loved her (and I still love her). I could feel her love in her actions, her words, and her presence. Sincere and unconditional. But reality was that she spend a lot of time in a parallel universe. And I would feel her despair and loneliness. She withdrew in her own thoughts, huddled up, intensely sad. Her gaze turned downwards. Her fingers aimlessly fidgeting with a piece of paper or the peels of an orange. I see her ironing the laundry in a trance with tears in her eyes. It looks like something deep inside her realizes that this activity is as pointless and hopeless as her own life. What is she doing it for? She washes, she irons, she folds, puts it in the closet... No one seems to appreciate it and the cycle starts again tomorrow.

Sometimes there would be an eruption. A subdued anger that represented the enormous desire that could not be expressed would explode with a fierceness that was uncalled for in the situation that was happening. It was a literal cry for help, to be seen for the preciousness she was, but that cry was

never answered. My father tried to fill the lack of a real connection with tangible things as much as possible. From buying groceries and doing household chores, to home renovations and giving her flowers every week—hoping that he too would be seen and that he could connect with my mother again in this way. The outside world would praise him endlessly. He was a skillful general practitioner and he was always there for his patients. A well-respected man, well-known, and immensely loyal to his friends and colleagues. And even though his intentions came from a pure place he unknowingly paid a high price for his loyalty, it came at the expense of his integrity. He wanted nothing more than for the marriage to work and made decisions out of fear of losing it. Not to fail in the eyes of the outside world and not to fail in his own eyes. In this he made his connection with the Catholic beliefs and the marital commitments ('...for better or worse, until death do us part...') more important than the connection with himself. Something that my mother was also spoon-fed with and that she had stored deep inside her system. All with the best intentions, I am sure of it. But the result was that they had dragged each other down into a theater of charity in which loyalty was more important than integrity. In the immense desire to be seen by the other they increasingly lost the connection with themselves.

You could feel the tension in our house. My mother's ability to hold on to this life came from her great love for her children. That became a burden I had to bear, but actually didn't want to bear. So I cut myself off, withdrew me in my room, buried myself in school, sport, and achievements to remain somewhat connected to my body and the present. I often felt alone and fantasized on what it would be like if I wasn't there anymore. Would that get me the attention I so desired? How many people would attend my funeral and what stories would be told? Would that wake them up and create a change? The realization that I would perhaps be able to observe from another place, but

would not experience the true connection and love brought me back to reality. Later on I realized that I had spent the largest part of my youth on the edge between the light and the darkness.

But my mother was also a strong woman. She was able to pick herself up time and time again. And that is where I could gain confidence, I repressed the thoughts on the possibility that she would one day leave and not return. But deep inside of me something remained and felt really insecure, actually realizing that it wasn't a given that if I would awake the next morning my mother would 'just' still be there.

She was very vulnerable in my eyes and very strong at the same time. That became clear to me when I was confronted with the same characteristics and behaviors as my father when I reach forty. And just to be clear: I appreciate my father as a human, as a colleague, and as a father. He loves me and he did the best he could in his fatherhood with the best of intentions. That the results were different than what we both had expected doesn't make it right or wrong—just different. Moreover it is his character especially that enabled me to take my place and grow up to the man I am today.

My father was, in his own words, a man of compromises. That seems virtuous enough at first sight, but the consequences is less rosy. It made him well-loved by the outside world—you just could not have an argument with this man, he was prepared to give so much of himself and would listen to everyone. While he never chose to do so, these qualities made him a central figure in our environment. He could serve everyone's interests after all, and it felt unconditional. But he became the victim of his own kindness before he knew it. While he had the best interests for everyone at heart, there was a layer underneath—by taking good care of the other, his self-esteem, visibility, and acknowledgement were being nourished. So in other words his

self-esteem became dependent on the appreciation and acknowledgement of others and it made him dependent on the identity he created of himself subconsciously. It must have been extremely painful that his wife wasn't able to go through with his kindness. My mother confronted him with the emptiness inside of him, his own insecurity for self-respect and self-appreciation, but she was unaware of this. It was so painful to connect with this place that he chose to work even harder to show all the kindness inside of him. 'Please see me, acknowledge me, appreciate me for the man that I am.' He covered up the pain by doing even more and working even harder. Being a doctor was the perfect distraction with its daily opportunities to receive and experience recognition and appreciation from your patients and colleagues. His work and his social life nourished his ego and his sense of loyalty which enabled him to cope with the situation at home. Perhaps his wife would appreciate him for who he was someday... Without him noticing it, he had taken a seat in the waiting room of his own life.

