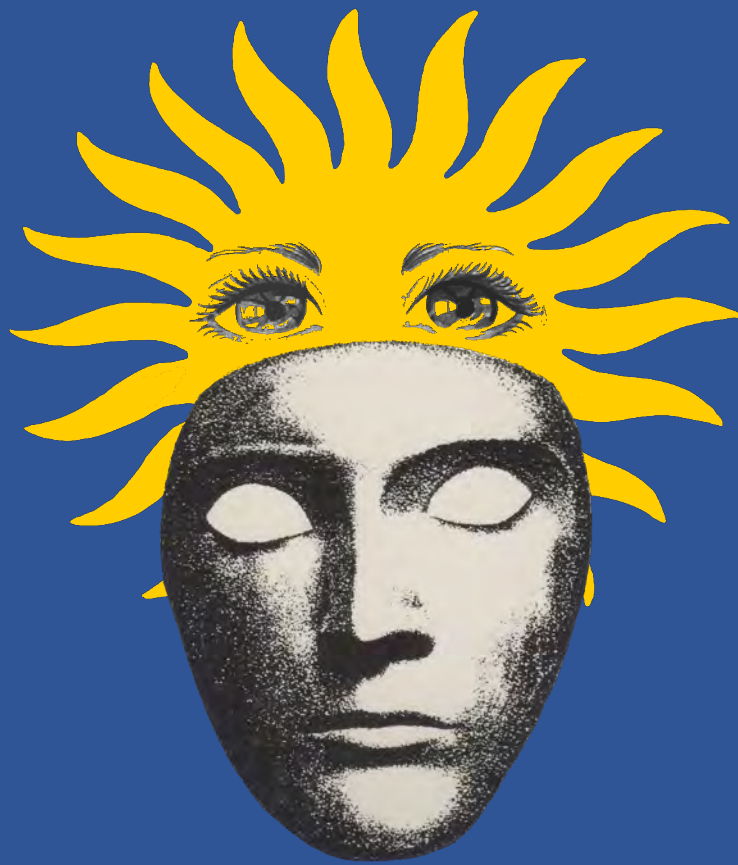


Revised Edition

Removing Your Mask



No More Hiding
From Your Truth

Marion Moss Hubbard, Ph.D.

Removing Your Mask

No More Hiding from Your Truth

Marion Moss Hubbard, Ph. D.

Orion Publishing Company
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Removing Your Mask: No More Hiding from Your Truth

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To **Richard Hubbard**,
My beloved husband. His love and
support continue to urge me
to live from my truth.

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Ed Hess, my friend, and colleague. He lives the life of a facilitator and true leader. He strives to bring the ways of truth into the real world.

Introduction

Over 30 years ago I began writing a journal specifically to explore my issues related to fear. Even though I believed I presented a strong exterior, fear seemed to be an underlying theme in my life. As I wrote, an image for my feelings became clear. The scene was a haunted house. I was creeping around every corner waiting for something to jump out and frighten me. I put on my “brave mask,” walking with authority and whistling a happy tune. But underneath I was terrified and wondered if my false bravery would fool anyone.

This was an apt metaphor for my life at that time. I attempted to show a “together” mask to the world. But fear was an undercurrent that undermined my effort to obtain lasting happiness. I hated to admit that I had so much fear. I wanted to believe the illusion of being so together. I wanted to believe that I could really be what my mask said I was. I wanted to show myself that I was tough and could handle anything. And I wanted to cover the deep emptiness I felt inside.

Through the haunted house image, I realized that I had to decide whether I was willing to continue living in fear behind a false mask, or whether I chose to walk freely in the world, despite my fear. Part of me doubted that I could live authentically without a mask. But, then something inside said I could. In an act of faith, I decided to choose freedom.

In making that decision, I didn’t know how much courage I would have to summon to make this journey toward freedom. I didn’t realize how much inner examination and understanding lay ahead before I would feel safe enough to shed my mask, layer by layer. I didn’t know how raw I would feel by exposing my bare face to the world. I didn’t understand how to end the fear beneath the disguise of the mask. And I didn’t anticipate the lightness, joy, and inner peace I would experience through the process of letting it go.

I am now more comfortable in my own skin. I have made discoveries about myself and others that were impossible to make while all those layers of the mask weighed me down. Each time I peel away a layer of my false covering, I feel freer to experience life fully on my own terms and to get on with what I am called to do.

What I present to you is a synthesis of my truth and the inner process that has gotten me to this point. I do not pretend that I am able to live consistently from it. I continue to grow and learn ways to remove even more layers of my mask as I become aware of them. This book is my reminder of what must be *lived*, not just talked about.

There are many ways through which people can approach their clearing process to realize their dreams. There is no simple formula that will work for everyone. Tender feelings must be acknowledged and accepted for what they are. Everyone’s process is valid for them, no matter what it looks like on the outside to others.

What I present is given out of love. It is intended to act as a catalyst in supporting you to *reach within yourself for your own answers*. I hope you will keep the pieces of my experience and truth that fit for you and feel free to throw out the rest. After all, that is what we each must do if we are to remove our masks and embody our true selves.

Marion Moss Hubbard, Ph.D.
May 2022

Section 1

Hiding Behind the Mask

Chapter 1

The Mask Revealed: A Story of Transformation

“Mask definition: A covering for the face or part of the face, to conceal or disguise the identity.”

— Webster’s New World Dictionary

Imagine that you have been invited to a masked ball and you feel very excited about attending. Thinking about it brings back the childhood joy of playing “make believe.” The memory is a reminder of how much fun it was pretending to be someone else.

To prepare for the party, you create a papier-mâché mask to represent the character you want to portray. You add layers of paint and decorative touches until the mask perfectly matches what you had envisioned. Delighted, you step back from your creation and say, “A job well done!”

When you try on your mask for the first time it feels like a great fit. Wearing it around the house helps you get into character. Over the next several days you practice inhabiting the speech, movements, and subtle demeanor of your chosen role.

When you get to the party, your world of make believe transforms you into your character. As you whirl around the dance floor with your date, your friends are enchanted by this mysterious person not knowing it is you behind the mask. The evening is a fairy tale come true and the whole experience feels magical!

When the party is over and it is time to go home, you realize you had so much fun wearing the mask that you hate to take it off. You loathe going back to being who you really are since you don’t like yourself much anyway. Attempting to hold onto the magic of the evening, you wear the mask to bed.

The next morning still half asleep you go into the bathroom forgetting you are still wearing the mask. As you absentmindedly try to brush your teeth you hit the mask instead. Now fully awake, you look in the mirror with shock as you see there is someone else staring back!

You desperately tug at the mask to get it off, but it is stuck on your face. In full blown panic, you try ripping off the mask only to find it is firmly attached to your skin. Feeling your heart pounding in your chest you wonder in horror, “What am I going to do now? I can’t live with the mask on, but I don’t know how to get my real face back!!!” This is when you wake up in a cold sweat greatly relieved that what you just experienced was just a terrible nightmare.

This book is a transformational story about waking up to the truth of who we are behind our masks of conditioning. In our awakened state we see that masks can be fun to wear occasionally when we know we are pretending. However, when we become too attached to any identity it denies the existence of the real us underneath. The pretense that once felt so good now smothers us, preventing us from being who we naturally are and dampens our ability to embody our previously dreamed of potential.

What Is the Mask?

We all wear masks from time to time to hide our real selves. As the dictionary states, a mask conceals our identity. It shields who we authentically are. It protects our real selves from a perceived outside threat. A mask is the cover we present to the world to tell others about ourselves. It conveys a message, “I want you to see me this way.” If, however, we wear a mask

while having forgotten that we are pretending, we can start to cause ourselves damage. It is as if the true self is knocking on the mask from the inside, screaming, “Hey, you, out there! Let me out! Remember me? I can’t breathe!” We know we are uncomfortable, but we are unaware that it is the mask that is causing our discomfort. We have confused the mask with our true self.

To conform to the shape of the mask, we begin to behave in ways that don’t fit our internal truth. Our energy becomes tied up in dealing with the mask. The more we focus our attention away from our truth, the more we feel uncomfortable facing others without wearing our mask. We have forgotten what our truth even is or who we truly are. It is important for us to realize that the behavior we have when wearing the mask is not the real us. It is a sham, a pretense used to prevent our true self from being exposed and hurt.

As we become more aware that we are wearing a mask, we begin to want to shed it. However, we have mixed emotions about how to deal with the mask. We sometimes want to rip it off quickly to get rid of it. But when we try to do that, we feel too raw and unprotected. At other times we prefer to cling to the mask for familiarity and security, but this makes us feel weak and like we are living a lie.

This book is designed to help us discover how to remove our mask without damaging ourselves in the process. By eliminating the artificial barriers that separate us from ourselves, others, and the world around us, we can learn to respond to ourselves and others in more compassionate and honest ways. And this is what frees us to experience the pure joy of being fully ourselves!

Why Did We Agree to Wear Masks?

“I like your mask. Did you make it yourself?”

We didn’t know the rules of the game when we agreed to wear masks. We were children, simple and curious about life. We were like sponges, soaking up experiences, observing the world around us, and learning how to be people.

At first, wearing masks was like a game of peek-a-boo. It made us laugh and it made our parents happy, so we agreed to wear them. We didn’t know that adults were serious about the “games of mask.” Then one day we started to take off the masks and we got punished or ignored. We didn’t want to wear them, but we wanted to be loved and noticed, so we kept them on. Adults seemed to like us better with our masks on. They responded to us. They proudly showed us in our masks to their friends and we were rewarded for wearing them. We began to think that we could only be loved and fit in if we wore masks.

Then we went to school. We arrived our first day with shiny shoes and new clothes. We also wore our masks that were becoming very finely decorated by then with ornate patterns and glitter. Our teachers looked at our masks approvingly and may even have told our parents what a fine job they had done helping us design our masks.

When the teachers weren’t looking and we were with other children, we took off our masks. We felt the cool air on our faces and could breathe again. It made us feel happy and alive. Then the teachers saw us and scolded us. They made it clear that it was not polite to show our bare faces. They sent notes home to our parents telling them that we had exposed our faces in class. After a while, some of us gave up and decided to wear the masks given to us or self-created, so we could avoid more trouble or pain.

Some children decided that they didn't like their masks, so they smashed them into the ground. They were punished severely by the adults for having naked faces. The children who kept on their masks ridiculed and pummeled those who had the audacity to show their faces. Reluctantly, the rebels made new masks for themselves, this time out of very hard material that couldn't be penetrated by the stings and barbs of others. They knew it was much safer to wear a thick, protective covering than to reveal who they really were.

There are very few adults who do not wear masks. Most of us have been influenced through the years by the circumstances, events, and people in our lives. Although we are not always aware of these influences, they can impact how we feel and the face we show to others. It is important to recognize that as adults we have choices. No one can make us wear masks any longer. It is up to us to decide if we are willing to risk taking them off or if we choose to keep our true selves hidden behind a façade, screaming to be let out.

Chapter 2

Games of the Mask

“Oh boy, a game! Can I play too?”

In the 1983 movie, *War Games*, a high school student and hacker, played by Matthew Broderick, is trying to hack into a computer gaming company to access free games online, when he inadvertently connects to a system that doesn't identify itself. He scans the system for games and decides to play the game, “Global Thermonuclear War.” What he doesn't realize is that the system he is accessing is the NORAD War Operations missile launch control center. What he accidentally sets in motion is a war game simulation that convinces military personnel at NORAD that actual Soviet nuclear missiles are headed to the U.S. Although the command center finally realizes that the scenario is a simulation, the program doesn't know the difference between the game and reality. It continues to play the game as it prepares to really launch the missiles. Through a series of trial and error to avert World War III, Matthew Broderick and the creator of the simulator, realize they need to get the computer program to learn the concept of futility and no-win scenarios. The military personnel helplessly watch as the computer continues to access more and more digits of the missile launch code, all while the simulator plays out different no-win scenarios. [Spoiler Alert!] Just before the last code is obtained, the computer figures out that the only winning strategy for the “mutually assured destruction” scenario is to not play the game. The crisis is averted, and the computer offers, “Would you like to play a nice game of chess instead?”

Although the *War Games* movie, describes a deadly serious scenario, in many ways it is not much different than the “games of the mask” we knowingly and unknowingly play in our personal relationships, families, community, and between nations. Many times, we have no idea that we are repeatedly playing out no-win scenarios and the only strategy to “win” is to choose not to play the games at all. But before we make that choice, we must understand the games and the current roles we are playing. Once we do, we can then decide how we want to play the game of life instead.

Why We Play the Games

Almost all of us were taught from a very tender age as children how to play the “games of the mask.” We did it to get the sustenance, love, and nurturing that we needed to survive.

But why do we continue to play the “games of the mask” now as adults? Why don't we choose something different? Part of the reason is that most of us are unaware that we are playing games. We are so enmeshed in the games themselves we don't have the understanding to step back and see ourselves as players.

Some of us see the games and are frustrated at being sucked into them. But we don't know how to extract ourselves. We are tired of hiding from our truth. Yet we receive only periodic glimpses of what that truth is. Our times of insight are so infrequent that we may feel as if they are illusions, unrealistic or unattainable fantasies.

Another factor that keeps most of us from ending the game playing is fear of the unknown. We may yearn for bliss but fear the unknown will hold death or pain instead. So, reluctantly we settle for a constant dull pain of what we know rather than risk stepping outside the familiar games.

Whatever the reasons we avoid taking the *adult* responsibility required to quit playing games, even though we may be in grown up bodies, we continue to remain mental, emotional, and spiritual children. From this childlike perspective we are not responsible for what occurs in our life. While we may not like the rules of the game, they allow us to justify blaming others, the system, society, or anything else that serves as an external scapegoat for what we don't like or don't want to face within ourselves.

Rules of the Games

1. All the games can be played with one or more players. All humans currently inhabiting this planet can participate.
2. None of the "games of the mask" require experience to play. There are no playbooks to study before you enter a particular game. You can get into the games at any point, no matter how long they have already been played by others before you.
3. No special equipment needs to be purchased prior to joining the games. The only thing you need is your mind. (The more experienced players will shape your mind in the manner necessary to play a particular game.)

Selecting a Part to Play in the Games

It is necessary for you to play a role in all the "games of the mask." You may want to begin thinking about the role you prefer (or are already playing). It is okay for you to duplicate someone else's role. In fact, that can make for a more exciting game. You can also switch parts in mid-game. Be forewarned, though, that to do so will cause very interesting dynamics that you should be prepared to handle. In the next chapter, we will look at some of popular masks, but first we'll examine some of the popular games that are played.

The Game of "Bully/Victim"

Players

You will need at least two people to play this game, but there can be an infinite number of players. At least one person acts as a bully and at least one person acts as a victim. (*Note:* It is possible for this game to be played solitaire if the person is willing to play the roles of both bully and victim, but it takes much more energy to do this.)

Object of the Game

Deny everyone's truth by using intimidation and fear.

Rules of the Game

1. Bullies:
 - a. Act superior and in control.
 - b. Must not let down their guard or open their hearts. (This would be a serious rule violation.)
2. Victims:
 - a. Act worthless and out of control.
 - b. Must not show their strength.
3. Bullies always feel superior to the victims. If there is more than one bully, one becomes the “top bully” (unless there is a deal made to carve up territories).
4. Conflict and strife are required. The more turmoil the better. Bonus chips will be given for outstanding examples of strife between players. (Collection of chips will be discussed later.)
5. None of the players can let the others see their truth or the real person underneath. To do so will cause the following consequences:
 - a. *First time rule violation.* The other players can ridicule and ostracize to keep the truth from being told again.
 - b. *Second time rule violation.* The player can be ganged up on by all other players and pummeled physically, verbally, or spiritually to let the violator know that the situation will not be tolerated.
 - c. *Subsequent rule violations.* If the player violating the rules is still functioning, the other players can put this person into the special “bully’s circle.” The violator will have to wear the “bully’s target” on his/her back for the rest of the game. Any time game players feels like it, they can abuse the violator in any manner that feels appropriate. There is no way to escape the “bully’s circle,” unless the other players vote that good behavior has been demonstrated long enough to gain their confidence no additional violations will occur in the future.

How the Moves are Made

Bullies go around the room stomping, screaming, and making cutting verbal remarks. They can abuse others, especially those who are smaller, younger, or weaker than they are. It is helpful to find others’ flaws and pick on them. It is also appropriate for the bullies to carry weapons (or pretend to have them) and hit people whenever they want.

Bullies can take a more subtle approach if they choose. They can give the “You’re dead if you even think it” look, the steely stare, the raised eyebrow, or pointed finger. Flared nostrils, clenched jaws, and tapping feet will give them bonus chips, if they are able to get their victims to stop in their tracks.

If victims try to point out what bullies are doing to them, bullies should deny any responsibility for what they have done. They should turn the responsibility back on the victim with statements like, “You provoked me.” “You have a problem with that?” “What’s wrong with you?” “I never said that to you.” “Read my lips!” “What are you trying to get away with?” or “What’s your problem?”

Victims go around the room wringing their hands, worrying, apologizing, or acting scared, stupid, numb, or trapped. They can nervously clean house, get involved in other people's lives, and play "ain't it awful" with friends.

It is a good idea for victims to stoop their shoulders, hang their heads, and shuffle. It helps if victims do not look directly into the eyes of the bullies. This will not be considered staying in character and chips will be taken away.

Victims can get bonus chips by being especially nice to the ones bullying them. After the bully has done something particularly mean, bonus chips will be given for saying such things as:

- "I'm sorry I provoked you. It won't happen again."
- "I deserved that."
- "Please do it to me again, if I get out of line."
- "I didn't mean to offend you."
- "I'll be more careful next time."

Accumulating Chips

Chips are accumulated by outstanding examples of playing in character. Both bullies and victims can accumulate chips. Only the bullies determine who receives a specific number of chips for certain performances, though. The more dramatic the performance, the better. The following criteria will be used for obtaining chips:

1. **How All Players Accumulate Chips:**
 - a. Each time players enter the "conflict and strife zone" they obtain a chip.
 - b. Players who spend protracted time in turmoil, trauma, and drama get bonus chips.
2. **How Bullies Accumulate Chips:**
 - a. Intimidation of victims in a particularly short time.
 - b. Making victims grovel for more than five seconds without getting up.
 - c. Saying outrageous statements to victims and being believed by them.
 - d. Manipulation and control of multiple victims. (The bigger the group, the more chips are given.)
3. **How Victims Accumulate Chips:**
 - a. Living in constant fear of being hurt by a bully.
 - b. Groveling at the feet of a bully for long periods of time.
 - c. Not questioning anything told to them by bullies no matter how outrageous. (e.g. "If you love me, you will jump off a cliff.")
 - d. Being so completely cowed that even pets can bully them.

Deducting Chips

Chips can also be taken away. This, too, occurs at the discretion of the bullies. The following criteria will be used for taking away chips:

1. Anyone telling the truth. The only situation that requires an automatic loss of at least one chip.
2. Bullies who open their hearts.
3. Victims who show strength.
4. Anyone trying to resolve conflict and strife by means other than bullying or playing victim.

Determining the Winner

Players who are still alive at the end of the game and have accumulated the most chips will be declared the winners. There can be multiple winners in the first round. But they will be obligated to play additional rounds, to determine a “sudden death play-off” winner.

The Game of “Let's Pretend”

Players

Although this game can be played solitaire, any number of people can play. It is well-suited for playing in families with addictions, abuse, or codependency issues. It is used effectively by con artists, politicians, and entire political parties. It proliferates quickly through media and social media.

Object of the Game

Denial of the truth by pretending that the obvious is not present.

Rules of the Game

1. No one is to speak the truth or talk about how they see the repeated patterns in the behavior of themselves or others.
2. Keeping secrets is a must. Chips will be taken away if any secrets are divulged, especially to anyone not playing the game.

How the Moves Are Made

One person is assigned the role of a rhinoceros, who stands anywhere it wants. Everyone else must go around the rhinoceros pretending it is not there, even if it breaks windows or emits loud, obnoxious sounds. In fact, it might be best for someone to throw a tablecloth over the rhino while the other players are not looking, so it will be easier to ignore. (*Note:* If a player is seen putting a tablecloth over the rhinoceros, the other players are to act as if the whole incident did not occur.)

Accumulating Chips

The player who is most oblivious to the truth, will be the person who gives out the chips. Chips are accumulated by everyone keeping their mouth shut about what is really happening. Periodically, players can be given extra chips just to show appreciation for the fact that the truth has not yet been exposed.

Deducting Chips

1. Chips are taken away for:
 - a. Noticing the rhinoceros
 - b. Drawing attention to its existence
2. Telling the truth or revealing *any* game secrets to other players or to anyone outside the game.

Determining the Winner

All players are winners as long as no one speaks the truth or says the obvious. If players have chips deducted for violations of the rules, they can be declared losers or scapegoats. The game continues, but if anything goes wrong, the scapegoat can be blamed.

Variations of the Game

Many game variations can be played. Here are some of the most common:

- **Game of “Pretend You Don’t Know Yourself”**
This game is best played solitaire but can be played with other people. The object is to act as if you don’t know who you are. You play the role of someone you think others want you to be. You get chips for saying things like, “Oh, I’m too dumb to figure that out.” “I just don’t know what has come over me.” or “I don’t know what made me say such a thing.”
- **Game of “Pretend You Don’t Know You are Hurting Yourself”**
This is best played in a family setting or with friends. The object is to make others think you don’t know you are hurting yourself. You play the masochistic role. You get chips for doing things like cutting your wrists, banging your head on the wall, having repeated accidents, or sitting in a dark room listening to depressing music. If anyone confronts you about why you were hurting yourself, you say, “I didn’t know I was hurting myself.” or “That didn’t hurt.”
- **Game of “Pretend You are Bad”**
This can be played with any number of people and any setting but is especially good to play if you are a child or are in an intimate relationship. The object is to convince yourself and others that you are a bad person, rotten to the core. You play the role of the troublemaker or saboteur. If you are a child, you get chips for doing such things as poisoning the neighbor’s dog, throwing rocks at cars, picking fights, or stealing things. As a partner you get chips for having affairs, forgetting birthdays, or always being late. If there is more than one “bad” player, you should find out who is the “baddest” of them all. That person gets bonus chips.

Other Games of the Mask

Game of Hide and Seek

This game is played best in a work setting or in a love relationship. The object is for you to hide from other people and give them just enough of a clue about your truth that they are intrigued and will try to seek out the real you. You play the role of mouse in this cat-and-mouse game. You want to leave enough of a trail that they will want to look for you, but you never let them get close enough to know the real you or your truth. In love relationships, this game can go on for years. While you may never let anyone close enough to you to get the love you want, you will never get badly hurt either. The pursuit itself substitutes for the love. Your energy is so tied up in the hide-and-seek that you may forget that you are keeping yourself from being deeply loved or known for who you really are.

Quick-Change Mask

This game can be played with many players. The object is to have as many different masks as possible so that no one knows the real you. Everyone will see just a piece of the truth without having enough pieces to know your true self. The roles you play will differ depending on the person you are with. You may have so many roles you've played your energy is consumed in keeping all the roles straight. After a while you may forget who you really are entirely. That's okay. Just keep trying new roles. Your act has fooled so many other people in the past, surely you can find at least one role that fools you, too.

Game of Non-Responsibility

This game is played by as many people as are willing to play. It is like the game of "toss," except a "hot potato of responsibility" is used. The object is to get rid of the "hot potato of responsibility" as quickly as possible by tossing it to someone else. The potato cannot touch the ground, however. It must always be in someone's hands or in the air.

If the potato comes to you, you must start blaming someone else and saying it is not your fault. If you can get the person you blamed hooked into responding to your accusation, then you can toss the potato to them. You get bonus chips for coming up with creative excuses for why you are not responsible. Extra chips will be given to those players who can blame the most other people by the end of the game.

Game of Struggle

This game is best played in pairs or solitaire, although entire groups can play. The object is to decide that you want something but then sabotage yourself from getting it. In this game the players all play the role of the mythological character, Sisyphus. (Sisyphus was doomed to roll a stone uphill, only to have the stone fall to the bottom. Then he would have to start over again. He did this for an eternity.) In the "Game of Struggle" each player will get to choose what their own stone will represent. Some examples of struggle include:

- "I'll never get to have any fun."
- "Life's a bitch, and then you die."
- "Nobody will ever love me."
- "Anything worth having must be worked for."
- "No pain, no gain."

After players have selected their "stone of struggle," they start rolling their stones looking longingly off in the distance at the mirage of the goal they think they want. (*An important note:* The stone must always be kept between the player and the goal.) The goal can never quite be reached. Anyone who does, loses all chips and is declared an instant loser.

Chapter 3

Wearing Our Favorite Masks

*“Mirror, mirror, on the wall.
Who’s the masked one at this ball?”*

To play the “games of the mask” we must select masks to wear. We can choose from ones mentioned here or create our own.

Emotional Masks

If we choose to wear an emotional mask, we play at being emotionally out of control. Emotions must override judgment and common sense. We need to be so into our own perceptions of the world that we do not see any way of being other than our own. Behind the emotions is a desperate plea for love since we feel unlovable.

Tasmanian Devil

As the Tasmanian Devil, we unload emotionally on whoever or whatever is in our path. We are like a tornado sucking up everything as it rips through a trailer park. Since we have no clear internal sense of what we really feel, our emotions are chaotic. We may be crying and screaming in one instant, throwing things, *and* feeling immense grief. We have no sense of others’ existence when we are in the middle of whirling through a room.

Our energy is spent very quickly, though, because it came out in such a fury. The storm of emotions passes, and we see the devastation we’ve caused. We feel guilty, but don’t know how to keep the outbursts from occurring again.

Puddle on the Floor

As a Puddle on the Floor, we collapse in an emotional puddle whenever there is pressure on us, we must make a decision, or we are challenged in any way. Our collapse can take many forms. We can get too sick to leave our bed. We can get so severely depressed that all we do is sit at home, read romance novels, and eat. Or we can be so numb that we leave for several days without telling others where we are. Whatever the form, we are unable to function in our day-to-day tasks and we feel emotionally overwhelmed.

Hysterical Hyena

As a Hysterical Hyena, we shriek our emotions at the top of our lungs no matter where we are or who we are with. We do not notice or care if we disturb others’ peace of mind. Our need to draw attention to ourselves is so great that we start out at the highest possible volume. After a while though, people ignore us because we are like the little boy who cried wolf one too many times. No one believes our pleas for attention are serious. The very attention we so desperately want eludes us since we are so irritating to be around.

Angry Masks

If we choose to wear an angry mask, we try to “unload” our anger on others. There may be a temporary sense of relief, but then we regret dumping on them and feel frustrated that we are unable to deal with our anger in another way.

Bully in a China Shop

As the Bully in a China Shop, we are like the Merrill Lynch bull wreaking havoc on all the fragile merchandise in a fine China store. We may enter the store with the intent of stating our position rationally, but our anger takes over and pushes us out of control. When we see the damage we are causing, we try to back out of the store. But because we are so unable to channel our anger constructively, we create even more breakage on the way out.

Hot Head

As a Hot Head we act like a pressure cooker that has “popped its lid.” We get rageful with others for small things since so much internal pressure has built up from not dealing with past issues. Others may begin to react to us as if we are a walking time bomb. This stifles their willingness to be genuine with us. Seeing others’ responses and sensing their distance from us further escalates our rage. We justify this verbal violence by proclaiming we are the real victim. We easily rattle off multiple examples of how badly we have been treated by those we see as the “objects” of our anger.

Godzilla

As Godzilla we play the part of an overgrown monster consumed with our internal rage. We are totally oblivious to other people’s feelings, so we step on everyone in sight leaving a disaster in our wake. When we come back through the area later after our anger has subsided, we don’t understand why others are doing a damage assessment. We don’t realize we are the cause of the community’s emergency procedures that are now in place to protect them from any future “rage attacks” we might inflict on them.

Inflated Ego Masks

If we choose to wear an inflated ego mask we need to puff ourselves up like a float at a Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade. In our overblown state we are totally self-absorbed, and we see other people as beneath us. Seeing others in this way means we can’t develop close connections with them. We lose touch with our empathy, and we see human emotions as signs of weakness. For us these weaknesses in others feel intolerable and become our excuse for why they deserve to be exploited for our own purposes.

However, we do not tolerate weakness in ourselves either. Secretly we are afraid if we show any sign of weakness, our inflated ego will pop like a balloon. If we pop, we fear all that will be left of us is a wet piece of rubber on the ground. Then others will see the truth that we are just full of hot air without any substance to back our big talk.

Top Dog

As a Top Dog we need to be “the winner” in all situations. We see life as a competition, so we will do anything to keep from losing. We will even step on our mother if we think we need to. Since emotions are irrelevant, we rarely notice others’ emotions or if we do, we see them as signs of weakness and confirmation that we have won.

As a Top Dog it is difficult have close friends. Friendship requires being a peer with others and developing a mutually supportive relationship. However, as a Top Dog we see this equivalency as losing. We may wonder why others do not want to have long lasting relationships with us. But we don’t spend much energy thinking about the why’s. Our energy is tied up in looking for another way to best others.

Professor

As the Professor we are condescending toward others. We use our superior knowledge or skills to intimidate others and make them feel stupid or inferior. We use our degrees or experience to degrade anyone who challenges us. Even if our expertise is in a specific area, we may act like we are the authority in all other areas of life as well.

As Professor we have an extra wide doorway in our home and office just to accommodate our inflated head. What is inside our head, though, is a secret feeling of stupidity. We might even imagine we really have a pea-sized brain. We think that if we can make others feel less intelligent, somehow we will feel smarter.

Drill Sergeant

As the Drill Sergeant we consider ourselves the undisputed authority, demanding respect from all of those around us. We may use degrading tactics to get others to fall in line and kiss our boots. We attempt to “break” others’ spirits, so they will do whatever we ask. No matter how much others grovel to us, though, we never feel like we have enough personal authority. Under this authoritarian façade we don’t respect ourselves and wish we could get ourselves to fall in line.

Debater

As a Debater we see our interactions with others in either a “right” or “wrong” column based on logic. We are like Mr. Spock on *Star Trek*, who is without emotions. If others get emotional in an argument, we attempt to show them the lack of logic in their response. We need to make others “wrong” to preserve our “rightness.”

People close to us may become infuriated with our narrow perception of “right and wrong thinking” and our need to view life through only logical eyes. But we see their fury as further evidence that they are wrong and flawed human beings. This allows us to continue feeling superior to those who have these humanoid logic defects.

Tough Cookie

As a Tough Cookie we are like a toasted marshmallow, crusty on the outside and mushy on the inside. The crustiness covers the feeling that something is missing at our core. That feeling has merit. Something needs to be solid within us to feel safe in the world.

But what we act out in the exterior world is an impenetrable barrier to hide our mushy core. The energy that we must use to keep the crustiness in place is enormous.

Occasionally, despite our vigilance someone gets under our crustiness. This is when an internal warning signal goes off, “Danger, danger, core melt-down is emanant...Someone is getting too close...Put all exterior defenses in place NOW!” What we don’t realize is this warning is not really about an emanant melt-down of our core. It is an invitation by our core to break through our crustiness to access the heart-felt human connection we secretly yearn to experience.

Control Masks

When we choose one of the many control masks, we are choosing to duck personal responsibility on what we can control and focus instead on areas of life over which we have no control. Whether that is imposing directives on others without their input, attempting to force outcomes that are never going to happen, or trying to bend the laws of nature to our will, we set ourselves up for a world of disappointment. The more disappointment we experience the more we clamp down in our attempt to control. What we fail to realize is that if we just loosened our tight grip often things fall into place on their own and it becomes clear about what we should do instead that is within our personal control.

Orchestra Conductor

As an Orchestra Conductor we do not play with the others in the orchestra. Instead, we act as the master controller of the music. We stand above others. All eyes must be on us before we lift our baton for the playing to begin. When we point at the instruments, we expect the players to play. If we do not point at them, the players are to remain silent. Players who make mistakes get “the look” that lets them know they will be in trouble after the performance. We take credit when others play the music well and blame them if it didn’t meet our stringent standards. While we may get technical perfection by taking this strict stance, what we may miss is the soaring and cohesive quality of the music that comes from musicians who are in synch with one another and letting the music naturally flow through them.

Backseat Driver

As a Backseat Driver we do not fully participate in the ride through life but instead we tell others how to drive their cars. We tell them what to do and where to go. If they choose to take a different route, we berate them for not doing it our way. If the driver gets lost, we say, “I told you where to go, you should have listened to me.” If the car breaks down, we tell the owner how to fix it, even though we may not even know what is under the hood. By staying in the backseat, we never have to take full responsibility for driving our own car. Since we deny ourselves the pleasure of living life fully, we compensate by riding vicariously in other people’s cars.

Movie Star

As a Movie Star we see life as a movie set. Life is not real, but only make-believe, so we are never really ourselves. We play whatever starring role we feel will fit the situation to get what we want. We may create a drama, comedy, or tragedy, with others in our life just playing bit parts. Whatever the type of movie, we are always the center of attention with others orbiting around us.

Whiner

As the Whiner we have “Please take care of me” tattooed on our forehead. We think that if we whine like a child, we can manipulate others into getting what we want. “Self-responsibility” is nonexistent in our vocabulary. If anyone tells us they won’t take care of us, we tell them they are mean or cruel. We sulk, pout, and whine trying to wear them down, so they will cave in and treat us better than we are willing to treat ourselves.

Sneaky Masks

When we choose to wear a sneaky mask, we find excitement in turmoil and conflict. We thrive on the intricacy of interactions. We like to plot and scheme. Secrecy gives us a sense of power. But the power we feel is hollow since our sneakiness is an attempt to hide our real feelings of inadequacy.

Ambush Renegade

As the Ambush Renegade we set traps for those we are angry with. We are very sneaky and deliberate in our planning since revenge is our motive. We patiently wait for just the right moment to make sure all the traps are properly set. We create diversionary tactics if necessary, so our “prey” will be unaware of our snares. We feel a sense of pride after “bringing in the kill,” displaying the dismembered heads of those caught in our traps.

Underlying our outward show of pride is a desire to warn others. We do not want them to fall prey to us, since we know we are unable to stop our own sneakiness. The only way to stop others from being harmed by us is to give them advanced notice of our plans.

Snake in the Grass

As a Snake in the Grass we slink around on our belly, striking at unsuspecting people as they walk by. We do this just to stir up trouble, since we find life dull without conflict or difficulty.

When we see others attending to their bites and wondering who wounded them, we accuse them of having done the deed themselves. We may not accuse the same person every time. We get a thrill out of seeing whether others will accuse anyone else besides us. We find excitement in watching confusion and strife between people, especially when we can stand on the sidelines without being blamed for starting the problems.

Backstabbing Confidant

As the Backstabbing Confidant we act as though we are a friend to others. We encourage them to confide in us and share all their secrets and perceptions about life. We act to their faces as though we are in complete agreement with them.

Behind their backs, we slip out their secrets to those we think can hurt them. We plant the seeds of mistrust in the minds of their friends. We tell them just enough truth about what has been confided to us that their friends feel betrayed and trust us instead.

“Good” Masks

If we choose to wear a “good” mask, we must be willing to do a lot of self-sacrifice. We believe that if we are “good” we will be rewarded externally for our deeds.

Florence Nightingale

As Florence Nightingale we spend our energy taking care of other’s problems rather than our own. We are the selfless martyr who sacrifices ourselves for the outside rewards we get from others. We feel we will get brownie points in heaven for being “good.”

Everybody’s Buddy

As Everybody’s Buddy we have an intense desire to be liked by others. We act more like a dog than a human being. We ask for other’s opinions before we tell our own to make sure we do not offend. We only laugh at jokes that others laugh at first. We compliment others at every possible turn. We do “good” things for others hoping they will notice us and give us a pat on the head.

Goody the Two Shoes Wimp

As Goody the Two Shoes Wimp we cop out on ourselves by letting others determine our destiny. Since we are “good” we believe we should be given things and shouldn’t have to exert our own effort to get what we want. When things are not handed to us by others, we complain that we have been wronged. We do not take matters into our own hands. We continue to stand on the street waiting for handouts and wondering why others won’t give us what we believe our “goodness” deserves.

Nice Nobody

As Nice Nobody, we are nice and accommodating to others even when they are total jerks, or their behavior hurts us greatly. We deny our feelings of hurt or anger. We do not want others to know we really have such “un-nice” feelings. We have a lot vested in having others think we are without flaws. We would rather be nice and a nobody than to be seen and risk having the real us not loved.

Struggle Masks

If we wear a struggle mask we must decide what we want but are not willing to give ourselves. We are like the mythological character, Sisyphus. We must roll our stone of struggle uphill, but never get to the top.