My father's identity became clear to me when I took a major decision in my general practice, the practice I had taken over from my father and in which he was still working as a colleague. One of the acting physicians had worked there a long time, a highly skillful doctor who was treasured by me, by colleagues, and patients. She shared a similar vision and commitment with my father. And it was obvious that they got along great. In this period I had started a reform in the practice that I felt was important. I carried not only the financial responsibility for the practice and the medical responsibility for the patients, but I also had a clear vision to create a medical center in which we could look at symptoms from a wider angle. In which regular and complementary health care could complement each other. But I could not realize this by myself. What I needed at that time was a motivated doctor who could actively participate in this dream and vision. She repeatedly told me

that she could accept a more holistic vision, but that could not support me completely and would not meet my needs. So I decided eventually to end the collaboration with her to allow me to search for a doctor that would share my vision and help realize it.

This decision was like a stab in the back for my father. I had to face resistance from assistants, colleagues, and patients, but at that moment it also became clear that my father's loyalty towards me wasn't unconditional. He could not understand why I had said goodbye to such a skillful doctor. While I was prepared for the backlash, these reactions transcended my darkest presumptions. It was at that moment that I realized that you cannot make everyone happy and I decided that I would remain faithful to one person in my life: myself. Nobody else would have to understand my decision. It was right for me and it came from the best intention. That should be enough.

My father frequently told me how wrong my decision was. I had to take all 'my' patients into account and take care of the other above all. Of course I could think about myself, but not at the expense of the other. That 'the other' is essentially perfectly capable of taking care of themselves, isn't depending on me, and certainly isn't my responsibility, was something completely outside of his frame of mind. In his opinion I ruined the practice he had built and which was inseparable from his identity. I could not hurt him more if I wanted to. To this very day he tells me that he regrets that he handed over 'his practice' to me.

What I needed most at that time were people around me who were able to support me. My father was wrapped up in his own pain and wasn't able to fulfill that need and we had almost no contact at all for nearly two years because of that. I needed that time to get in touch with my own pain, create my own foundation, and take back my place again. And after our period of

being out of touch with each other I regularly was confronted with his assumptions and judgements. I could view them from a different perspective but they remained hurtful and lonely all the same. I finally could carry myself and relieve him of his obligation to acknowledge me and respect me for the son and man I have become.

Don't get me wrong, my father was there for me on many occasions. He was the one to pick me up during the lowest point of my burnout. I was clear enough to feel that something inside of me took control and made me call him in the middle of the day during consultation hours and ask: 'I don't feel too good, could you come by?' He was beside me on the sofa within five minutes. That is also an aspect of my father I don't take for granted and think is really special.

Along with my development my respect for my mother grew too, as she longed for recognition for years that she never received sufficiently from my father. While she contemplated to step out of their marriage for years it was eventually my father who had the courage to take that decision. I fully understand that decision, which was conceivable and understandable given the situation, but also necessary to release them both from the stuck system of connection that they both held each other captive in.

I have been a part of a family that is connected in theory but miles apart from each other at the same time, for over ten years, which shaped me both positively and scarred me deeply. That my father could not go through with his marriage according to the acquired standards feels like a massive failure to him. He could partially cover up the complementary sadness with a new relationship and the attention and recognition he could find in it. My mother was left behind broken. Abandoned by the man who could do nothing wrong in the eyes of others. I now think I can understand and feel how helpless and

lonely she must have felt all those years. I suppose that the fact that she had to take care of herself and was confronted mercilessly with her own pain and loneliness had been her gateway towards healing. While you could sympathize with her if she would have taken a different path, she has been able to confront her own pain, account for herself and use that path for a transformation towards more self-confidence, self-respect, and self-appreciation. And in that sense my father has conceived, unknowingly, at least two important transformation processes, that of my mother and my own, by being exactly the man that he was. A great gift, even if—as often happens in life—it didn't come in the wrapping we imagined.

You only live once

We have learned to adapt and behave. According to acquired thoughts, rules, and concepts. If you do your best and fulfill your responsibilities you will be good enough, you will be regarded good enough, and will have a good life.

If you merge this with the philosophy that you should take good care of the other before you put yourself in first place and you have all the ingredients to gradually lose all connection with yourself eventually.

You follow a program that might work well for others but of which you feel deep inside that it doesn't fit. And still you continue. Everybody does it like that, so it must be right, right? You put your feelings aside and slowly turn into a machine that makes decisions out of fear to lose or fail.

You pursue the blueprint you have entered in the hoop that maybe, someday, once...

The price you pay is high: tired, exhaustion, frustration, fear, tension, physical and/or mental complaints. It impacts your relations, your work, your private life.

If you have been attuned to the wrong program for years, prompted by others or society, it can be difficult to sense again what YOU want, who YOU are, and what YOUR mission in this life is.

If we remove the 'wrong' things they are not automatically replaced by the 'right' things. You create a void. A space that can feel so unpleasant and unknown that we fill it with..., with what we already know in no-time. Old patterns. Blocking the way towards the gateway to change.

We haven't learned how to deal with true calm, space, emptiness, and actual freedom. It is important to connect with these things without filling the void right away.

So you can slowly, step by step, have the insights and ideas that you hadn't had before. Insights that may be outside of your comfort zone but that are good and right for you.

You live only once. You owe it to yourself to make the best of it.

5. THE DEBT OF THE PROMISE

From our need for connection, our longing to be seen, recognized, appreciated, and meet others we make all sorts of promises. Promises we often cannot keep. We promise that we will always be there for the other, we promise that something will be finished after the weekend, that the door is always open for your children, that you will always do your best, and of course that you be there for the birthday of your father, mother, brother, or sister. Hoping to be good enough and be a good person. Out of the fear to be rejected you stay loyal and make the connections with others and the connections with your promises more important than the connection with yourself. Then you are rudely awakened by the fact that simply cannot keep your promise and you realize that you cannot always be there for the other. Merely because you angry, sad, or exhausted, or are consumed by something completely different and really don't want to deal with someone else's misery right now. That your promise to deliver that thing after the weekend is entirely unrealistic because of all your other commitments, but that saying 'no' didn't feel like an option. And that your child asks if she can drop by this weekend, even though you were longing for a quiet weekend together with your partner after a busy week. And as for the birthday of your father, mother, brother, or sister, that is something most of us cannot be bothered with to begin with. And then we aren't even talking about the promises you make with yourself. Your resolution to be on time for appointments from now on, to exercise more, eat healthier, go to bed earlier, and get out of bed earlier too... A lot of our problems come from the fact that we cannot keep the promises we make to ourselves. We make promises out of the fear not to be good enough and pay the price later on. It makes us unreliable, it damages our relations, and we try to justify our behavior with lots of stories

afterwards. Instead of deciding to take an honest and sincere position and feel the difficulty of our promises and decisions and adjust with fierce if necessary.

The debt of the promise ‘I will take care of you...’

Out of your desire to be a good person and show that your heart is in the right place you sometimes make (big) promises. But then external factors turn out to have more impact than you had hoped and anticipated, and you will have to break your promise.

To soothe our guilt we often make even more promises or excuses that you will try again, do your best, and repeatedly tell how guilty you feel. Mind you, this isn't about right or wrong and of course doing your best is admirable, keep trying, or succeed sometimes. But in reality you simply haven't kept your promise, period.

All the well-meaning stories only act as a diversion from the main issue, that you have made choices and have given other activities a higher priority instead of communicating clearly from the start what your true intention is, but that you realized at the same time that things could go differently.

But here is what happens next: you are not valued for your wonderful intention, you will be valued for your actions. If your actions match your promises that will make you a reliable person. Everyone can live with the words ‘I completely miscalculated that job’, ‘I forgot all about it’, or ‘I see that I have been absolutely unreasonable’. Instead we come up with excuses van wonderful stories, hoping we can be a good person. In reality you create a growing distance between the person you want to be and the other. The disaster you were afraid of has already become a reality: the other doesn't see you, doesn't trust you, and you're left behind with feelings of guilt and the fear of loneliness.

So you try harder... and the circle is complete.

To break this destructive cycle you need to take your responsibility, your ownership and make a shift towards integrity and sincerity. To do what you promise or even better, to do valuable and loving actions without making a grand promise on doing them.

One of the most important insights from my own life is that I am sometimes not a sincere person. 'Sometimes' actually means that I am not. 'I am not sincere...' Few, that is a relieve. Like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. It was a great relieve to let this be true. Suddenly I didn't have to keep up the appearance anymore, play a role, or tell wonderful stories to show everyone and convince myself what a good person I really am. No, I am insincere and that is fine. By letting this be true I automatically moved towards a more sincere place. A place from which I could connect with my intention and my great desire, to wanting to be a sincere, honest, and trustworthy person. And a place from which I realized that I am the one who makes the choices. And that I am also the one that pays the price for them. If I proclaim loudly that my wife and children are very important to me and that I value a loving, warm, and intimate relationship but still give my work priority and don't take the time to listen to them, how sincere am I? In my work too I could (and can still) make choices out of fear for the potential consequences. If I promised to call someone and didn't do that for whatever reason, do I make up a story out of fear for the reaction of the other or do I simply tell it like it is? That I forgot to call them and that other things had my attention with a higher priority to me at that particular time? If I am late for a meeting, do I choose to make up some excuse to justify why I am late or do I tell them that I miscalculated the time, left home too late, and that I realize that I have

forgotten how precious the time of all others involved also is? From which place do I want to come?

Again, this is not about being right or wrong. This is not something you have done wrong and you should punish yourself. There is an art in being loving and gentle for yourself. You come from one place and that is a loving place. You want nothing more than giving love and being able to receive love, but sometimes things can become too tense for you. We want to be a good person, be seen and understood by the other so much that we are tempted to tell stories that have nothing to do with who we really want to be. We end up in a bad movie in which we try to uphold our characters but actually create a growing distance from who we originally were.

The price you pay is that it affects how you feel, your relations, your results at work, your health, and your quality of life. And you can bet that you will start feeling this.