Busy Bee

As the Busy Bee, we run around in “manic mode,” continually *doing* without relaxing. We act like we have one speed...hyperdrive.

We never stop long enough to see if what we are doing really needs to be done. Also, we never consider there might be an easier way to do what we are doing. We do not question whether we really want to do something, or whether it feels uncomfortable.

If we ever feel we are close to running out of things to keep us busy so we can rest, we instead make a list of more to do. We also may ask others to give us their chores to add to our pile. The point of keeping busy is not to be happy or content, but to let ourselves and others know we are indispensable and therefore deserving of recognition and love.

Perennial Procrastinator

As the Perennial Procrastinator, we wait until the last minute to do things so we can create a struggle. We may like to run late for meetings or keep people waiting. The more people we can pull in around us at the last minute to help us in the struggle, the better.

Struggle makes us the center of attention. At least for a short time, because we are the commander telling everyone else how we want the struggle drama to be played out. Like a speedboat going amongst the sailboats, we create a wake that rocks anyone else close by.

Sabotage Specialist

As the Sabotage Specialist we are required to find difficult ways to do things, especially when there is obviously an easier way. If we can walk in a straight line, we instead take a circuitous path just to make it harder on ourselves. We love to tell others in minute detail about how difficult the route is that we have chosen.

We take great pride in the struggle. Since we have struggled, we have a bigger sense of accomplishment when the task is finally complete. If we ever accidentally do something easily, we discount the experience as a fluke and forget it was easy. The only ways that count to us are the difficult ones.

Juggler

As a Juggler we like to keep as many balls in the air as possible just to show how we can handle anything thrown in our direction. Once a situation has become stabilized, we will ask someone to throw us another ball.

When we have as many balls as we can possibly juggle, we add to our routine by twirling a ring on one leg and then a hula hoop on our waist. We get a superior feeling from being able to juggle so much at once. We are judgmental toward others who are not willing to do as much as we do. We feel they are slackers.

Amelia “Ear Heart”

As Amelia “Ear Heart” we play the victim and do not take responsibility for our own issues. Like scout badges, we wear our victimizing struggles on our sleeve as excuses why life is so hard. If anyone asks us why we are making things so difficult, we can point to the badges and “bend their ear” by telling them how the traumas in our life have kept us from being who we could be otherwise.

Grim Grump

As Grim Grump we must see no joy in life, only blackness. We walk around with a frown on our face. We attempt to be a rain cloud on other people’s sunny days. Everything we do is a very serious matter and undertaken in a work like manner. If others try to cajole us out of our grumpy mood, we try instead to bring them down into our misery.

To Play or Not to Play, That is the Question

Now that you've seen the games and the masks, do you still want to live life this way? If you decide you don't, you're going to have to look at things differently. *To take off your mask and end the games playing means you must take responsibility for your part in choosing to play the games and choosing your perception about life.*

If you stop even for a short time, you will never again feel completely comfortable in your mask and playing the games. You will start to see the unholy nature and the absurdity that living with a mask has created for you. Stepping outside the games means that you must do what it takes to embody the happiness and joy you say you want.

If you really want to stop living from behind your mask, read on. But beware! If you want to keep any of these masks on, you should put this book down now. Seeing more may only frustrate you and sabotage your enjoyment of mask wearing.

Chapter 4

The Face Revealed

“Come out, come out, whoever you are.”

We play the games and wear masks because we *believe* we are protecting our tender face beneath. We fear exposing ourselves means our very existence will be threatened or harmed. Wearing masks helps us feel protected. But there is a price to pay when living with masks. The barrier we hide behind under the guise of protection smothers the most precious part of us, our *essence*.

Our essence is the precious gem we treasure more than anything else in life. We will do *anything* we feel we must do to protect it and keep others from taking or damaging it. We will even deceive ourselves if necessary to keep our essence from harm. In the next chapter we will see how we deceive ourselves for “protection.” But now we will examine this precious gem we so carefully guard.

Our Essence Contains Our True Self

Our essence is the inward, pure nature of us as a person, our true substance. It contains the innate qualities that set each person apart from all others. It is our individuality that makes us as unique as a delicate snowflake. Our essence is our real face under the mask.

Essence is not about personality, although personality can show us glimpses of our essence. It is the intangible part of us that is connected to all that is. Some people call it spirit, core, higher self, or soul. Whatever you call it, your unique essence is what makes you, *YOU*.

A Look Behind Our Masks

Since we hide our essence behind masks, we may have forgotten what it is like. But our essence will always have certain qualities even when we do not acknowledge them. We can choose whether we want to be consciously aware of and act on these attributes or not. The following are some of the characteristics that are naturally a part of our essence:

- **Our Portal to “Inner Truth”**

There are two levels of inner truth our essence can access. One is *universal truth* of which we are all a part. Our essence, which is always aligned to universal laws, has access the truths contained in those laws. Much like checking out books from a universal online library we have 24/7 access.

The other inner truth we can access is our *personal truth*, which is relative to us as individualized human beings. It is part of our blueprint that makes us the unique human beings that we are. This is this truth that gives us our personalized perspective on reality. It is also where our inner genius and outer environment meet that allows us to contribute to the world in ways only we can do.

Inner truth is always there, even when we are not willing to acknowledge it. It is something that no one else can give us since we already have it inside. Outside influence can only confirm or challenge our truth but can never replace it. It may be silenced but never killed, no matter what others do to us, or we do to ourselves to try to deny its existence.

- **Free Will is Innately Ours**

No matter what system of government we live under, or what our personal circumstances, we are each innately endowed with free will. There is nothing others can do to the *real* us (our essence). Our bodies can be shackled, our intellect can be challenged, our emotions can be toyed with. But only *we* decide how those outside forces influence us and affect our perception. We may be made to do certain things against our wishes, but no one can make us feel internally about ourselves any other way than how we choose to feel.

Free will means we can choose whether we want to remain free or whether we are willing to allow others to do our thinking for us. There are plenty of examples of people put in isolation or brainwashed to “break their spirit,” so they could be easily controlled. Some people succumb to the outside pressure and others choose to remain internally free. The choice, either consciously or unconsciously, is ours to make.

- **We are Innately Loving**

Just as we cannot stop our heart from beating or our lungs from breathing, love involuntarily emanates from our essence from the time we’re born. Love is the glue that connects us to everything. It is the energy that transcends the three-dimensional reality in which most people experience life.

Love naturally flows in and out of our essence with ease and grace. There is no effort involved in giving or receiving love. It is a limitless wellspring within each of us when we tap into this universal supply.

Some people think there is a finite amount of love available. This is only because they have temporarily forgotten the truth about love or have been conditioned to believe otherwise. There is always more love available than we have already experienced. All we need to do is allow ourselves to feel what already naturally flows through us by our being connected to all that is.

- **We are Perfect as Is**

We are each perfect beings just the way we are. Our essence contains no flaws, just as a snowflake cannot be flawed. We don’t need to justify ourselves for being “different” from others. Of course, we are different. It cannot be otherwise.

People often confuse the “perfection of essence” with the “perfection of our personality.” The fact is our personality can evolve through life, to the extent that we are aware of and connected to the real person under our mask. Rather than think about perfecting our

personality it can be more helpful to see ourselves as becoming more of who we already naturally are. Seeing ourselves from this perspective takes the sharp edges off our conditioned “perfectionistic” tendencies that attempt to fix what is wrong with us. Instead, it brings a gentleness to our evolutionary process, much more akin to a flower coming to full and fragrant bloom.

- **We Each Have Life Force**

Emanating from our essence is a life force from which all our other energy flows. The life force is that spark of power that propels us into humanhood. This force naturally flows throughout our entire being. It is what makes our being and our doing like gliding freely on ice skates.

When we stifle the life force by wearing a mask, the force becomes backed up within us mentally, emotionally, and physically. It is like dammed up water looking for an outlet. Eventually it must come out, but it may not flow where it best serves us. Unblocking our life force energy allows us to experience our natural flow once again. In Sections 3 and 4 of this book we will explore how to clear many of the mental, emotional, and body blockages that impede our ability to flow through life.

- **We are Inherently Strong**

Being strong is not just a trait that a few select people have. Everyone has strength. We have strength to be and do whatever we are innately guided to do, strength to make the best of a situation, and strength to overcome seeming obstacles.

We do not need to be superheroes to realize that we are strong. But we each have a heroic level of strength we carry with us throughout life. It took a lot of strength for each of us just to be born. And if we have made it to adulthood, we have exhibited our strength in countless small and large ways to get to where we are now.

- **We are Innately Open**

As babies we are completely open to learning and showing others who we are. This is because openness is our natural state of being. In an open state we can see choices and possibilities unfold before us. When we allow others to truly know us, we are more likely to fulfill our hearts’ desires.

Openness allows our essence to come to the surface, so it can guide us through life. When we are directed from within, there is no fear of failure at anything we do, since every experience is seen as an opportunity to learn something new about other people and about ourselves.

- **We are Energy**

All matter in the universe is made up of energy. The form of the energy takes on certain shapes that we see as our three-dimensional reality. But energy is not limited to only what we see. As we have all experienced when we love someone, there is an energy that is felt, even though it cannot be seen. We know this loving energy exists even though it lies beyond our five senses.

Such is the case with being in human form. We, too, are pure energy. The form of our energy is unique to us. Like strings on a guitar, we each have a unique resonance that vibrates at a specific frequency. When we align ourselves to our natural energy vibration, it allows us to flow through life rather than being dragged through it kicking and screaming.

- **We are Pure Consciousness**

We are not our thoughts. We are not our emotions. We are not our bodies. And we are not our actions. So, what are we?

Our essence is pure consciousness that is beyond what we can take in through our five senses or what we are able to do with our body or mind. When we go beyond our senses and connect with our pure consciousness, we are transformed. We are no longer just “*human doing*.” We truly become *human beings*.

Moving to the “being” level of consciousness allows us to experience life from a broader perspective. We see endless possibilities, tap into the universal knowledge, experience infinite creativity, discover our full potential, awaken to the beauty of everything around us, and know that we are unbounded and free.

We experience bliss when we acknowledge our pure consciousness. Bliss goes beyond the emotion of happiness. Bliss is pure ecstasy. It is expressed at every level of our being down to our DNA structure. Bliss allows our energy to vibrate in synchrony with the universal energy that brings us ultimate peace.

- **All Our Answers are Contained Internally**

We may need to be reminded by outside sources about what we already know. But the fact remains that anything or anyone outside of us only serves to jog our memories. Sometimes others say things that we know are not true. This also serves to clarify our answers by clearing away the “non-answers.”

If we are willing to listen to our essence, it will always give us an answer. Only we can know the *answer that is uniquely our own*. When it is our answer, we may have an emotional sense or a body sensation of having hit the jackpot. We may begin to tingle all over, get a burst of energy, or want to shout, jump for joy, or cry. There may be an enormous sense of peace that wraps around us. The verification of the truth will vary from person to person and experience to experience. But there will be an internal sign that helps us know the answer reflects our inner truth.

Answers may come in many forms. A co-worker may say something to us at just the right time. A passage in a book may remind us of what we had written in a journal entry but forgotten. An image in meditation or prayer may guide us to a new perspective we hadn't considered. A letter from a friend may speak directly to the part of us that needs encouragement. Or a billboard's message may be the key we needed to spark our creative process. There are infinite ways our answers reveal themselves to us. But even if the message appears to come from outside of us, it is our *internal ability to see the message as a key to our truth* that gives us the answer we sometimes didn't even realize we were searching for.

- **We are Inherently Wise**

Human beings have an amazing knowingness. As a species we have wisdom on many levels that most people are just beginning to understand. Our wisdom extends to the smallest molecules in our microscopic world all the way into universal consciousness.

There is also wisdom in our ability to read ourselves and other people. Everyone has everyone else's blueprint. We really know all there is to know about one another. There are no true secrets. We know how to separate out truth from falsehood and we know what is really coming from the essence and what is coming from another source. We may choose to cover over this wisdom, but it is there waiting to be uncloaked.

There is also an immense amount of wisdom contained in our body. Body wisdom may not be as articulate as other aspects of our essence, but when we slow down enough to really listen to what our body is attempting to convey, it can guide us to our optimal wellbeing.

We are Innately Balanced

We are each born with an internal gyroscope that helps us maintain perfect balance. At our birth we are balanced on so many levels. Our centers of energy (chakras) are balanced. Our emotions are balanced. Our body is in balance with all its parts. Our breathing is in balance. Our entire system naturally fits together harmoniously to allow us to go through life with grace and ease.

There is no need to struggle when we operate from our essence. Struggle happens only when we attempt to override our natural balance by thinking that something other than our essence can do it better. Here are some of the aspects of balance that help calibrate our internal gyroscope:

- **We are Innately Capable of Giving and Receiving**

Part of the balance that is contained in our essence is our ability to be both a giver and a receiver. This does not just mean with money, although money is one outward

experience that gives us lessons on giving and receiving. But we also have an innate balance of giving and receiving in the areas of emotional support, physical touching, spiritual nurturing, and many other areas.

We only get out of balance with giving and receiving when we deny or ignore our essence. So, if we are feeling out of balance on either the giving or the receiving end, we are blocking our natural balance.

- **We are Naturally Connected to Everyone**

The feeling of separation or isolation from others is simply a self-imposed illusion. We all are connected through love, the glue that holds humanity together. We may choose to block or numb our connection, but it is still there waiting for us to reach out and experience it.

We are part of a whole that forms this network of humanity. We each have a unique role to play in this community of people. It is up to us to figure out how we fit into this grand puzzle. When we are connected to ourselves, we are guided to our natural connection with others.

- **We Know We Have Lessons to Learn**

When we come into life, we each have a specific curriculum to further our personal and collective evolution. By examining our patterns of perceptions and interactions with the world around us, we are given repeated opportunities to embody the teachings, so we can move through life with greater meaning and flow with a natural ease.

We can choose to work through the lessons or not. If we choose not to, that is all right, too. We will get another chance at it later. The scenarios may look slightly different, but the underlying teachings will be the same. Just acknowledging that we even have lessons to learn is a first step to owning the truth of this. If we find ourselves struggling, it may be our wakeup call to pay attention to what is right in front of us to understand at a more conscious level.

- **We Each Know What We Want to Contribute**

We each have special contributions to give to one another and to the world that only we can make. Much of what our life is about is learning the skills, acquiring the knowledge, and discovering what we need to have as tools that help us to do our part.

Our contribution must come from our own unique calling, or we will constantly be dissatisfied fulfilling someone else's version of what we "should" contribute. A lot of what we learn is weeding out choices that do not fulfill our inner truth's desires. Many times, by process of elimination, we can see our true choices standing shining before us.

- **We are Each Doing the Best We Can**

Each of us is doing the best we can, coming from the level of awareness we have in any given moment. Some people choose to spend an entire lifetime repeating lessons without understanding their meaning. They may need the same situation to happen over and over until they hit bottom so they can say, “No more. The pattern ends here.” Other people may face lessons and go through them very quickly. No one can say what is right for us. There is no set timetable for all people or a certain way we “should” learn. This is not meant to be used as an excuse for not facing our issues. It is simply a statement that everyone has their own unique pace and methods for discovering their true essence.

When the qualities of our essence are revealed, it is no wonder we are so protective of this most precious gem within. Unfortunately, in the effort to protect our essence, we may fall prey to the masks’ promises to protect our essence for us better than we can protect it ourselves. Ironically, what we end up doing is sacrificing our essence to somehow save it. In the next section, we will examine why we do this.

Section 2

Lies of the Mask

Chapter 5

The Mask's Lying Contract

“Never mind what it says, just sign here.”

When we feel secure about who we are, we know we can take care of our own essence. But being secure within ourselves is not something promoted in our society comprised of so many mask-wearers.

Most of us have been deceived for so long about our truth and essence we have become brainwashed. We continue to be sucked into the “lies of the mask” because we do not know how to think, feel, or act for ourselves. Our indoctrination is so complete that unless we break the spell of the mask now, we will not only continue to hurt ourselves. We will also unwittingly preserve and perpetuate the mask's lies for future generations.

In this chapter we will examine some of the ways we deceive ourselves, so we can agree to play the “games of the mask” and take on roles that do not fit our truth. We will also explore how we've unconsciously agreed to a contract that “seals the deal” and binds us to a life of misery behind our games playing and mask wearing. As we become consciously aware of what we have agreed to, it becomes clear why it has felt so necessary to cling to a façade to hide behind. We can then start to unwind the false beliefs we've taken on as our own and compassionately address the painful feelings we've endured for so long.

Agreeing to Live by the Contract

Living from behind a mask automatically means that we have agreed to the “mask's lying” at some very deep levels. We are allowing something or someone other than our true self to dictate our behavior, attitudes, values, and feelings. Instead of ignoring anything outside of us and going about our own business, we listen to the lies and decide to act as though they are true.

It is as if the mask gives us an imaginary contract to sign. If we want to play with everyone else (i.e. feel connection and experience a sense of camaraderie), we must sign on the dotted line. Not wanting to be left out, we sign the contract without even reading it to see what we have agreed to.

The only way the “mask's lying contract” can go into effect is if both parties agree to the lies that their individual masks have created. *If either party does not agree to accept the lie and chooses to stand firm in his or her truth, the contract falls apart.*

Provisions of the “Mask's Lying Contract” We Agree to:

1. The mask knows what is best for us. We should ignore all intuition or feelings that contradict what the mask tells us.
2. The mask is all-wise and all-knowing. We do not need to think. If we think that we are wiser or know anything, it really means we are stupid or ignorant.
3. The mask is strong, we are weak. We must depend on and draw upon the mask for our strength.
4. The mask is well-rounded and together. We are wounded, scattered, sick, or deluded about ourselves or the world around us.

5. Living without the mask can cause us great harm. There is no way we can protect ourselves. Without the mask's defenses, we are at the mercy of anyone who wants to hurt us.
6. There is no freedom unless the mask grants it to us.
7. Self-responsibility is oppressive responsibility. Relinquishing our power to the mask makes our life easy and safe.
8. The mask decides what emotions we are permitted to feel, and it will determine how those emotions are allowed to be expressed. If we feel other emotions, there is something wrong with us. We must bury those emotions so no one will know we have experienced them.
9. Someone must be blamed if things go wrong. The mask only takes responsibility for things perceived as right or good. Once the mask assigns blame, we must go along with the mask's assessment and act as though blame is part of our reality.
10. Life is complicated. The mask must decipher what it all means. It would be impossible for us to figure it out with our simpleton minds.
11. Uniformity of thinking and behaving is all that is permitted. The mask does not tolerate any other ideas, thoughts, actions, or behaviors. Nonconformity indicates deviance or mental illness.
12. Individuality is a sign of selfishness and perversion. Only the mask can tell us who we are supposed to be.
13. There are finite resources available to us. All resources are controlled by the mask and must be carefully doled out, since we don't have the discretion or discipline to use resources appropriately.
14. This contract is binding upon the signer. Any attempt to get out of the contract will result in severe penalties being imposed, including death if necessary to enforce all provisions in this contract.

Your signature

Date

At the point we sign the "mask's lying contract," we have unknowingly given ourselves over to a tyrant. If we later attempt to get out of the contract, the tyrant mask will point to the last provision to remind us that the contract is permanently binding.

Self-Deceptions Bind Us to the Mask's Lies

If we believe we are stuck with the mask's contract, we will have to twist and contort our perception of ourselves and our inner truth. This attempt to cover over our essence takes an immense amount of "self-deception" energy. It is like trying to perpetually keep a giant beach ball under water.

The mask is willing to plant the seed within us that there is something profoundly flawed about our essence. That is the only way it can continue its position of power over us. Whenever we start to feel good about ourselves, the mask whispers in our ear that there is

something fundamentally wrong with us. It is only by continually bombarding us with these lies about ourselves that the tyrant mask can keep us brainwashed into believing it has real control over us. Here are some of the self-deceptions we must believe to hold this contract in place:

- **Self-Deception 1: We Believe We are Bad**

Because we perceive ourselves as bad, this is what we project into the world. We attempt to get others to validate our badness by doing and saying things that will get people to dislike us.

Example: Ginger grew up in a very tough neighborhood. She developed a reputation as being a “rotten” kid. She robbed old ladies with a knife, just to see their fear. She smashed car windows with a baseball bat and waited to see the owners’ reactions. Now she is an adult. She just got a job at a manufacturing company, on the assembly line. On the first day, she picked a fight with the woman next to her and purposely put parts on backward to see if anyone would notice. She acted out her bad behavior to tell herself she was innately a bad person who had to uphold that reputation with her co-workers.

- **Self-Deception 2: We Believe Something is Wrong Within Us or We are Defective**

Twisting our perception of ourselves into what the mask says is true, makes us feel like something is desperately wrong. But we mistake the “something is wrong” as emanating from our essence rather than from living in an impossible reality created by the “lies of the mask.” Because we feel powerless to turn against the mask, we instead turn against ourselves. When we feel something is wrong with us, we add another layer to our mask to keep people from seeing who we really are.

Example: Frances was a battered wife. She knew something was very wrong. But instead of seeing that what was wrong was being in an abusive relationship, she blamed herself. She stayed in her marriage, continually trying to find and fix what was wrong with her. She was afraid to leave, fearing that if she did it would expose to others her massive defects.

- **Self-Deception 3: We Believe We are Unlovable**

If we think we are bad or something is wrong with us, we may believe we are unlovable. Even when other people show us love, we may reject it so we can keep ourselves deluded.

Example: James was dating Cindy. Cindy was very open in her affection for James. Every time she said, “I love you,” James flinched. He felt as if a lightning bolt stabbed his heart. The more Cindy expressed her love, the more James gave her the cold shoulder. Since James felt unlovable, he believed that anyone who said they love him must be lying.

- **Self-Deception 4: We Don't Believe it is Possible to Get Love**

We believe love is like a carrot at the end of a stick just out of our reach. It is something to strive for, but never obtain. We, therefore, keep love at arm's length to

prove that it isn't possible to experience. If someone comes into our life who gives us the love we want, we may sabotage or end the relationship. The game of "push-pull" is a very familiar one.

Example: Alice was perpetually looking for a man to love her. But every time one came into her life, she looked at her list of her "perfect man" and she found some excuse why this one was not Mr. Right. She complained to her friends that love seemed to be just a fantasy. She lamented that others who say they are in love are simply deluding themselves.

- **Self-Deception 5: We Believe We are Less Adequate Than Others**

We extrapolate the comparison of outward abilities as an indictment on the value of our essence. We don't see our unique qualities as strengths. Instead, we focus on our weaknesses or "faults," so we can put ourselves down. Is it any wonder we buy into a "one up, one down" mentality when we see others as superior to the very essence of who we are?

Example: Ronnie, who was a great mathematician, heard George playing the piano. He thought, "Look at how well George plays the piano. I'm not as good as George, since I have no skills on the keyboard." Ronnie completely overlooked his mathematical ability as having just as much merit as George's talent on the piano.

- **Self-Deception 6: We Feel Stupid or Unintelligent**

Even though our intellectual IQ might say otherwise, we may feel stupid or less intelligent than other people. We may put ourselves down due to our different background. Or maybe someone told us we are stupid and we believed it. The fact is we each have a unique genius that can take many forms besides intellectual I.Q. There are those who are considered "eggheads" who can't beat their way out of a paper bag in a situation we may find very easy to deal with. Maybe our genius is in the form of street savvy or a well-developed emotional I.Q. When we look for evidence of what we lack in intellect, we miss the cues that point to where our genius authentically shines.

Example: Jeannie never went to college. Instead, she worked as an office manager for a large law firm. She always felt stupid when speaking to the attorneys. She acted as though they knew more about life than she did since they went to law school. She ignored the fact that she had an amazing ability to organize and remember details. All the attorneys who worked with her valued Jeannie immensely for her ability to keep the office running smoothly while they did their legal work. No matter how much the attorneys expressed their appreciation for her unique contributions, though, Jeannie discounted her abilities and focused instead on feeling inferior due to her lack of formal education.

- **Self-Deception 7: We Believe We are Unimportant or Unworthy**

We feel we must prove ourselves worthy of being here on earth. We have forgotten that if we are alive, we automatically are important and worthy. When we don't set

our own course in life or feel we continually must prove our worth, we set ourselves up to fit into other people's views of what is important and worthy. When we do this, we suppress what we naturally are guided to contribute.

Example: Juan's father was an accountant. So were Juan's two brothers. Juan really hated working with numbers, even though he had helped in his father's business since he was 16 years old. His secret love was writing music. But he felt unworthy as a son since he didn't want to follow his brothers into his father's profession. Juan stayed up nights writing depressing songs about how unworthy he felt. He failed to realize that accepting music as his unique gift was his ticket out of feeling so unworthy and blocking his ability to fulfill his potential.

- **Self-Deception 8: We Believe We are Untrustworthy**

If we believe we can't be trusted, we may act out toward others to prove we are not trustworthy. By betraying others, we reinforce this belief about ourselves.

Example: Fred was almost always at least 30 minutes late for dinner at restaurants when meeting his wife, Amanda. Eventually Amanda became fed up and told Fred in the future if he was more than 15 minutes late, she would leave the restaurant without him. Fred agrees he would change, but as he was walking out of his office on the evening of their next dinner date with his wife, he found paperwork that *needed* to be done before the next day's meeting. Instead of leaving so he could be on time, he stayed to do the paperwork, which made him 40 minutes late for dinner. When his wife was not at the restaurant, he said to himself, "I knew I couldn't get here on time." Fred sabotaged himself and his relationship, so he could prove to himself that he was untrustworthy.

- **Self-Deception 9: We Believe Our Perceptions Cannot be Trusted**

One way to believe the mask's many lies is to quit trusting our perception of reality. To do this we need to shut down what we clearly see, hear, and know. But no matter how far underground we shove our reality, it is still stored in our psyche and body. Over time if we do not acknowledge the truth of our perception, it will leak out in self-destructive ways.

Example: Sandra just saw her brother molest her younger sister as she has seen so many times before. At first Sandra was horrified about what she saw. But now she denies to herself that anything is wrong. Instead, she tells herself, "Oh, Bill was just tickling Barbara." Denying her perception of this horrific situation seems preferable to expressing her rage. Sandra is afraid if her rage ever comes out, she will kill her brother. But denial doesn't make the *intensity of her feelings* go away. Sandra gets stabbing stomach pains that just won't go away. By focusing on her personal pain, she doesn't have to act on the molestations she has repeatedly witnesses.

- **Self-Deception 10: We Believe We Must Live a Life of Suffering**

Attempting to live our life the way someone else wants us to live it, rather than the way we want to, automatically means we will not be going with our natural flow. Going against our natural inclinations makes us very angry. In our self-anger we may punish ourselves by suffering. It is the only way we know to keep doing something other than what brings us joy and makes us feel fully alive.

Example: Mabel suffers from chronic back pain and heart problems. She suffers because she sees her children “wreck” their lives. She suffers because she has had an unhappy marriage for over 50 years and has never gotten the love she really wanted. Mabel is a life-long sufferer who feels that life is passing her by since she has never enjoyed life or gotten to do what she really wanted to do.

- **Self-Deception 11: We Don't Believe There is Enough to Go Around**

We have a belief that there is lack in the world. Lack of money, lack of support, lack of love, lack of resources, lack of opportunities, etc. There is a lack of everything—except lack. This is a very insidious belief since lack is exactly what we will draw to ourselves when this is what we believe. Lack also fuels our self-doubts and fear of the world. Within us we have a feeling of “not being enough,” so we are afraid to show the world who we are. We do not want to be ridiculed for lacking a sense of wholeness.

Example: Beverly was a hairdresser who was always low on funds. No matter how many extra clients she added, she never had quite enough money at the end of the month to pay the rent and her car payment. She saw herself as lacking skills to get a better paying job. Beverly doubted she could ever have a better life since she believed she didn't have enough gumption or substance to ever amount to much.

- **Self-Deception 12: We Believe We Are Trapped**

Believing the mask's lies boxes us into a world that is not our own. We may feel like caged animals without realizing the reason. We don't give ourselves freedom to explore other options, since we believe our whole world might fall apart. To maintain this view, we must keep ourselves narrowly focused on how things “have to be” according to the mask. We reject alternative perceptions, so we can remain trapped in our illusory cage.

Example: Wayne worked at a job he hated. He believed he has no option but stay. He had a house with a mortgage and two kids, with another on the way. He wanted to change fields, but he felt trapped by all the obligations. He got depressed thinking about his lack of options. Because Wayne felt so trapped, he didn't bother to look for another job, take classes to improve his skills, or even talk to others about his true desires. He closed out all possibilities by his unwillingness to entertain any alternate perceptions.

- **Self-Deception 13: We Act as if We Don't Have Courage**

The mask is always ready to tell us that courage will bring pain with even greater intensity. The desire to avoid pain is an underlying reason it is difficult for so many of us to access our own courage. We believe if we feel the pain at the heart of our issues, it will hurt so badly that the pain will never go away. Since we may have not yet experienced the *release that comes from leaning into our pain*, we do not know there is joy on the other side. So, the very thing we so desperately avoid, a perceived perpetual pain, is exactly what we draw to us.

Example: From the time Lucinda was a small child she showed innate talent as an ice skater, and she excelled in junior competitions. Her heart's desire was to skate in the Olympics. She knew deep down she had what it took to be a champion, except for one thing. She lacked courage. She was afraid if she began competing at the national and international level, she would not reach her ultimate dream. She was so afraid she would not succeed that she held herself back from even trying. Lucinda's failure to push through her fear of possible disappointment, kept her from accessing the immense pool of courage innately within her just waiting to be tapped. She failed to allow her courage to give her the confidence to go as far as possible with her immense skating talent.

As the above self-deception examples indicate, when we are willing to deceive ourselves, the "mask's lying contract" is well on its way to having complete control over us. The mask can then coast along simply reminding us periodically of the contract we signed, while we continue to brainwash ourselves.

Chapter 6

Playing Bullies and Victims: Acting Out the Mask's Lies

“If I've flogged you once, I've flogged you a thousand times.”

The “mask's lying contract” remains only a grotesque idea until we agree to play roles to activate and actualize the contract. This can become a bizarre live game. Because the mask must act like a bully to get us to live out the contract, it is no wonder that the game of “bully/victim” is a cornerstone of the mask's contract.

If we decide not to play a role in the game anymore, the mask points out that the contract is permanently binding. Any attempt to nullify the contract will cause severe punishment. The irony, of course, is that we can get out of the contract any time we want. Nothing can stop us except our belief that we are conscripted for life. If everyone operated from their truth and ignored the mask's lies, the contract would dissolve into oblivion.

Behavior Versus the Real Person

When we encounter someone, whose behavior is bullying or that of a victim, we can be sure we are not seeing the real person. We are instead seeing a “bully” or “victim” mask. This is a defensive covering to protect the person beneath it, who has been hurt or brainwashed by the mask's lies. We may be experiencing bullying *behavior*, but the actual *person* is not a bully. We may be seeing someone *acting* like a victim, but the actual *person* is not a victim. This distinction is very important since it is that very confusion that allows us to buy into the “mask's lying contract” and the game of “bully/victim.”

Opposite Sides of the Same Coin

People who play roles of bullies and victims have many similarities. They each wear masks to hide the truth of who they are from the world. They each use self-deception to live by the “mask's lying contract.” And they each are so enmeshed in the game that they are unable to see that they are even playing the “bully/victim” game. The difference between the two roles is only in the way self-deception is played out and their view of themselves and their relationship to others. Thus, the bully and victim roles are simply opposite sides of the same coin. An internal flip of the coin can make a bully into a victim or a victim into a bully. As long as they flip back and forth between bully and victim, they stay trapped on the face of the coin, never rising up from this flatland to live a multi-dimensional life beyond their self-imposed prison.

Deciding Between Bully and Victim Masks

How people decide which side of the bully/victim coin to be on is something that is very individualistic and will need to be explored on a case-by-case basis. But there are some common factors that go into the decision about whether to play the bully or victim role. Some of the differences include:

- **How Truth is Sacrificed**

Both bullies and victims sacrifice their truth to play the “games of the mask.”

- **Bullies** sacrifice their truth for *power over* others. They deny their feelings and the feelings of others. They attempt to make others as uncomfortable as they are, thereby denying responsibility for their own issues.
- **Victims** sacrifice their truth to *get along* with others. They deny their reality to keep others from feeling uncomfortable. They ignore their personal feelings and inner knowing, so others won't have to face their own traumas and pain.

- **Whose False Reality is Believed**

Both bullies and victims believe and act from a false reality of their mask instead of dealing with life from their truth.

- **Bullies** believe that their reality must be everyone's reality. Even when others have a difference of opinion, bullies demand that others see their reality as **THE** reality. Conformity to their belief system gives bullies a sense of false righteousness. If they can get others to agree with them, then they *must* be right.
- **Victims** suspend (or pretend to suspend) their reality to go along with the bully's perspective. They do this to be loved, cared for, have someone else make their decisions, or avoid standing up for themselves. Conformity to another's belief system is the price victims pay when they relinquish control of their lives.

- **Who is Blamed**

Both bullies and victims look for someone else to blame for their negative feelings or behaviors. They do this to weasel out of self-responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

- **Bullies** blame anyone and everyone for how they are when they don't like something. Bullies search for a scapegoat, even if they must get very creative to find someone other than themselves.
- **Victims** act to bullies' faces as if they accept the blame that the bullies dump on them. But behind a bully's back they tell others how shabbily they have been treated by the bully.

- **Where Action is Focused**

Both bullies and victims focus attention on playing out the “games of the mask,” rather than on their individual truth. Their energy is so consumed in games playing that there is little left to nurture the real person.

- **Bullies** act as if they are the *center of attention*. All others are supposed to orbit around them. Everyone's energy is focused their direction. Bullies will sacrifice others' feelings or rights, so they can maintain their starring role.
- **Victims** act like stagehands and *bit players in the bully's drama*, catering to the bully's every whim. Some victims will sacrifice their entire self, if necessary, to accomplish this. Victims fear being in a starring role themselves. They are afraid being the center of attention will expose their flaws for all the world to see and it open them to personal attack.
- **Where the Self is Perceived in a "Hierarchy"**

In accepting the "mask's lying contract," people place themselves in a "one up, one down" hierarchy based on their perceived value in relation to all others. In this value system there must be someone higher and someone lower in status, ability, worthiness, etc. Bullies and victims are necessary to maintain this "pecking order." The hierarchy is exposed for the illusion that it is when people realize they are peers with all other human beings, with no one more valuable than anyone else.

 - **Bullies** act as though they are higher than other mere mortals in the hierarchy. Living in the fantasy of their overblown egos, allows them to feel superior, instead of facing the fact that they have human foibles just like everyone else.
 - **Victims** act as if they are lower than others in the hierarchy. Their sense of inferiority lets them off the hook for taking personal responsibility for their lives. It keeps them prostrating themselves before other's perceived power, rather than owning their own power and living life on their own terms.
- **How the Self is Defended**

Bullies and victims both need to defend themselves, since they do not feel comfortable showing their true selves.

 - **Bullies** act as though the best defense is an *offense*. They see things in terms of attack. If they attack others first, maybe no one will see who they really are and try to hurt them.
 - **Victims** act as if the best defense is to *retreat*. They see the world as a scary place with someone ready to attack them behind every corner. They tie up their energy in staying in this role, and looking for places to retreat, so they won't be confronted or need to stand up for themselves.
- **What is Acted Out Instead of Assertiveness**

Neither bullies nor victims act assertively since they don't know how.

 - **Bullies** generally behave *aggressively*. They attempt to do things by force, whether it is physical force or verbal force. They try to *make* things happen.
 - **Victims** generally behave *passively*. They attempt to stay out of the way of the bully's force, not wanting to be run over. They hope things will magically work out for them if they just get out of the bully's way.

- **How the Self is Portrayed to Others**

Since both bullies and victims wear masks, they hide their true selves from others.

- **Bullies** attempt to look *stronger* than they really are. They are afraid that others will see them as weak, so they pump themselves up like a bullfrog to protect themselves. Their boundaries very often extend into other people's space.
- **Victims** attempt to look *weaker* than they really are. They are afraid that they will be perceived as a threat to others if they show their true strength. They squeeze themselves down as if they live in a sardine can. Their boundaries are often so collapsed that others can easily run rampant in their space.

- **How to Get What is Desired**

Both bullies and victims seek outside themselves to get what they want. They think they will feel better about themselves if others give them the love, attention, respect, loyalty, or material items they desire.