How can you trust the world when you cannot trust yourself? In my opinion by first acknowledging that you are not always honest and trustworthy. But from mildness, you are a human, what more can you do? By acknowledging this you immediately take back control over your life. You can be ruthless from this place of mildness, it is you who makes the decisions. And if you are the one making the decisions, make sure that you create a space in which you can also choose not to make decisions. 'Mom, I said that I would be there for your birthday party. I realize I was afraid to say 'no' and it feels like it would be better for me if I didn't come. I am not comfortable with all those people. I would rather visit you another time when we have the time to be together.' Again, this is not about right or wrong, not even about if this would be righteous or unjust. What matters is the decision with which you really contribute the most to your relationship with the other. Do you have the

courage to let that be true? Even if the outcome is unsure and you judge or even condemn the other? Can you be who you want to be, even if that is difficult for the other?

That is a scary place. It takes courage to take an honest position. No more veils, no walls to hide behind. It takes courage to be honest and sincere, to keep your promises with the most important person in your life, you.

6. YOU ALWAYS PAY A PRICE

When Iris realizes that has spent her whole life adapting herself to the desires and wishes of others, she feels suffocated and deeply sad. She has lived for so long according to the expectations of society and how she was expected to behave. She had identified completely with all the various roles she gradually had taken up: the role of partner, the role of mother, daughter, and the role of caretaker. Over time she had prioritized the connection with her identity and the accompanying labels and beliefs over the connection with herself.

And when she allows for this suffocating feeling and sadness to be felt, she suddenly enters a very difficult place. A huge void. She feels unrest and her head is spinning from all her thoughts. What is the meaning of this all? Who am I? If this is not who I am, what do I need to do to become someone again?

You already *are*, Iris. You don't necessarily need to do something to be someone. You already receive the right to exist the moment you were born. It didn't require any action or anything else from you at all.

Over time you are taught that you mainly have to do something and achieve something. That you first have to adapt and behave to suffice and be valuable. That you first have to earn before you are allowed to receive. That you get a dessert when you finish your plate, that you are promoted to the next class if you get good grades, that I need to finish this email before I can get a cup of coffee, that I can take a holiday after I have worked hard, that I am a good employee, manager, father, mother, et cetera if I finish this successfully. These are stories and concepts you have been spoon fed and have accepted as truths without much deliberation. The fact is that you already *are* someone. And that you are allowed to receive. You can completely be

yourself and you can do it in your own way. You are the greatest gift to the world around you when you are allowed to be yourself one hundred percent. There is a big difference between using the frames of society as your starting point and try to create some freedom and attempting to express your true self within those limitations, or starting with yourself and experiencing what wants to be expressed from within and then start to look how you will make this tangible in the world.

“So you are telling me that if I feel what I think is important and what makes me happy, I can create this in the way I want to. That can never be real, right?” This is how we smother our dreams. Our heads gets involved and measures what might be realistic and what not. But these are also stories, concepts and beliefs we think are true. And this is how we deprive ourselves from every opportunity to be amazed and surprised. This is how the unlimited creativity and open-mindedness we have as children is being nullified by our adult thought if something is realistic or not.

This is an effective strategy, because by smothering your desires you avoid the risk of being hurt when you fail to realize your needs. That would be very painful. But now you suffer every day because you are not realizing your desire. I will repeat myself: you have to be willing to be hurt if that is the price you have to pay to realize your desires. There is no other way. Are you prepared for the uncertainty and the chances of seriously hurting yourself, if that is the sacrifice you have to make in order to align what you are and what you do with yourself, and become the person that you were born to be?

Iris nods. “Yes, I am. But I feel scared.” Of course you are. But you can be afraid and still do this...

You determine your leeway

You are born and you have space to play around you. Soon you notice that there are rules that reduce your playground. You start elementary school and encounter more rules you have to abide by. You learn and you grow but your space keeps getting smaller. You continue your education and meet new rules you have to follow at every step. Meanwhile your knowledge grows and you have new experiences. Some of us enter college and university in which even more rules and concepts are being taught. Here you also enrich your life but your playground is diminished further at the same time. You get a job with yet more new rules, structure, and protocols to follow.

Most of us like this process because it provides a clear structure and creates a sense of security and safety, meanwhile your leeway is getting smaller and smaller. And while a relationship is meant to enrich and bring out the best of each other, all too often the relation leads to more adaptation. Now your playground has become a tiny space in which you desperately try to maintain your own freedom anyway you. Your desire for growth and development has slowly shifted to the fear of losing something. Especially the things that provide you with certainty, these things in particular are the things that deprive you of your freedom.

Most people feel kind of trapped in their work. They try to create as much freedom as they can within the limitations of the structures and rules of their work. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as you feel happy with it. But it is valuable to realize that you are the one that can decide how to shape your life and your working life. Agreements, rules, and protocols are concepts. These are ideas, not rock-solid boundaries. They can be changed but all too often they are accepted as truths without much questioning. Why? Because they provide clarity and safety. You think you are free, surely you have a good job, you earn money with which you might have bought a great house, go on cool vacations, drive a pretty car, and support a loving family. You can do the things you like to do. But

in the meantime you work more than you want to and are trapped in your golden cage.