- **Bullies** try to make others give to them by *demanding*. They set themselves up to be godlike figures who must be appeased. Others are supposed to bring them sacrifices, so the wrath of these "gods" will not be incurred.
- **Victims** try to get others to give to them by *groveling*. They may do this by promising loyalty, cajoling, pleading, or whining. They will crawl long distances on their bellies if they think it will get others to give them what they want.

- **Who Has Control**

Both bullies and victims look outside themselves for control since they feel out of control in their own lives.

- **Bullies** leverage the weaknesses and flaws in others to control them. Bullies believe that controlling others demonstrates how together and in charge of their lives they really are.
- **Victims** look for weaknesses and flaws in themselves. They believe if they can give enough of their control away, they will be taken care of by others. Then they won't have to become their own best advocate and take charge of their own lives.

Acting Like Bullies

*"Bullies may feel powerful,
but they do not feel accepted or loved."*

—Lillian Katz, Ph.D.

A bully is defined as a person who hurts, frightens, or tyrannizes those who are smaller or weaker. We are used to talking about bullies in the context of children. The terms "neighborhood bully" and the "schoolyard bully" are well-known. But we rarely talk about the role of bullying behavior in the adult world. Instead, we talk about "power games," "ego trips," "politics," "we're number one," "that's just the way it is," "this is reality, take it or leave it," etc. Most of us let ourselves become conditioned into coping with situations or developing the behavior of people we abhor, since it is easier to play games than to figure out another way to live.

Some kinds of bullying are more socially acceptable than others. This depends on what circles we move in. But the social acceptability of bullying behavior does not make it any healthier. We may not always be conscious of this, but at a deep level we each know when we are accepting the “mask’s lying contract” and it doesn’t feel good.

Physical Bullying

The object of physical bullying is to hurt, frighten, intimidate, or *wear down people’s will* so they will be easy to control. It requires making others fear for their physical safety. Superiority of size, physical strength, or weapons are often used or threatened to further terrorize people.

- **Examples of Physically Bullying Individuals:**
 - Hitting a spouse
 - Spanking a child
 - Mugging someone in a dark alley
 - Kidnapping
 - Rape

- **Examples of Physically Bullying Groups:**
 - Robbing a bank full of people at gunpoint
 - Hijacking an airplane
 - Driving a vehicle into a crowd of people

Mental Bullying

Mental bullying is hurting, frightening, or tyrannizing people’s *thinking* reality. We each create our thinking reality by taking in information from all our senses and synthesizing it into our perception of the world.

Mental bullying may produce more long-term scars than physical bullying. It damages at deeper levels than just physically and can become a traumatizing experience. It makes people question their thinking processes, which are so crucial to functioning effectively in the world. Those who feel bullied already feel weak in some portion of their thinking process. People who mentally bully others sense this and kick others while they are down, so those being bullied further question their internal reality. One of the hallmarks of mental bullying is *gaslighting*, which makes a person doubt their sanity through psychological manipulation. When people question their own sanity, they may feel it necessary to suspend their own reality and try to adopt that of those who are bullying them to escape the pain.

- **Example of mentally bullying another person:**

A boss attempts to mentally bully a subordinate who questioned an earlier directive if he said, “Jim, I never gave you that order. I would never say such a thing. What makes you think a thing like that?”

- **Example of mentally bullying a group of people:**

In his election campaign, a presidential candidate uses the campaign slogan: "NO NEW TAXES." When he is elected and raises taxes, he says in a news conference, "My opponents have been spreading vicious lies about me. I have consistently said that I did not favor an *income tax* increase. But it is obvious that we will have to raise other types of taxes."

Emotional Bullying

Emotional bullying is hurting, frightening, or tyrannizing people's *feeling* reality. If emotional bullying is consistently done to people over time, they may armor up and quit feeling, become numb, or mistake the real emotion being felt for another emotion. This may include feeling anger but expressing sadness. Or those being bullied may indeed feel the emotion, but later feel guilt and self-blame for having their own true emotional reaction.

- **Example of emotionally bullying another person:**

Arthur says to his son, Benjamin, "Young man, quit your crying right now. That is nothing to cry about."

- **Example of mentally bullying groups of people:**

Mrs. Flynn is a teacher who has just made a fool of herself in class. She turns beet red as she shouts to the class, "I want you to quit laughing. There is nothing funny here. Wipe those smiles off your faces or you'll get an F in my class!"

Spiritual Bullying

Spiritual bullying is hurting, frightening, or tyrannizing people's *core beliefs about themselves*. Spiritual bullying can be very overt such as a preacher telling a congregation, "You are going to burn in hell for your evil ways." But it can be much more subtle, such as when a parent doesn't allow a musically talented child to develop that talent.

Spiritual bullying hasn't been talked about much in our society but the damage to individuals can be very devastating. Prolonged spiritual bullying can cause people to deaden their passion for life. Once their passion is zapped, the rest of life may feel hollow or like we are the walking dead operating on automatic pilot.

- **Example of spiritually bullying another person:**

Rosalyn says to her son, Roger, "I hate looking at you. You look just like your father, and I hate your father's guts. He is a worthless bum and you're turning out to be just like him."

- **Example of spiritually bullying groups of people:**

Bill is a boot camp drill sergeant. He says to new recruits, "You are the scum from the bottom of my shoe. You aren't fit to live on this earth. But I'm going to make you *act* like men even though you aren't."

Hero Worship of the Bully

Throughout history bullies (and tyrants), whether fictional or real, have been revered and worshiped as heroes. Ruthless leaders in history include Genghis Khan, Alexander “The Great,” Julius Caesar, and more recently Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump. Bullies are worshipped in such popular movie characters as Marlon Brando’s *The Godfather*, Chuck Norris’s *Delta Force* Series, Bruce Willis’s *Die Hard* Series, Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Tiger*, Sylvester Stallone’s *Rambo* Series, Clint Eastwood’s *Dirty Harry* Series, and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator* Series. Many have argued that some of these fictional characters are only symbols of good triumphing over evil. The fact remains that all that they have done is to switch roles. The former bully is now bullied by the “good guy” using force against force. One character is still down while another is up. There is now just a different player who has come out on top.

Bullying Under the Guise of Love

Part of the reason we worship bullies is our belief that, “Right justifies might.” It is still a cornerstone of our view of reality. The underlying premise is that bullying others can be a loving gesture, if it is done with a good intent. This attitude is very pervasive in cultures around the world. The phrase, “Spare the rod, spoil the child,” came out of the belief that if we hit children, it can be a way to show our love.

We see many authority figures who believe their role is to bully others into doing what is “good” for them. Judges issue community service as punishment for crimes. Military boot camp instructors make recruits clean restroom floors with toothbrushes for minor rule infractions. And nations justify singling out residents considered “dangerous to their culture” and incarcerate them in detention centers, ghettos, or reeducation camps. The “might is right” attitude sends clear signals that “if you say you love someone, it’s okay to bully them as long as you can justify it to yourself in the name of love and enough people agree with you.”

This is not to say that as individuals and societies we should not hold one another accountable for our actions. Clearly this is necessary for us individually and collectively to thrive. But when we think force is the only way to demonstrate our love, we miss the opportunity to find other creative and healthy approaches to show our love while honoring the essence of all involved.

Acting Like Victims

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

— **Eleanor Roosevelt**

People who decide to play the victim role have agreed to read the “script of lies” and take directions from someone else rather than their own truth. Victims play the part of the wounded one, the sick one, the small one, the deluded one, the stupid one, or the silly one. They act out the “poor me” role.

Having forgotten who they truly are, victims often become very attached to their role over time. They can recount their victim history in minute detail and describe an elaborate story of how they have been victims their entire lives. They proudly wear incidents that “happened to them” like scout badges they have earned fair and square.

Fear is a hallmark of victimhood. Victims convince themselves that the wrath of the mask must be feared above all. *Although they may say they desperately want to get out from under the control of the mask, the truth is that what they really fear most is freedom from their self-imposed prison.* With freedom comes personal responsibility for all our choices, the good, the bad and the ugly.

Hurting Our Bodies

The body is our haven. It contains our essence. If we feel safe within our body, then we will feel safe about exploring the realm of emotional, mental, and spiritual growth. If our body feels unsafe, we will be preoccupied with survival. Without our body remaining alive, all else will be moot.

Most of us were taught, however, not to trust our bodies. We were encouraged to override our body's understanding of the world and ourselves. The natural things our body knows are covered over by what others have told us. As children, we were told to trust adults who "knew better." As we get older, we still carry the feeling that our bodies cannot be trusted. Some people have taken this feeling to an extreme, viewing the body only as a machine or a vessel for carrying their head. These views deny the fact that our body contains valuable wisdom and can be our partner in discovering our truth.

Hurting and victimizing our body is one of our favorite pastimes as a victim. We often spend an inordinate amount of energy (and money) to hurt our bodies to hide ourselves and keep our truth buried.

There is ritual and decorum around body victimization that has been built into our culture. We gather so we can victimize ourselves together and even gloat to one another about who outdid who in hurting ourselves. We revel in "all you can eat" food orgies and stuff ourselves into gluttony. At sporting events we drink alcohol to excess and stagger around with one another in a mental fog in the name of fun. We go to Botox parties to numb parts of our face, so we won't show the effects of our natural aging process.

Society dictates to us how we are to hurt ourselves by telling us what is "proper" and "acceptable," such as cigarette ads that show us how cool it is to smoke. Conformity is stressed because if we all victimize our bodies in the same way, there is no one to remind us that we are damaging our most precious vehicle that carries us through life. There are so many ways to victimize our bodies that it would be impossible to look at all the creative ways humans have devised to do it. Here are a few of them:

- **Examples of common ways we hurt our bodies:**
 - Overeating, bulimia, anorexia
 - Denying ourselves enough sleep
 - Over- or under-exercising
 - Addiction to caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, drugs, and sex
 - Bombarding (overstimulating) ourselves with noise and sights
 - In the name of beauty-piercing ears and noses, tummy tucks, tattoos, artificial tanning
 - Wearing uncomfortable clothes including tight pants, high heels, and neck ties
 - Shallow breathing
 - Self-mutilation, including biting fingernails, slashing wrists, cutting on ourselves
 - Having repeated accidents

Using Our Thoughts Against Ourselves

Mental bullying questions our thinking reality. When we choose to mentally victimize ourselves, our mask plays mind games with us to see if we will buy into its lies. It uses our thoughts as weapons against us. (See more about this in *Chapter 11*.) This is only possible when we are not in touch with our truth. When we know ourselves, we have a solid foundation that no one, not even a very smart mask, can shake by attempting cheap tricks of the mind.

- **Examples of common messages whispered in our ear by our mask in hopes our thoughts can be used against us:**
 - “Stupid, stupid, stupid. I can’t ever get anything right.”
 - “I can’t believe I was such a ding-a-ling.”
 - “I must be crazy to think a thing like that.”
 - “I’m too helpless to do that.”
 - “There I go again, being weird.”
 - “I always crack under pressure. I can never count on myself.”
 - “I’m so lazy.”
 - “I can’t be trusted.”

Emotionally Wounding Ourselves

When we emotionally victimize ourselves, it hurts our feeling reality. It is a way to control us. If we can be made to feel numb or confused about our emotions, then we begin living like wind-up dolls, going in directions decided by others.

The only way we can be emotionally victimized is if we deny our true feelings and relegate them to a life of exile. It is not that we don’t have feelings. We simply have stuffed them deep down inside ourselves. Without access to our *real* feelings, though, we lose touch with our true selves and doubt our reality.

When our feelings are in exile, we are subject to the whims of a mask, whether it is our own or someone else’s. Wounding ourselves emotionally is like wearing a neon sign saying, “Please hurt me.” If we are willing to pick at our own wounds, those who bully say, “Sounds like fun. I’ll take you up on your offer to join in and pick on you, too.”

- **Examples of ways we let our mask pick on us to emotionally wound us:**
 - “Don’t feel it. Don’t *even* think it.”
 - “I must be very sick to feel that!”
 - “Ignore those feelings. They’ll go away.”
 - “I’m too old to cry about a thing like that.”
 - “I can’t feel that. It hurts way too much.”
 - “I don’t feel a thing.”
 - “That didn’t hurt my feelings.”
 - “I don’t feel any anger.”
 - “This is not a laughing matter. It is very serious.”
 - “Don’t get too used to feeling good. Pain and suffering are just around the corner.”

Spiritually Maiming Ourselves

We spiritually maim ourselves when we disconnect from our essence or believe that our truth has no value. We do further spiritual damage when we believe we are not connected to something greater than the mask of ourselves or others.

If we see God (or whatever term we use whether it is Source, Divine, All That Is, etc.) as a punishing force, we may also spiritually harm ourselves. We confuse God with our mask rather than accepting the fact that we have bought into a limited *perception* of God.

As spiritual victims, we may feel like we are in the middle of an ocean of futility clinging to the sides of a mask that is shaped to seem like a life raft. Prolonged spiritual abuse can deaden us and make us lose a passion and a zest for life. Without passion and zest, life can feel meaningless. There are many ways we devalue our truth and spiritual connection. Here are a few of the ways we do it:

- **We Deny Our Needs and Desires**

We may act like we are needless and desireless. Because we really do have needs and desires, we try to attach ourselves to others, who we feel have more “valid” ones. Or we may become numb and stuff our needs and desires even further down inside us.

- **We Put Ourselves Last**

This is a very common one among those who are champions of spiritual victimization. We may do this in small ways like always choosing the movie our partner wants to watch and never mentioning we'd like to see something different. We may fix all the meals for the family no matter how tired we are without asking for assistance. Or we may volunteer thousands of service hours to the community but never sign up for the dance class we've always wanted to take.

- **We Deny Our Creativity**

We may deny our creativity since we have been conditioned to think our creativity has no value in life. Some of us have so completely suppressed our creativity that we don't believe we have a creative bone in our body. When our natural creativity is squelched, we may feel deadened. This is especially true if we are doing everything else except what brings us joy.

Examples:

- Shannon really is a poet at heart but does electrical engineering as a career since her family believes that is the only worthy profession that brings honor to her family.
- Jim is a very good cartoonist but feels he could never make a living at cartooning, so he works at a fast-food restaurant. In his boredom he scribbles cartoons on napkins and throws them away at the end of his shift.
- In high school Janet had an eye for photography and dreamed of being a professional photographer. But as a woman she felt she “should” be a caregiver, so she chose instead to run a day care center.

- **We Disconnect from Our Hearts**

When we don't love ourselves, it is difficult to love others or feel strongly about life. We may become like Ebenezer Scrooge with a sour disposition. Or we may become a "talking head," simply carried around by our body, but numb to anything other than logic or reason. Disconnecting from our heart takes a great deal of effort. Our radiant heart is always there reminding us we can open to self-love, connect deeply to others, and experience universal love anytime we want.

Examples:

- "I don't deserve love."
- "I'm a worthless human being."
- "I'm so ashamed of myself."
- "I'm fundamentally a bad person."

- **We Hold Back Our Passion**

Whether our passion is exploring through lifelong learning, sexuality, creating culinary delights, or connecting with other cultures, when we play the spiritual victim, we hold ourselves back from experiencing what we are naturally curious to find out about in life. We are like racehorses in the starting gate, waiting for something or someone else to release our pent-up passion. When we are not in touch with this life force waiting to burst forth, we may mistakenly believe that passion is a finite resource rather than an underground spring, continually flowing whenever we want to access it. Or we may mistakenly believe that there is something innately bad about tapping into passion and if we do, it will lead us down a dark path we should avoid. But avoiding our passion only drives it deeper underground. Eventually this wellspring will find fissures in our mask's façade, so it can emerge to encourage us to experience life more fully.

The Role of Shame in the Game of "Bully/Victim"

Shame is the act of making others feel bad to manipulate their feelings or behavior. It is a tool used often by those who bully. The intent of shaming is to get people to conform to a certain reality other than the one they naturally have. Attempting to shame others is only necessary when one's own personal reality has a shaky foundation. When our reality is solidly grounded in truth and integrity, there is no need to manipulate anyone else through shame.

Shame can only be given to others if they are willing to take it. Shame is like a ball of energy. If the ball is tossed by the senders, but the potential receivers refuse to accept the shaming energy, it falls flat. It is then up to the senders to decide what to do with the "shame ball." They have several options. They may attempt to throw the shaming energy to the same receiver again to see if the receiver takes it this time. Or they can find someone new to throw the

“shame ball” to instead. Or they can examine why they felt the need to send shaming energy in the first place. If the sender takes this third option, their energy is freed up to instead amplify the strengths in others rather than shame them.

There has been reference in some codependency literature about “healthy shame.” Healthy shame has been described by others as reminding us that we are not God and that we have a relationship to people in this world. But this is not shame at all. Knowing that we are not God and that we have relationships in the world around us does not require any shaming. It does require a broader perspective of the universal laws to see that we are a part of the whole yet have wholeness within ourselves. Shaming others for not having that perspective does not change their perspective. It does, however, often leave them feeling bad about themselves.

It is important to understand the difference between shame and accountability. Shaming affects the spiritual level of another's essence by attempting to make them feel there is something fundamentally bad about them or innately wrong with who they are. *Accountability holds others responsible for their behavior, while honoring their innate value as a human being.* While it is true that people can act however they want, to maintain healthy bonds with one another and build trusting relationships, it is important that we hold one another accountable AND do our best not violate the holism of others or ourselves.

The Role of Blame in the “Bully/Victim” Game

As we discussed earlier, blaming is one of the provisions of the “mask's lying contract.” It keeps our energy focused *outward* looking for someone or something to dump our issues on. The fact is most of the time our energy is better spent looking *internally*, where the real issues lie beneath our desire to blame.

And why do we choose to blame? Because *avoiding responsibility* may seem like an easy way out of difficulties and it is what we have learned how to do all our lives. As siblings we learned how to blame one another for things we did to avoid getting into trouble. We saw our parents blame one another for problems in their marriage, to avoid taking responsibility for the parts each of them played in creating the difficulties. We see political parties blame one another for the ills of the country, to avoid the hard work of co-creating positive and healthy solutions.

Whatever the level of blame, most people would rather avoid stirring things up inside than do the painful introspection needed to get to the root of issues and the profound level of personal work required to clear blame. While continuing to blame may seem on the surface like taking the easy way out, though, it has long term consequences. Not only do we personally continue to suffer from all the drama and trauma blame creates. By not resolving our underlying issues, we assure future generations will suffer through the same issues we have avoided facing.

The Role of Fault-Finding in the Game of "Bully/Victim"

Fault-finding is very close to blame in the way we expend our energy. We can spend an inordinate amount of time looking for someone's flaws and assigning fault to them. This gives us a justification to blame that person for our reaction to them.

Looking for faults is a way to pick a person apart like a vulture at a desert feast. Picking on someone else's faults is saying, "See, you have faults that I don't. So, I'm better than you." It's a way to feel superior to the person being picked on. What our dissection of others really says is, "If I look long enough here, I'll find a part of you I can blame for my feelings and perceptions of the world." In other words, we use fault-finding to deny our personal responsibility for our own issues.

Finding fault is not the same as seeing people for who they truly are. There is judgment involved in finding fault. Judgment is not present when we simply observe the whole person. From this vantage point we see strengths and weaknesses from a detached perspective where there is no need to find fault or to pick on anyone's weaknesses.

Deciding Whether to Identify as a Victim

It is difficult for many people to accept, but it is our choice whether identify as a victim. Some people get very angry when they hear this, especially if they are in the middle of feeling victimized by something or someone. They don't want to believe they have chosen to do something so hurtful to themselves.

It is true that to fully get over feeling like victims, we may need to go through a period of *fully* feeling the experience of being victimized. We need to know to our core that we did not deserve the treatment we got, past or present. This period of clearing our sense of victimization may vary in length from person to person and this fact should not be discounted. It is by owning the real feelings we have that we can work through them and move on. Only we know the truth of whether we are in a clearing phase or if we have crossed over into "victimization as an identity" that keeps us from living life fully and meaningfully.

There are all kinds of reasons we can manufacture to justify why we feel we have no choice for our long-suffering victimization. There is a lot of blaming we can do about it. We can say that it is his fault, her fault, my rough childhood, society's fault, the government's fault, men's fault, women's fault, the situation's fault, or the kitchen sink's fault. But placing blame only gives our power away and as we discussed earlier, ties us more tightly into the "mask's lying contract." It is only by extracting our energy from the all-consuming bully/victim minutia that we free ourselves from our "mask of victimization."

Even as children, we had choices about how we perceived what happened to us. For example, in the same family with more than one child and an abusive parent, different children viewed or experienced the abuse in different ways. George, a sensitive child, took in the shaming words told to him by his mom. He ruminated on them. He personalized them and began to think of himself as a "bad person." When his sister Sarah was beaten or yelled at by their mom, Sarah saw her mom's hitting and yelling as "that Mom is going at it again." Sarah knew that the abuse was not her fault and she let it roll off. As an adult, George now

sees his abusive childhood as a major trauma that ruined his life. He feels immobilized by it and attributes his not being able to hold a steady job to his “bad childhood.” Sarah sees her childhood as something that helped her understand that other people have problems and need help. She sees her experience as giving her compassion for other people in abusive situations.

There are many adults like Sarah who use their childhood experiences as “grist for the mill” to rise above circumstances that seem to hold others down. These people *choose* not to be victims. They can let abuse roll off them, realizing that abuse says nothing about them personally. To them abuse only shows the masks of those who abuse.

By stating that we have choices about our victimization, some people might think what is being said is that victims are at fault for their situation. However, this is not the case. Part of playing the game of “bully/victim” is believing that there must be *someone* to blame or at fault, whether it is another person or ourselves. When we take fault finding and blame out of the equation, we can rise above the “bully/victim” game and see that ultimately there are only situations to learn from. How we choose to perceive a situation determines whether we *feel* like a victim.

Another example may further clarify this point. Two women are raped in separate instances, but similar scenarios. Sheila hangs on to the rape scene for years, feeling angry, violated, hostile, and desiring revenge. She blames society for allowing people like her rapist to exist. She hates all men because of what one man did to her. She hangs on to the rape as one of her badges to show that “life has done her wrong.” She *feels* like a victim, and it has become her long-term identity.

Jill, who was also raped, may have gone through all the same feelings as Sheila did after the incident. She, too, felt like a victim at first. She, too, felt angry, violated, hostile, and desired revenge. But she was able to put the rape behind her after some time, not because she forgot about it or numbed out to the experience. Rather Jill was able to *fully* deal with her feelings and beliefs about herself and others. She was willing to dive down to the root of her pain, anger, and fear. With self-compassion she was able to step-by-step move beyond each of these intense feelings to an internal sense of clarity and peace.

Jill is now no longer tied into the rapist's energy by dwelling on it. She does not hang onto blame, so she does not hate all men for the actions of one man. She goes on with her life as a stronger person for the insight she gained from seeing the rapist for the troubled person he was. She knows that she is blameless and has a good sense of self-esteem. She feels good about herself, and she did not let the rapist's intrusion on her body ruin her life. She sees the incident as a lesson for her that no matter what others do to her physically, she will not let it say anything about her as a person. Is she a victim? Not if she doesn't *feel like one*.

As Jill illustrates, when we take responsibility for our own feelings and perceptions about our interactions with people, we stop feeling like victims. Many people get stuck right there and end up mucking about endlessly in their victimization. They are unwilling to accept self-responsibility for their *current* feelings and perceptions about past situations. They know that to do that would require self-examination and that is something they are afraid to do. They would rather continue to blame others so they can divert energy away from facing themselves. When we can raise our head above the muck, we can see that blaming others and feeling like a victim only ties us even tighter to the “mask's lying contract.”

Taking Bullies Off the Pedestals

We may not like bullying behavior, but because there is such reverence in our society for bullies, we may put them on a pedestal like mythical gods and goddesses. If we act out bullying behavior, we may have put ourselves on our own God-like pedestal. But pedestals are dangerous places to be since they can be knocked over at any time. Without being firmly planted on the ground *and* anchored in their own essence, bullies are more likely to fall on their faces.

Knowing that bullying is a pretense makes it easier to see the authentic human beneath the façade of the bully persona. While it does not excuse or let them off the hook for bad behavior, it can help us feel more compassion for them and have curiosity about what they are so vigorously attempting to hide about their essence. *Compassion and curiosity are our superpowers.* No longer are we cowed by others. The next time someone exhibits bullying behavior or attempts to place themselves on a pedestal, we will be ready to do our part to transform our own personal part in the “bully/victim” dynamic.

Chapter 7

Manipulation and Gullibility: Feeding the Mask's Lies

"If you'll believe this, you'll believe anything."

Preying on people's gullibility has been used through the ages to control people. Gullibility can be used on a grand scale such as Adolf Hitler did. He played on the blind faith of the German people to follow him. He got them to destroy millions of people and entire countries to further his desire to control much of the Western world before his regime was destroyed. We see Vladimir Putin operating from the Hitler playbook for many of his tactics with the people of Russia related to his invasion of Ukraine.

Gullibility can also be used on a smaller scale such as when children twist parents around their little finger to get toys in a store or when teenagers get on their parents' "good side" to butter them up for a big ask like outlaying money for car. No matter what the scale, the gullibility of others has been exploited and will continue to be as long as people are not aware of how their own weaknesses are used against them by manipulators.

What is Gullibility?

Gullibility means one is being easily cheated or tricked. Gullible people allow their boundaries to be invaded and accept others' reality as their own. There is so much garbage allowed in from the exterior that an individual's inner truth is suffocated. One of the most often used statements by people who realize they have been gullible is, "How could I have been so stupid?" No one likes to be taken in or tricked by anyone else but without access to internal truth, the gullible person may be doomed to repeat the pattern many times. As if walking through a thick fog, gullible people are blind to seeing the part they play in creating their own gullibility.

Confusing Gullibility with Innocence

Innocence is freedom from guile or cunning; it is simplicity. It implies purity, a trusting nature, and not being tainted with a cynical attitude. Innocence is what many gullible people think that they are being. Images of the "innocence of a child" seem appealing because they imply a pristine quality of not yet having been jaded or armored with mistrust of the world.

But innocence is different from gullibility in that our inner truth is easily accessed when innocence is present. There is simplicity in the connection between the inner and outer world. To see this, all we need to do is listen to a child quickly cut through an untruth. This is what the story, "The Emperor's New Clothes" was about. The adults were willing to buy into the emperor's reality (mask's lie) that he was wearing clothes. It was the child who had the courage to speak the simple truth, "He has no clothes."

Manipulation as a Substitute for Self-Responsibility

Manipulation means to manage or control artfully, by shrewd use of influence, often in an unfair or fraudulent way. *Manipulation is what bullies do* to hurt, frighten, or tyrannize people. Underlying manipulation is an internal desire to *get* something. Manipulation comes from a need to have others do something, be a certain way, or give something.

When we were very young, we manipulated to get our needs met. For many of us it was a tool we used for our survival. But as adults, we no longer need to manipulate others to survive. We are completely self-contained in our ability to meet our own needs and desires. If we manipulate now, we are doing it because at some level we have abdicated our own personal responsibility.

Gullibility and Manipulation Are Opposite Sides of the Same Coin

Gullibility is to victimization as manipulation is to bullying. Both gullibility and manipulation are what we use to get others to take care of our needs and desires. So, like bullying and victimization, gullibility and manipulation are opposite sides of the same coin. Both the gullible one and the manipulator toss their self-responsibility back and forth in hopes that the other one will do what they are not willing to do for themselves.

Behind our mask of gullibility, we are subject to manipulation because we feel disconnected from our truth and power. Without tapping into our own true power, we attach power and responsibility to others. Without listening to our truth, we have no way to check the validity and honesty of others' words and actions.

Rarely are we purely the gullible one or purely the manipulative one. We may frequently switch roles, sometimes in the middle of a situation. It is also important to remember, as we discussed in the sections on bullies and victims, that the *behavior* of people may seem gullible or manipulative, but the *real people* beneath are never either one. Removing the mask of gullibility gets rid of our victimization. Removing the mask of manipulation gets rid of our bullying. Once these masks are off, our truth will feel safe enough to reveal itself to us.

Understanding the Difference Between Manipulation and Facilitation

To facilitate is to make easy or easier. Facilitation is the opposite of manipulation in that it comes from an internal desire to *give*. Facilitators do not ask for anything in return for those they support. They do not need to control situations or make others do anything or act in a particular way. When they assist others, facilitators do not ask for recognition or thanks. They are like wells that are fed by springs. They have no need to be filled up by someone else since they are filled from their own internal sources.

Sometimes there is confusion about whether something is manipulation or facilitation. People who bully will cloak manipulation in the guise of facilitation in such statements as, "I'm only doing this for your own good." or "I am just trying to help you."

If you look at the underlying motives of statements such as these, manipulation is at the root. When a parent hits a child, saying it is to “discipline” the child, the hitting is often really based on the parent’s anger, frustration, or need to control. The parent may be trying to get the child to do what the parent won’t do for him or herself, which is to be mature enough to find a non-violent approach to developing personal discipline. When friends give us unsolicited advice saying they want to help us, they really may want to live vicariously through us since they are not willing to take responsibility for their own lives.

A way to determine which is occurring, manipulation or facilitation, is to do this simple check: When others act from their weakness or gullibility, what do we do? If we manipulate, we take advantage of their weaknesses or gullibility to turn it to our advantage. If we facilitate, we don’t take advantage of the situation. Instead, we honor others’ boundaries and do not step on them, even when others invite us to do so. We do this for the pure joy of supporting others and championing them as they build the self-trust to live their lives more fully.

Controlling Groups Through Their Gullibility

As we mentioned in the last chapter, throughout history bullies have been worshiped as heroes, whether they are real or fictional. People who have worn tyrant’s masks have received special attention because of their ability to bully masses of people at the same time. They are held in reverence even though they may be despised for their deeds. Much of the fascination with tyrants is how they can steamroll over so many people without being stopped.

There have been reams of books written about how particular tyrants, like Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun, Napoleon, and Hitler to name just a few, were able to do what they did. Even though the regimes of these tyrants did not end well, as a world civilization we still haven’t learned the lesson of tyranny as evidence of recent rise of authoritarianism and “strong men” forms of government around the world.¹ *The bullying behavior of tyrants is only considered powerful because people wittingly or unwittingly choose to be victims.* The many choose to kneel before the few or one, buying into the bullying contract that was held out for them to sign.

¹ For more detail about the rise of authoritarianism and tyranny, you may be interested in reading:

- Ruth Ben-Ghiat. [*Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*](#). New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2020.
- Anne Applebaum. [*Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*](#). New York: Anchor Books, 2021.
- Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. [*How Democracies Die*](#). New York: Penguin Random House, LLC, 2019.
- Masha Gessen. [*Surviving Autocracy*](#). New York: Riverhead Books, 2021.

How Groups are Manipulated

Not all methods of mass manipulation are as flamboyant and noteworthy as the tyrants mentioned above. But the principal ways of bullying groups of people through manipulation still applies, whatever the level of tyranny. Whether the person acts like a political tyrant, a hijacker of an airline, a high school principal, a corporate boss, or an abusive parent, the methods used to bully groups of people are very similar:

- **Lumping People Together to Deny Personal Identity**

One of the first things tyrants attempt to do is to strip away personal identity. Individuality is strictly taboo in a tyrannical system. Individuals are difficult to control since they have their own agenda, not the agenda of the tyrant. So, herding people together like sheep is what any tyrant worth their salt will do. There are many ways to do this, but one of the best is to give all people the same new identity. Nationalistic banners, slogans, flags, colors, special names, uniforms, mascots, lapel pins, and talking about being “team players” are all ways to create a new identity.

People who didn't like their own identities anyway are more susceptible to this type of manipulation. They willingly give up their old identity with the hope that the new one assigned by the tyrant will be better. While they may have initially been drawn to the tyrant's group to meet like-minded people, eventually the connections end up being allegiance to the identity of the group, rather than the actual individuals involved in the organization.

- **Keeping Individuals Moving and Doing**

If people are kept busy moving and doing, they will not have time or energy left to think about what they personally want or need. They may feel frustrated, but since they are moving at the pace the tyrant demands rather than their own, they may not even realize why they are so frustrated. If they ever do express their frustration, the tyrant will tell them the source of their frustration is that they are not doing enough to meet the tyrant's demands.

- **Promoting the Big Lie**

The lies may start out small as a test to see if tyrants will be challenged. When their fabrications are not pointed out by others, the lies get bigger. Then the lies become outrageous. But by that time tyrants have people caught in their web of deceit like spiders drawing in their prey. People so want to believe what they are told that this way of deceiving groups works surprisingly well. The axiom of tyrants is: *Say the opposite of the truth with a straight face long enough and people will start to believe the lie.* When tyrants turn their big lies into snappy slogans and chant them at the top of their lungs in a call and response with a group, the tyrant often can whip the crowd into a frenzied mob that will blindly do the tyrant's bidding no matter how nefarious or bizarre.

- **Diverting Attention and Energy Away from the Real Issue**

This is one of the oldest tricks in the tyrant's book. It is like telling people to look the other way while you steal something from them. But groups keep falling for it, so tyrants keep using this technique. They do this by:

- Focusing energy on materialism and away from the inner longing for meaningful connections.
- Focusing energy on production and away from individual's definition of self-worth.
- Developing a "common" enemy to keep people from seeing how they are being manipulated, used, or lied to by the tyrant.
- Playing groups against one another to channel anger away from the tyrant.

- **Keeping People Ignorant so They Won't See the Whole Story**

Doling out small pieces of information without disclosing the whole picture is a common ploy used by tyrants to control groups. If people don't know the real story, they generally will not be angry with the tyrant. When a few people get close to discovering what is really going on, tyrants will strategically release "disinformation" (lies) to throw groups off the scent. If anyone outside the group points out the obvious lies or tries to rationally explain the real facts, tyrants will proclaim that the truth tellers are the liars. Tyrants further divert attention away from the truth by focusing the group on chasing trails of false information so the real story can remain hidden. Eventually, group members become so confused or exhausted in their search that they ignore anything other than what the tyrant says is true.

- **Exploiting Individual Weaknesses**

The hallmark of all good tyrants is to manipulate groups by exploiting individual weaknesses. When people feel weak or inadequate in a personal area, they are easy targets for conversion to the tyrant's cause. Here are some of the ways weaknesses are used to further the tyrant's agenda:²

Individual Weaknesses	Through Group Manipulation Become
Sense of isolation	Group belonging
Low self-worth	Being a somebody in the organization
Personal poverty	Social status bestowed by manipulator
Lost faith in self	Faith in the cause
Feeling that personal life is boring	Spying on others, spreading gossip
No sense of personal excellence	Proclaim the tyrant's "all knowing" excellence

² Adapted from Eric Hoffer. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movement*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1951, p. 12-16.

Why Individuals Accept Group Manipulation

Tyrants delude themselves and those they victimize into believing that they can decide better for groups of people than individuals can decide for themselves. Responsibility is given over to the tyrant, without question, by those who choose to be manipulated or feel they are victims.

But why is it that so many individuals are willing to be bullied along with others? *Most people don't want the responsibility that comes with freedom.* Freedom requires us to accept responsibility for all that happens to us. And responsibility requires us to think and feel on our own. Most people are not willing to do that. It feels like a burden. We would much rather have others to blame when things do not go our way. And as we have seen earlier, this is the classic victim mentality.

If we see the world as a harsh or scary place to be, we may seek others to take responsibility for us as a cushion between us and the "big bad world." We place ourselves in the role of children who still need to be protected by parents. At some level we feel we are too little to be out in the world on our own. It is as if we have our eyes tightly closed, so we won't have to see or deal with the things that frighten us about life. We want someone, anyone, to lead us through this scary world.

Those who manipulate groups of people play on individuals who are desperate to relinquish personal responsibility to someone else. While manipulators promise to fulfill our needs and desires, they count on us to keep our eyes tightly shut so we won't see how our choice to abdicate our personal responsibility leaves us vulnerable to exploitation. Here are a few of our issues that manipulators use to exploit us:

- **They Play on Our Desire to Make Order Out of Chaos**

As human beings, we have a desire to bring meaning to our lives. We seek to make order out of the universe, which can feel very chaotic. We want to solve the universal puzzle, so we can find our place in it. And we want to tame the unpredictable so we can feel safe in a world filled with unknowns.

In our desire to understand, we look for clues from others who are also searching for the same thing. We are served well by others when we take pieces of information from them with a grain of salt and adopt only what fits for us personally. This is how we remain independent thinkers. Gathering sources of information from a variety of sources can broaden our perspective even further.

We become subject to the manipulation of others when we suspend our thinking and say to ourselves, "They have the one true answer. I'll stop searching and follow them instead." It is following of others unquestioningly, which makes us easy to lead around by the nose.

- **They Play on Our Desire for Connection**

Human beings are by nature social creatures, who need connections to other humans to thrive and fully enjoy life. As adults, it is important that we fully connect to ourselves at

all levels, so we know just how much connection with others we really need. Otherwise, we begin to “cling” to other people in a desperate attempt to have them fill the black hole within us that is our lack of self-connection.

When we substitute external connections for our natural internal connection, we may seek to “belong.” We begin to define ourselves by the groups of people we associate with. We do this if we define ourselves through our nationality, our social status, job title, political affiliation, etc. It is when we define ourselves in terms of others, that we are ripe for group manipulation.

This is not to say that just because we are members of groups, we necessarily are subject to manipulation, or that we lack self-connection if we are in groups. But if our identity *depends* on the group, or if we care about their opinion of us more than we care about our opinion of ourselves, we open ourselves up to group manipulation.

- **They Play on Our Desire to Contribute to the World**

We all have a desire to contribute to the world in some significant way. We want to make a difference and feel that our lives matter. When we are not clear about our reason for being here, we may seek others to define our contribution for us. Instead of internally owning what is innately valuable about us, we may draw our sense of value from being part of a group or organization. If we allow our value to be defined by anyone or any organization outside of us, we open ourselves to being manipulated to prove our self-worth.

- **They Play on Our Desire for Immortality**

One reason we want to contribute to the world is our desire to live on in some form after we die. If we leave a legacy it will show that we existed. We also may want to feel connected to future generations or see ourselves as a link in the eternal chain of humanity.

When we feel fearful about dying or don't have a sense of being part of a greater whole, tyrants see this fear or disconnect as an opportunity to exploit our vulnerability. They may promise us immortality if we monetarily contribute to their organization or perform certain tasks for them. What they say either overtly or subtly is, “If you do this, you will be remembered and rewarded.” The implication is that if we don't do what they want, we will be forgotten or have the wrath of God (in the form of the tyrant) reign down on us.

- **They Play on Our Desire to Feel Powerful**

We all have a desire to be a powerful force in the world. We want to feel a sense of control over our own destiny. Many people have felt so smashed down throughout their lives, however, that they don't have a sense of their own personal power. To regain it, they may look to others who promise to give them that missing sense of power.

When we join a group, if we are not accessing our power independent of the group, we may draw on the group's collective energy to substitute for our personal power. This abdication of responsibility leaves our fate in the hands of the group.

This is not to say that there is anything inherently harmful about group energy. To the contrary. When groups work at their optimal level, they encourage individual members to own their personal power, knowing that the mutual support amplifies the collective effort toward positive transformation.

When groups instead amplify individuals' weaknesses, though, at best they create a "group think" mentality that further dilutes personal power. At worse they incite a "mob mentality" that uses the group's collective power of fear and/or rage to intimidate or run over others for the accumulation of power of the tyrant and others at the top of the tyrant's orbit. The individual members in this type of group, may temporarily feel powerful, but ultimately are left feeling hollow, since their power was not generated from within themselves.

- **They Play on Our Desire to Experience Love**

We all have a desire to receive and give unconditional love. When we allow love to flow in and out unhampered, we can make a straight-line connections to others. If we shut off the flow of love on either the incoming or the outgoing end, however, we numb out to our experience of life on some level. When we are in this numbed state, we are subject to tyrants who offer us membership in groups that will "love us."

These types of groups gladly take us in and initially show us loving support. But very quickly they show us there are conditions attached to that love. If we do not adhere to the conditions (like loyalty, silence, or a strict doctrine), the love is often cut off just as quickly as it was turned on. This is a sure sign it was not real love, which is naturally and continuously radiant. It was a manipulation of our "heart strings" designed to keep us tightly tied to the group.

- **They Play on Our Desire for Hope**

We all have desires in life and to fulfill those desires we need hope. We "hope" the future will be better, hope there is life after death, hope we will get a check in the mail, etc. Sometimes though, because of repeated disappointments, we begin to doubt ourselves and lose hope that we will ever fulfill our dreams. This is when we are most susceptible to placing our hope in the hands of a group that says they can guide us to the "promised land" of personal fulfillment.

Tyrants use groups to channel their adherents' hopes in one direction, the direction of the tyrant's vision of the future. At first a member's deviation from that vision is seen as a *misunderstanding* of what "should be" hoped for. Later deviations may be considered *subversive* or even *sabotaging* to the group's vision. This is when members of the group pity or shun those who do not share their hoped-for vision.

All these tactics are designed to mold the group members into the tyrant's likeness, rather than encourage its members to trust themselves and figure out ways to follow their own path to a more hopeful future.

- **They Play on Our Desire for Freedom**

Our essence wants us to be free. We all know this at a deep level. We want to be free of the oppression and pressure that we feel is placed on us. But many of us still believe the portion of the "mask's lying contract" that states self-responsibility is an oppressive responsibility. If we have never been truly self-responsible, we do not understand that freedom comes with self-responsibility. So, we fear freedom more than we do the oppression of the mask.

Tyrants know this about us, so they offer us an alternative to freedom through the groups they head. *What they offer us is parental care in exchange for our adult freedom.* When we are part of a group, we no longer make decisions. Decisions are made for us and instead we are given rules to follow. We no longer think for ourselves. The thinking is done for us and handed back to us as doctrine. We no longer feel our own feelings. Emotions are sanitized for us and come back to us as "fervor for the cause." We are no longer responsible for our actions. Actions are translated and handed back to us as orders that must be followed.

- **They Play on Our Desire for Truth**

Our desire for truth is a fundamental part of our human nature. To find truth is to find ourselves. Our connection to universal truth and personal truth are our foundation. When we build our lives on our innate truth, our sense of individuality is solid. We can withstand whatever we encounter in life.

If we are not connected to our personal truth, our lives are built on a shaky foundation. In our desperation to keep our lives from crumbling, we may look outside ourselves to create that foundation for us. If a group offers us truth to cling to, we may grab onto it as a life raft.

When we fall prey to group manipulation we begin to believe that our truth must exactly match the group's truth. Tyrants are great promoters of "the one truth" that is, of course, their own. Good tyrants can convince groups that "the one truth" will solve the problems of the world, sometime in the future. Not now, of course, but if followed strictly over time (often accompanied by large contributions), people's lives will change for the better. But when we build our lives on *anyone else's truth or empty promises*, our lives will never really feel like our own. Along with this realization we may also find our wallets are empty, too.

By following truths outside ourselves, we buy into the underlying implication that we can "escape" what we don't like about ourselves. As social philosopher and author Eric Hoffer says, "The urge to escape our real self is also an urge to escape the rational and the obvious. The refusal to see ourselves as we are, develops a distaste for facts and

cold logic.”³ To believe the truth of a group, we must “disbelieve” everything else that does not fit the group’s belief system. When we encounter new information, instead of considering whether it has personal validity, we throw it out as irrelevant and opt instead to be a “true believer.”

Tyrants are well aware of this group dynamic. Once we have bought into their beliefs hook, line, and sinker, they flatter us by calling us “insiders.” It is at this point tyrants know they can step up the group manipulation. They get the “insiders” to follow even more outrageous commands, which none of the insiders would otherwise consider without their peer group members backing their actions.

Pretending Others Can Think for Us

Of course, no one can ever really do our thinking for us. Even when tyrants offer their own truths and groups accept, the contract can never really be fulfilled. Since we are all unique individuals, even when we relinquish our responsibility and turn our thinking over to others, we eventually become discontent, angry, rebellious, or deadened. So, we accept the tyrant’s version of the game of “Let’s Pretend.” The variation that we play to be manipulated in groups is “The Sheep that Graze Together, Stay in a Daze Together.”

Making Ourselves Easy Prey to Manipulation

Those who manipulate are good at reading people. They instantly spot those who are gullible, as if they are wearing a flashing neon sign around their necks saying, “Take me, I’m yours. Have your way with me.” Manipulators see these signs even when we are unaware we are wearing them. They do this by scanning us and taking our conscious and unconscious measure. It is our very lack of self-awareness that allows them to “hook us” and reel us in when we least expect it.

There is often a childlike glee sparked in manipulators when they can draw us onto their hooks of control. If we don’t take their bait, many times they quickly lose interest in us and move on to others who can be more easily hooked. But what makes us such easy prey for manipulators? And what is it about us that allows manipulators to read gullibility sign within us so easily when we are so blind to those signs?

- **They Play on Our Lack of Self-Understanding**

When we understand who we are and love ourselves, no matter our human foibles, we radiate self-confidence that acts as a repellent to many manipulators. But when we feel unsure of ourselves, lack self-understanding, or are disconnected to our true self, we don't radiate a personal self-confidence. As a result, we often pull in our energy making us easy prey to spot for those who want to exploit us.

³ Eric Hoffer. [*The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*](#). New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1951, p. 83.

If we find ourselves feeling pressured by others to disclose intimate details or to justify our thoughts or feelings, we may want to stop speaking to them and refocus our attention on understanding ourselves first. Once we do, then we can decide if those who pressure us are trustworthy of sharing ourselves with them at all.

- **They Play on Our Self-Condensation**

If we act harshly toward ourselves when we make mistakes, or think we are an innately bad or shameful person, we are a walking target for others to throw condemnation our direction. People who have an abundance of their own self-condemnation may see us as a dumping ground to alleviate their negative feelings about themselves. Of course, making others feel bad or shaming them does not rid manipulators of their negative feelings, but that doesn't stop them from trying.

- **They Play on Our Feeling that Something is Missing**

When we feel like something is missing inside, we may try to get others to fill in our missing pieces. This is a golden opportunity for manipulators to exploit us for their own purposes. They will promise to give us what we are missing in exchange for us handing ourselves over to their control. If we take the bait, they can feel superior to us. Since they can never really give us what we are missing, though, we will eventually feel shafted and used. We may become afraid we will never really feel filled up. If we don't shift our attention to finding for ourselves what we feel is missing, we will be ripe for someone else to come along and sucker us all over again.

- **They Play on Our Being Scared of Being Hurt**

If we are currently feeling hurt based on past traumatic experiences, our whole being may radiate "woundedness" and we will feel fearful that we will be re-wounded again in the same way we were previously. While we may be fortunate enough to meet someone who genuinely wants to help us and treads lightly around our pain, we will also sometimes attract others who claim on one hand they want to protect us so we can "heal" and on the other hand exploit our pain and use it against us when it is to their strategic advantage. The more compassionate we are with ourselves as we work through the pain associated with our past trauma, the less likely we will attract those who cannot support us with a compassionate heart.

- **They Play on Our Caring About How Others Perceive Us**

If we care too much about what others think of us, we will attract exploiters who are disguised as friends. They will offer to tell us what we want to hear. In exchange, we will have to do what they want us to do or be who they want us to be. If we later decide we no longer want to do their bidding, they will shame us, speak negatively about us behind our back, isolate us, or make us otherwise feel unworthy of others' notice. Once we feel comfortable in our own skin, others' perceptions of us will matter very little. Any shame they send our direction rolls off us like water off a duck's back.

Ways We Let Manipulators Toy with Our Reality

As we discussed earlier, for us to believe that the “mask’s lying contract” has any hold over us, we must sacrifice our reality and believe the reality of those who manipulate us. Here are some of the ways we do that:

- **We Trust Words Told to Us and Ignore All Other Signs**

Spoken words are only a small part of the total communication that goes on between us as human beings. There are many other signs that indicate what people are truly conveying under the words. A few of the other important signs are tone, inflection, volume, body language, and demeanor. There is also an energy radiated from others that can give us information about the truth behind what they say.

The first intuitive impressions we form before our mental programming takes over are often extremely helpful in reading others. These intuitive hits can give us a quick “window into the real person” behind the image they attempt to project. If we meet someone for the first time and the hair on the back of our neck stands up, we feel a tightness in our stomach, or we find ourselves looking for exits, these may be vital early warning signs not to get involved with that person.

- **We Only Hear What We Want to Believe and Disregard the Rest**

We may want to believe others so much sometimes, that even when they say exactly how they will manipulate us, we ignore it. We may listen to only surface statements of praise and promise and filter out slams against us and cutting remarks.

Sometimes we totally block out the lies or an overwhelming number of statements about how others have also been similarly manipulated. Instead, we believe we will be the exception. Or we override our reasoning that is telling us to look below the surface of our fantasy to the reality of what is clearly going on.

- **We Don’t Read Between the Lines to Get Underlying Messages**

Manipulators may test us to see if we are gullible by playing the game of “fill in the gap.” They give us clues that we are being manipulated without giving us the whole picture. Then, the manipulators sit back to see whether we are onto their game. If we ask probing questions to get the full picture, they know we are likely onto their game. At this point they may get very evasive, squirm uncomfortably, or try to insult us by saying we are asking too many questions. If, instead, we don’t ask more questions to fill in the missing pieces, they know we are a good potential target for their game. Since we are *making assumptions* about what they said, they know we are creating the picture we want to see rather than what is real. When the picture doesn’t turn out the way we expected and we get angry about it, the manipulators have “plausible deniability” saying we incorrectly assumed something that was never going to be true.

Sometimes the game is played by giving individual statements that are true but create an overall false impression. We are tested to see if we are sucked into the falsity. In another variation of the game, important information is omitted that creates a false picture. We are tested to see if we can figure out what information is missing. If we figure out the game and let manipulators know we are on to them, they will likely stop playing with us and quickly move on to someone more gullible. Much of the fun of the game for them is lost when we expose their misleading tricks.

- **We Don't Scrutinize the Truth of What is Said**

Manipulators will check to see if we call them on their lies or ask for verification of the truth. If we don't challenge them, they will go for a bigger lie to see if we buy it. This cycle continues until we are totally under their control, or we stop them and say, "No more lies. I'm out of here."

- **We Feel Bound to Bargains No Matter How Circumstances Change**

If we are dedicated to being true to our word or we are loyal toward others no matter what the cost to ourselves, we are ripe for manipulator's pickings. We may find others lying to us, or not disclosing the total picture but expecting us to adhere to our end of an agreement. Manipulators will say, "You *promised*. Now you are stuck." If we feel guilty or act like they are right, we are asking to be taken.

- **We Believe What Others Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Situation**

When we don't know ourselves, we look for others to tell us who we are. Manipulators jump at this chance. They know we are in our most malleable state of "not knowingness" and they can mold us into whoever they want us to be for their own purposes.

We can also be manipulated in much the same way when we have not assessed our own situation. If we ask others to do the assessment for us, manipulators will shape the facts to suit their own purposes. They may bleed off our assets and leave us with only our liabilities before we even had a hint of their nefarious intent.

- **We Give Greater Weight to the Written Word Than is Deserved**

Just because something is in writing doesn't mean we should give it any more credibility than if it is spoken. Some gullible people tend to believe that if it is written down, it is like the *Ten Commandments* handed down from God at Mount Sinai. Lies, misleading statements, or other information intended to manipulate can be as easily put on paper. We may need to investigate beyond the written document they present to us to check its validity. Examples include having an attorney review the legality of a document, checking deed records, searching title histories, reviewing copyrights or patents, etc.)

- **We Defer to Other People's Perceived Expertise or Authority**

As gullible people, we may trust what others say or do because we believe they have more power or special knowledge in a certain field that we don't have. Our trust may go well beyond the level that person deserves. Instead of trusting our own perception of the

situation, we defer to their perceived status. We don't challenge outrageous activities of "experts" and "authority figures" since we don't believe our perceptions have equal validity with theirs.

- **We Don't Connect Our Intuition to Our Reasoning**

If our intuition and reasoning are not wired together, we are likely to be easy targets for manipulators. When we operate strictly from one or the other of these internal tools we naturally possess, we are handicapped. When we only use reasoning without intuition, we will likely be hooked by manipulators in endless "logical" justifications to do things their way. Eventually they will find just the right hole in our logic to back us into a corner, so we feel trapped in their logical snare. If we operate only from intuition without being grounded in reason, we may get swept up in the excitement of someone else's vision without thinking through the practical details with our personal interests in mind.

Ways We Let Manipulators Toy with Our Trust

We all want to be trusting, but as gullible people there are ways that we do not *trust wisely*. Here are some ways we sacrifice our wisdom regarding who to trust:

- **We Show Our Soft Underbelly Before Natural Levels of Trust are Built**

When we are gullible, we often do not respect our personal boundaries, which unwittingly invites manipulators inside to mess with our psyche. They see it as a golden opportunity to tighten the screws on their grip over us. When we act wisely, we know that trust takes time to develop. Others must demonstrate in multiple situations over time that they are trustworthy before we disclose too much too soon.

- **We Believe Other People's Motives Are Pure**

If we are gullible, we may assume that others have pure motives. But rarely are anyone's motives completely pure since so many of us wear masks. Our own motives may be a mixture of good intentions and manipulations without our being consciously aware of it.

Manipulators may purposely or inadvertently hide their motives from us. Asking questions of others can give us more details to clarify whether manipulation is mixed in with their good intentions. Their answers may not be truthful. But as we develop our ability to read people, we begin to clearly see the truth, or at least get an intuitive sense of their motives, despite their verbal statements.

Ways We Let Manipulators Toy with Our Emotions

Buying into the "mask's lying contract" means we have agreed to deny our emotions in favor of what others choose for us to feel. Here are some of the ways we allow our emotions to play directly into the hands of manipulators:

- **We Want to Avoid Conflict**

If we feel we need to keep the peace at all costs, we will likely sacrifice ourselves to manipulators at some point in our lives. Manipulators will fan the flames of conflict to see if we can be smoked out of our position and collapse into their waiting and controlling arms.

- **We Are Afraid of Anger**

When we are afraid of others' rage, manipulators will get angry with us to see if they can control us. They may scream, yell, or throw things and then watch us dart around like scared rabbits attempting to find a place to hide. When we feel desperate for a place to shelter, manipulators will then step in and offer us refuge under their protective but smothering wings.

- **We Let Our "Bleeding Hearts" Rule Decisions**

Manipulators see our compassion for others as weakness and will seize on the opportunity to use it against us. They attempt to make gullible people take responsibility for others' hurts or mistakes. Manipulators will give us some sob story about why they need help, and they will act as though *we* are the only ones who can correct the injustices done to them.

There is a great "Far Side" cartoon by Gary Larson that illustrates the absurdity of a person's bleeding-heart gullibility. In the cartoon two women are standing inside a house at a door. One is about to open the door. In the window next to the door, we see a giant bug the size of a person. One woman turns to the other and says, "Calm down, Edna. Yes, it's some giant, hideous insect...but it could be some giant, hideous insect in need of help."⁴ If we take the "bleeding heart" bait without analyzing whether *we will hurt ourselves by helping others*, we are just the suckers manipulators are looking for.

Ways We Let Manipulators Toy with Our Good Nature

In our effort to deny we have bad feelings about ourselves, we may begin to play the role of the "good" one. When we attempt to hold onto this role we allow manipulators to take advantage of us since they know we don't want to appear the least bit "bad." Here are some of the ways we allow ourselves to let manipulators twist us around their little finger:

- **We Don't Want to Seem Impolite**

If we are gullible, we may have been raised with the belief that we must be polite, no matter what the personal cost. If we believe this we lay ourselves wide open to manipulation. Manipulators may run a "politeness check" to see how tenaciously we will

⁴ Gary Larson. *The Far Side Calendar 1991*, Sunday, September 29, 1991. Kansas City: Universal Press Syndicate, 1990.

hold onto our need to be nice, sweet, gracious, or generous. They may become rude or impolite to get our reaction. If we become nicer when they become rude, they know they can push us around.

- **We Mistake Passivity for Peacefulness**

Many of us have allowed ourselves to be repeatedly pounded on by others through the years. As a result, we feel mashed down and we have become very passive in our responses to the outside world. We may confuse this doormat-like passivity for being internally peaceful. However, this behavior only indicates that we are numb to life, not peaceful. Peaceful people do not confuse peacefulness with passivity. They willingly stand up for themselves when that is the action called for. They radiate a peaceful, yet strong presence that communicates to the outside world, "Turbulence is not welcome here. Go somewhere else." By contrast, doormats invite in turbulence with lettering that says, "Welcome. Wipe your feet here."

- **We Let Others Dump on Us**

Manipulators are always looking for good scapegoats and they see gullible people as perfect dumping grounds. If we are willing to take on others' emotional or verbal garbage, there will be many, including family members and so-called friends, who will oblige us by heaping it on. The more we are willing to take, the more others will pile it on. Only we can decide when we are no longer willing to be the city landfill.

- **We Put Other People's Needs and Desires Above Ours**

If we put others' needs and desires above ours, we invite manipulators to abuse our giving nature. Others see self-sacrifice as a stupid thing to do since they put themselves first. Their attitude may be, "Okay, you asked for it. I'll help you be last on your list if you insist."

- **We Mistake Manipulation for Assertiveness**

When we are gullible, we may mistake manipulation for assertiveness. We don't challenge manipulators because we believe that they are "learning how to be an adult," or "expressing themselves." What we ignore is the fact that they are stepping on us to be who they are. When we do not stop their bad behavior, we teach others that it's okay to become a bully and use manipulative tactics to get what they want from us.

- **We Would Rather be Gullible Than Manipulate Others**

Sometimes we don't see other options besides gullibility and manipulation. Since we know how much it hurts to be manipulated, we would rather hurt ourselves by remaining gullible than be the one hurting others through manipulation. What we don't realize is that there are other ways to operate that take us out of this dualistic thinking, which keeps us stuck playing these dysfunctional games of the mask.

Ways We Let Manipulators Treat Us Like Children

As we have seen already, many grown-ups are really children except in physical form. When we act like children, we are inviting manipulators to treat us like children. Here are some ways we do that:

- **We Want to Believe the Unbelievable**

The childlike part of us wants to believe others have some magical powers we don't possess. We want to believe they can do for us what we are not willing to do for ourselves. So, we suspend our belief system to temporarily incorporate the improbable. If we understand that we are playing the game of "make believe" we can have fun with it. But if we take the game seriously, we set ourselves up for manipulation. Gullible people do not want to believe what is usually the case, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." We will remain gullible if we continue to seriously look outside ourselves for "pie in the sky."

- **We Want Easy Answers and Quick Fixes**

Most of us would like the answers to our questions and problems in life to be easy. We long for simple "by-pass" solutions rather than having to unravel the complexities of adulthood. Manipulators know the childlike part of us wants the problems we face to just go away. They also know that few people are willing to spend the mental, emotional, and psychic energy it takes to figure out things for themselves. So, manipulators are glad to step in and tell us the answers we want or offer us quick fixes to our problems, so we don't have to worry "our pretty little heads." But those easy answers and quick fixes almost never pan out and sometimes require ongoing "investments in ourselves" that drain our bank accounts and rob us of our ability to truly examine our internal terrain that would help us feel like a real grown-up.

- **We Want Our Future to be Assured**

No one knows what the future holds for anyone including themselves. We may predict and look at likely odds, but anything we do is a guess, because the future is not in our humanly control. If we are scared about what the future will bring us, we are more likely to believe others who promise to make our future secure. As gullible people we want to believe that the uncontrollable can be controlled. We will put our future in the hands of a manipulator rather than take our chances at creating our own reality.

- **We Deny We Have Opinions and Adopt Other People's Positions**

When we are gullible, we may act as if we do not have opinions. We ask what others think or feel. Then we judge what we think, feel, or say based on their truth rather than what authentically rings true to us. One of the gullibility tests that manipulators

use is checking to see if we are willing to stand behind our opinions and positions. Or do we instead cave in and adopt theirs. When we don't stand our ground, manipulators know we live externally due to our weakness, and we can easily be made to do whatever they want.

- **We Act Like We Have Limited Options**

When we are gullible, we believe we have limited options. This sets us up for manipulation by others offering to expand the choices for us. Just when we are convinced that manipulators can really do that, they clamp down on us and attempt to make us believe we are at their mercy. They insist we have no other choice but to do as they say. If we believe them, we remain trapped in their imaginary prison.

- **We Confuse Control and Manipulation for Love and Support**

When we are gullible, we often fear loss of approval and support from others. Part of us believes we cannot get what we really want, so we must cling to what others are willing to dole out to us. This belief radiates out an energy to others that says, "I don't deserve more than this." Manipulators know our low deserve level means we will grovel at their feet for whatever small pittance they throw our direction. They know we will settle for an inferior substitute for what we really want, since we don't believe we deserve to even ask for anything more.

- **We Believe We Must Do What We are Told to Do**

If obedience was heavily demanded of us in childhood, as adults it may still be so ingrained into us that we continue to operate in this rote, mechanical way. Without thinking, we take orders from others, even if they don't make any sense. Because we are so programmed to listen to outside commands rather than our own internal directives, we become particularly susceptible to the spontaneous whims of manipulators.

- **We Are Rewarded for Our Gullibility**

As gullible people we may have a long history of being rewarded for playing victim. In this victim stance, we settle for a pat on the head from someone who says, "There...There...You are so good, understanding, patient, etc." We act more like loyal dogs than human beings. We wait for our "master manipulator" to feed us and throw us special treats every now and then.

- **We Are Not Willing to Take Adult Responsibility for Our Lives**

With a long-term history of acting like a child, we may feel it is much easier to blame others for our lot in life than to take the reins of our life and strike out on our own. We may feel just comfortable enough the way we are that we don't want to change the status quo. We may feel we are not strong enough or courageous enough to take on self-responsibility. We may think if we can just get others to change, we won't have to wade through the messiness required to become a real adult. Whatever the reason for ducking our personal responsibility, when we toss it outside of us, we have hung out our "apply here" gullibility sign for manipulators to offer to become our substitute parent.

Ending the Pretense

As we have seen there is a lot of pretense involved in playing the “games of the mask.” Making a commitment to end the pretense is a huge step forward in living more authentically and fully. The power the mask once had over us begin to evaporate. In the next section we will examine how, layer by layer, we can shed the mask’s tight grip.

Section 3

Shedding the Layers of the Mask

Chapter 8

Releasing the Tight Grip of the Mask

“Is it safe to come out, now? I think I’m ready.”

Removing our mask is both a goal and a process in our effort to live from our truth. But to expect that we will just be able to take off the mask all at once may be unrealistic. Since we have had for such a long time to pile layer upon layer of varnish on the mask we have created, it may take time to remove.

If we become impatient in remove our mask, we may slow down the process. We are only able to shed layers of the mask when they are ready to come off and not before. It is like getting a skinned knee. The skin forms a scab to protect the wound. When it is ready, the scab sloughs off naturally. The wound needs its own time to heal. If we get in a hurry to get rid of the scab and pick at it, we may damage the tender new skin beneath and slow down the healing process.

Therefore, we need to allow ourselves time to slough off layers of the mask naturally. As we become more self-compassionate and comfortable living from our own truth, we free ourselves from the mask’s tight hold on us.

Benefits from Showing Our Face

The world will give us lots of reasons to keep our mask on. Yet here are some reasons to go against our conditioning and take it off:

- **To Breathe Fully and Feel Safe in Our Body**

When we wear a mask, life starts to feel smothering. The thicker the mask we have created, the more difficult it becomes to breathe freely and feel safe in our body. Our breathing becomes shallow, just letting in enough air to stay alive. Shallow breathing cuts off the flow of blood to our heart and extremities. Without our blood circulating fully through our heart to our extremities, we start to lose feeling in our hands and feet. And when our feet can’t connect with the earth, we may become panicky. Removing our mask allows us to breathe more deeply and feel safer in our body, which lessens our anxiety about taking up our rightful space in the world and being who we naturally are.

- **To Feel Lighter**

If we have spent many years slapping new layers onto our mask, we may feel like we are carrying a great burden that weighs us down. Our shoulders start to sag under the load. Our backs hurt and we feel lethargic. Every step we take is made with great effort. Removing our mask can feel like we have punched through a thick shell. As we throw off our burden, we may feel so light that we have a buoyancy in each step we take.

- **To Remember Simplicity**

Wise teachers around the world know the power of living simply. But this knowing is not reserved for great masters. It is a knowing that exists at the very core of our being in every one of us. Living from the essence of who we are is simple. It is what we put on top of our essence that can make life seem complicated. This is also the case with truth. Truth is simple and straightforward. It is the lies we manufacture to cover the truth that distort, twist, and convolute our life experiences. Bursting through these illusions of complexity allows us to embody the simplicity that is just waiting for us to experience.

- **To Recover Our Sensations and Feel Fully Alive**

With our mask on, our senses become dulled. Colors are less vivid. Sounds are not as crisp and clear. Tastes are flatter, and smells may become indistinguishable from one another. Our senses become dulled so gradually that over time, we don't realize our sense of the world has become almost two-dimensional. We begin to miss out on life's joy and excitement. Showing our face allows us to feel alive again and ready to take on all that life has to offer. Then we can recover the wonder and awe that we once had as children.

- **To Recover Our Full Range of Emotions**

When we are hiding behind our mask, it is difficult to allow our face to truly have emotions of its own. Our face has become molded into the fixed position of the mask. Since we are playing a role, we must stay within the role even when we really feel something else. Removing our mask allows us to quit suppressing the real feelings we have so we can regain our full range of emotions, which give us clues to our own personal truth.

- **To See the Patterns in Our Life**

We can get caught up in roles we play while wearing a mask. When our energy is consumed in this way, we have a difficult time stepping back from that role to see the patterns in how we have related to others throughout our life. Once we remove our mask, we can see more clearly the part we have played repeatedly (often unconsciously) to create that pattern. From this new vantage point, we can then decide what we want to do to evolve beyond the old patterns we have outgrown.

- **To Stop the Inner War**

Living from behind a mask means we carry on a continual war between our inner and outer self. It is difficult to ever rest completely since we are on constant battle alert. A lot of energy must go into maintaining a "fight or flight" readiness for this war effort. At all times our mind must remain sharp, focused, and ready with multiple strategies for the best ways to attack or defend. Our emotions must be on guard to protect us whenever we call on them day or night. And our bodies must pump lots of adrenalin to our entire system so we can be ready to march forward or retreat at a moment's notice. Ending the inner war brings an end to our exhaustion. We can finally calm down, relax, and get deep rest. We can put our lives back together the way we choose, rather than living in constant fear of following someone else's unreasonable orders at a moment's notice.

- **To Sense Our REAL Power**

While living behind a mask, we likely have a distorted view of power. From this distorted perspective, we can't embody our true power. It remains imprisoned behind a twisted illusion that may view power from a predatory perspective, which uses manipulation or overt aggression to force others to bend to its will. The energy that surges through the universe and the earth also surges through all its inhabitants. From the moment the spark of life animates our physical body, we naturally have access to this universal power source. Since it comes innately from within, our true power is not invasive of others. When we exert true power, our connection with others is clean and pure. It is from this clean, pure place that we honor the space we each naturally inhabit in the world.

- **To Find Our Natural Pace**

Once we have moved beyond the inner war that has gone on due to hiding behind a mask, we are free to find our own pace for living. The mask may have told us to hurry like we have been running an endless race to nowhere. Or it may have held us back, like a racehorse in a starting gate. Whatever the pace set by the mask, it undoubtedly doesn't match our own rhythm. Freeing ourselves from it allows us to flow through life at our own signature pace.

- **To Fulfill Our Deepest Desires**

Since the mask sits rigidly on our face, no matter how much we adjust it, our field of vision is narrowed. We are unable to relate to the world from a more expansive perspective. With all the mask's conditioning, we begin to believe our deepest desires are unwise, unhealthy, impractical, expensive, or impossible. Ridding ourselves of this irritating façade frees us to explore new possibilities, so we can fulfill what our essence is calling us to do.

- **To Laugh Again and Experience Joy**

Sometimes the drama of the mask can make life appear to be one big tragedy, full of dark sadness. When we focus on tragedy, we see life through tragic eyes. We may forget that life has a lighter side, too. Wouldn't it be nice to experience that side of our unique self? When our face is free we can finally wipe away our tears, step back from situations, and see how we humans can be funny in how we interact with one another. We may find ourselves laughing spontaneously at what used to make us cry. We also may see more joy all around us since we now see life through joyful eyes.

- **To Reconnect with the World**

As human beings we need connections to others to survive and thrive in the world. We want to be seen and loved for who we are. But wearing a mask keeps us from truly touching and being touched by others. We become like the "bubble boy" living

inside a translucent cocoon. To be insulated from the hurt we can never experience the powerful connection with another human being. Our cocoon of safety becomes our prison of isolation. Gently removing our mask allows others to know the real us, maybe for the first time in our lives.

Interwoven Emotions, Mind, and Body as Clues to Our Well-Being

Our emotions, mind, and body are integrally linked and contribute to our sense of well-being. However, we are not our emotions, thoughts, or body. We are the feeler of our emotions, the thinker of our thoughts, and the inhabitant of our body. It is our essence that transcends all these aspects of the “self.” When we realize this, these parts of the self are freed to do what they are designed to do—help us operate from our essence in the physical world.

When we are out of balance in one of these three aspects of our being, it causes stress on our entire system. To bring our system back into equilibrium, we must pay attention to the clues that our emotions, mind, and body send us. We can then make minor course corrections to bring ourselves back into internal and external harmony.

Unfortunately, society has conditioned many of us to believe these clues are instead “flaws.” If we see ourselves as flawed, we may punish ourselves for not being “perfect” and in the process miss the very clues that could guide us back to our sense of well-being. Refocusing our attention on the gifts that each of these amazing aspects bring to us, creates a loving bond that enhances our sense of self and helps us flourish.

The Gifts of Our Mind

Our mind is a storehouse of information. But our mind is much more than that. All of what comes into existence begins with the mind generating a thought. From a thought an idea is born, which is one possibility that can then be brought into three-dimensional reality. Without an initial thought, we would not have the basic comforts in life, new technological advances, or great works of art.

Our mind also creates a context for our cognitive understanding of ourselves in relation to the universe in which we live. This context provides reference points for what we experience. But thinking about an experience is not the same as the experience itself. The thought is only a thought until it becomes a *lived* experience. It is the difference between reading a book about a foreign country and experiencing the culture firsthand.

Our mind acts as the guardian of our essence. It assigns a meaning to messages we receive from our emotions and body based on the context through which our mind interprets incoming experiences. So, in many ways, our mind holds all the cards. Will it allow the messages from our body and emotions to come through, or will it choose to keep the clues hidden?

The good news is that our mind is designed to evolve and expand our context based on new input. If our mind can assign one interpretation, it can also assign another if it chooses. This mental flexibility has been referred to by many as neuroplasticity¹.

¹ There are many books on neuroplasticity, including Philippe Douyon. [*Neuroplasticity: Your Brain's Superpower: Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*](#). Salt Lake City, UT: Izzard Ink Publishing Company, 2019.

Whatever the basis of our mind's evolving capacity, we choose whether our mind's guardianship of our essence acts more like a prison guard, or as a partner dedicated to helping us embody our full potential.

The Gifts of Our Emotions

Emotions bring texture and richness to our lives. Without emotions we couldn't genuinely laugh, cry, dance, or sing. We also couldn't experience the pure joy of being alive. Without emotions we are like walking automatons. Our feelings are a flat line. We are not aroused to the point of greater awareness, so we can recognize something is off kilter in our life.

One provision in the mask's lying contract is that only the mask decides what emotions are permitted. So, when we wear a mask it encourages us to shut off or bury certain emotions. But if we deny *any* emotion, we get out of balance, making it more likely that we will become bullies (who angrily react while repressing pain and sadness) or victims (who easily express pain and sadness often through crying but repress deep seeded anger). This repression focuses so much energy into keeping emotions hidden, that it is like trying to hide a barking dog from our landlord next door. We can muzzle the dog for a while, but we can't totally control it. Eventually the dog can no longer contain the barks, often expressing them at the most inopportune time.

To maximize the gifts of our emotions requires that we dive fully into whatever we are authentically feeling in the moment. This does not mean we unload our emotions indiscriminately. It does mean we explore what messages our emotions are telling us. This may require going deeper within ourselves in self-honesty than we have ever gone before. When we listen quietly with compassion and curiosity, we invite messages to come to conscious awareness. Once we have consciously received the message, our emotions often calm down. Then we can refocus our attention on experiencing more of what brings passion and joy into our lived reality.

The Gifts of Our Body

Our body doesn't lie. Its innate wisdom cooperates with our essence to urge us toward wholeness. It gives us physical clues about our emotional, mental, and spiritual state of well-being.²

We may first become aware of how important our body is in our overall well-being when we experience stress. Stress is often our body's initial warning sign that we need to slow down, rest, develop more healthy eating habits, exercise, or pay attention to something else important we are attempting to ignore. Physical symptoms like insomnia, jaw tightness, inflammation, lower back pain, and even cancer can also provide us with valuable clues to underlying issues our essence may be attempting to communicate with us.³

When we begin to do deeper emotional, mental, or spiritual exploration it is especially important be in touch with our body. As we bring issues to a more conscious awareness, our body can release stored-up trauma and other negative energy that may have been trapped

² Deepak Chopra has an excellent book and audio series on this topic. The book is [*Quantum Healing-Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine*](#). New York: Bantam Books, 2015. The audio series is [*Magical Mind, Magical Body*](#). Chicago: Nightingale Conant, 1990.