What if you allow the feeling that you might not be so comfortable in your work to be true? That it actually is too busy, too hectic? That everyone is just running around, chasing the need to fulfil all kinds of obligations and responsibilities? That your body is giving you the message that you are asking too much of it? That starting at eight in the morning actually doesn't fit with your biological cycle and that you enter the morning traffic because... Yes, why? Because everyone has done it for years? Because it is scary to say, "I will do things differently"? And because your colleagues and boss might think something about it? Imagine losing your job. You will adapt. But you calm yourself with the thought that it is not so bad and that there is much to enjoy in your life. Of course there are, the cage is golden after all.

Realize that you can always open the cage door and fly out, spread your wings to start doing what you are meant to do. Does this require courage? Yes, much courage because you have no idea what awaits you. No idea what the consequences are going to be. But the same can be said for being stuck in the golden cage. That may feel clear, safe, and predictable, but you have no guarantees inside the cage in reality. In it, you also have to deal with unexpected events, setbacks, and accidents. And deep down inside you something knows this and you make decisions every day (subconsciously) out of the fear to lose something. *That* is what you will start to feel sooner or later.

Your work, your relationship, where you live, let them work *for* you. In a way that they enlarge your playing ground, that you bring out the best of yourself and others. And that the door is always open. There is no right or wrong, but you are the one who decides if you stay inside it or if you fly out. So that you can start doing what makes a real contribution to how you feel, and gives you the opportunity to add your full value to this world.

7. IT IS WORTH TO TAKE A 180-DEGREE TURN

“What isn’t working in your life?”, I ask Ramon, a man in his early 40’s.

“That my work and private lives are too busy. I am always in a hurry.”

I ask the question again: “And what isn’t working?”

“That people are demanding too much from me. My employer, my clients, the people around me.”

“And what isn’t working in this for *you*?”

“That I frequently cross my own boundaries.”

“And what is the price you are paying for this?”

“That I don’t feel well.”

“If you don’t feel well, how do you feel?”

“Not well.”

“And if you don’t feel well, what do you feel instead?”

“Uh... uncomfortable, not happy...”

The head subconsciously and expertly bypasses the true pain. By telling what it isn’t, you don’t have to come to terms with the price you’re paying. It is less confronting to say you don’t ‘feel well’ than feel the actual pain. That it is exhausting, energy draining, and makes you feel depressed and stressed. And that you requires your entire weekend to recover before you can join the rat race again on Monday. Which means that you cannot be there for your partner and family how you would like to be there for them and feel absent. That it diminishes your self-esteem which in turn makes it harder to bring yourself to exercise regularly and eat healthy, you withdraw and decline. This undermines your feeling of dignity, self-respect, and self-confidence even further. The only way to experience just a hint of satisfaction and self-worth is to oblige to all the responsibilities, commitments, and results that have

been imposed by yourself and your environment. Hoping you will get something in return.

“Yes, but it isn’t *that* bad.”

Another tactic of the head to avoid having to create change. By saying what isn’t working in your life you’re not saying everything is truly horrible. Perhaps a lot of things are working really well in your life. And there are situations and patterns that don’t work. These also determine (a large part of) the quality of your life, urging your body to send a message that something isn’t right. So it is valuable to look at this. Even then we are able to cunningly avoid our own troubles, by trying to find both the cause and the solution with the other or in the form.

“If they would hire more people, then...”

“If my partner would take more time, then...”

“If I start exercising more, eat healthier, and rearrange my schedule, then...”

That seems like a successful approach and I can work fine for many people. This is not a matter of being right or wrong. It is about how much things actually contribute to the relationship between you and yourself. Who or what is in charge of who?

As long as you hold on to the idea that the form or the other should solve your problems, difficulties, and discomfort you run another great risk. Then you hand over control and influence. You take a seat in the waiting room of your own life, hoping that once, maybe, someday the situation will change and things will feel good and right again for you. In the meantime you are surviving according to the strategies you have been taught and you have accepted for truth thoughtlessly. You have turned into a machine that thinks it lives in freedom, but whose hands and feet have been tied to an incorporated thought pattern and controlled by conditioned beliefs. That

tries frantically to control the world around itself in order to create an environment it thinks would suit its needs. Deep down inside you realize this cannot be controlled. You feel this tension... every day repeatedly.

Every now and then there is a tear in the mechanical armor through fear, pain, anger, and sadness. This shines a light on your humanity, the person you are deep inside and your really are meant to be. So it is important to listen to it. But instead of giving it attention, we try to fix those negative feelings as quickly as possible. The system of government, economy, and pharmacy is reaping the benefits while you are paying the price, thinking that you are doing really well. You chase rest, freedom, happiness, and satisfaction, hoping that you will have them someday maybe. So we are continuously searching for the best choice, to what will create the best result and the biggest success.