³ For anyone not familiar with this concept, you may want to read books by Louise Hay including, [*Heal Your Body*](#). Santa Monica: Hay House, 1988. Or [*You Can Heal Your Life: Special 20th Anniversary Edition*](#). Santa Monica: Hay House, 2006.

deep within us for a lifetime. Our body can shed toxins (often very quickly) through our pores, our voice, nose, bladder, rectum, hands, and feet, etc. When we listen intently to the messages our body is communicating, this is an important first step toward experiencing optimal well-being.

Feeling Raw at First

When we begin to shed layers of our mask, we may feel very raw and exposed as we face the outside world. This is a natural feeling as we get used to our essence living closer to the surface.

Rawness is the sensation that indicates our truth is more closely aligning with our outside reality but is not yet accustomed to that feeling. We may get messages from our mask that something is not right, and that we should protect ourselves from this raw feeling. Our mask will attempt to keep us from trying new feelings and ways of being since it sees our transformation as a threat.

When we are honest with ourselves, we know the raw feeling is not really a bad feeling. It is only a *new sensation* we have not experienced before. There is a difference between rawness and pain. Acknowledging the raw feeling for what it is gives us time to become accustomed to the new sensation.

Even if we mistake the raw feeling for pain and decide to put our mask back on, while it may feel familiar, the mask will never again feel like a good fit. Having breathed freely and directly experiencing life, our face will never be completely satisfied going back into hiding.

Liking Who We See

As we shed layers of our mask, we may find we like more of who we see. As we look at ourselves in the mirror and connect with this real person, no longer will we feel like we are peeking through eye holes to get a mere glimpse of who we are.

Liking ourselves creates a snowball effect. First, we may feel a momentary flash, “Hey, I’m not half bad.” Then we may say to ourselves, “I really love you. You are a wonderful human being.” Later we find ourselves writing affirmations on a regular basis, “You are a great human being, meant to be here on earth just as you are.” Eventually, we will have this knowledge so ingrained within us that when we look at one of these old affirmations, we find ourselves saying, “Of course. I *know* that.”

Don’t despair if it takes you time to love yourself and live from your truth. If you have had old internal messages repeatedly telling you otherwise, it may take time to override what you have heard for so long. *Just know that the more you love yourself, the more you love yourself. And the more truthful you are, the easier it is to tell yourself the truth.* This is not a selfish thing to do. It is a necessary foundation to authentically love yourself and others and share your unique gifts with the world from the essence of who you are.

Understanding Comes from Experience

What you read here or any other place, will be totally meaningless unless you experience the truth of it for yourself. This is why so many teachings fail. Many people believe wisdom can be spoon fed to them and assimilated instantly.

We can wish that we could open our heads and pour in the knowledge. We may wish we could look at a book of music and know how to play the piano. But that is not the way life works. It is through trial-and-error experience that we develop deep understanding. We must learn again and again at multiple levels how to embody wisdom.

There is no prescribed order for shedding layers of the mask to reveal your face. And there are no magic cures discussed in the rest of this book. What we will cover are some of the most common issues that contribute to our wanting to wear a mask in the first place. Just as creating a mask is a unique process, so are the ways we shed it.

As you move through your self-discovery process, you will likely think of other techniques not mentioned here. *Do not discount anything that works for you.* Be proud of your creativity. And be proud of yourself for discovering who you are from the inside out.

Chapter 9

Goodbye Bully, Goodbye Victim

“Goodbye old familiar buddy. It’s time for me to experience life on my own.”

One of the most challenging aspects of removing our mask is to get to the point of saying goodbye to the bully and victim roles we have played for so long. Without these roles, what do we do instead? How will we deal with others who still play these roles? And when we say goodbye will we still be able to fit into society or will we become misfits?

Only we can individually answer these questions. We choose whether we reinvent ourselves outside “the games of the mask.” It requires experimentation and risk-taking to become who we naturally are. And we will need courage to remain true to ourselves as we learn and grow in a new direction.

Human Being Rights

There is a movement to teach children that as human beings we each have rights, no matter what our size, age, color, sex, or religion. We all have the right to be strong, safe, and free. Most people who are grown now were not taught this when they were children. If anything, we were taught to sacrifice our personal rights and conform to existing norms to fit in. Therefore, most grown people are in adult bodies but feel and behave like children. So, it is no wonder it is difficult to pass on concepts about basic human rights to our children.

Getting rid of our internal and external bully/victim patterns requires that we learn as adults how to be strong, safe, and free human beings. Whether or not we personally have children, when we courageously commit to being real adults, we leave a path for future generations to follow to live beyond the current bully/victim patterns.

Being an Adult

People who play both bully and victim roles have in common an underlying theme. Neither type is willing to take personal responsibility for their issues. They both play childlike games to avoid the more challenging requirements of being adults.

Real adults are not bullies or victims. They do not need to hide behind those masks. *Being adult means taking full responsibility for our beliefs, feelings, and actions now—no matter what our past has been.*

Examining our childhood and other past challenges can give us great insight into who we are now. We can look at what perspectives and beliefs have shaped us. We can also look for recurring patterns or consistent themes of relating that we have created in our lives. And we can actively recover feelings we may have suppressed.

The fact is that looking at the past only helps us see our patterns and what lessons we continue to repeat *now*. Whatever happened to us 30 years ago, five years ago, or even one year ago, does not need to have a bearing on our choices in the current moment. However, if we get

stuck repeatedly playing out our past without gaining insight from what we experienced, we doom ourselves to living on a continuous loop of past misery.

At some point, to get out of this self-destructive loop we must say to ourselves, “Okay, enough raking my past over the coals. I am no longer a child. My destiny is in my hands now. What insights do I need to gain to take charge of my life and move on?” This level of self-honesty can be the turning point to get beyond our current bullying/victimizing behavior.

This is not to say that being an adult means we should abandon the part of us that still feels like a scared helpless child. It does mean that we assuage our inner child’s fears and compassionately support our inner self through healthy reparenting. As we become a dependable and trustworthy adult, the childlike part of us can relax, knowing it doesn’t have to figure out life by itself. Instead, it can become the playful, creative, and carefree part of us that is meant to thrive.

What Are Real Adults Like?

It is easy to say we must be adults and take responsibility for our issues. But being adults takes awareness and real-life practice to accomplish, especially if we didn’t have consistent modeling from adults when we were growing up. Here are some of the qualities of authentic adults you may want to embody:

- **Adults Listen to Their Inner Wisdom**

As adults we trust ourselves, so we are willing to listen to our inner truth. We know our truth is filled with innate wisdom. We follow it, no matter what outside sources tell us we should do instead.

- **Adults Do Not Blame**

As adults, we do not blame others. We take personal responsibility for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. We know blame is like a ball and chain around our leg that weighs us down. When we refuse to blame others, we feel lighter. It becomes easier to redirect our energy toward gaining insight from life’s lessons. From this more mature perspective, when others are stuck in blame we see them with compassionate eyes, since we know how challenging it was for us to stop playing the immature blame game.

- **Adults Do Not Find Fault**

As adults we know finding fault is not only a waste of time. It keeps us from having the real connections we want with ourselves and others. When we find fault with others, we attempt to put ourselves in a “one up” position with them in a false value hierarchy. When we find fault with ourselves, we put ourselves “one down” in that hierarchy. Either way, fault-finding keeps us from seeing all human beings have life struggles of some kind. As adults, rather than being in attack mode, we nurture ourselves and do our best to uplift the parts of us that are struggling.

- **Adults Give Up the Need to Be Right**

As adults we do not need to prove ourselves “right.” We know this is irrelevant since there is no single right way. There are as many right ways as there are people. Like the three blind men feeling different parts of an elephant, each of us can be “right” from our own perspective.

- **Adults Are Not Judgmental**

As human beings we have been given the faculty of judgement—the ability to thoughtfully evaluate a situation. This evaluation process allows us to make the best decisions possible, given the information we have available in the moment. From this perspective, if we obtain additional information, it might change the decisions we make.

The ability to judge is not the same as being judgmental. When we are judgmental, we are so rigidly attached to a judgment we hold that it becomes part of our identity. Even when we are presented with new information, we reject it since it threatens our identity. This inability to expand our perspective prevents us from having a more complete picture that might lead to wiser decision making. Our rigidity can harden us in defense of our position and make us act harshly toward others who do not hold our viewpoints.

As adults, while we no doubt hold judgements about situations and other people, we hold these judgements lightly. We remain open to additional information that might alter our perspective. We also *do not judge the value of others* based on their thoughts, feelings, or actions. While we may not like the way others think about a particular topic or even find their behavior repugnant, we know their essence is innately valuable. This allows us to remain compassionate and unconditionally loving for their humanity, even as we choose how (or whether) we want to interact with them.

- **Adults Know When to Draw on Internal Resources and When to Reach Out**

As adults we do not pridefully think, “I can do it all alone.” We know that no person is an island. Part of what makes our human existence so magnificent is our need for connection to one another. We trust ourselves enough to determine when the action called for is to do things on our own and when we need to reach out to others for assistance, guidance, or comfort. We begin to recognize that to ask for help is sometimes the real sign of courage and strength.

- **Adults Are Not Attached to Outcomes**

Adults realize that the *process* is more important than the outcome. Goals can be important to set, but much of why we set them is to get needed experiences along the way. Even when a goal is reached, a new one almost always appears to take its place. So, life simply becomes an unfolding story with us writing the chapters as we go. We may find out even when the short-term story does not turn out the way we hoped, it takes us in an unexpected direction that is ultimately more fulfilling than if we had remained consciously trying to stay in control of the outcome.

- **Adults Allow Others to Make Their Own Decisions**

As adults, we live our lives to the fullest, so we do not need to live vicariously through other people. This means we do not take responsibility for others, and we do not give them advice unless we are asked. We know others may need to make their own mistakes to get the full impact of their lessons. While we may offer a helping hand, we don't repeatedly rescue others. We know that can be disempowering and delay their ability to learn how to make their own course corrections in life.

- **Adults Are Good Listeners**

As adults we know more is gained from listening than speaking. We don't need to impress others with what we know, and we don't need to be the center of attention. When we really listen, our curiosity kicks in, which widens our aperture about how other people process information and experience life. When others feel genuinely heard, they are more likely to authentically share with us and become more receptive when we do have something to say.

- **Adults Are Pleased to See Others Succeed**

As adults we feel "enough" within ourselves, so we are happy to see others succeed. If we feel twinges of jealousy, envy, or anger toward others, we use it as an opportunity to go more deeply within. We examine what may be causing us to feel like we are "not enough" in some aspect of our personal development. If we "lose" to someone in a competition and we're not able to take it in stride, we look at the source of our suffering. Is our inner perfectionist putting undue pressure on us to succeed at all costs? Are we viewing ourselves in a "one down" value hierarchy with the other person that can only be resolved by finding a way to be "one up?" When we can honestly celebrate others' successes, it reflects how secure we have become in our own sense of power and self-esteem.

Becoming an Adult

Becoming an adult is a process, not necessarily an end goal. It may take some of us an entire lifetime to feel we have matured and blossomed into full adulthood. Here are some ideas that may help accelerate that process along the way:

- **Find Models for Adult Behavior**

There are many real adults in the world. Look around and find the people who demonstrate adult maturity. This doesn't mean you should idealize others. Rather, it means you observe the *aspects* of their behavior you believe fit your understanding of what it means to be an adult. Try on a behavior to see if it authentically fits for you. If you like it keep it, if you don't, throw it off and keep trying new behaviors until you find your natural fit. *Remember*, no one else is totally "together," so if you find yourself wanting to completely emulate someone else's behavior, chances are you are putting them on a pedestal and not seeing the real person.

- **Reprogram Internal Negative Talk**

For many of us there is a constant internal chatter that consists mainly of negativity we spew toward ourselves. We discussed in *Chapter 6: Using Our Thoughts Against Ourselves* (p. 43) the kinds of things we say to ourselves that can be very destructive, even if we say them occasionally. Negative talk can be reprogrammed over time as we become more self-awareness and self-compassionate.

- **Put the Past in the Past**

If we are stuck in the past, we are trapped in the “mask’s lying contract.” To be truly an adult requires that we quit mucking around in what is over and done. We must let whatever happened go, so we can live fully in the present.

Forgiveness may take time and might not feel possible for us in the early stages of shedding our mask. Sometimes we have a hard time forgiving ourselves or others since we think it means excusing bad behavior. The fact is forgiveness has nothing to do with forgetting. It does mean “re-remembering” what happened from a place beyond the anger, blame, guilt, and shame we felt while trapped in bully and victim roles. Asking ourselves to tell the truth about what makes an incident so hard to forgive can be a good first step in our “re-remembering” process.¹

- **Nurture the Inner Traumatized Child**

Because we may not have been parented in ways that best nurtured our inner child, as grownups we may still carry childhood trauma with us. Learning how to parent ourselves is one of our main tasks if we want to be a real adult. Only when our inner child feels safe and cared for, will it let go of the mask that has been its source of protection. There is a lot of current literature about nurturing our traumatized internal child. You may want to check out some of these resources to help you with this process.²

- **Talk Openly with All Parts of Ourselves**

Much of the talk within us is like talking to a whole room full of people. We have an inner child, and we have an adult. But we may also have an internal tyrant, critic, wimp, complainer, nag, artist, genius, idiot, etc. Sometimes there is a cacophony of competition for air space between all our inner voices. Under all those louder voices is our internal sage who does not compete for space. It simply waits for the silence. It waits to be asked for its wise counsel that has been there all along.

¹ For more detail about the self-forgiveness process, see my book [*The Heroic Path to Self-Forgiveness: Change Your Story, Change Your Life*](#), (San Diego, CA: Orion Publishing Company, 2012).

² As a starting point see John Bradshaw, [*Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*](#), (New York: Bantam Books, 1992) and Charles Whitfield, [*Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*](#), (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2006).

Helping ourselves quiet the inner competing voices may feel like parents dealing with multiple children. One of the obvious actions to take with children who constantly talk, is to give them full attention. Sometimes that is all they want. Once you focus attention in their direction, they often calm down and have no need to speak.

As we begin to deal with our inner voices, we may find that we have “raised” very unruly voices. They are totally without discipline, and they act like internal bullies. If we deal with these internal bullies as if they are undisciplined children, we may begin to see a change over time in their disruptive behavior.

Some examples of what you may want to say to your bullying voices are:

- “From the way you’re acting [e.g. being mean, rude, etc.], I wonder if you’re really feeling sad or hurt? I’m here to listen to the real reason you’re acting this way.”
- “You are obviously in a bad mood. It’s fine for you to have your feelings, however, it’s not okay for you to drag down the rest of us. You’ll have to go off by yourself for now if you want to be negative.”
- “We want to have a good time and enjoy ourselves right now. We’ll listen to you later, but for now, we will not sacrifice our good time to deal with your negativity.”
- “You are very loved AND this specific behavior is still unacceptable.”

We may also find parts of ourselves that have been so damaged or are in so much pain that they barely have voices at all. They are not bullies and they need to be treated gently, like lifting newborn babies from earthquake ruins. We will need to cuddle them, and coo over them. We will want to rock them, stroke them, and sing to them. Imagine taking these parts of ourselves in our arms and saying, “I’m so sorry I couldn’t be there for you sooner. But I am here now, and I love you. I will protect you. You are safe.” Tenderness goes a long way toward helping the scared parts of us relax and feel safe again.

Just as parents cannot treat all children in the family alike due to differences in personalities, we cannot treat all inner parts of ourselves alike either. It is our task as adults to figure out how to interact with each part, so they can receive the customized nurturing that is best suited to their individual needs.

- **Practice Dialogues with Others in a Safe Environment**

Learning how to be an adult when dealing with others will likely take practice. Obviously, it will take trial and error. Sometimes we need to practice in a safe environment before having a difficult conversation with the actual people involved. Practice dialogues with a friend, spouse, family member, or therapist allows us to try different strategies and flesh out any underlying issues we may need to address. Whoever we select to practice with should be someone we trust not to hurt or manipulate us or tell us what to do when we expose our trauma.

Freedom and Responsibility

While there is responsibility that comes with being an adult, there is immense freedom as well. Once the ties to the games of bully/victim disappear, we no longer allow the mask to dictate our lives. We know it is our choice to be whoever we are naturally capable of being.

Chapter 10

Turning Gullibility into Wisdom

“If you don’t stand for something you’ll fall for anything.”
— Peter Marshall

We have examined some of the ways manipulators read gullible people so easily. Just that awareness alone is a good start coming to terms with our gullibility patterns. In this chapter we will examine techniques that, when practiced, can make us immune from being magnets for manipulation and help us relate to the world in much healthier ways.

“Red Flags” Signaling Manipulation

Within us we all have mental, emotional, physical, and intuitive “red flags” alerts that act as our early warning devices to tell us of potential manipulation. Paying attention to our “red flags” gives us a heads up so we don’t put ourselves in a dangerous situation or get sucked into the mask’s game of manipulation. Here are a few of those red flags:

- **Red Flag 1: When we *feel* like saying or doing one thing, but *actually* say or do something else instead.** Any time we have felt something and reacted the opposite of our feelings, we have set ourselves up for manipulation. Here are examples of how we sabotage ourselves:
 - **We override our intuition with “should” or “ought to” messages.**
Example: Mary was asked by her husband, Alvin, what she wanted for their anniversary. What came to Mary’s mind that surprised her was “a divorce.” What she said instead to Alvin was, “a cookbook.”
 - **We don’t want to show any weakness, so we project strength instead.**
Example: Henry felt overwhelmed at work with so many projects he had to finish before the holidays. He was trying to figure out how he was going to get all his work done when his boss, Frank, came into his office. Frank said, “Henry, I always know I can count on you to pull us out of the fire. I have a special project I want to assign to you that is due next Monday. For the sake of the team, will you show us what you’re made of on this one?” Henry wanted to scream, “You have got to be crazy! No way can I take on another project!!! I’m about to lose it.” What Henry said instead was, “Sure, Frank, you can always count on me.”
 - **We want to avoid conflict.**
Example: Raymond was engrossed in a football game on T.V. when his wife, Margaret, said, “I’m going to the mall for some shopping. I really want you to go with me, so we can spend time together.” Raymond didn’t want to leave the game he was watching. He hated malls and shopping. Besides, when Margaret shopped, she never paid attention to him anyway. But when Raymond looked at Margaret with

disgust, she screamed at him, “You never want to be with me!!!” What she silently communicated with this scream was, “I’ll make your life a living hell if you don’t go with me.” Raymond remembered the last time Margaret asked him to shop with her and he declined. They got into a terrible argument. She snapped at him for a week afterward. Remembering the last incident, Raymond instead turned to Margaret and said, “Why, of course I’d love to go to the mall with you, dear.”

When we stop overriding what we really want to say, we put a significant dent in others’ ability to manipulate us. Even if it is difficult at first to stay true to our feelings, the more we practice, the easier it gets. Changing the way we respond, especially if it is done with compassion and respect, might even lead to developing more honest and trusting relationships, especially with those we care about the most.

- **Red Flag 2: If we feel anxious, claustrophobic, itchy, trapped, creepy, or restless.** Our body may be warning us that we need to immediately get away from a person or a situation.

Example: Kathleen agreed to go out on a blind date with Bill, a neighbor’s friend. The moment Kathleen met Bill at the restaurant she felt creepy around him. She wanted to leave quickly after dinner, but Bill invited her to his house for a drink. Kathleen felt like saying no, but she was afraid Bill would be offended, so she agreed to go to his house for “one quick drink.” Once there Kathleen felt very restless and claustrophobic. The whole time she felt like making a dash for the front door. Bill brought her a drink and the next thing Kathleen remembered was waking up in the morning in Bill’s bed. It was obvious that he had put something in her drink and “date raped” her! Kathleen realized too late that she had overridden all her internal warning signs telling her exactly how dangerous Bill really was.

When we are in the middle of a situation and we get an intuitive or physical warning, we may not know why we feel it. But if we heed these important internal signals, without waiting for an answer to *why* we feel that way, we can avoid a potential danger. We may never know if something really would have happened. But the mystery is better than later finding out, like Kathleen, that our instincts were right all along.

- **Red Flag 3: If we feel numb, immobilized, tongue-tied, or confused.** Our mind could be saying, we need to take time away from a situation to figure out what is going on. Some of the things our mind may be trying to figure out are:
 - **We are scared and need to find a safe way to deal with a person or a situation.**
Example: Whenever Christine and her partner Kurt fought, he screamed at her, often within inches of her face. Each time that happened Christine became so numbed and frightened that she felt like a stone statue unable to think, speak, or even move.

The only choice Christine felt she had was to brace herself for Kurt's "hurricane of emotions" to blow over. Christine needed space away from Kurt to feel safe and she needed help from someone she could trust to help her figure out how to speak her mind with Kurt or if it was even possible to have a healthy relationship with him. But Christine's numbness kept her stuck, unable to see she had the power to change her part in this very destructive relationship pattern.

- **We feel rushed into a decision and need time to think about it away from others.**

Example: Jerry got very frustrated with himself whenever he was around his boss, Wilma. Wilma was the type of person who had great ideas but was always in a hurry and operated on tight schedules and deadlines. Jerry was a very slow and methodical worker, who was very detail-oriented and precise. When Wilma threw out ideas to Jerry about project changes and wanted a decision on the spot about their viability, Jerry often felt tongue-tied and muddled. What Jerry needed to realize about himself was he wanted few hours away from Wilma (without her type A personality pressuring him), so he could carefully think through each step of their product's production and delivery process. Then he could speak to Wilma with confidence about whether her proposed changes would actually work.

- **We need to sort out our feelings and get to our own truth about a situation.**

Example: Sonia had been dissatisfied with her job as a retail store manager for some time, but she wasn't sure why. Her husband, Jorge, called her at work excited to tell her that he had been offered a very good-paying job in a small town in another part of the state. He thought Sonia would be excited to move since she didn't like her job anyway. Instead, Sonia said to Jorge, "I don't know why, but I don't want to go. I'm confused. I can't think." Jorge was baffled. So was Sonia. She didn't feel like she had logical reasons why she didn't want to move.

What Sonia hadn't been willing to admit to herself yet was that she really wanted to go to massage school. The only one nearby was in the town where they currently lived. If they moved to the small town across the state, she wouldn't be able to fulfill her passion to become a massage therapist.

Giving ourselves time to figure out what we want to do in situations is an act of self-love. By taking time to clear away what is at the root of our confusion and immobilization we give ourselves time to mentally align to our inner knowing. This alignment builds self-confidence and leads to better decision making and clearer communication with others.

- **Red Flag 4: If we express one emotion, but really feel another emotion.** Due to our own past, we may have learned it was acceptable to express certain emotions and we had to suppress others. Often it is the "bottled up" emotions that are the ones we most need to express. Here are some examples:

- **We want to express anger, but instead we cry.**
Example: Denise was called into her boss Julie's office for her evaluation. Denise felt she had done a very good job during that evaluation period. When Julie handed Denise the written evaluation, though, all sections indicated her performance "needs improvement." Denise was furious. She felt the low marks had nothing to do with her job performance, but the fact that she and Julie had a falling out on a personal matter several months ago. Since that incident they had no longer been close friends. Despite Denise's effort to hold back tears, they started rolling down her face. She was embarrassed to be crying in her evaluation, but she couldn't help it. What Denise was hiding from herself was her immense anger and fear that if she opened her mouth, venomous rage would pour out and jeopardize her job. She had been trained from the time she was a tiny child that "nice" girls don't get angry and the only outlet for her rage was through her tear ducts.

- **We feel sad, but instead we express anger.**
Example: Jordon had just received a phone call from his brother that his father died. For an instant, Jordon felt like crying, but he pushed back his water works almost as soon as they began to flood in. A stern voice within Jordon reminds him, "Big boys don't cry." He found himself raising his voice at his brother, "How dare Dad die right now and leave Mom all alone! He always was a selfish jerk. And of course, you know who will be stuck taking care of Mom. It'll be me since I live so close. I can't believe Dad just up and died on us!" Jordon slammed down the phone. He stormed out of the house as he yelled at his son to pick up the toys in his path. Even though Jordon was 45 years old, he instantly felt like a child abandoned by his father. But Jordon wouldn't let himself feel that deep pain and the sadness of this loss. Instead, he covered it up with the only "appropriate" male emotion he felt he could express.

Awareness that we are feeling one emotion and expressing another is a very important step in evolving beyond our past conditioning. By learning how to express our full range of emotions in healthy ways, we give ourselves a full spectrum of responses to situations. Having more choices means we can take charge of our life, and we are no longer at the mercy of our emotions.

- **Red Flag 5: If we operate on automatic pilot without awareness of what we are feeling, thinking, or doing.** When we operate in a dreamlike state or a haze, we are more likely to be manipulated by others who pick up on our "unawareness."
Example: Jack just arrived home from work. He plopped down in his comfy chair and turned on the TV. His brain was totally disengaged from work, but not yet tuned into what was happening with his family. He was sitting in a semi-comatose state, staring at the television when his teenage daughter Debra asked if she could use his car to go on a date that night. Jack said "yes" without thinking about the fact that the day before Debra had been grounded for a week. He was also oblivious to the fact that it was a school night and Debra was not permitted to go out on school nights. Of course, Debra knew her father would be "out of it" at that time of night and it was the perfect opportunity to ask him what she knew both of her parents would never let her do.

By becoming aware of times when we know we cannot realistically make decisions or engage our brains, we can remind ourselves and tell others that we are not open for discussing things at that time or that we may just “need a minute.” Simply putting this thought in the back of our mind often alerts us to engage just enough brain cells to prevent ourselves from being manipulated.

- **Red Flag 6: If we feel smaller than or not a peer with *any other* adult.** There is a lot of emphasis in our society on putting one another in a pecking order according to social status, job or title held, educational level, culture, race, sex, etc. As adults we are peers to every other adult. When we hide this truth from ourselves, we make ourselves vulnerable to manipulation.

Example: Bob was the boss in a department at his company. He loved being very dictatorial with his staff, since he didn’t want them to forget that he was their boss. He periodically walked around his department with his chest puffed out to “inspect the troops” so he could keep them in line. Bob was walking through his department one day with his chest puffed out when his boss, Alejandro, walked in. Immediately, Bob’s demeanor changed. He stooped his shoulders and lowered his eyes. He fell in line behind Alejandro like a puppy behind its owner. Bob said, “Yes, sir” frequently and reflected whatever Alejandro said to him. Although Bob saw himself on top of the pecking order with his own staff, he felt on the bottom of the heap with the supervisors above him. He didn’t see himself as a peer to anyone else in the company or, in fact, anywhere else in his life.

We are all equal in our status as adult human beings. This doesn’t mean we don’t show respect to others for the role they play in an organization or in society. But if we find ourselves feeling inferior to anyone, we are likely to be gullible to their control at some level. If we feel superior, chances are we are more likely to manipulate others either on purpose or inadvertently. When we pay attention to how we feel about ourselves in relation to others, we can see more clearly whether we really believe we are a peer with others. When we feel like a peer, we radiate that to everyone around us through our behaviors and we are more likely to be treated with genuine respect as one human being to another.

What We Need to Turn Gullibility into Wisdom

To turn our gullibility into wisdom requires a good hard look at ourselves and at others. We must see everyone as real people and not the illusions we have created. At this stage our primary focus is on examining who we are, including our needs, deepest desires, inner genius, as well as our insecurities, sense of lack, negative inner voices, and anything else packed into what we consider our identity.

There is a sorting process that happens when we start unwrapping our “identity package.” As we take an inventory of all aspects of ourselves, it might be helpful to think about this process like sorting laundry into three baskets: (Note: We can always re-sort the baskets later as we get clearer about who we are and who we are not.)

- **Basket 1: Keep ‘Em** - We place anything here (e.g. our personal truths, our values, commitment to being heart-centered, etc.) and anything else we think authentically reflects who we currently are or aspire to embody.
- **Basket 2: Toss ‘Em** - We throw out conditioned parts of us we adopted from others (often in childhood) that do not reflect the real us.
- **Basket 3: Question ‘Em** - We place anything here that we are not sure reflects who we are, or we need more time to examine.

As we feel more comfortable with this sorting process, we develop the confidence and personal skills to face ourselves unashamed of what we find. It is this level of “truth telling” that allows us to clarify who we really are and shed our gullibility one personal sort at a time. Before we know it, we’ll find ourselves operating at a whole new level of being from our “Keep ‘Em Basket.”

Personal Skills to Live Beyond Gullibility

Rising above our gullibility means we no longer need to feel like a victim smashed under the heel of an oppressive giant. It means when we see manipulative behavior, we communicate a clear message without any words, “I see what you are trying to do, but it won’t work with me.” We trade in our neon gullibility sign for one that says, “Manipulators not welcome. Go away!” Below are some of the skills that may help you rid yourself of gullibility. If practiced on a regular basis, you will begin to see your gullibility wither away as your wisdom blossoms.

Be the Observer of Your Own Situations

It is often easy to see when other people are suckered. But we sometimes have a blindsight about our own gullibility. Since we are so immersed in the drama of the situation, we are unable to rise above ourselves to see from a more aware or expansive perspective. Developing our *observer self* can keep us from getting sucked into the manipulators’ grip. The observer is that “higher” part of us that objectively sees what we are doing. If we picture our observer sitting in the corner of the room, or somewhere above us, it can help us become the director of our life. We can ask our observer to notify us if we start to do anything that smacks of gullibility. We may need to ask our observer to shake our shoulder, whisper in our ear, or shout if necessary to get our attention. The job of the observer is to draw our attention out of the minutia of an event and warn us about what we are about to do.

From the *observer self's* vantage point, here are some things that may help you move beyond gullibility:

- **See where you get “hooked” by the manipulator.**
 - Listen to the manipulator from the perspective of the feelings inside you. *Stay with yourself here.* If you have a tug in your gut or a flash of an image while the manipulator is saying something to you, note this for later examination.
 - Be alert for any “red flags” that signal you need to pay attention. Without judging yourself, objectively examine exactly where manipulators hook you.
 - **Examples** of how manipulators hook us are:
 - Our need to be nice
 - Our desire to be loyal
 - Our fear for our personal safety
 - Our need to be perceived as intelligent
 - Our desire to be patriotic, good caregivers, etc.

- **See manipulators for who they really are.**

See manipulators as caricatures of their real selves. (Remember some of the common masks we examined in *Chapter 3*.) See if any of those fit. Or better yet, come up with your own memorable caricatures that fit the manipulators in your life. You may even want to create drawings of them. Once their caricatures are visually locked in, you are less likely to take them seriously or even believe them at all.

- **See the childish behavior of manipulators.**

You may not like the behavior of manipulators. However, if you see their attempts to cover their inner traumatized child, your gullibility will begin to be replaced by compassion. *When you have compassion, all the energy is taken out of the manipulation, and it has no power.* You may not find the manipulative behavior acceptable, but you still love them as the human beings they are, who feel so desperate they need to manipulate.

Stay Centered

As we discussed earlier, we are innately balanced at the level of our essence. But when we are feeling gullible, we are disconnected from our internal gyroscope that gives us a sense of balance. Here are some of the things we can do in dealing with others to strip away the weight which throws our gyroscope off balance:

- **Become a responder instead of a reactor.**

When we *react*, we read what is going on in the world outside of us and act based on external factors. When we *respond*, we read what is going on inside of us first and *then* act based on our internal truth about reality. Or stated more simply:

 - *Reaction* comes from *outside* of us.
 - *Response* comes from *inside* of us.

To some who aren't familiar with this concept, it may sound like mere semantics. Yet for those who understand and live by the response principle, there is an internal peace that begins to be present, no matter what the situation. The following may help illustrate this distinction.

Example: Tim is a pitcher in the last inning of a baseball championship game. The bases are loaded with two strikes. As he winds up for what may be the final pitch of the game, the opposing team's fans start calling Tim names and jeer him. They yell, "Choke. Choke. Choke."

- **Tim reacts.** He loses his concentration by looking up in the stands to see who called him names. He gets angry. He throws the pitch, and it is wild. He is still distracted by the fans. He does indeed choke in the clutch.
- **Tim responds.** He blocks out all outside distractions. He is completely focused. He is one with the ball, visualizing it going over home plate and the umpire calling "Strike three!" Tim throws the pitch and knows before the ball reaches the plate that his team has won the game.

The difference between reaction and response is not reserved only for the athlete or special circumstances. It can make a profound difference in our day-to-day dealings in everything we do. It may take practice to be a responder, but the change will be noticeable to everyone around us. Being a responder means that no one, and nothing can rock us off our foundation within.

- **Let others' hurt, anger, bad mood, and negative energy roll off you.**
Many of us have been trained to be like emotional Velcro strips. When someone throws their barbed emotions in our direction, we take them personally and let them stick to us. When we are centered, we pluck off all the negative feelings that others have tossed to us. Or better yet we take off our Velcro strips entirely, so no energy is invested in defending ourselves against the negativity of others. To do this, we must first become aware of how, when, and where in our body we take in the negativity. Then we can begin to practice techniques for keeping the negativity from sticking. Other images may be helpful for this process such as:
 - Picture yourself with a Teflon coating, where the negativity of what others say or do slides off.
 - Imagine other people's negativity like blow darts. As the darts approach you, see yourself as a Karate master catching the darts in midair and throwing them to the ground.
 - See yourself with a catcher's mitt, grabbing negativity coming your direction and sending it back where it came from.
 - See others throwing negativity your way and missing you, as it is deflected by the powerful force field that surrounds you.

Once we get used to stopping others' negativity from affecting us at a deep level, we may find that much of it fades away. Some people won't send it to us anymore since they can't get us to play their game. They will either quit playing the game with us entirely or, more likely, find a new player.

Some people will no doubt continue to send negativity our direction. But, if we don't take it in, no matter how much they try, their negativity won't affect us. When we are unhooked from them, then we can make clear choices about whether we really want consistently negative people in our life at all.

- **Set clear boundaries so you can feel safe, strong, and free.**

We discussed in the last chapter about having the “human rights” to feel safe, strong, and free. To exercise these rights, we must set clear boundaries, so we don't feel invaded by others. This is a key step in turning our gullibility into wisdom. When we are gullible, we leave the door to our “internal home” wide open for manipulators to walk right in and take whatever they want from us. It is no wonder we feel violated!

But we cannot expect others to honor our boundaries. To cease feeling violated, we must establish boundaries for ourselves. When we do, we confidently radiate them into the outer world, usually without having to say a word.

While some boundaries we need to set are physical, others exist only in the emotional and energetic realms. To have a robust boundary system, it is important to establish clear boundaries at all levels of existence. Questioning where our current boundaries are set (or whether they exist at all) is a good first step in no longer feeling violated by others or being gullible to their attempts at intruding on our space. If this feels like an important issue for you, there are many books¹, online courses², and therapists who can help you develop a boundary setting system that works for you.

Develop Common Sense

A typical reason we are gullible is that we override our common sense. Common sense combines our intelligence with our intuition. Without access to both, our common sense is hampered, making us easy prey for manipulators.

If we operate without common sense, we may rigidly see all people in a certain way. For example, if you trust all bankers because your father was a trustworthy banker, you are not using your common sense. Instead, if you talk to a particular banker, Paula, and feel after questioning her that she is *individually* trustworthy, you are more likely using your common sense.

It has been said that common sense is not so common. The good news is that if you are dedicated to developing your common sense, it can be cultivated. It will require you to deeply listen to what your innate intelligence and intuition are telling you.

¹ Here are suggested books to get you started on setting clear physical and emotional boundaries. Terri Cole. [*Boundary Boss: The Essential Guide to Talk True, Be Seen, and \(Finally\) Live Free*](#). Boulder, CO, Sounds True, 2021. Henry Cloud and John Townsend. [*Boundaries Updated and Expanded Edition: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Wondervan, 2017. For those who want to work at the deeper level of energetic boundary setting, see Barbara Brennan. [*Light Emerging: The Journey of Personal Healing*](#). New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

² See online courses by Carolyn Myss. [Discovering New Archetypal Patterns of Relationships and Relating](#), [Archetypes Everywhere](#), and [Sacred Contracts and Archetypes](#). See online courses by Robert Ohotto. [Boundaries of the Intuitive Heart](#), [The Art of Shadow Dancing with the Archetypes](#), and [Empathic Soul and the Love Rebel](#).