Sometimes it is better to make a 180-degree turn and ask yourself the question: "What price am I willing to pay? Do I continue to chose for connecting with the other in a personal and/or material sense, like work, finance, place where you live? Do I continue making decisions, hoping that it will yield something for me somewhere down the line, making my life dependent of external factors and the results of my choices? Do I pay the price for acting more and more out of fear and distancing me further from myself? Or do I chose curiosity and stay connected with who I am and is the price that I have to pay that I don't have to deal with insecurity, judgment, and opinions from those around me and a huge not-knowing? What price am I willing to pay?"

Two places

There are roughly two places from which you can make a decision. One is from the desire to get rid of a certain difficulty. Usually based on fear and from the idea that it will be better in a different position than where you are right now. But you don't have a clue. First, you are not there yet so you have no idea what it will be like. Secondly, you can not do anything once you are there.

Another place from which you can start to move is curiosity. This is a step made from a desire, the wish to gain a new experience. Whatever the results. Even when the outcome is different from what you had hoped, you always know that you will gain valuable insight and are able to learn, grow, and develop from this place.

A young medical student is in the midst of the most demanding internships: internal medicine and surgery. The days are long and the confrontations with the patients are taxing emotionally. It gives her so much stress that she literally becomes ill. She feels that she has no other choice than persevering in the internship and follow the rules. I confront her with the fact that she does have a choice as a matter of fact: "There is always a choice... But you will always pay the price too. You quit (temporarily or not) the internship in exchange for rest, time, and repair—the price you pay will be that education is delayed or possibly terminated. Or you continue, finish the internship and your education—but the price you will pay is that you will have to deal with the frenzy that comes along with this choice. There is no right or wrong, there is just a choice to make. The decision is yours." And then something magical happens. Because she is the one making the choices, she suddenly is in control and has taken command over her life and all the circumstances it encompasses, instead of having the circumstances dictate her life. In the end she decided to pay the price of the second option and has successfully

finished her internship. Yes, it was tough, but instead of blaming the situation for how she felt, she knew now that this was *her* choice. This insight brought her more peace, relaxation, acceptance, and gratification.

That realization has one major inevitable difficulty: you have to face it sooner or later. If you don't, it will continue to haunt you until she finally catches up with you and grabs you by the throat (and then you're lucky, because the chances of her doing more damage than that are far greater). To correct the mistakes you have made in life, you have to make a sacrifice anyway. If you have ignored the truth, have diverted your eyes, and have chosen to remain blind for it, you are creating a serious list of sacrifices you will have to make in your life. The longer you wait, the higher the price will be that you will have to pay. So make sure that you are sincere, adjust your course as soon as possible, remain true to yourself, and make sure that the list of sacrifices remains as short as possible. And at least make it worth your troubles...

Luckily you have a body. A body that has unlimited loyalty and will give off warning signs when you are going off course until the end. The body is always the entrance. Learn how to get in touch with the discomfort, to stay with it, and to research what exactly needs to be felt. The discomfort, the tear in your armor will lead you straight to a connection with your preciousness. This enables you to make the right decisions for yourself. Without the need to fully understand it all the time, regardless of what you have been taught, and outside of your own reason. But from freedom and a deep trust. Your body will show you the way, as long as you are prepared to accept everything you meet and have a true desire to listen to it.

The following twelve chapters will guide you to awaken the qualities for you to remain true to yourself. Twelve pillars, twelve perspectives from which

you will be presented with the insights and tools to build a life from a firm foundation of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.

Doctors are like humans

Like everyone else, doctors have luggage with their own doubts, insecurities, and fears. Doctors are like humans. They have their desires to be recognized, seen, and appreciated, to be able to give and receive love. A doctor is often valued for the speed and skill with which he can remedy the complaint of a patient. Years of education, training, and preparation have preceded this. And when a doctor can finally put a professional nameplate on his door, the door is full of invisible stickers with requirements a ‘good doctor’ should meet according to the standards.

We all have different roles to play: father or mother, son or daughter, partner, friend, and colleague. We have ideas on how we could best fulfil these roles, inspired by our education and by society that we have assumed to be true. But these are concepts. They are not *the* truth and most certainly don’t represent who *you* are. Are these roles wrong to fulfil? No, they are extremely useful and efficient. Until you need this role to feel good about yourself. Then the role has taken over command over you, instead of you controlling the role.

Most doctors identify themselves with their role as caretaker. They see it as their duty to help you. And rightly so, in my opinion when we are dealing with life-or-death situations, but under all other circumstances you as a doctor also have a choice in how you want to be there for the other. You as a doctor want nothing more than for the other to feel well again. But there is a layer underneath this: if the other feels well again, happy, healthy, how does that make you feel as a doctor? Much better too of course! And this is an important reason why a doctor—and you too—wants to be there for the other. A doctor is concerned

about your well-being of course, but (subconsciously) he also wants to feel better and does so by helping you find a remedy for your complaint as quickly and good as possible.

What if your body is smarter than your head? What if your head cannot say 'no' and your body starts doing this for you, and that the complaint actually is a sign from your body? What do you need to change in your life to make it right again for you? Then relieving them from their complaints could mean that someone can continue on their path while it actually is this path that makes them ill. Then both patient and doctor have missed a valuable exit...

Sometimes someone is better off if you keep them in that painful place a little longer or actually help them connect with it. You cannot tell this person what to do and not to do, but you can trust the wisdom of the body. Then the role of the doctor slowly changes to a role of a mentor. From fear and dependency to more trust and independency.

The doctor and the patient are both shareholders in this process. When the doctor prescribes a pill you as a patient still have the co-responsibility for what you put in your mouth. Do you demand from your doctor to take care of your health or are you prepared to listen and look to your own body and examine what it really needs the most? What can you change in your life to make things right again for you? Right in the sense that you contribute the most to the connection between you and yourself.

21. INJUSTICE AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP GETS CLOUDED

How do you deal with injustice? How do you maintain a sense of self-respect and self-esteem without becoming someone who needs to convince the other that they are 'right' and preventing that your sense of self-esteem is depended on the approval of others?

Sometimes things happen in your life that are the complete opposite of what feels right and true for you. This is especially painful if this relates to people from your inner circle, like a parent or a partner. When they don't recognize your good intentions or continue to make you responsible for the misery in their own lives. When they refuse to take ownership over this and pull out all the stops to drag you down with their own victimhood. You have learned by now that life isn't about justice or injustice. And it is not a question *if* injustice will happen in your life but *when*. So it is valuable to be prepared.

I think there are a few steps you can take to handle injustice the best way you can.

1. You live in stories

You don't live in a factual reality. You live in the stories you tell yourself every day. It is not about right or wrong. It is not about being correct or incorrect. It is not about just or unjust. What matters is which story contributes the most to the relationship between you and yourself. Which story do you choose? Which perspective do you want to use repeatedly?

2. How much percent is your relation?

When the event concerns a person it is valuable to ask yourself how big your share is in the relationship. Ideally the relationship is two hundred percent:

you invest one hundred percent of yourself and the other invest one hundred percent of himself or herself too. In the worst case, where you invest one hundred percent of yourself in the relationship and the other refuses to put in any commitment at all, the relation still exists for one hundred percent. If you wonder how much you bring to the table and find that you invest ninety, eighty, seventy percent or less, that is not a reason to start punishing yourself. But it is worth to see where you can adjust and influence the quality of the relationship and take responsibility for this. Even if it is hard and complicated. If you come to the conclusion that you really contribute one hundred percent and have done everything you can and the other still remains rigid, inflexible, and unrelenting, you need to take control for yourself.

3. Being right and convincing

We often choose to design our conversation with the other in a manner that transforms our love into wanting to be right and convincing the other, hoping to receive appreciation and approval that way. While you actually hand over control completely. Every time you think that the other should acknowledge, recognize, and appreciate you, you empower the other to determine the quality of your life. Because when the other goes along with you, you feel okay. If the other doesn't cooperate, doesn't understand you, or continues to put up resistance, it will evoke tension, pain, sadness, anger and other discomfort with you. So the other is basically in control.

4. Be prepared to get hurt

Are you prepared to get hurt? And to face rejection and misunderstanding?
To embrace the pain completely?

This can lead to enduring. Enduring the pain, the sadness, the loneliness. But it can also lead to influencing the situation and taking actions.

Taking action, not by trying to be right and convincing the other, but by having the courage to energetically wield the sword and cut the ties with the (unjust) situation. By accepting the situation in a way and avoiding that it no longer has a negative influence on your life. Acceptance in this sense can be perceived as giving up but it is far from giving up. When you give up you accept that the other is right and accept your defeat. This is nothing like that. You remain true to yourself, you can still disagree with the situation, you renounce the behavior or the event wholeheartedly, but you no longer allow the experience to intrude on your life continuously in a negative way. The decision isn't made against the other, but in favor of yourself. This sometimes results in creating distance or actually cutting the cords.

5. Your desire for harmony creates static

We have learned to strive for some form of harmony. I wonder if that really is a righteous objective. There is also a thing called injustice. And yes, I am in favor of looking at it from multiple perspectives. What can it teach you, how can it help you to grow and develop? But sometimes it helps to put your foot down and learn how to wield the sword. Not in an attempt to destroy the other, but by means to draw a clear line. Stop, this is it, no further!

But our desire for harmony makes us vague and unclear and vagueness isn't beneficial to us. It helps if you want to hide behind it, but where does this leave you? While hoping to keep the peace, be seen and appreciated, you slowly turn unreliable and invisible. Your wish to remain connected to yourself will make you gradually lose the connection with yourself. Are you able to wield the sword and clearly show your boundaries? This will clear the fog, make you visible, and then harmony can arise naturally—even in another form or with other people.