Don't Accept the Manipulation Contract

For there to be a manipulation contract, the gullible person must accept it. If it is not accepted, there is no contract. Simple as that.

The only power manipulators have is the power they get from those who are willing to be gullible. So, if you refuse to hand over your power to manipulators, they are impotent. They are left to face the consequences that come from not taking responsibility for their lives or, what more typically happens, they look for someone else to manipulate.

Regardless of what manipulators choose to do, when you hand them back their manipulative energy, you have called the “emperor’s new clothes” on them. You have remained their peer with your power intact. This demonstrates you are a real adult and is one of the best gifts you can give yourself.

Do Not Abandon Yourself When Faced with Manipulation

We will get many lessons in life facing would-be manipulators. One of the biggest challenges is not abandoning ourselves as we deal with them. Here are some reminders that may help you keep a clear sense of yourself when you are in the middle of a potentially manipulative situation:

- Pay attention to your gut reactions and heed your internal “red flags.”
- Don't allow others to rush you into decisions.
- Know that it is all right to say “no” or to tell others to stop.
- Remember it is okay to walk away if you feel you need to. Do not judge yourself as a coward. Sometimes leaving is the *prudent* thing to do.
- Know it is okay for you to change your mind, no matter how much others try to pressure you otherwise.
- Sort out whose issues are whose. When issues are clearly not yours, release them and move on. Taking responsibility for problems that are not yours never works anyway. You're likely to become resentful and you deprive others the opportunity to work through issues for themselves.
- *Other people's reality is not your reality.* Do not let others convince you that their reality is the “correct” one. If you do, you may fall into the trap of believing there is something “wrong” with your reality, which can lead to being manipulated through *gaslighting*.³ According to Stephanie Sarkis, author of *Gaslighting*, a classic gaslighting technique is, “telling victims that others are crazy and lying, and that the gaslighter is the only source for ‘true’ information. It makes victims question their reality...”⁴ Instead, if you remain open to other people's perspectives *while not abandoning your own*, your discernment can help you sort out which parts of what they say make sense, and which are manipulative tactics you need to avoid.

³ Gaslighting is defined as the “psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* accessed on December 21, 2021 at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gaslighting>.

⁴ Stephanie Sarkis, *Gaslighting: Recognize Manipulative and Emotionally Abusive People -- and Break Free*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2018., as quoted in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* accessed on December 21, 2021, at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gaslighting>.

- Deal with a situation as best you can and then let it go. If you find yourself like a dog with a bone, unable to let go of a past “mistake,” it may be a sign that you have abandoned yourself and let your “*perfectionist*” take over. This is a trickster part of your mask that is not real. The perfectionist incessantly beats on you under the guise of “helping you” remember lessons, so you can respond perfectly next time. Rather than relying on your essence for guidance, this form of self-punishment keeps you continually chasing after a perfected version of yourself that is impossible to attain.
- Use humor to lighten manipulative situations. Sometimes letting others know in a playful way that you see their manipulative tactics for what they are can stop the manipulator in their tracks. They really hate having their behavior exposed and being laughed at by others who see the silliness of the game they are playing.

Learn to Trust Yourself More than Anyone Else

To be truly free of gullibility, we must be willing to rely on our own perceptions, discernment, and self-knowledge more than we trust any other human being on the face of the earth. But, as we begin to build self-trust, there will undoubtedly be parts of us that we feel are not yet trustworthy. This is a natural part of the process of maturing as an adult and, in fact, it is this level of self-honesty that is necessary to deepen self-trust. When we encounter situations that make us doubt ourselves, rather than telling ourselves we are “untrustworthy,” we are better served by reframing our doubts as internal checks on whether our outer beliefs, perceptions, and actions are aligned with our inner knowing. Each time we do this level of introspection, we reaffirm our commitment to becoming more trustworthy and demonstrate a deeper level of self-love that is the very key to self-trust.

Communication Beyond Gullibility and Manipulation

Understanding the masks that others wear can help us separate their behavior from the actual person. While their behavior may not be acceptable, we still honor the essence of who they are. This requires us to:

- **Listen to the Underlying Messages**
We can ask ourselves what do others really want under the surface message they verbally convey or behaviorally act out? They may not even be aware of what that is themselves. Yet if we allow our intuition to tell us the truth, it may reveal what others are hiding beneath their words and behavior. The more skilled we become at listening to our intuition, the more our gullibility vanishes into thin air.
- **Drop Judgement and Replace It with Insight**
When we first begin to see the manipulation of others for what it is, we may feel very betrayed. How could people we trusted or loved take advantage of our weaknesses and use them against us? Why would they do that to *us*? We may be very angry and judge them as being bad or mean. These feelings are natural and may be signs that we have taken the first step toward ending our gullibility.

At some point, to get rid of our gullibility at a deeper level and communicate with others from a healthier place, we need to go beyond judging manipulative people as bad or mean. We see them instead as hurting people who haven't figured out how to give to themselves what they really want. Releasing judgement frees us to understand others more fully and lovingly. Knowing the real people under the manipulation (even if we do not agree with or like the manipulation itself) is an important step in true communication with them. When people feel truly understood, they feel validated. Validated people are less defensive and not as likely to lash out offensively, since they no longer need to manipulate to get what they want.

- **Keep an Open Heart AND Clear Boundaries**

What many people do when they figure out they have been gullible is they shut down their hearts to others. They may hold onto anger and feelings of betrayal that may lead to becoming bitter, crusty people who are unable to connect with others.

To keep this from happening to us requires that we maintain an open heart to love others and keep clear boundaries for ourselves. It is a real act of love for ourselves and those who manipulate when we communicate nonverbally, "I love your essence *and* I will not tolerate your manipulative behavior." At some level, they want to end the charade and just be real. Having love for them while keeping our own clear boundaries makes this option possible.

- **Let Others Know the Manipulative Game is Over**

Once we become clear about wanting to end our participation in manipulative games playing, we have a choice. Sometimes the action called for is to communicate that firmly, and straightforwardly to the manipulator. Other times we may want to take a subtler, less confrontational approach, while still making our decision clear. An example of this is saying something like, "I understand where you are coming from, but that doesn't work for me (or I'm not willing to do that)." At other times, the best option is to just walk away from a manipulative person and never look back. Regardless of what approach we take, it is important to stand firmly behind our decision to exit the game. When we take this courageous step, we boost our self-esteem and prove our commitment to developing healthier and more loving relationships.

Claiming Our Wisdom

Wisdom is the power to discern what is true and right based on knowledge, experience, and understanding. Wisdom relies on developing common sense and sound judgment to determine the best course of action. It implies becoming an astute observer of human nature, both of ourselves and others. From a place of wisdom, we see situations and people as they truly are, not as they present themselves to be.

Wisdom requires reclaiming the straight-line connection to our own truth. It also requires *reconnecting our intuition and reasoning*. Once we have these connections firmly reestablished, we can no longer be manipulated by others who offer to step in and make those connections for us.

Chapter 11

Using Fear as a Messenger for Freedom

*“Ultimately we know deeply that
the other side of every fear is freedom.”*

—Marilyn Ferguson

Fear has gotten a bad rap. Some people suggest that we can get rid of fear completely. But fear is an integral part of what it is to be human. It is a primal tool that is key to our survival. Fear is meant to warn us when we are unsafe or face potential danger or pain. It heightens our alertness and focuses our attention when we are in life-or-death situations. It can motivate us to do whatever it takes to achieve our goals, like studying to pass a crucial exam or completing important tasks to finish a project on time. Fear can help us hold dynamic tension as we are solving a problem. Once we arrive at a solution the fear often dissipates. Fear also helps us determine what is important in life, whether it is fear of not fulfilling a dream or fear of being hurt if we open our heart to someone. Generally, it is only when we fear we could lose something important to us that fear reverberates through our entire system.

Sometimes our fear is more cloaked in how it serves us. In this chapter we will explore how we can use fear in its overt and more subtle forms as a messenger for something within us that yearns to be free. Once we experience fear from this perspective our life will never again be the same.

Where Fear Comes From

Our fear comes from a variety of sources. One of the main sources is from our own past experiences we have labelled as painful. Anytime we start to do something that reminds us of the painful experience we say to ourselves, “Oh, no. I’m not going to experience *that* again!”

Some of our fears came from our parents or other family members when we were growing up. The messages of fear may have been overtly communicated through their words, stories, and actions or transmitted unspoken through their energetic field. For example, a mother was bitten by a dog when she was young and has been afraid of dogs ever since. When she sees a dog while walking with her small children, through her rapid heartbeat and involuntarily pulling her energy inward away from the dog, she teaches her children they, too, “should” be frightened of dogs.

As adults we no longer need our parents to tell us what we “should” be afraid of or what we “ought to” do about it. We have already incorporated these conscious and unconscious scripts deep within our memory bank. When a situation triggers one of these old scripts from childhood, we often react automatically from a place of fear.

Society is also a rich source of fear messages. People we encounter through work, community groups, neighbors, places of worship, and even at bus stops will gladly add to our memory bank of fear, if we agree to take in what they fear. We see fear amplified in movies, books, news, and on social media. Even when nothing is directly communicated, we absorb fear by osmosis from the social, cultural, and political environments in which we live.

There is a more subtle, but very important source of fear that is often overlooked. It is collective genetic memory held within our DNA. This memory has been passed to us over millennia as a human species. It is part of our survival instinct, such as fearing others we don't know, and the "fight or flight" impulse automatically activated when we are afraid we will be attacked.

Within families, there is also a genetic ancestral memory that is strongly imbedded within us from our specific genealogy. This type of fear is passed from generation to generation. Examples include family secrets that seem too shameful to disclose, distrust of all the relatives of a neighbor based on a past feud with our family, or a sense of futility we can ever break free of our family's "bad luck" curse.

There are so many layers of fear imbedded within us. Like nuclear stockpiles, most of us have much more fear than we could possibly ever need. To use fear to our advantage requires that we examine each layer of fear as it arises to determine whether it serves us or if we need to dig deeper within to decipher the message it is there to convey that is so key to our freedom.

Anger as a Specific Form of Fear

There is an unspoken contract related to anger that most people tacitly agree to accept. That contract is, "You become angry, and I will be afraid of you." or "You become angry, and I will become angry back."

A vast majority of people still see anger as a sign that someone is powerful. In fact, most anger, especially anger disproportionate to a situation, shows that we are fearful at a very deep level. We may fear we won't be heard, recognized, loved, respected, or get what we want. *Most anger demonstrates our internal and external realities are not in synch, which can cause us an immense amount of pain.* Seeing anger in this way, changes our perception of anger and how to deal with it in ourselves and others.

In many situations anger toward others dissipates our true strength. Instead of getting to the source of our anger we waste energy *externally reacting*, which focuses anger on the situations or people over which we have no control. By remaining outwardly focused, we have our back turned on receiving the real messages anger is attempting to convey from within. The actual message of anger is almost always based on our own beliefs, perceptions, feelings, or actions *triggered* by the situations and other people we encounter, not the actual situations or people themselves.

Conversely, when we *internally repress* our anger, we dissipate our strength by using our available energy to keep the anger under control. Internal messages like "It's not nice to be angry," or "I should be above anger," keep us from fully feeling our anger so we can address and release the core issue.

Whether we react or repress our anger, we deny it the opportunity to be our messenger for freedom. Denial begets more denial creating a painful loop within us. As anger becomes more urgent to deliver its message, if we are reactive, our reactions become more extreme. If we repress our anger, we attempt to control it by trying to shove it deeper inside us. These painful loops build pressure from within, which eventually can no longer be contained. Like a pressure cooker the lid of our anger blows off, often creating a huge mess that exposes the underlying fear that our anger was so desperately attempting to deny.

Anger is a valuable force within us. It is only when it is out of control or stuck inside that anger harms us. When we use it as the messenger it was designed to be, anger can give us the clarity to ferret out the pockets of fear that stand between us and our true strength and wisdom. This awareness is what can transform anger into a powerful tool for personal and collective evolution.

Realistic Fear Versus Illusory Fear

As a child did you ever see a shadow in the dark that you were *sure* was a monster? When your parent came in your room and flipped on the light you saw nothing was there and you realized it was just your imagination playing tricks on you.

Many times, as grownups we still fear what is really an illusion. It feels so real to us. The fact is we humans are extremely good at creating realistic illusions. We also may be influenced by our past or others who have similar illusions (or in the extreme cases, mass delusions). But the truth is once we flip on the light of awareness, we see there is no reason to be frightened.

One of the ways we can use fear as a messenger for our freedom is to separate realistic fears from illusory ones. (For examples see table below.) Sometimes, this is all it takes for the messages to come through loud and clear and help to dispel our fears.

Realistic Fears	Illusory Fears
When I go out of my house at night, I need to be mindful of my surroundings to make sure I feel safe.	I can't ever go out of my house. It's too dangerous and I will be killed.
The company has begun layoffs. I'd better look for another job now to take care of myself financially.	If I lose this job, I'll be a homeless person.
I've been eating unconsciously. I need to change my diet before it negatively affects my health.	I'm so fat, I'll never get anyone to marry me.

Leaning Into Fear to Get Its Message

One of the most common coping strategies when we experience fear, and its associated pain, is avoidance. Avoidance can come in many forms. One avoidance strategy is numbing ourselves to take the edge off our fear with substances such as drugs, alcohol, or food. Another avoidance strategy is distracting ourselves to divert our attention away from fear by such activities as watching television, checking social media, or getting overly busy. Whatever avoidance strategy we use, though, it can only temporarily keep the fear at bay. Sooner or later the fear returns and again stalks us to get our attention.

When we use fear as a messenger for freedom, we override our conditioned reaction to avoid fear and instead respond to the fear by leaning into it. Like a horse running into a burning barn, rather than flee from our fear we approach it with *courage and curiosity*. We willingly look fear straight in the face.

At first this strategy for dealing with fear may be very scary and hard to do, since the conditioned part of us will scream that this fear is life threatening. When this happens, we call on the adult part of us, while protecting our scared child within, to turn on the light of awareness. As the adult we know that the fear itself cannot harm us. Like Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” We allow our inner adult to courageously search every nook and cranny of our fear to get to source of its message. (See examples below about deeper messages fear may be attempting to communicate.)

Outward Reason Given for the Fear	Belief at the Root of the Fear
I'm afraid to quit my job and start my own business.	I'm afraid I'll lose my partner if I start a business since I've never had a good relationship and done the kind of work I love at the same time.
I'm scared to leave my spouse.	If I leave, I'll be a failure and a quitter. I can't bear to fail, and I'm not a quitter.
I'm afraid to tell my parents I want to spend Christmas in Hawaii this year, instead of with them.	I am afraid my parent's disapproval will mean I'll lose their love.

Even when we reach the root of our fear, sometimes we realize it has been there so long that it has created many offshoots throughout our system. One of our next tasks is to prune away each mental, emotional, physical, and energetic offshoot that remains stuck in our system. This may take time to dig out since there are layers of conditioning that have held this stuck fear in place for so long. Each layer we clear takes us a step closer to the freedom that comes from squarely facing our fear and compassionately reminding the terrified child within us that the big bad monster it feared was only a persistent illusion.

Mind Games That Perpetuate Our Fear

Over the years of living with fear, we might have developed internal mind games that inadvertently perpetuate and even amplify our fear. There are plenty of people who will gladly teach us how these mind games work and cheer us on to continue being fearful. (Misery does love company!)

But these mind games not only keep us fearful. They make us ripe for manipulation by those who will gladly play on our fears for their personal benefit. Having conscious awareness of how mind games perpetuate our fear can help us find exit ramps out of the fear cycle. Once our

fear is no longer trapped in our head, it can deliver its message to us often in profound and transformative ways. In the process, our mind is free from the endless fear loop that kept us from clearly seeing manipulative tactics for what they are. We can now refocus our mental energy on stopping potential manipulations in their tracks. Here are some of the common internal mind games we can free ourselves from playing:

- **“If I Just Think Positively Enough, My Life Will Change for the Better”**

Having a positive outlook on life can be extremely helpful in keeping us focused on our goals. But if we think all it takes to change our lives is positivity, we’re living in the la-la land of magical thinking. Attempting to only think positive thoughts creates an endless loop of hope and disappointment, which keeps us from addressing the dark thoughts we harbor and the deep despair we are afraid to face. To have a life that is truly fulfilling, we must be authentically ourselves, not some idealized version of ourselves. This means we cannot skim across the surface of life expecting to be happy all the time. There are times we must dig down within ourselves for the good, the bad, and the ugly to discover who we really are and what we really want. If we don’t do this, we miss out on the grittiness of life that can become the grist for our mill to receive deep learnings and powerful truths. It is this level of insight that can aim our life in a surprising and ultimately more rewarding direction than can happen when only focusing on positivity alone.

One exit ramp out of this magical thinking loop is to *see the unwanted gifts that come from dealing with difficulty*. Maybe related to our vocation, it is realizing that we need more self-discipline to accomplish our goals, more realistic expectations about what we can accomplish given our current skillset, or a better understanding of the market forces at play in starting a new business. Concerning a love relationship, maybe it is realizing we can’t just create a vision board about what kind of lover we want. We must go out on dates, open ourselves more fully to love, or hash through relationship challenges to reach true intimacy. Concerning why we don’t have long lasting friendships, we may need to look at our internal patterns that drive people away. Maybe it is our inability to hold a confidence in sacred trust, a judgmental attitude toward our supposed “friends,” or hair trigger emotions that dump on others when we are suffering.

By looking for the unwanted gifts of our fears, we can move from magical thinking to practical thinking, which gives us a more pragmatic and grounded sense of reality. There is also an extra bonus of thinking more practically related to manipulation. When someone offers us a “quick fix” that will make our life all better, rather than grab for the brass ring without thinking, we call on our mental faculties to thoroughly evaluate whether that offer makes any sense for us.

- **“What I Understand About the World Can’t be Trusted”**

When we reenforce this internal message, we groove into ourselves the belief that we cannot trust what we see with our own eyes or know in our gut. This makes us even more fearful about life since we have just ripped our very foundation of reality out from under our own feet. As a result, we continually feel like we are on shaky ground.

Having no ground of self-trust to stand on makes us extremely vulnerable to manipulators, who will gladly exploit our fissures of self-doubt. We may feel like we are walking on eggshells, fearful that potential danger awaits us with every step we take. The more fearful we become of taking the next step, the more fearful we become. This is a vicious cycle that loops through us, amplifying our fear out of all realistic proportion.

To exit this vicious cycle of self-doubt, we can call on our internal “detached observer,” who is not emotionally involved, to step in and give us a realistic read on the situation. From this detached perspective, we can ask ourselves, “What do I see with my own eyes?” or “What do I know right now to be the truth about this situation?” The very act of asking ourselves these questions can help us regain self-trust and the self-esteem needed to change our behavior and take action to avert manipulative situations.

- **“If I Can Just Get to the End of This “To Do” List, I Will...”**

We mentioned earlier how getting overly busy is a classic avoidance strategy that distracts us from facing our fear. When we are overly busy, we continually add to our “to do” list to assure we never really face the fear of the overbearing internal task master or grim reaper bearing down on us. Our fast-paced society and conditioning that we must constantly be “productive” not only encourage us to use this type of avoidance, but “guilt trips” us if we don’t. We feel doomed to keep running in this treadmill of busyness.

An exit ramp out of this “damned if we do and damned if we don’t” misperception loop is to slow down. This strategy may seem at first counter intuitive. But slowing down the busyness in our head allows us to tune into our own internal knowing. Instead of adding to our “to do” list, we look at what we can take off the list. Often once we do, the monster of doing is no longer breathing down our neck. With this illusion dissolved, our mind is free to think instead about creative solutions that may take less time or focus on what is most essential to achieve. Taking this exit ramp can calm our mind, actually make us more productive, and often leaves more time to focus on what brings us greater meaning and joy.

- **“I Just Can’t Stop This Incessant Chatter in My Head”**

For many of us, especially those who are more mentally focused, we may have a difficult time hearing our inner truth since we have a cacophony of voices in our head competing for attention. The more we try to shut them up, the louder they become. We may feel at times like a teacher, exhausted from coping with a room full of unruly kindergartners.

One strategy for stopping the chatter in our head is to separate out the voices, identify each of them as a particular character, and truly listen to what they have to say. Maybe one of the voices we identify is the *Judgmental Jerk*, who punishes us whenever we do something wrong. Maybe another voice is the *Rebellious Teen*, who doesn’t like authority saying what needs to be done. Maybe another voice is the *Troublemaker*, who likes to poke and tweak others whenever life feels too boring.

Once we have identified each of the characters in our head and observed how they act to get our attention, we can look at their behavior a little more deeply. Like a parent who wants to understand what is really going on behind each of their children's external behavior, we ask these inner parts of us what they are there to help us understand. From this level of deep listening, we seek to discover the logic of each of our internal characters, even if that logic may at first seem twisted.

In the case of the *Judgmental Jerk*, he may say he is there to help us remember when we make mistakes, so we won't make them again. This is when the adult part of us can remind him that continual judgment is painful and counterproductive to his goal. Asking him to redefine his role to better align with our inner truth gives this part of us a new role, maybe as *Course Corrector*. In this new role, we suggest that he gently nudge us back on track when we forget where we are going. With this new role, it is more likely this part of us will calm down knowing we are finally listening to his message, and we have reengaged him in a more constructive role as an ally to help us fulfill our potential.

Repeatedly using this process as we listen to each inner voice that wants to be heard, eventually reduces our inner chatter. It also coalesces the different aspects of us into a common mission of fulfilling what our essence is calling us to do.

- **Lying to Ourselves to Deny What Comes from Truth Telling**

Sometimes when we have a lot of mental rumination, it is a sign that we are keeping ourselves distracted from facing an internal truth we don't want to acknowledge. Maybe that truth is telling us to leave a spouse that will upend our life and have financial ramifications. Maybe the truth is telling us to follow our passion to become an entrepreneur, which will require leaving the safety of a job with a predictable income and secure benefits. Maybe our truth is telling us we need to end a friendship, but we procrastinate to avoid having that difficult conversation.

Sometimes, to prevent ourselves from bringing our truth to conscious awareness, we create and then repeat to ourselves and others an elaborate story to prop up our lie. We may create a story with our inner victim as a sympathetic figure who righteously defends against a "big, bad bully" who repeatedly "does us wrong." Maybe our story is about how hard we toil to get what we want, but the outside world (in the form of our boss, the system, God, etc.) just won't give us what we deserve. Maybe our story is that we are much too fragile to handle the very scary world around us.

If we find ourselves mentally ruminating about an issue we can't get out of our mind, it may be a sign we are lying to ourselves about something deeper. An exit ramp out of our rumination may be to ask ourselves, from a place of compassionate curiosity, "Is there a difficult truth I need to acknowledge, but haven't yet revealed to myself?" When we sit with this question quietly and earnestly, often an answer bubbles to the surface of our awareness. Once that awareness crystalizes in our consciousness, it breaks the spell of our old storytelling lie and frees our mind and heart to courageously act on what our inner truth is telling us to do.

Emotional Ploys That Amplify Our Fear

Emotions by nature are irrational. So, although the messages of our fear may not seem logical to our rational mind, they make perfect sense to our emotions. It is important to understand that many of the fearful emotions we carry today are tied to perceptions of reality we developed in childhood. To get to the root of these irrational fears we've carried so long, it is important to *feel into them* with the compassionate curiosity that parents use to understand their children's distress to dispel their concerns. Seeking this level of understanding within us builds internal self-trust. We begin to trust that when we are at our most fearful, our inner adult is there for us with the skills and resources to address our fears as they arise. Here are some examples of emotionally based fears and how we can reduce their intensity:

- **Lying to Ourselves About Our Real Feelings**

One of the most common emotional ploys we use that perpetuates our fear is lying to ourselves about our true feelings. This emotional tactic works hand and glove with mental ruminations that distract us from internal truth telling. Sometimes we deny our painful reality by describing an untenable situation as “not too bad” or “not as bad as other people have it.” Other times someone may tell us something that makes us “spitting mad,” but we deny our anger and tell ourselves instead that it was no big deal. Still other times we may be warned by a family member to never disclose a shameful family secret, so we repeatedly tell ourselves the incident never happened until we convince ourselves we imagined the whole thing.

There are so many ways, large and small, that we attempt to lie about our real feelings. But no matter how we try to justify lying to ourselves, the truth of that lie sits inside us like a lead balloon. It gets heavier and heavier in its attempt to get our attention, so we can transform the situation.

One way we can turn around this repressive pattern is to ask ourselves when we first wake up, “How are you feeling today?” By doing this right at the beginning of the day, our emotions are closer to the surface before our mechanism of self-deception has time to kick in and suppress the truth. This truth telling invitation helps our feelings relax and trust that it is safe to be authentic. This feeling of safety often opens a clear path in our conscious awareness on what actions we need to take, based on what our emotions are telling us. The more we invite our feelings to be real, the easier it gets to tell ourselves the truth about other challenging situations. Without the pressure to lie, our emotions can focus on what brings us a healthier relationship with ourselves and others.

- **Disconnecting from Ourselves to Deal with the Outer World**

Many of us, especially those who are sensitive to the world around us, developed early in life the keen ability to tune in to what is going on within other people. This is especially true if we grew up in an abusive or hostile atmosphere. We needed a mechanism to quickly alert us to potentially dangerous situations, so we could

rapidly respond to keep ourselves safe. One of the ways we kept ourselves from feeling pain was to disconnect from our feelings, so we could redirect all our energy toward dealing with the perceived danger “out there.”

While this ability often enhanced our sensitivity to other people’s feelings, this early patterning may have kept us from developing a strong bond to our own emotions. When we are disconnected from our own feelings, we may miss the emotional warning signs that tell us where our attention needs to be directed. The saying, “Remember to walk a mile in [someone else’s] moccasins”¹ is not something those of us who are sensitive need to learn how to do. It is exactly the opposite. *We need to learn how to walk in our own moccasins as we connect with others.*

The good news is that we can develop that strong bond with our feelings without losing our sensitivity to others. One technique to do this is to notice where our attention is focused. If it is “out there,” in our mind’s eye we can turn ourselves around and focus instead on “being in here.” We can then ask ourselves, “What is it I am feeling right now?” This very act of consciously turning inward allows our inner wise counselor to emerge and tell us how to deal more effectively with the world “out there.” Practicing this technique over time can reconnect us to our essence and support us to feel genuinely more at home within our own inner sanctum. Having this place within we call home, makes the world a much less scary place to be.

- **Continually Feeling Like We Need to Fill Our Well of “Not Enoughness”**

We all come into life with lessons we need to learn, but one of the most common is an emotional fear of inadequacy that we are somehow “not enough” as is. We have been taught through conditioning that our value to the world is *extrinsic* based on outer factors, such as what we do through our labor, our place in the social hierarchy, or our contribution to the community.

Without understanding that we have *intrinsic* value just because we are alive, we stand on the periphery of ourselves, feeling an internal sense of emptiness we long to fill. We constantly look for our sense of worth in the external world. If we just had the right house, car, or financial portfolio, we would feel successful. If we just had the right job, we’d have great self-esteem. If we just had the right relationship, we’d know we are lovable. If we just give more to our partner, family, charitable causes, etc., then we will prove we are worthy of taking up space in the world.

We can’t sustain a sense of “not enoughness” without using guilt and shame to remind us of our sense of inadequacy. Anytime we attempt to give our self-esteem a boost, guilt and shame rear their ugly heads. They suppress our sense of aliveness and push us back down into our dark hole of hopelessness by telling us we can never be enough, no matter how much we try.

¹ From a poem written by Mary T. Lathrap in 1895. The original title was *Judge Softly*.

All this outer focus, though, is a cheap substitute for what we really want. *Self-love is the only strategy that will ever fill the empty well of “not enoughness” deep within us.* Self-love is not to be confused with narcissism. Narcissism is self-absorption that arises from an inability to differentiate between ourselves and our outer environment. It can lead to a need to be continually adored, combined with a lack of empathy for others, and a belief that we are entitled to a special place in the social hierarchy. Narcissism is like a vacuum cleaner trying to suck up everything in its wake to fill the black hole within.

When we experience true self-love, we know we have intrinsic value, so we don't waste energy trying to fill self-worth well from our outside environment. Instead, we replenish ourselves by tapping into our essence's infinite power source, which is there for the taking. We draw on our core strength to accomplish what we want to do in the world, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We also open our heart more fully to life's lessons.

With this deep well of self-love filled over the brim, we are energized and have a zest for life. We want to share our bounty with the world and focus our talent and passion on experiencing greater purpose and meaning in our life, right here and right now. Through self-love we have a sense of internal well-being and fulfillment that was not possible when we were chasing after it in the outer world.

From this place of fulfillment, we have better self-esteem. We know we have an equal right to be here, so we stand as an equal to others. Our sense of self-worth and personal confidence attract different people into our life. We naturally gravitate to people who nurture and uplift us. As an unknown author said, “When you start seeing your worth, you'll find it harder to stay around people who don't.”

- **Fleeing from the Existential Terror of Annihilation**

The ultimate terror within all of us is the threat of our demise. If the survival instinct hadn't been built into us as human beings, our species would have disappeared long ago from the face of the earth. This threat operates in the background of our awareness even when it isn't conscious.

Too often, though, our emotions confuse what is actually threatening our physical death versus the death of our conditioned, self-created mask. At the emotional level we may not feel there is a separation between the two. When we feel our life is threatened, our system tends to unconsciously go into fight or flight mode as a self-protective mechanism.

As we shed layers of our mask, at some point, we will inevitably experience what feels like an existential threat to our existence to go any further in our personal evolution. When many people get to this point, they retreat in fear. They fail to realize that this defense mechanism kicking in is a sign that freedom is right around the corner.

While we may not ever eliminate our fear of annihilation, an exit ramp out this level of terror, which may have been inhabiting our system at a heightened alert level for many years, is to go back to our earlier point about whether the threat is real or illusory. We may have to activate all our inner parenting skills to convince this highly emotional part of us that the heart palpitations, shallow breathing, sweating, nervousness, etc. we are experiencing is just a particularly terrorizing story our mask is telling us to make us believe that *freedom is death* and *captivity is aliveness*. When our emotional self realizes the twisted illusion it has bought into, the mask's spell is broken, our emotions calm down, and our discernment kicks in, so we can more easily separate truth from fiction.

How Fear Can Affect Our Body

Our body holds keys to our well-being. This is especially true when our mind and emotions are fearful or out of synch with our essence. Fear can specifically affect our body in adverse ways including through addictions, back pain, bladder problems, headaches, indigestion, nervousness, skin problems, and cancer.² What we often consider “problems” are our body's attempt to get our attention when we do not hear more subtle internal clues from our thoughts or emotions.

Many people take pain killers and other drugs that mask the pain or may temporarily get rid of outward symptoms related to their fear. But without listening to the underlying message our body is presenting to us, it can be like putting a band-aid on a wound with puss still in it. Eventually the wound needs to be excised or it will fester and cause more problems. Our body does not give up easily to communicate with us, even when we are extremely resistant to hearing what it has to say.

There are many ways we can address body related symptoms. Although there are times we need to rely on medical intervention, there are many other times holistic approaches are more helpful in addressing underlying fear-based issues that have settled into our body. Some of the techniques that may help lessen even long-standing body related symptoms include therapeutic massage, Bioenergetics Therapy³, Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy⁴, and SHEN Physio-Emotional Release Therapy⁵.

Although it may take time to lessen fear related body symptoms, sometimes deep transformational revelations that get to the root of a core issue can release physical symptoms in an instant. Other times, we may have unexpected body signs that let us know we have made a profound shift within. Some of those body signs experienced by others include:

² For more detail on how new thought patterns can lessen or eliminate physical and mental problems, see the book by Louise Hay. [*Heal Your Body*](#). Santa Monica: Hay House, 1984.

³ [Bioenergetics](#) was developed by Alexander Lowen, M.D. It examines the body-mind's restrictions on these functions: physically in one's body, emotionally in one's feelings, and intellectually in one's understanding.

⁴ [Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy](#) was developed by Ron Kurtz. It creates an experiential route to the precise psychological core material at the root of clients' unwanted psychological patterns and behavior. This, deepens therapy beyond insight and words, allowing us to access the unconscious “blueprints” and early experiences that invisibly guide our clients' lives, relationships, and self-perceptions.

⁵ [SHEN Physio-Emotional Release Therapy](#) (SHEN® is an acronym for “Specific Human Emotional Nexus”) was developed by Richard Pavek. Through a series of planned hand placements on and around the body, the practitioner activates the client's natural energy flows, which releases trapped emotional trauma held in the body.

- Breathing deepens and relaxes
- Heightened senses, including:
 - Sharpened sight or colors more vivid
 - Smells are more aromatic
 - Hearing is more acute
 - Touch is more sensuous
- Feeling physically much lighter
- Tension released in neck, shoulders, back, diaphragm
- Lower blood pressure
- Less anxiety and nervousness
- Deeper, more restful sleep
- Body is more grounded and feels more connected to earth
- Toxins are released into the bladder to be expelled
- Increased circulation in hands and feet
- Pores of the skin open
- Spontaneous laughter, singing, whistling, or dancing!

Dialing Down Fear's Intensity

Since fear always lives within us for some very healthy reasons, we will never be without it. However, the more we listen to and act on the messages of fear, the less intensely we experience survival level fear in our system. Learning how to dial down that intensity may take some practice, but over time it can make an enormous difference in our life. Here are a few suggestions that may help facilitate this process:

- **Fear Can't Be Forced Out of Us**
Sometimes the original causes of the fear in our system happened so early in our lives that we didn't have enough life experience or emotional development to process it. This may be especially true for those of us who experienced a lot of personal trauma or generational stories imbedded within us related to physical or sexual violence, racism, war, etc. In many of these circumstances, fear may take on an oversized painful significance in our lives.

When we are committed to allowing the messages of fear to come to our conscious awareness, at first we may feel the same "larger than life" overwhelm of fear we experienced in childhood. This is when we need to be gentle with ourselves and allow snippets of the original trauma to surface gradually, as we are ready to process each one. Attempting to force ourselves to reveal all the fear at once may be counterproductive. The very act of force may re-traumatize us and trigger our flight response that buried the fear in the dark recesses of our subconscious memory in the first place.

It is important as we process fear to nurture ourselves. We do this by reassuring our child within as often as possible that we are there for them. We can remind them they are safe now and it is OK to feel the fear. Each time we express this profound level of love, that tender part of us can relax into our soothing arms, which automatically dials down the intensity of fear.

- **Reducing Fear Does Not Follow a Linear Path**

Sometimes we may think we have gotten to the root of a particular fear. But then when another similar situation arises, we have the same fear present itself again. We may feel frustrated that what we thought was completely gone has resurfaced.

It may be helpful to realize that to reduce fear, our journey inward does not follow a linear path. It is more of a spiral route that may require that we revisit the same fearful issue many times from multiple perspectives before that fearful emotion's survival instincts to fight or flee can calm down at all levels of our being. Once we have enough of our mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the fear addressed, our new, less fearful perspective of reality becomes embodied in our unconscious as well as conscious awareness.

- **Fear May Be a Habit**

Fear may have been with us so long it has become a habit. Even when we feel we have addressed the cause of the fear repeatedly, our internal feelings and our external behavior may still react as if we are afraid. This may take time to unravel.

For instance, suppose there has been an internal fear that has caused us to hunch our shoulders for many years. Even though we have gotten to the root of the fear, we may still find ourselves hunching our shoulders without realizing it. In a nonjudgmental way, we may need to remind ourselves that the reason for the fear is no longer there and it is now okay to relax our shoulders. We can then gently remind ourselves to stand up tall and let our self-confidence shine. Habits take a long time to form, so we need to allow ourselves time to rid ourselves of them, too.

Making Room for Freedom to Enter

When a long-held fear is drastically reduced, we may experience an internal void, since we have had so much energy tied up in keeping the fear at bay. Accept the void as part of the transformational process. To be filled with something new requires we must first empty out the old.

At the unseen level within us, the emptiness is what makes room for a new reality to take shape that is not fear-based. New affirmations may spontaneously come to us that are lighter and more joyful. New images may arise that shift our perspective. And we may find that former mental concepts are now transformed into embodied wisdom.

Don't be surprised if you have extra unexplained energy as you get used to your new-found freedom. Allow yourself to savor it. Reward yourself. Give yourself lots of positive strokes. You deserve it! You have shown yourself that *you are becoming your own best friend*.

Chapter 12

Embracing Courage

“Everyday living requires courage if life is to be effective and bring happiness.”

—Maxwell Maltz

To work through the associated fears that arise in learning to live without a mask requires us to be courageous. While the mask encourages us to play many games, one it doesn't want us to play is the game of “How Courageous Can I Be?”