6. Be sincere

You need to take a stand for your beliefs, create a clear boundary, and communicate it by expressing what you think. Say how the other's behavior affects you by making your experiences be true. And be prepared to bear and even endure the hurting yourself. Choose to come from a place of sincerity, time and time again. Practice what you preach. When your actions are pure there is no room for doubt and guilt.

7. Don't take it personal

If you can stand by your beliefs, the other has the freedom to do the same. We often feel assaulted and have a tendency to arrange a counterattack or our retreat. It can be worth it to understand that every time it happens you don't have to take the emotions and feelings of others personal, or the resulting opinions and actions. You might be the cause for the event, but you are not responsible for it or guilty because of it. It is easier to take and feel this position if you remain true to the previous point and make sure that you are coming from a place of sincerity.

8. There doesn't have to be a solution

This provides the most rest and relaxation, there *doesn't* have to be a solution, period.

Too often and too fast we want to create a solution and take the responsibility to provide it. Take your time. Create some space. Put the situation, the opinions, and the judgment of the other on an imaginary table between yourself and the other. Look at it, observe it. Feel what it does with you. Without feeling the need to do anything. From this place you can examine, study, and feel it. Allow yourself, the relation, and the other the time to look at it from multiple angles. In the worst case there is a difference of opinions, is that permitted? From a point of rest, space, and relaxation, you can make a movement that is right and true for you.

24. SUMMARY: THE TWELVE PILLARS FOR LIVING WITH SELF-CONFIDENCE, SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-ESTEEM

Twelve pillars, twelve insights, tools, or steps you fully control regardless the opinions of others. When you start design and fulfill your life with these pillars, your life will increasingly work *for* you. You will have the feeling that you are at the steering wheel of your life and all the events in it, instead of continue to having the events determine the quality of your life. The fighting will diminish and you will play more, from curiosity and amazement. It will enable you to develop and build your character. But it may well be that this path is outside of your comfort zone and that you have the urge to choose the familiar road. Don't worry, stop there and adjust your course. You are worth it to be yourself for one hundred percent and add your value to the world around you for one hundred percent.

1. Allow yourself to be insecure

The world exists due to contradictions. If you are able to see them you will feel less inclined to hold on to them or to escape some feelings as quickly as possible. The one exists because of the other. You would not know what it is like to be really happy if you didn't know what it feels like to be really sad. You only know what it is like to experience rest and relaxation because you know what it is like when you are completely tensed. You will not feel more successful if you hunt for success, you will feel more successful if you allow yourself to fail too. In other words, you will not reach a place of power, happiness, joy, and trust by searching for it. The gateway to power, happiness, joy, and trust is through allowing yourself to be vulnerable, sad, and insecure.

Accepting the fact that something inside you is insecure or feels uncomfortable in another sense is not the same as agreeing to it, or feeling happy or thankful for it. No, you can still feel super annoyed or frustrated by it, but you accept that it's there. Just because it exists. It is there. When you can say with that intention, 'okay, if this is the situation and let's suppose this situation is created to help me teach, grow, and develop, what can I do or let go to shift a little toward a direction that feels right and true for me?

Give me thresholds
to grow
Ask me questions
where I have lost the answers
Give me insecurity
to have faith again
Provide me with resistance
where I have lost my strength
Bring me loneliness
to awaken my longing
Give me a mountain
that I can conquer
A safety net for my emotions
that will give me the courage to jump
Break me
so I can rebuild
Two hands on my feeling
so I can dare to trust

2. Look in the mirror before the day begins

The most of our suffering is created by our desire to be a good person.

We adapt, hoping to satisfy and maybe become happy in the future. You are prepared to cross your own boundaries for this.

But the fact is that you are not perfect and that you do not have to be. Your imperfections are exactly the things that allow you to grow and develop. If you were completely perfect every incentive to grow and develop would be taken away from you. There is an art to learn to see your own imperfections, appreciate and embrace them. You can take this position if you have a clear view of the place that you want to come from. Continue to choose the desire to be a sincere person. Practice what you preach. If you act sincere there is no basis for doubt and guilt. Choose for love and compassion and realize that this is the best place. Something inside you wants nothing more than to be able to give love and to receive love. If you look into the mirror at morning and know, feel, and experience deep inside that this is the intention with which you start your day, it will have an effect. It can still be that someone else yells at you, thinks that you have done something wrong, or have made a terrible mistake. And of course that can still hurt you. But you can bet that you will be able to recover more quickly and think, 'well, that may be, but I come from one place and that is a good place. I come from a place of love and compassion. If the other feels and experiences it like this, that has nothing to do with me.' You can examine what part is yours and what you could change in that. You check with yourself if your actions have been sincere. Then you see that you may have given the motivation for the feeling of the other, but that you are not responsible—and most certainly not guilty for it. So that you can honestly say to the other, 'I have been completely unreasonable to you just now and you did not deserve that'. But without feeling guilty. Why not?

Because you are not perfect and come from the best place, a place of love and compassion. You are human, what can you do? You're not perfect. You can make mistakes.