Courage is our passport out of the mask's games playing. When we are courageous, we are not easy to control. Courage pumps up our energy and gives us the perseverance to lean into our dreams. We become an unstoppable force in service to the world. The “games of the mask” seen through the eyes of courage seem silly, hollow, and without meaning. Courage shows the mask for what it really is, a symbol of tyranny's false power.

Be Willing to Take Risks

To be courageous, we must take risks. It requires giving up the familiar, “the way things are *supposed* to be,” and giving up playing small, so we can stretch ourselves to new heights.

Risk-taking is the natural way our essence urges us toward fulfillment and toward enjoyment of life. Without risk-taking, we become stagnant and unenthusiastic, like automatons trudging routinely through daily activities.

Risk-taking is a mindset and an adventure in learning and personal growth. It challenges us to push outside of our “safety zone,” so we can open to a new level of understanding and awareness. Once we have gone outside our known territory, our “safety zone” expands. We now have less fear of the world around us, which frees our energy to experience love and fulfillment rather than just protection and survival.

Learn Lessons from “Mistakes”

When faced with taking risks, we may fear we will harm ourselves if we make a wrong choice. This view of risk-taking plays on the fear we will be a failure or die if we make an incorrect choice. If we reframe our decision point as an opportunity to learn more about ourselves, those around us, and the nature of the world, we see there are no incorrect choices or mistakes in life, just different ways to learn. Having this perspective helps us lighten up about our decision making, so we can more quickly rise to life's challenges, learn its lessons, and move on to new and richer experiences.

Example: Jill just started living on her own and she had a hard time managing her money. She loved to shop and party with friends on weekends. Situations repeatedly appeared offering her the chance to look at her money management issue, but Jill chose to ignore her lessons. After several months in a row of having to borrow money just to pay her rent and minimum credit card payment, though, she became alarmed and embarrassed she had let her finances get so out of control. Jill realized she had to make a choice. Was she going to

become a financially responsible adult, or continue to lurch along in life with money problems and make her life more difficult? This was a turning point as she chose to face the underlying reasons for her spending habits, commit to her personal evolution, and do whatever it took to become a full-fledged adult.

Release Perfection and Judgment

It is much easier to take risks when we give up our need to be perfect. Perfection is something the mask sets up for us to strive toward, but never achieve. It is a sure-fire way for us to feel like failures. It keeps us from enjoying who we are now and appreciating who we are becoming, messy learning and all.

As we release perfection, we lose the need to judge our “mistakes.” We stop seeing our errors as great life tragedies. We stop punishing ourselves for being “stupid” or not having done it “right.” We simply learn from the situations presented, thank ourselves for the opportunities to practice what we think we already know, and commit to being as conscious as possible next time about how we want to respond differently.

Reprogram “Mistakes” into “Lessons”

We can reprogram our way of thinking about “mistakes” by using a very simple technique. When a situation occurs that we feel was a “mistake,” we can ask ourselves questions to turn the experience into a learning opportunity. Here are some sample questions:

- Did I operate from my external programming, or did I come from my truth?
- Did I listen to my intuition before I listened to my logic?
- Did I *respond* to the situation from my essence, or did I *react* without being connected to myself?
- Did I act from fear and defensiveness or from love and desire to genuinely connect?
- Did I stay true to my personal integrity?
- Were there obvious signs I did not pay attention to that led to my error in judgment?
- Were there signs I saw but chose to bypass or override?
- Were there pieces of information I was missing before this incident, which I now have access to for future decision making?
- Did I rigidly hold onto outdated views of reality that do not fit anymore?
- If the situation arises again what will I remind myself to do differently?
- Is there a pattern in my response I can learn from?
- Am I being gentle with myself about this situation?

When we become aware of our part in situations that arise, we are better be able to turn our “mistakes” into “lessons.” With practice, we learn how to ask ourselves useful questions while we are in the middle of situations. Sometimes just through this awareness we change the outcome. As we become even more conscious through our self-questioning technique, we can often anticipate situations before they even arise. We quickly play out different scenarios in our mind’s eye and decide how we want to proceed or if the best course of action is to just walk away.

Release the Experience, Hold onto the Lesson

An important aspect in transforming “mistakes” into “lessons” is to release the experience after it is over. We don't have to replay it repeatedly to remember it. Repeating it too often will do more harm than good since it will feel like self-punishment. We always have access to the information in our internal memory bank any time we need it. Releasing it in our conscious awareness creates internal space within us to learn from new experiences.

Learning Lessons is Not Linear

It is important to know that learning is not a linear process. Just because we got something one time, does not mean we will never fall back into old patterns related to the same underlying issue. It may take time for new ways of being to become so internally ingrained that they are second nature to us. Understanding that our learning may be “*5 steps forward and 3 steps back*” allows us to be gentler on ourselves.

When we find ourselves forgetting what we learned and acting in old ways, it is important to honor these experiences as equally important to our new ways of being. There is a difference now. Since we are acting with more awareness, the old experiences probably will never again feel as comfortable as they once did. It is like wearing a pair of new shoes. At first, they may not be as comfortable as our old shoes. But after we have worn the new shoes awhile and then step back into the old ones, we notice our feet have changed, and the old shoes no longer fit the “new” us. Until we had both experiences to compare, we may not realize how much we have already evolved.

Develop Self-Discipline

If you ask those who are successful what they attribute their success to, many will say it is self-discipline. This one factor often kept them going when all others said something couldn't be done or their prospects to accomplish their dream looked bleak. They kept their focus step-by-step, day after day courageously doing whatever was required to achieve their goals and dreams.

Many of us look at someone who has “made it,” and we just see end the result. We may think, “I can do that, too.” We may try something new for a while that interests us. But when it doesn't get immediate results, without self-discipline we may fall back into old patterns that sabotage our perseverance.

Without self-discipline we may use this as a justification for continuing to feel like victims of why we can't fulfill our dreams. Like a good victim we can say, “I tried it, but it just didn't work out.” Many people use this as their victim motto throughout life. They refuse to admit that their very lack of self-discipline is what keeps them from breaking free from their victim identity.

Self-discipline is a choice. We can choose to focus on finding a breakthrough on a difficult task or abandon it and instead veg out in front of the TV. We can practice our gymnastic moves all summer to prepare for competition, or we can hang around the mall

shopping and gossiping with friends. We can choose to work through a problem with our spouse or use avoidance by going to a bar every night after work. We can choose to complain to our friends about our weight, or we can eat less, exercise more, and seek professional support to keep ourselves on track.

There is no set formula for how to develop self-discipline, but here are some ideas that may be helpful:

- When you are clear about your desires or goals and really get excited about them, make a list of what you will need to do to stay on track. Refer to the list when you are at a low point or can't remember what you need to do to meet your goals.
- If you see yourself doing things in the old pattern that does not serve you in fulfilling your dream, ask yourself, “Do I really want to do this? Or am I avoiding doing what I know will help me get what I really want?”
Example: You feel that you want to look for a new job but say to yourself that you need to update your resume. When you have time to work on your resume, though, do you instead clean out a closet, update your address book, or find other tasks that you have “needed to do” for years?
- If you decide to do something you know interferes with what you really want to do, notice if you are operating unconsciously to sabotage yourself.
Example: You want to compose a song, but instead you go to the refrigerator and eat ice cream. Choose to eat the ice cream with awareness. Ask yourself questions like, “Is eating this ice cream fulfilling, or do I feel guilty and angry with myself for eating it?” “Is the ice cream a cheap substitute for the real sweetness of life I truly desire?” “What am I scared of if my song writing is fulfilling?”
- If you are stuck in a routine that makes it hard to do what you say is important, vary your routine.
Example: You want to exercise more. You wake up in the mornings resolving that today after work you will exercise. But after work you are tired and hungry. Instead of exercising you grab some fast food and collapse in front of the television to eat it. Choose to change your routine by exercising in the morning before you are awake enough to talk yourself out of it.
- If you want to do something, but there never seems to be enough time to get to it, set specific time aside for yourself.
Example: You want to write a children’s book. Let everyone in the family know you are unavailable from 8:00-9:00 p.m. each night. Do not do anything else during this time. If family or friends interrupt you, firmly remind them that this is your uninterrupted time. Do this consistently for at least three weeks and see if it helps you develop a new writing habit. By establishing a new routine, it helps you clearly define your boundaries for yourself and your family. You also affirm to yourself that time to fulfill your dream is sacrosanct.

Be Willing to Stand Alone in Your Truth

One very important aspect of courage is our willingness to stand alone in our truth. It is easy to feel courageous when we are surrounded by others who are saying or doing the same thing that we are. But this is false courage. The truly courageous are willing to stick with their truth no matter how few others agree with them or back them. Mahatma Gandhi, who knew real courage, said it well, “Strength in numbers is the delight of the timid. The valiant in spirit glory in fighting alone.”

Truth is something that cannot be voted on. There can be, and often has been, mass delusion. Otherwise, tyrants would never be able to run over people in wholesale lots. If our truth tells us the opposite of what everyone else around us says, we exhibit true courage by refusing to go along with others.

Standing alone in our truth takes real dedication at times. We may be tested by situations to see how far we are willing to go to back our truth. Are we willing to face the perceived risk of losing a job, our spouse, or the love of our parents by stating our truth?

Often, we may find that standing with our truth does not bring the actual consequences we feared. The fear was only a way to mask our truth. Once we are truthful, we are then free from the bondage of fear. We may not actually lose the job, spouse, or parental love by standing behind our truth.

If we lose those things, the lesson is *not*, “we should not have told the truth.” The lesson may be to see if we will *abandon our truth* to get something from others. The lesson also might be that we need to let go of the job, spouse, or need for parental love to draw to us new connections that better align to our truth and integrity.

Many people fear that they will be lonely if they stand in their truth. This may be the case in the short run. If we are truly courageous, though, we must be willing to experience short-term loneliness, to gain long-term self-respect. We may need to release the closeness with people we have outgrown for possible new connections with those who are more closely aligned with our personal values. Even if we don’t find other like-minded connections, when we are true to ourselves, we are never alone. We always have *ourselves* and our connection to all that is.

Being willing to stand alone does not mean we must evolve in isolation. Sometimes the courageous thing to do is ask for help, whether that is from friends, a therapist, or a support group. Asking for support is acknowledging to ourselves that with a helping hand we can free ourselves from our own loneliness, fear, and victimization.

Don't Take Life Too Seriously

As mentioned earlier, risk-taking is easier when we see life as an adventure, rather than a series of mistakes. To see life this way, we must lighten up and not take life or the people around us too seriously.

One of the reasons we have looked at the “games of the mask” and masks we wear in the way we have is to see the funny side of human nature. So often, when we are in the middle of dealing with challenges, we take them too seriously. We miss the fact that others are just seeing whether we will play a game with them. When we understand this, then we can say to ourselves, “I see the game. No thanks.”

Strengthening our courage does not have to be a stressful or heavy process. In fact, as we lighten up, we invite ourselves to take additional courageous actions, which creates a courage snowball effect. The more courage we access, the more courage we can activate to live life fully and tenaciously pursue our dreams.

Chapter 13

Ditching the Struggle

“Struggle...is not natural; it is an unholy battle we fight within ourselves...”
—Stuart Wilde

What is Struggle?

We all know when life feels like a struggle. We may struggle just to get up in the morning and get the kids ready for school. We may experience more challenging struggles when faced with long-term financial hardships, the breakup of a relationship, an ongoing illness, or difficulties at work with a demanding boss. But what exactly is struggle?

Struggle is defined in the dictionary as, “To make one’s way with difficulty, violent exertion.” Struggle is not the same as the *dynamic tension* we may experience when we are problem solving, nor the *mental focus* it can take when learning new skills that stretch us, nor the *rawness* we may feel when reaching deep within ourselves for clarity about what is bothering us about a particular situation. By contrast, struggle implies resistance, hardship, and turmoil. Often judgment and a need to control are entwined with struggle.

As with so many other things we have examined, there is an opposite side of the coin for struggle. Otherwise, there would be nothing for the struggle to push against. So, what is the opposite of struggle? Ease.

Ease and struggle have one element in common; they both require effort. Effort is the use of energy to get something done by exertion of strength or mental power. But there is no judgment in effort, for it is not easy or a struggle. There is effort for a seed to push out of the ground to become a flower. But it doesn’t say, “Boy, did I have a tough time blooming.” Neither does it say, “It was easier than I expected to become a flower.” The plant just grows and blooms into a flower with an effort that was neither easy nor difficult. As far as the plant was concerned, it just did what came naturally.

Struggle is not a natural thing. It is something that we clever humans manufacture for ourselves. *Struggle is effort to which we have attached negative emotions.* The mask encourages us to play the “game of struggle,” since it makes us easier to control if we think life is difficult. We are more willing to try doing things someone else’s way, if we think they might have a better approach.

But just as we can attach negative emotions to effort, we can also choose to assign positive emotions to effort, so we no longer feel like we are struggling. This is what “ditching the struggle” is about. It is altering our internal perception about where we choose to exert our strength and focus, so we can flow with more ease through life.

Why Ditch the Struggle?

The main reason to let go of struggle is that it doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel good mentally, emotionally, or physically. Mental struggle keeps our mind tied in knots. Our focus is occupied in an internal battle. This means that we have very little energy left for creative exploration, relaxation, and enjoyment of life.

Emotionally struggle keeps us feeling desperate and perpetually hopeless about our difficulties. We become like a thirsty person wandering the desert in search of water. Maybe we'll stumble upon what we seek to quench our desires, but we feel the chances of finding an oasis are slim.

Without resolving the underlying mental and emotional issues around struggle our body starts to feel the effects. We may experience tension almost immediately when we are struggling. Shoulder tension and back pain are common indicators that we are "carrying the burden" of struggle. If we continue to struggle for any length of time, we may develop aches, pains, anxiety, hyperactivity, or fatigue. All of these can be indicators that we are spending an excessive amount of energy, like the mythical character Sisyphus, we continue to unsuccessfully roll our stone of struggle uphill. If we don't pay attention to these warning signs, our body may develop deeper internal symptoms like ulcers, a heart attack, or cancer to alert us to the damaging nature of struggle.

Struggle is Championed as a Virtue

We may have struggled for so long we consider it a virtue. We wear it like a badge of honor. Rather than dealing with why we struggle, and doing something about it, we get together with fellow strugglers and compare notes on how we have each struggled in our lives, how much more worthy we are compared to others who haven't struggled, and how it defines our identity or justifies our existence. We pat one another on the back and say, "There, there. What a good little struggler you are." This creates a group of people who reward one other and perpetuate each other's struggle.

Mistaking Struggle for Excitement

There are some people who are addicted to struggle because they mistake it for excitement. They see their struggle as a drama with interesting twists and turns. Soap operas would not be as popular if there wasn't confusion between struggle and excitement.

When we talk in terms of things being easy, many people equate in their minds, "Easy = Boring." But this is only an illusion to keep the struggle alive. Life can be simultaneously easy *and* exciting.

We cannot experience *true excitement* about life until we quit struggling. True excitement is pure bliss. Bliss is felt at a more profound level than mere emotions, thoughts, or body sensations. It is a *total being experience* that cannot be adequately described in words. Once we have experienced bliss, though, we know struggle was only a cheap substitute for the exquisite state of bliss we really wanted to experience all along.

Why Do We Choose Struggle?

Struggle is a programmed response. We are taught how to struggle from the time we are tiny tots. We received messages all through our years of growing up like, “Life is a struggle,” “If you want anything in life you have to struggle for it,” “It’s not worth as much, if you didn’t struggle for it,” or “Those who work hard are rewarded in heaven.” We heard adults say, “I am struggling with that issue,” or “I’ve wrestled the problem to the ground,” etc.

We also learned that struggle came with rewards (or promised rewards). When we were children we may have been rewarded with an extra allowance if we did something we found particularly distasteful, like cleaning toilets. At work, we see the workaholics who stay until 10:00 p.m. every night on a project to receive raises and promotions. Governments tell their citizens, “If you tighten your belt just a little bit more, we will get through this economic crisis and then you will get financial relief.”

Many people struggle since they don’t know another way to approach life. Struggle has been so ingrained that they operate on automatic pilot, never stopping to see or feel what they are doing. The momentum of moving forward in struggle may engulf their energy completely. Even if an easy way was handed to them on a silver platter, they would reject it without a second thought, since they are so thoroughly enmeshed in the struggle mentality.

Some people may decide they don’t want to struggle and stop doing it for a while. Then they get negative pressure from others around them who are still strugglers. So, they succumb to the pressure and get back in line along with everyone else and once again roll their stone of struggle up the hill. To justify going back to the struggle, they may say, “I tried to make things easy, but that’s just not the way life works.” They chose not to see that they faced an internal test. That test was to see if they were ready to give up the struggle. For many, the answer is a resounding NO.

The Antidote for Struggle

Throughout this book we have discussed how important our essence is to living without a mask. Our essence contains our inherent strength and life force, the truth of who we are, and our innately loving nature. It is our essence that provides the structural integrity, core stability, and central reference point we need to deal with life from the inside out.

Nowhere is this more evident than our relationship with struggle. *When we struggle, our reference point is located externally.* We operate from our conditioned self instead of our essence. We look to others to define who we are. We are cut off from our natural flow that connects us to all that is, and we attempt to bend the flow of life to our personal will. We also have difficulty adhering to our inner integrity and personal values, which are so integral to self-esteem and self-respect.

Whenever we find ourselves struggling, *the antidote is to turn ourselves around and focus within.* As we contemplate inward and look at our struggle with curiosity and compassion (remember they are our superpowers), the source of our struggle often becomes clear. Each time we rely on our essence as our central reference point, we lessen struggle’s hold on us and we strengthen our self-trust, reliance on our natural flow, and our ability to create a more loving and internally stable environment for ourselves.

Releasing Struggle

When we look at other people struggling, it may be easy to see what they are doing to create more struggle than is necessary. When it comes to our own struggles, though, it is a different matter. We often have a blind sight about how we create our own difficulties. As we turn inward for insight, here are some areas of contemplation that may help us release the programmed responses that hold our struggle energy in place:

- **Be Honest About How We View Struggle**
 - If we see struggle as a virtue, no amount of external behavior change will create anything but struggle, since our internal and external realities do not match.
 - We humans have an innate desire for life to be exciting, so if we believe struggle equals excitement then we will not give up the struggle.
 - If we are the type of person who always wants to be in control, we are setting ourselves up for a life of struggle, since control blocks our natural flow.

- **Examine Our Goals**
 - We may say we want to get to the finish line on a project and really mean it. However, without self-discipline our attention wanders, making it a struggle to achieve what we set out to do.
 - If we are trying to get too many different tasks done at once it dilutes our effectiveness, making it a struggle to focus on completion of our primary goal.
 - It is important to thoroughly assess whether our goal is realistic, otherwise we may set ourselves up for struggle and disappointment. It is also good to remember that it often takes longer to bring a goal into reality than we initially envision, since we think faster than we can act.
 - Sometimes we push so hard to make things happen that we miss the internal signs telling us to change directions. This may be especially true if we are attempting to create what we think will make us successful, admired, special, etc., instead of listening to what our essence is calling us to do.

- **Release the Need to Fix the Unfixable**

Sometimes we are so focused on a specific outcome that we struggle attempting to force a round peg into a square hole. Maybe we envision a particular outcome, but the rest of our work team envisions something completely different. Maybe we are attempting to fix a broken system that is not in our power to change. Maybe under the guise of trying to be “helpful” we attempt to change the behavior of someone we care about who hasn’t asked for our help and doesn’t appreciate our attempt to change them. When we focus on fixing what is not in our control, we miss the opportunity to look within and get to the heart of our need to force our will on others.

- **Assess Our Need for Acceptance**

If we crave acceptance from others, chances are we will be a struggler. Our need for external acceptance drives us to defer to other people’s lead rather than follow our

internal guidance. It is likely that the very people we crave acceptance from are strugglers, too. They will stroke us for struggling and reject us if we choose not to struggle along with them. Our need for acceptance leaves us open to other's who want to manipulate or control us. This will inevitably create an internal struggle as we attempt to free ourselves from their tight grip.

- **Which Part of Us Do We Listen To?**

We are especially susceptible to struggle when we listen to what our conditioned self tells us to do rather than our personal truth. Our internal dialogue is fraught with contentious debates as the conditioned part of us wrestles for control of situations. Until we align with our true desires, we are destined to create unnecessary internal strife.

- **What Can We Do to Bring Ourselves Back into Balance?**

When we are aligned with our essence, we are innately balanced. Struggle inevitably creates imbalance and a lack of stability in some aspect of our life. When we feel "out of whack" it may be helpful to ask ourselves what we need to do to bring ourselves back into better balance. Do we need to stop working and rest? Do we need alone time away from our kids? Are we spending too much time inside and need to get out in nature? Asking questions like these brings awareness to our struggles and can lessen their impact. Over time we may find we naturally seek internal balance without even having to consciously focus on it.

- **What to Remember When Transitioning from Struggle into Ease**

The difference between struggle and ease is the difference between attempting to live outside or inside ourselves. When we struggle, we react to situations, people, and events outside of us. To do that we must disconnect, often unconsciously, from ourselves to put our energy "out there."

When we live with ease, the same things may be occurring externally, but we radiate our energy outward from our essence. Since our energy comes from a natural place within, there is nothing for the energy to struggle against. With this alteration in perception, we no longer have a need to control things "out there," since everything we need has been "in here" all along.

Accepting Struggle's Gifts

Whenever there is struggle, there is a gift wrapped in the form of a lesson we need to learn. If we ignore the lesson, our struggles will likely increase to get our attention. We can continue to reject this gift, or we can open ourselves up to what it has to offer. It is our choice. Here are some of struggle's gift offerings:

- **Are We Loving Ourselves?**
Struggle may be saying we are not showing ourselves enough love. We may be using struggle to punish ourselves for being bad, mean, or unlovable. Maybe we haven't forgiven ourselves for a past deed. If this is so, struggle may be our form of penance.
- **Are We Going at Our Natural Pace?**
Are we dancing to someone else's drummer? Chances are that if there is struggle, we are not going at our natural pace. We may need to slow down or we may need to speed up. But whatever the pace, it will be different from the pace of the struggle.
- **Is There an Easier Way?**
Sometimes we are so involved in the struggle that we do not see easier ways of doing things. The struggle may be pushing us so hard that we would benefit by stepping away from the situation. During this respite, an easier way may present itself that doesn't involve struggle or we may go back to the situation and see it with fresh, more creative eyes.
- **Do We Need to Let Go of Something?**
There are times when the struggle is trying to tell us we are not doing what we really want to do. It may not be what will make us happy or fulfilled. Struggle may be encouraging us to reevaluate what really fits for us and to let go of what doesn't.
- **Do We Need to Change Our Attitude?**
Struggle is sometimes telling us that rather than change what we are doing, we need to change our attitude. We may be doing something now we don't like but is necessary for our personal growth or training. Later we may find we have all the skills needed to carry out our life's purpose.

Our struggle may be like the student in the movie *Karate Kid* being told to paint his karate teacher's fence in "up and down strokes" and wax his car in "circular strokes." What the student didn't understand at the time was those menial tasks had a purpose. When his teacher later showed him karate moves, the student saw those earlier tasks which he had struggled with so mightily, gave him the muscle memory needed to make quick karate moves.

- **Do We Have What It Takes to Bring Our Dream into Reality?**
Through struggle we may be tested to see if we really want what we say we want. It could be pushing us to examine our priorities or face internal issues that stand in the way of our dreams. Through that clarification process, sometimes struggle is there to show us we really want something entirely different.

Struggle may challenge our resolve. If we crumble under stress, it might be saying we need more preparation (such as business acumen, market savvy, leadership skills, emotional maturity, strength of character, etc.) to accomplish what we've set out to do. If we are clear that what we are doing comes from a natural place within, what we may

have previously thought of as struggle is now experienced as confirmation that *nothing* will deter us from fulfilling what we are passionately and joyfully guided to do, no matter what the seeming external obstacles.

- **Are We Enjoying Life?**

For some people struggle feels like a very grim game that must be taken extremely seriously. We may be “working at life” instead of doing what we find fun, relaxing, or accomplished with childlike exuberance. If we experience very little joy in life, struggle may be trying to tell us we need to shift gears and do something else that offer us more happiness and peace of mind.

How Do We Ditch the Struggle?

Getting rid of struggle begins with a choice. We must decide we are so tired of the “game of struggle” that we are truly dedicated to ditching it. We must be willing to stop seeing struggle as due to outside circumstances so we can squarely face the fact it is an inside job. And we need to commit ourselves to do whatever it takes to learn the lessons our struggle is offering us so we can operate in life with more ease and joy. Here are some of the actions we can take to release the struggle:

- **Observe How We Struggle**

The first step to getting rid of struggle is to admit to ourselves that we are struggling. This means that we must rise out of the middle of the struggle and allow our impartial observer to tell us the truth about what it sees. The observer does not judge the struggle or analyze why the struggle developed. *It simply observes.*

Our observer watches our actions. Do we get easily upset when things don’t turn out the way we planned? Do we see how we make things more difficult than they need to be? Do we move continually, never giving ourselves a chance to rest and tune into our intuitive knowing?

Our observer pays attention to the thoughts inside our head. Do we feel anxious in new situations and struggle to adjust? Do we wake up in the middle of the night obsessing about tomorrow’s “to do” list? Do thoughts enter our awareness and then kidnap our focus?

Our observer sees how struggle effects our emotions. Do we stay constantly angry with ourselves or others? Do we feel a sense of futility about life? Do we often feel depressed and have difficulty extracting ourselves from a very dark place?

Our observer also witnesses how the struggle affects our body. Do we feel tightness in our neck, back, or buttocks? Do we clench our jaws? Does our whole body feel like a spring wound too tight? Do we have a knot in the pit of our stomach?

- **Look for Flashing Neon Signs that are Set Ups for Struggle**
 - We do the unnecessary tasks first, leaving the important ones for crunch time.
 - We do the horrible tasks first, leaving no time for items that are fun and fulfilling.
 - We have a clear idea of what to do, but instead, we do what others tell us to do.
 - We sabotage ourselves by doing everything but the thing that most needs to be done.
 - We may count on someone else to pull us out of our struggle and then right before a project is due, we realize we are left to our own devices.

- **Understand Struggle’s Relationship to Worthiness**

Much of our need to hang on to struggle has to do with our not feeling worthy of having it easy. We may feel like we are not as worthy as someone else we respect who is still struggling. We may feel that we don’t deserve to be here in the first place, so we must struggle to prove our worthiness. We may not feel like we are worthy of having things the way we want them since we didn’t “work hard enough” for them. There are many other worthiness issues that can create struggle within us. Whatever they are, until we address them, we will unconsciously hold ourselves back from embodying our full potential.

- **See Struggle as Fear of the Sublime**

Do we believe that it is impossible to have things easy or the way we want them? If so, we won’t let ourselves have what we want, even if it is within our reach. In her book, *Prospering Woman*, Ruth Ross, Ph.D., talks about women having a fear of success. But what she says applies for men as well as women, and for struggle, as well as success, “Fear of success has sometimes been called the fear of the sublime—the fear of acknowledging that we really are great and wonderful beings. That idea is more than many of us can stand. Being prosperous [*or having things easy*] comes too close to prove it true.”¹ When we finally admit that our fear of the sublime is creating our internal struggle, we have gone a long way toward evaporating struggle in multiple areas of our life.

- **Be Willing to Change Old Habits**

When we have been struggling for a long time, it begins to become habitual. Most of us have gone through the process of changing other habits. We know it can be a struggle if we aren’t ready to let go of that habit, whether it is an addiction to alcohol or drugs, overeating, or being a workaholic. Here are some of the ways we demonstrate to ourselves that we are truly ready to break the habit of struggle:

 - **When we see we have struggled, think of how we could have done it differently.** This does not mean we should internally flog ourselves for not having seen how to do something more easily before. This process instead is a nonjudgmental one. It brings our observer online to simply impartially state how we could have operated with more ease and grace.

¹ Ruth Ross. [*Prospering Woman*](#). Berkley, CA: WhateverPublications, 1982, p. 46.

- **Be willing to let go of struggle and guilt along with it.** Sometimes, once we begin to release struggle, our guilt increases. Remember the mask wants us to hang onto guilt so we will continue to do the mask's bidding. It may be helpful to picture struggle and guilt floating off into the sky in a helium balloon until the balloon is out of sight. Once both are gone, there is nothing for new struggle to cling to inside of us.
- **Be willing to put good ideas on a back burner if the timing seems off.** Maybe we are ready to bring an idea to fruition, but the external conditions are not conducive to making it happen or it is an idea ahead of its time. Rather than struggling to force completion or wasting time on fleshing out all the details, it might be prudent to put the idea on a back burner and ask ourselves if there are other things that need to be done first. Putting our idea on a back burner frees you to carry through with new ideas whose timing may be more appropriate.

The Transformational Nature of Struggle

As we discussed earlier, struggle does not come naturally to us. It is something we clever humans have manufactured. If we think life is difficult, it makes us easier to control.

It has likely taken years for our conditioned self to learn how the “games of struggle” are played. It will likely take time to unravel what we have, for so long, woven into the very fabric of our life. While ditching the struggle may not occur overnight, it is a transformational process that accelerates as we bring more of our conditioned programming to conscious awareness.

As we examine the multiple layers of struggle programming within us, we will begin to see how pervasive struggle is in our collective as well as personal psyches. We likely will be called repeatedly to separate out inherited struggle (originating from our culture and family lineage) from that of our personal life experiences. The more we bring curiosity and compassionate understanding to what we are learning, the easier it is to release struggle so we can operate from our personal truth and the purity of our essence. Unlike Sisyphus, we *can* let go of our stone of struggle one step at a time. When we do, we'll know what it feels like to be truly free.

Section 4

Living Without a Mask

Chapter 14

Living Authentically

*“If one advances confidently in the direction of [his/her] dreams,
and endeavors to live the life which [he/she] has imagined,
[he/she] will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

The point of removing our mask is to live authentically from our real selves, unhampered by what we believe others want us to do or be. The stress and energy we used to pretend are gone. When we are ourselves, we are free.

Being ourselves has much more impact on the world than all the “acting” we do when wearing masks. As we show others we are not afraid to be who we are, imperfections and all, we exemplify it is possible for them to remove their masks and live freely as well. Living authentically invites others to participate in the fullness of life. We are beyond the “games of the mask.” Now we can dance together in the joy of a co-creative future from the truth of who we are!

Living with Awareness

When we are in the middle of a dream, we may not realize we are dreaming. The events in the dream feel very real. But when we wake up, we know we were dreaming. If we experienced something scary in the dream, sometimes we wake ourselves up to end that feeling.

Many people go through their whole lives in a walking sleep. Their sensations are numbed, and their feelings dulled. It is as if the pilot light on their aliveness has gone out. They trudge through life barely able to put one foot in front of the other.

Living with awareness is like waking up from a dream state. Awareness allows us to fully take advantage of what life has to offer. We feel more connected to the world and excited about our participation in the process of living. We stand in awe of the perfection and beauty we all have played a part in creating.

As we remove the layers of our mask to live from our truth, we will naturally become more aware. Awareness cannot be forced. It comes from releasing the tight grip we have on the illusions (dreams) we have had about ourselves and others.

Awareness is what gives validation and vitality to our truth. Our truth is no longer under the weight of the “mask’s lying contract.” Awareness gives our unique truth permission to shine forth in the world.

When wearing a mask, we carefully avoid self-responsibility. *Awareness helps us know that the only responsibility we really have is to become more aware of what we are doing with our lives.*

Acting from wakeful consciousness is all we really need to feel free of the mask. Once we experience the freedom of being more conscious, we are never completely content going back into a dulled, lifeless walking sleep.

Beyond Analysis

Analysis can be a very helpful tool when we are searching for our truth. It is a way to understand bite size pieces of truth when we still feel too overwhelmed to live our life from a larger perspective.

But if we continually analyze ourselves without going beneath a cognitive understanding, we may do intellectual violence to ourselves. It might feel like we are examining ourselves like a specimen inside a glass jar. We may experience a feeling of being constantly watched and evaluated. We may judge ourselves rather than just love ourselves for who we are in this particular stage of our personal development. It is difficult to feel safe when we have no respite even from our own scrutiny.

Beyond analysis is synthesis. Synthesis is a way of putting the pieces of our lives together into a cohesive whole. Instead of seeing our lives only through the critical eyes of analyzing what is not working, synthesis helps us see our personal evolution through the eyes of wonder, joy, humor, and beauty as we learn more about ourselves and our place in the world.

Synthesis allows us to make our own order out of chaos. We see life as synchronistic patterns instead of disjointed events. We understand there is unity to the universe, even as we can only glimpse a small portion of it. Synthesis helps raise our conscious understanding of ourselves and others to a higher level of being. It gives us a sense of peace knowing everything is perfect the way it is, imperfections and all.

There is a time and place for both analysis and synthesis. True synthesis cannot be accomplished unless we understand where we are from our current perspective. We do this by analyzing the pieces. However, we cannot feel whole until we put those pieces back together again in our own unique way. The trick to living an authentic life is to be adept at doing both analysis and synthesis. We must discern when each is the action called for to bring our external life into alignment with our internal truth.

Dedication to Truth and Integrity

To really honor ourselves and others we must have complete dedication to truth and integrity, whatever that is for each of us. For some of us this will be a challenge, since there are so many ways, both big and small, we have deceived ourselves and others.

We must ask ourselves on a regular basis, “Did I tell the truth in this situation?” “Am I honoring my truth, even if it feels uncomfortable?” “Have I shown integrity in this situation?” When we are honest with ourselves, the answer often may be no. Many times we may cop out since it is easier not to face the issue directly. We have an amazing slippery ability to skirt confrontation, but this only perpetuates problems internally and externally.

At some level others know our dishonesty and they will resent us. If dishonesty continues for a long period of time, the relationship will likely deteriorate since we know at a deep level lying hurts us. Telling the truth and living with integrity, eventually brings self-respect and the respect of others. We demonstrate we can be trusted to be honest no matter what the outcome.

Personal responsibility is integral to integrity and telling the truth to others since there are many ways to tell the truth. Some ways can be helpful and loving. Other ways can be hurtful or mean. The key is twofold. First the truth must be told from a place of purity. It should not be an attempt to manipulate or change anyone else. Our intent is to offer our perspective, which others can choose to take in or not. Secondly, the intent of responsible truth telling is to challenge a mask's lie or to stretch an outmoded perspective, but not harm the underlying essence of another person.

Along with personal responsibility comes an increased ability to deflect shaming energy. When we first bring a truth or lack of integrity to conscious awareness, the mask will inevitably attempt to suppress it. This is especially true when we confront our own truth or integrity. Our mask may attempt to get us to take back the truth by bringing out all the shaming messages contained in our internal database. It might also give our body physical symptoms, warning us to back off from our truth. Through our body, our mask may scream at us, "What you're saying is life threatening! If you don't stop saying that I'll have to punish you severely."

When we live from integrity and speak our truth to others, they may pull out all the stops to deny our truth or get us back into old patterns of relating, so they won't have to face their own issues of truthfulness or lack of integrity. If we take back our truth or go against our integrity, we hurt both ourselves and others. We punish ourselves by reinforcing that lying is necessary if we want to be in relationship with others. We hurt others by depriving them of the challenge they so desperately needed and hoped they would get from us. At a deep level they may feel betrayed and internally feel, "If I can't count on others to tell me the truth, they are not really supporting me."

Lying takes an enormous amount of energy since the truth naturally wants to be heard and expressed. The more we tell the truth, the easier it gets. Truth validates that we really love ourselves and others. Truthfulness says, "I love you enough to give you the gift of honesty. This is your opportunity to shed the lies. It is your choice whether you do."

Living an Open Life

Openness allows us to access our essence without barriers. When we are open, we are in an expansive state, allowing our perspective to take in new positions, possibilities, and understandings. Openness means we are flexible to changing circumstances around us. We can respond to people in fresh ways, and we are not afraid to try new experiences.

Being open means we are continually growing. Exposing ourselves to new information increases our awareness and broadens our knowledge of the world. To be open requires less energy than being closed. When we are closed, it is like putting chairs and tables against a door to barricade ourselves from forces we believe can harm us. Openness allows us to stand planted in our truth, while outside forces blow by us like a gentle wind.

Some people confuse openness with having no boundaries. They don't realize the difference between barriers and boundaries. Barriers erect walls between us and the rest of the world. *Boundaries radiate from our essence outward, claiming our natural space in the world.* When we claim our space, there is no way anyone can intrude. Our openness allows our truth to act as our "force field." It naturally protects us while allowing us to easily connect to others.

To be open means we freely accept challenges from ourselves and others. Most people do not want to be challenged, so they urge others to shut down too. Like ostriches with their heads in the sand, they think that if they are not challenged, they can pretend that everything is fine the way it is.

Openness allows us to continually challenge what we believe to be true. It helps us see whether we are really feeling fine or covering over our fears, lack of self-esteem, or a sense of "not enoughness" that hampers us from experiencing a sense of wholeness. When we are living from our truth, outside challenges do not rock us off center. They simply confirm our truth at a deeper level.

Releasing Our Need to Defend

If we use our body, emotions, and thoughts to bring pure consciousness into our experience, we no longer feel like we need to defend ourselves. We simply *are*. Being without defenses means no one can attack us. There is nothing to attack. Defenselessness is the ultimate power. It empowers us to be outside all the "games of the mask."

Defenselessness denies others an enemy. Without an enemy, others have several choices. They can attempt to find chinks in our defenses to get under our skin and attach their "enemy energy" to us. They can find someone else who will more readily take on their "enemy energy." Or they can let down their defenses to match our defenselessness.

Regardless of how we choose to respond to our defenselessness, we are not doing it to get any reaction from anyone outside of ourselves. We choose it since it is our natural state, from our pure consciousness of being.

Redefining Vulnerability as Power

As we shed the layers of our mask, an interesting confluence often occurs. We become simultaneously more vulnerable and more powerful. Most of us have not been taught how the two are interconnected. Yet, without our conditioning suppressing our true nature, our *vulnerability power* is what gives us the strength and vitality to live comfortably and effectively in the world from the truth of who we are.

Vulnerability still has a negative connotation for most people. Most of us have been taught that if we are vulnerable we open ourselves to being hurt by others. However, the truth is the more we explore our inner terrain, radiate our boundaries from within, and claim our natural space in the world, the more we appreciate who we are and love ourselves for all our eccentricities. We are no longer afraid of having our humanness "hang out there" for others to see.

When we are vulnerable we don't have to spend energy protecting or hiding ourselves. With extra energy available, we can connect with others from a more authentic place. Since we are not presenting a "games playing" façade we are not as threatening to others, and they often feel safer about being themselves with us. This is what starts the cycle of trust and understanding between ourselves and others. As our trust between one another grows, so does our loving curiosity about who they are, human complexities and all.

As we become more comfortable in our *vulnerability power*, here are some additional benefits along the way:

- **We become more sensitive to the feelings of others and ourselves.** We are more aware of and attentive to personal boundaries. We don't let others intrude on our boundaries and we don't intrude on theirs. We are more tender with the precious child within each of us. We also more acutely feel our universal connection with all that is.
- **We experience true intimacy (Into-Me-See).** We see ourselves for who we are and act on what we know is right for us to do and be. We know others will benefit from our being ourselves and it gives them safety to be who they are. When others feel safe around us, they are more willing to be intimate with us.
- **We continually seek the highest good in ourselves and others.** In our openness and loving light, negativity reflects off us. Others then are responsible for dealing with their own negativity. This allows them to learn what they need to do for their own highest good.
- **We are more comfortable with risk-taking.** When we surrender to our essence, we *know* it is safe to follow our internal guidance and we more easily move beyond our own resistance. We realize that our fear of risks is often much worse than actually taking the risks. We feel more comfortable facing the unknown and living on the edge of our personal growth. Taking risks allows our courage to grow and expands our willingness to go deeper inside, to better know and love ourselves and others.
- **We feel more centered, no matter what is going on around us.** We know centeredness emanates from our essence (core being), which allows our internal gyroscope to keep us upright. We view situations that challenge our ability to remain centered, not as difficulties, but as opportunities to fine tune our ability to access and remain in our calm center, no matter what happens around us.
- **We feel balanced internally and externally.** We discard any genetic or societal programming that does not allow us to live from a natural place of gentle strength and a heart-centered connection to the world. Our intuition and intellect act in harmony, which allows us to speak our truth, while honoring other people's feelings.

Our vision of *vulnerability power* for the world becomes clearer as we strip away our own falsity and get down to our naked truth. We are no longer afraid of nurturing other's *vulnerability power* when we value differences between ourselves and others. We stand in awe of other's unique beauty. We know that no one else can be who we are, so we are not threatened by others showing us who they are. We see that we each have a special place in the world, like threads in an elaborately woven tapestry.

Experimenting with different ways of being allows each of us to be pioneers in *vulnerability power*. It is part of the fun of life to discover greater ways to love ourselves and others. Leaping into the unknown expands the possibilities for generations to come. Let us each remember that at the point we trust enough to take the personal leap, it will become clearer about the possibilities of where we can collectively land.

Living Simply

Simplicity is stripping away all that is nonessential. It is living an uncluttered life. Simplicity allows our essence to appear in the world without needing to compete for attention or defend our actions.

Our essence is simple. What we place over it to keep it down is complex and unneeded. Truth is simple. The lies we manufacture to cover truth are complex. So, living simply relieves us of the burden of complexity. We untangle the chains that have put a stranglehold on our lives.

Living simply is not living poorly. Poverty implies there is no choice. There are people who consider themselves "financially poor" by others' standards. But these people derive richness from the simplicity of their lives and see "things" as unnecessary to their happiness. They are filled with joy and love life. They do not consider themselves poor at all.

There are many financially rich people, who live in "internal" poverty. They are encumbered with outside complications that keep them from living freely. They feel they have no choice but to keep doing what makes them feel financially secure.

Living simply does not mean we must live without creature comforts. It does mean things must serve us, rather than our serving them. If we stay in a house we dislike thinking someday it will bring us a profit, we may be subservient to our house. We let things serve us when we live in a space that comforts us and feels like a haven, no matter what it's physical size.

Living simply does not just apply to our outer environment. Stripping away what is not essential can apply to any facet of our lives. When we live with awareness, we examine how to strip away what no longer serves us in our diet, how we spend our time, in our friendships, and our internal psyche. Related to our psyche, are we living in a way that encourages our truth to come out? Are we encouraging ourselves to live free of the mental clutter that drains so much of most people's energy? Are we allowing our true needs and desires to be fulfilled? When we can answer yes to all these questions, we experience the freedom that simplicity can bring to our daily lives.

Freedom from Inside Out

Freedom has been discussed a lot in this book. Freedom from the oppression of others. Freedom from our deepest fears. Freedom to express ourselves. Freedom to show our truth to the world.

We have seen repeatedly that self-examination and independent thinking are keys to living freely. When we know ourselves, we are not afraid of being challenged. This does not mean we are gullible or defensive. We remain open to input from others without feeling we must take on their understanding of reality as our own.

Wearing masks shackled us. Living freely means we release ourselves from our self-imposed bondage of the mask. It is a lifelong process of looking more deeply within to see where parts of us remain imprisoned and doing whatever it takes to free ourselves from the inside out.

Stretching Our Bliss Tolerance

The great mythologist Joseph Campbell talked about the importance of “following our bliss.” He said, “[I]f you do follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while waiting for you. And the life you’re living is the one you ought to be living...Wherever you are—If you’re following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you all the time.”¹

Living in a state of bliss may take some getting used to. After all, not many of us have role models for how to live authentically while in a blissful state of being. The few people who seem truly blissful are idealized. But we *all* can experience the same feelings within. We just need to practice “stretching our bliss tolerance.”

When we first experience bliss, we may feel like it is a fluke. We have been conditioned to believe if something good happens, then something bad must follow. We may hold our breath “waiting for the other shoe to drop” or anticipate disappointment right around the corner. If this is our expectation, it will be difficult to hold the frequency of bliss.

As we become more used to experiencing bliss, though, it begins permeating our feelings even when challenging situations arise. We start to believe, and then finally know, the state of being in *bliss is always available*.

Bliss does not require us to be continually happy or “up” all the time. Bliss runs deeper than these temporary surface feelings. There will be times when we are in pain or dealing with difficulty that is not pleasurable. Even in these times we can experience the bliss of being fully alive, growing human beings, pain and all.

We may want to try this test periodically to see how much bliss we can tolerate. In the middle of a challenging situation, we can ask ourselves, “Am I bliss *now* even though I don’t like what’s happening?” When we can honestly answer yes, we know we are finally letting our natural state of bliss surface and spill over into our lived experiences.

¹ Joseph Campbell interview with Bill Moyers. [Following Your Bliss](#) 1988 video, Joseph Campbell Foundation.

Living in the Gap

What is the gap? The gap is the space between. The silence. The process. It is like the silence between notes in the music. It is what makes us “human beings” instead of “human doings.” The gap is the place where we connect to ourselves and to others.

We live in the gap by listening in silence, observing, and being still. Living in the gap allows our receptivity to flourish. We become the excited student, eager to learn what the depth of silence has to offer.

Hearing the Messages of Silence

Listening in silence opens us to new dimensions of communication. Through the silence we can tap into the collective knowledge of the universe. The language of silence operates beyond our five senses. It can “speak” to us in pictures, symbols, metaphors, thoughts, vibrations, colors, or voices. At this level of awareness, there is a whole new world to explore.

In silence we are more attuned to nature. We can hear the soothing lullabies of the high-country stream, we can feel the powerful strength in the force of the wind, and we can experience the wisdom of the ages in a graceful cedar tree.

The silence helps us feel connected to the sacredness in everything around and within us. Silence anchors us to our core. It allows us to listen more intently to the whispers of our inner desires and deep personal knowledge.

As we suspend our need to judge situations and sit in silence, we can see life from a higher vantage point. Encrusted patterns begin to fall away, opening our eyes to new possibilities and our heart to more love.

When we are busy talking all the time, or thinking about the past or the future, it is difficult for the messages of silence to come through. But when we quiet our minds, the messages emerge in the moment, often with great clarity. The messages are usually simple and to the point. The message may be, “Be still.” “Feel.” “Breathe.” “Be patient.” “Trust yourself.” “Support is all around you.” or “Connect to the love that is already here.” When we let go of the noise around and within us, the messages from the silence penetrate to our very core. We feel comfort and safety, knowing that in our stillness, the soft voice within is our best guide through life.

Quieting Our Turbulent Mind

If we are not used to listening to the silence within, it can be very difficult to get our “chatterbox” mind to be quiet. The “chatterbox” mind is a turbulent mind, never giving us respite from the hubbub around us.

There is a reason our mind feels compelled to keep talking. We have been taught we must be in constant movement. A turbulent mind is an anxious and fearful mind, which is when we are most susceptible to buying into the mask’s lies.

The mask knows, as does our essence, that when our mind is quiet, pure consciousness can emerge. This is the ultimate threat to the mask. If we are in a state of pure consciousness, we are beyond the mask’s reach. The mask is impotent against the powerful force of pure consciousness.

What we must do is practice *dropping down into our inner being* and invite our mind to join us there. There are many powerful tools to train our turbulent mind including meditation, affirmations, mantras, mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and yoga. Whatever method we use, once we have experienced the power of silence, we will never again tolerate constant chatter intruding on our inner peace.

Life's Great Balancing Act

To own our truth and live authentically may seem like an incredible balancing act. Some of the areas in our lives that may need balancing are:

- Work and play
- Activity and quiet time
- Wakefulness and sleeping
- Feeling and thinking
- Connection with others and solitude
- Acting like adults and acting like children
- Giving and receiving
- Expressing and listening
- Doing and being
- Filling up and emptying out
- Holding on and letting go
- Seriousness and humor

The good news is we don't need to constantly juggle to remain balanced. We have an entire lifetime to learn how to do it. As the great Dr. Seuss said, "You're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So...get on your way!"²

² Dr. Seuss. [*Oh the Places You'll Go!*](#) New York: RandomHouse, 1990.

Chapter 15

Living in a World Free from Masks

*“When we change our way of seeing,
we begin to live in a different world.”*
— Eknath Easwaran

Envisioning a world without masks is not a utopian fantasy. It is something achievable now, without any other resources than what we already have. *We* are the resource, both individually and collectively.

Teaching Our Children Not to Wear Masks

All the effort we must expend on ourselves to remove our mask does not need to be repeated by the next generation. We can teach our children how to live without masks, so they can live life more fully from their earliest memories.

Many parents still see their primary job as disciplining their children and helping them learn how to cope in the world. While these are certainly important tasks for parents, if instead we saw the role of parents as teaching children how to *parent themselves*, children would not have as much need to wear masks. Through each phase of their personal and social development they would not be afraid to express their individuality, while connecting to the world in healthy ways.

The same applies in our educational systems. Many systems are set up to indoctrinate students into certain ways of thinking and focus on downloading information into their minds, so they have the skills to become contributing members of society. This is not the education that most children need. Rather than stuffing them full of rote material, which is the lowest form of learning, children thirst for knowledge and wisdom. They crave guidance in how to access resources internally and externally for themselves. In this model of education, teachers evolve from that of mere authority figures to guides who teach children how to teach themselves and explore how to fulfill their own inner genius.

Whether we are family members, educators, advocates for children, or community members, here are a few of the ways we can support children to evolve into their full sense of self:

- **We can teach children to be curious about life.** This means encouraging them to “suck up life” by falling in love with lifelong learning. As lifelong learners they are naturally curious about themselves and others, life science, creative arts, philosophy, history, other cultures, etc. When children’s curiosity remains fully engaged, they find joy in all of the connections they make. They remain fluid in their perception, and they are better able to synthesize information. They also can see the world within them and around them through the eyes of creativity, expansiveness, and opportunity.

- **From the time they are born, we can teach children they have an innate essence that is both connected to all that is and to that which is uniquely their own.** Rather than setting strict religious rules or dogma to follow, we can offer them guidance on how to tap into their intuition, inner strength, courage, and integrity that are core to their sense of themselves. We can encourage them to *find their own answers within* by listening to their inner truth and their compassionate heart.
- **We can teach children that they are an integrated system, which is connected mentally, emotionally, physically, and energetically into a unified whole.** In age-appropriate ways, we can help children identify each of these aspects of themselves and encourage them to listen to each one for clues about how to bring themselves into an optimal state of well-being by being a part of and contributing to the whole.
- **We can teach children that they are unconditionally loved and “enough” as is, no matter what they do.** We can help children understand that they do not have to be perfect, and it is okay if they “mess up,” since this is how they will learn to do things differently next time. We can assure them that if they need assistance along the way, we will be there to support them. We can let them know that sometimes that support will take the form of tenderness with their vulnerabilities and other times it will be firm guidance with consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- **We can teach children how to use their triggering situations to learn more about themselves and others.** As they become triggered by situations, we can help them take personal responsibility for what they are thinking and feeling about situations. Rather than blaming or shaming themselves or others, we can encourage them to develop self-compassion and compassion for others, especially related to hurt feelings. When we see them struggle with repeat patterns of behavior, such as lashing out at others in anger or taking things too personally, we can give them tips on how we effectively managed our own emotions in similar situations.
- **We can teach children how to balance their intuition and reasoning.** While everyone has access to both intuition and reasoning capabilities, most people tend to use one more than the other. As children mature, we can help them develop both their dominant and non-dominant tendencies, so they can evolve into their “whole being wisdom.” We encourage them to do deep listening, so they know the difference between intuition and extraneous internal chatter. To help them sift through information overload (whether it is related to social media, advertising, sales pitches, political speech, etc.), we can teach them how to develop critical thinking skills by using their keen observation skills and inductive and deductive reasoning and to determine the validity of information sources.

- **We can teach children the power of service.** With so much time spent on television, computers, and technical devices, it can be easy for children to become self-absorbed and fixated in their own space. It is important to get them up and out into the community to learn the joy of serving something or someone greater than themselves. We can remind them of what Albert Schweitzer said about how important it is to the creation of their own destiny, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know. The ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”¹

When enough of our children are taught from a tender age that they are here to learn and evolve into loving, giving, and joyful beings, their lives will be drastically different from our own. Unlike us, they will not need to spend an inordinate amount of time unlearning stifling and deadening conditioning. Instead, they will be free to spend their energy exploring who they naturally are and expressing their unique form of creativity. What an incredible world they will co-create when they unleash their individual and collective potential!

Redefining Leadership

Whether they are presidents of countries, presidents of P.T.A.’s, CEOs, military commanders, or mid-level managers, people in leadership roles are no different internally than the rest of us. Unfortunately, many people in these roles are motivated by self-interest and fear rather than service to the greater whole. In their misunderstanding of the nature of true power, these so-called leaders attempt to exert their power to control others or to rule by force. They believe if enough other people are made to do their bidding, it will prove they are more powerful than they internally feel they are.

Some people in leadership roles want to be liked, so they don’t take on the mantle of true leadership. Their positions on issues waffle as the internal and external opinions of them change. It is obvious from their decisions that their validation still comes from outside of themselves.

Unfortunately, there are too few real leaders. Those who are true leaders know themselves well, see situations clearly, and lead from inside out. Here are some additional qualities of true leadership:

- **Real Leaders Are Guided from Their Inner Wisdom**
They trust themselves enough to know when to stand alone in their own decision making and when to turn to others for wise counsel. They are not swayed by the rise or fall of their popularity. Through challenging times, they lead with clear-eyed vision, a steady hand, and honest communication that inspires others to rise to the occasion, so they can collectively forge ahead toward new horizons.

¹ Albert Schweitzer quote. *BrainyQuote.com*, BrainyMedia Inc, 2022.
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/albert_schweitzer_133001, accessed April 18, 2022.

- **Real Leaders Know Integrity Starts with Them**
They understand they cannot expect the organization they lead to operate with integrity unless their actions demonstrate they are a person of integrity. They set integrity as a core value of their organization and assure it is carried out at every level of operation.
- **Real Leaders are Facilitators**
They know their role is to nurture the talent in those they lead and support them to achieve their personal best for the well-being of the organization, employees, customers, and all other stakeholders they serve. Through their personal example, they teach budding leaders how to *lead themselves*, which is the ultimate succession plan.
- **Real Leaders are Responsive to an Evolving World**
They know their leadership depends on their ability to adapt to the changing needs of their internal and external environment. Through their vision, they dedicate the organization to innovation, which fosters a culture where creativity flourishes.
- **Real Leaders Accept Responsibility for Their Actions**
Their desire is to contribute to the well-being of all concerned. Therefore, before they act, they look at potential choices for the ripple effect that their decisions may set into motion. They do not cling to power or their position. If necessary, they are willing to let go of their leadership role for the organization to accomplish the goals they strive to achieve.
- **Real Leaders are Simultaneously Empathetic and Firm**
They have no need to fulfill some personal dictatorial mandate just to serve their personal desires. They know toughness does not necessarily show real strength. Therefore, when appropriate, they are not afraid to show others their caring side. They do this even while they remain firm in not accepting anyone's inappropriate behavior. This also applies to negotiations. They demonstrate a compassionate understanding of all positions presented, even as they take a firm stand based on integrity and the best interest of the greater whole.
- **Real Leaders are Open to New Ways to Develop Mutual Trust**
Whether they are dealing with people on a one-on-one basis or working with large groups of people, they remain open to creative ways of communicating that foster mutual trust between all parties. They listen intently to others' ideas of how to bring everyone closer. They reflect what they heard to make sure everyone is on the same page. They put all options for discussion on the table. They bring forth areas of mutual agreement and then codify action steps that have been co-created for how to move forward.

Leading Our Leaders

To develop the kind of leaders who will guide us collectively into a world free from masks requires we each become our own best leader. This is what will help us “lead our leaders into leadership.” We can lead our leaders by living our own lives in the direction we want the planet to go. This means all the traits of leadership we want in others; we must draw out in ourselves. In his book, *Gifts from Eykis*², Wayne Dyer speaks of human beings’ five “fuzzy” thinking categories:

- Quality instead of appearance thinking
- Ethics instead of rules thinking
- Knowledge instead of achievement thinking
- Integrity instead of domination thinking
- Serenity instead of acquisition thinking

Clarifying our thinking so we live from quality, ethics, knowledge, integrity, and serenity, means we naturally lead. Individually we do not need to be recognized by the public as leaders. *We lead not by words, but by example.* Here are a couple of points about self-leadership to remember:

- **The collective will of the people is ultimately more powerful than any tyranny.** Weak leaders’ and tyrants’ survival at the top depends on the weakness in those they lead. When we each live from our personal strength, no one can make us do what we are not willing to do. Even when tyrants temporarily gain control, their tyranny ultimately collapses under its own weight, since it is not operating from their core where true power exists. For more insight about how to respond when faced with tyranny see American author and historian Tim Snyder’s book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*.³
- **When individuals no longer tolerate fighting and wars as a solution to conflict, leaders will stop proposing fighting as a problem-solving tool.** There is a well-known saying, “Fighting is what you do when you aren’t willing to look at other options.” Broadening our perspective to see common ground rather than fighting helps us find solutions to personal and collective conflict. What better form of world disarmament can there be than for all of us to lay down our façades and radiate that we are not afraid of who we are and who others really are. For more eye-opening insight about the interior sources within each of us that create war, see American author, professor, and philosopher Sam Keen’s book, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*.⁴

² Wayne Dyer. *Gifts from Eykis: A Story in Self Discovery*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002, p. 111.

³ Timothy Snyder and Nora Krug. *On Tyranny (Graphic Edition): Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. New York, Ten Speed Press, 2021.

⁴ Sam Keen. *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991.

Uniting Our Truths for a World Without Masks

When we talk about uniting our truths to live in a world without masks, we do not have to give up our truth, or individuality, to adopt one world truth. An unmasked world will be lived through people who *give of* their individuality to further evolution, not *give up* their individuality for it. Sacrificing ourselves would defeat the purpose and it would not accomplish a world without masks. Self-sacrifice only shows we are still hiding behind the mask of a martyr.

There is a community activists saying, “From diversity comes our strength.” Uniting our truth means we each focus our individual truth toward the idea of betterment of the whole. As we live our truth, the whole world becomes stronger.

We have no idea what the whole story is for this beloved planet since we are co-creating it as we go. What we can do is provide our talents, insight, love, and caring and then trust that the rest will be taken care of in a pattern greater than each of us can fully understand.

Playing the Game of Life Without Masks

Much of what we have done in this book is examine how we play the game of life *from* behind a mask. We have explored ways to stop playing these games. We have seen how the “games of the mask” extract a high price from us and the entire planet. Only we can decide if we are willing to continue to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of these games or if we are willing to do what it takes to be totally free.

The childlike part of us loves games. If there is no game around, we will find something to make into a game. We are afraid life will become dull and serious without the games we have become familiar with playing.

But living without a mask is anything but dull. No longer do we need to hide behind bullying, victimization, manipulation, gullibility, fear, and struggle. Without our masks, those things dissolve to reveal our real selves.

Our creativity to discover new ways of living flourishes. Now we can live with the childlike joy that is our birthright. We can develop new games to play that allow others to play with us in our newfound freedom. We may be surprised to find how many people are tired of the old games, too, and were just waiting for ways to experiment with living life differently while connecting with others. Some possible features for our new games might be:

- **As Players We Don’t Take Attempts at Manipulation Personally**

As players in the new game of life, we do not take on the negative energy of anyone who tries to manipulate us. We make it clear those behaviors are “understandable, but not acceptable.” Therefore, we do not feel personally hurt or offended by other people’s manipulative tactics. Instead, we spend our energy becoming more and more skilled at seeing through manipulative behaviors to the core of the person under their mask. In bypassing the surface caricatures created by mask wearing, we can finally connect real person to real person.

- **As Players We Speak Our Truth**
Even at the expense of short-term alienation, we speak and act from our truth. We have no desire to pacify another with a “white lie” or a compliment that is not sincere. We learn that speaking our truth ultimately draws to us others who are also dedicated to truth telling. This level of dedication often creates deeply trusting and long-lasting relationships.
- **As Players We Do Our Best to Respond Rather than React**
When challenging situations arise, rather than react with a knee jerk reaction, we pause, reach inside ourselves for inner guidance, and quickly assess the best way to respond. If we can’t give an immediate response, we let others know we will need more time to consider the issue raised and we will get back with them later to discuss it. When we follow our inner guidance, what others might think of us is not a factor in our decision making about how we respond.
- **As Players We Don’t Take on the Responsibility of Others**
We display our caring for others while keeping in mind not to “over give.” We still do what we are guided to do to assist others, but we know we are not responsible for the actions, feelings, or outcome of other people’s lives. We recognize it is a loving gesture not to interfere with other people’s learning process. When we “stay in our own lane,” we naturally experience a freedom and a lightness of being.
- **As Players We Go with the Flow**
When circumstances change, we adapt. We no longer cling to rigid ideas or beliefs that no longer fit the new situations. Rather than a brittle stick that gets easily broken, we are like the willow that bends gracefully in the wind.
- **As Players We Can Laugh at Ourselves**
We are not afraid to be ourselves, even when we appear foolish. Being willing to look silly, strange, weird, or ridiculous around others is considered a sign of maturity. When we are not afraid to appear foolish, no one can manipulate us by threatening to make us look ridiculous. We have already broken the ice by doing it for ourselves.
- **As Players We Sing, Dance, Laugh, and Enjoy Ourselves Every Day**
The “life force” dosage requirement may vary from player to player. But we might want to download “life force apps,” (like blood pressure apps for our wrists) that we players can check anytime we want to see if we are getting our daily dose of enjoyment. If not, it may be time to stop what we are doing, shift gears, and do whatever fills our joy quotient for the day!

For more information about how you can take internal pressure off yourself, while still taking a deep dive within, you may want to explore, [***Inner Treasure Mapping***](#)©. This process invites your *Inner Self* to communicate with you in playful creativity. You are guided how to gently and compassionately reveal to yourself your innermost desires, so you can develop the courage to take your next step to a richer and more rewarding sense of self.

For personal support on any of the challenges you're facing in your life, you may want to consider [**Personalized Mentoring**](#), which includes *Life Guidance Mentoring* and *Leadership Development Mentoring*.

Chapter 16

Letting Go to Receive the New

“Freedom—Letting come what comes. Letting go what goes.”
—Deepak Chopra

Many years ago, I was facing a very scary and extremely challenging time of my life and I felt awful! I was having difficulty in my marriage. The issues the two of us brought into the marriage meshed to create a perfectly dysfunctional relationship that was very destructive. Part of me wanted to run out the door as fast as I could and never look back. But another part of me felt I had to stay and make the marriage work. After all, I had made a forever commitment.

During that time, which was filled with lots of therapy and a great deal of contemplation, I had a continual image I just couldn't shake. I saw myself clinging to a craggy rock face that was cutting my hands and making my fingers bleed. My knuckles were white, and my muscles ached. I knew I couldn't hold on much longer, but I feared that if I let go I would fall and impale myself on even sharper rocks below. Still, I clung to the rocks, afraid of what would happen to me if I let go.

Then one night in meditation when that same image haunted me again, I heard a voice deep within the core of my being say to me, *“What if you let go and instead of falling on sharp rocks, you fall into a big pile of fluffy pillows?”* This was a transformational moment when I realize I had another option!!! I instantly relaxed and let go of my fear about making the right decision. I instinctively knew I could now trust that inner voice I now recognize as my intuition, or *Inner Wisdom*, to guide me about what to do next. With this shift in mindset, it became clear that my choice to leave my seven-year marriage was a commitment to freedom and fulfilling the next phase of my personal development. I was finally able to divorce, move on, and begin to soar.

There are still times when my inner voice tells me to let go of something internally or externally and I am afraid to follow its guidance. Then I remember this original experience and it makes it easier to surrender to the new. I now know from inside out that my holding on is only an illusion created by my mask's past conditioning to keep me frightened. Popping each illusion that bubbles to the surface of my awareness keeps my self-doubt at bay and allows me to surrender my old life and confidently take the first step into my amazing journey ahead.

Embracing the Unknown

As we have seen over and over, removing our mask is a process of releasing what we have been clinging to and hiding behind. It requires that we attune to our own truth and the desires of our very essence.

To do this, we must first rid ourselves of old outdated feelings, beliefs, and understandings. Even though they may have been with us for years, we know deep down when they no longer serve us. Releasing these allows us to make room within for the new.

In the process of letting go, there will be times when we need to feel empty before we experience the new. Emptiness precedes expansion. It is the period of gestation before birth. We have planted the seeds of acceptance by simply opening. Now we must wait for the gifts of the unknown to come to us and be ready to receive them when they arrive.

The Process of Removing Your Mask Summary

No matter what the specific process we go through to remove our mask, there are helpful reminders that can apply in almost any situation. There is no order to these points and the list is not complete. It is intended only as an example for you to design your own unique list. Remember, you define your own process as you go. Allow yourself time to evolve into the person you already are. Let go into the process of *BEING FULLY YOU!*

Your Perception

- You are responsible for all your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions.
- Your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions hold clues to your truth.
- Remember you *always* have choices.
- No one can make you feel or believe anything you don't want to feel or believe.
- Take pieces of what others tell you that fit for you. Throw out the rest.
- Trust your reality over what anyone else tells you.
- To reduce your struggle, reframe “problems and difficulties” to “lessons, opportunities, and gifts.”
- See the funny side of human nature.

Observe Yourself

- Be your own nonjudgmental observer.
- Be willing to step back and see the “bigger picture” and patterns in your life.
- Trust your body to give you important signs about your truth.
- Be willing to open yourself over and over to access more and more of who you naturally are.

Your Emotions

- Remember you are not your emotions.
- Allow your emotions to guide you to your truth without staying stuck in the emotion itself.
- Be willing to feel your pain fully, so you can fully release it.
- Once you no longer fear others, they no longer have power over you.
- Listen to the underlying message of your anger, so the energy can be directed toward what you really want.

Understanding Others

- Separate people's behavior from their essence.
- See other people's behaviors as caricatures of the real people they are behind their masks.
- No one has all the answers. Everyone is making up life as we go.
- You aren't responsible for others' disappointment or hurt. But they may attempt to shame you to see if you will relieve them of their issues.

- Don't take others too seriously.
- See yourself as a peer with everyone else.
- Beware of offers for instant cures or fixes from others.
- Others can't give you security. It is a hoax if they pretend to.
- Release your own self-condemnation and others will never again be able to use shame or condemnation to control you.
- The only power that bullies and tyrants have over you is your fear. Give up your fear and their power is gone.

How You Act

- Become a responder instead of a reactor.
- Honor the boundaries of yourself and others.
- Allow yourself to be imperfect and make mistakes.
- Don't let yourself be rushed into decisions.
- It's okay to change your mind.
- Be guided by your intuition before your intellect.
- Be willing to stand alone in your truth and you'll never be lonely.

Nurture Yourself

- Allow yourself time to evolve into who you already are.
- Evolution is not a smooth progression. Know that you may have to go back to old ways to learn they no longer fit who you are now.
- Be willing to listen and act on your inner desires.
- Remember curiosity and compassion are your superpowers.
- Balance your desires for work and play.
- Be gentle with yourself.
- Allow yourself to laugh, sing, dance, and enjoy living to its fullest.
- *Love yourself unconditionally. This means mask and all!*

Epilogue: Embracing the Incredible Lightness of Being

*“The moment in between what you once were,
and who you are now becoming,
is where the dance of life really takes place.”*
— **Barbara De Angelis**

As I mentioned in the *Introduction*, when I wrote the first edition of this book over 30 years ago, I wrote it to explore my own issues related to fear. I finished the first draft in less than six months. The information seemed to pour through me onto the page. In looking back on it, I’m still amazed at how much clarity flooded into me in such a short time.

While writing it gave me a structural context to understand the content in this book, I was only at the beginning of my process of digesting what I wrote and applying it in a variety of situations in my life. Now, with the perspective of time, I see how long the *embodiment* of this content is taking me. No doubt I’ll still be assimilating this material at deeper and deeper levels until I take my last breath.

Part of why I decided to revise this book now is because it is more relevant than ever. Never in my lifetime have so many personal and collective fears collided in such a toxic mix that threaten our entire planet. There’s nothing like the simultaneous existential threats of climate change, a pandemic, wider and wider gaps in economic disparity, political tribalism, the rise of authoritarian and despotic regimes around the world, the unprovoked invasion of another country by Russia resulting in genocide, AND the terror of possible nuclear annihilation to bring all our fears as a species to the surface to be dealt with. The choices we are making now are determining the future we create. Is it going to be dystopian as we have so often envisioned in our inner thoughts, nightmares, novels, and movies? Or are enough of us going to make evolutionary breakthroughs in our inner and outer terrain to co-create a different outcome?

As a species, I see us collectively moving through the *shadow of our becoming*. There is nothing like facing a shadow, personally or collectively, that brings long-standing issues to the surface to be faced and dealt with. We can tip this balance drastically by each doing our part to remove the masks of our conditioning and stand in as much radiance of our authentic, compassionate selves as we can open to moment by moment. It is from this place within that each of us lights the way to a healthier, more peaceful, and fulfilling collaborative future.

“We needn’t manifest a collective Apocalypse if we learn enough from our individual ones. So, this isn’t a time to be frightened; it’s a time to be wise. It’s a time to think more deeply and live more deeply, and love more deeply, and connect more deeply to all the people and possibilities that are literally throwing themselves in front of us now.”
— **Marianne Williamson**

About the Author



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She is the founder of [Heroic Journey Consulting](#) and creator of an affiliated educational eLearning portal, [Heroic Transformation](#).

As an author, educator, mentor, and speaker, Marion has over 30 years of experience helping individuals and groups build resilience, develop greater awareness, and create a context for their lives that brings richer meaning and depth to their personal experiences.

Early in her career, Marion worked as a consumer fraud investigator and served as an investigative training coordinator for the Texas Attorney General's Office. During this time, she helped build legal cases and assisted with courtroom presentations on a variety of white-collar cases including land sale fraud, multilevel marketing scams, false advertising, and investment schemes. She learned a tremendous amount about what makes con artists tick and what makes people vulnerable to scams. To help the Texas Attorney General's Office attorney and investigators present cases in court, she created and taught a course, *Profile of the Con Artist*. She later taught this course to State of Washington Crime Prevention Officers and AARP senior citizen volunteers. For more information on topics related to this course and contained in this book see the FREE presentation, [Unmask the Con Artist](#).

Marion is also the author of:

- [Work as a Heroic Journey: Use the Workplace to Evolve Your Character and Consciousness](#)
- [The Heroic Path to Self-Forgiveness: Change Your Story, Change Your Life](#)
- [Messengers of Wisdom: Ten Ways People You Work with Can Help Evolve Your Heroic Character](#)
- [From Trauma to Triumph: Use Your Personal Story to Set Your Transformation in Motion](#)

Marion currently lives in San Diego, California and is working on her next book focused on mythology's relationship to quantum physics.

Live Free from Gullibility and Victimization

This book will challenge you to discover the truth behind the “mask of gullibility and victimization.” You will learn how to quit being manipulated or controlled by others. Plus, you will learn the joy that comes from claiming your own power, speaking your truth, and living authentically.

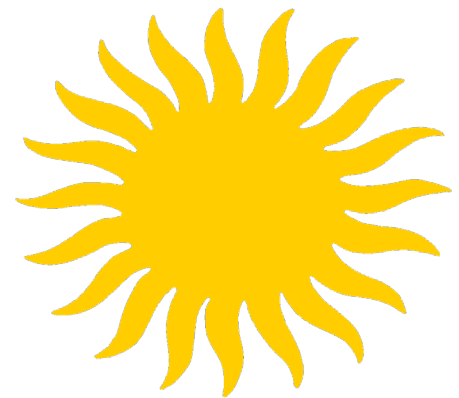


You will discover how wearing masks:

- Makes you easy prey for manipulators
- Encourages a self-destructive “bully/victim” game
- Negates your strengths
- Sabotages your happiness
- Keeps you from finding out who you really are!

You will learn tools to:

- Turn your gullibility into wisdom
- Use fear as a messenger for freedom
- Access and strengthen your courage
- End struggling with yourself and others
- Rediscover your individuality and unique gifts to the world!



Praise for *Removing Your Mask*

“The author shows a deep understanding of people and life in general. Her writing is very humorous and compassionate. The book could actually be a treatise on how to heal your life!”

– Krysta Gibson, Editor, *The New Times*, Seattle WA

“This is a ‘must read’ if you are interested in living your truth while connecting from your heart.”

– Velma Peace, Bellevue, WA Bookstore Reviewer

“I really value and appreciate the book! I value its simplicity and clarity. I found it confrontive, supportive and empowering!!”

– RY, Koloa, HI

“Your book has been a tremendous help. I have read my share of self-help books. But your book has almost a singular effect upon me...You gave the best, the clearest description yet, I’ve ever seen in print or ever heard of!...There are so many meaningful passages that I expect this book to be one of my ‘all time favorites’ for some time to come!”

– TG, Cornwall, NY

