



## Introduction

### **Another Self-Help Book?**

There is nothing in this book that you don't already know. Should you still read it? That would be like saying if we already know the notes that make up music, should we listen to a new song? We listen to it because of the unique arrangement of its notes and the new emotional place to which it can take us. Furthermore, while reading we can't predict when the wonderful aha! moment may occur. So we keep on reading, listening, and tuning in to receive a message at the time we seem most receptive.

“When the student is ready, the teacher appears.”

## **What's Different About This Book?**

This is not a self-help book about selecting clothes, appearing slimmer, age-defying skin care, or satisfying your mate in bed. It does not contain quick financial advice, or specific tips on relationships.

Instead, it looks at blocks that prevent a woman from releasing her full energy into her own life.

The six chapters in this book represent a set of principles to help you tap into your deepest energy source; they give you the tools you need to free yourself from the invisible shackles that weigh you down. They can help you identify areas where your emotional energy is being wasted while at the same time they can help you develop a *discipline* to harness your innate energy. You become more content as you are able to achieve more of what you want.

## How This Book Came to be

The seed for writing this book has been growing for a number of years. After I divorced and became the single mother of a young child, I began working full time at the local county Mental Health clinic as a Clinical Psychologist while managing a small private practice and teaching a class at a graduate school each year. I enjoyed taking care of my daughter, our home and garden, and took great pride in making homemade meals for us and creating a stable life. Our life was full.

I was often puzzled when I heard the general advice given to women “Make yourself #1 priority,” because I didn’t know which of my current responsibilities could be given second place: Feeding and caring for my child? Being involved with her school? My work? Housework? Yard work? Paying the bills? Social life? Exercise? I asked in frustration, “Could someone please tell me how to give myself high priority while I still do a good job of everything else that needs to be done?”

As years passed, I learned what it meant to take good care of myself. It wasn’t about the occasional manicures or massages, although those felt wonderful at the time. Taking care of myself meant learning to use the limited emotional energy that I had and set better boundaries. Let me share a small example to illustrate this point.

When my daughter was 3-4 years old, she loved when I read stories to her before bedtime. We'd sit on the couch and she'd bring one book after another for me to read. That was our after-bath ritual. Some nights I was tired and didn't feel like reading, but I'd feel bad for wanting to stop because I thought I'd be an inconsistent parent and would harm my child emotionally for life! As months passed, I reasoned with myself and realized that there is a difference between a *rigid* boundary and a *flexible* boundary. A rigid one would be: Read so many stories every night. A flexible boundary would be: Read at least one story every night; more if you are up to it. I started checking in with myself after the first story was finished. My daughter, of course, wanted more. I'd pause to see how I felt. Then I would say: "Mommy can read one more tonight." Some nights I would say: "I am going to finish this story and it's going to be our last one for tonight because I am tired." This is a small, everyday example of how I learned to take care of myself in face of hundreds of daily demands.

With practice, I learned how to organize my time and live my life within my few waking hours so I could do the things that I thought were important for me. I became more *content* with life and gradually achieved even more of what I desired.

Notice, I use the word "content" instead of happy, because the two are not the same. Happiness is a feeling, and therefore can be transient. Contentment is an *attitude*, a lens through which we see our life, and implies a degree of serenity. I became fascinated by what makes a person feel content in life, and began to pay attention to patterns of lifestyle

and thoughts that content people have. These people have their share of challenges and disappointments like the rest of us, but they seem to navigate through life holding on to a compass that keeps them on track.

Over the years I continued to work with many women in my role as a psychotherapist. As I listened to them discuss their challenges, I became aware of patterns into which women fall that siphon away their precious energy and make them discontent. I also watched many of my friends feel burdened by the demands of their lives. Many women appeared happy to the world, but when you sat down and listened to their heart, they told you that they were utterly exhausted. I felt compassion for them.

I became determined to write about these patterns as a way to help my fellow sisters. In writing this book, I am also drawing significantly from my own experiences as a woman who has lived in different cultures, as well as watching other people who are content in their lives. All of this weaved together became the text that you are now reading.

### **Are Women Getting What They Want?**

As women, we may look different and have different wishes, but we all share the same fundamental needs: we need to know that someone loves and respects us; we need food, shelter and enough money for necessities; we want to feel productive, and we need to know that we make a difference in life. These are our needs.

What are our wants? Nearly all of us want to be healthy, live a financially secure life, and have satisfying relationships with friends and family. Just about all of us know at an intellectual level what we need to do to achieve all three, but clearly not all of us can do that to the extent that we want. Many of us have dozens of cookbooks: low fat, low cholesterol, vegetarian, but does that mean we have solved our overeating problem? Even more than cookbooks, we have a collection of self-help books about communication, parenting and relationships. Does that mean we know how to build and maintain a low conflict relationship with those around us? If we are honest the answer is no to both of these questions.

We often start with good intentions and make plans for what we want to accomplish, but soon other things begin to interfere and we lose focus and momentum. This means that many of our projects never get completed, or if they do, the results do not last.

Remember that we lead incredibly stressful lives; we tolerate daily commutes; juggle conflicting demands, and have a limited amount of time and energy to do what needs to be done. No wonder we lose focus.

In addition to the external demands that we face because of our roles, we put further pressure on ourselves. For example, we listen to cultural messages that tell us we should turn back the clock and regain our body of youth or else face social disapproval. Another source of pressure is the fact that the lion share of the responsibility to keep the flame of passion alive in our romantic relationships seems to be on us. We listen to programs and

read articles that teach us the latest tips on how keep this flame alive.

Although our mates may help us around the house, the majority of us who work outside the home find that we are primarily the ones responsible to make the domestic wheels run smoothly. Just watch what happens in any household with children when the mother is gone for over a week. Living can become an exhausting proposition. Is this what we wanted? Work more and be less content?

### **What's Going on?**

Maybe we are exhausted because we women have been socially programmed to give until we feel depleted. Is there a way we can take care of others as well as ourselves? Is something preventing us from getting what we want? If we truly desire something in our life, what is it that stands in the way? It is as if some of us carry an invisible *shackle* that drags us down and sabotages us. We may be completely unaware of this. Sometimes these shackles are repetitive thoughts, feelings, beliefs or habits. They tie us down, sap our energy, and will not leave us alone unless we untangle ourselves from them—and that can only happen when we have both the necessary information *and* the discipline to apply what we know.

The six chapters in this book are created as responses to those shackles.

## Is This Book for You?

This book is written for women from many walks of life. As a woman maybe,

- You are in midlife and face an empty nest with a broken heart and need to rediscover who you are.
- You want to learn how to take care of yourself without appearing selfish to others.
- You want to feel better about yourself and stop a self-defeating habit.
- You are a working mother and spouse, and want to organize your time to have a more balanced life.
- You are a working mother and feel as if you are losing yourself to everyone else's needs around you.
- You are in your 30's and wonder what you should do with your life now that your only child is old enough to go to school during the day.
- You want to select mates who are kinder to you in your relationships.
- You may wonder why, given your talent and ambition, you have not achieved your peak in life.
- You may wish to gather enough motivation to get in better physical shape, or follow your lifelong dream.
- You are tired of someone else holding the remote control to your life. You want to claim your power back.
- You are just starting your adult life and don't want to repeat the expensive

mistakes of others around you. You want to start off on a fresh path.

You may be at a stage in your life where a particular chapter interests you more than another, or you may come back to a topic after a few months and feel ready to digest the information at that time. Once you learn to practice the set of skills offered in each chapter, it will be easier to stay focused on what you want because you'll have a compass to guide you.

No woman I know has mastered all six of these principles, but many practice a number of them successfully. When I talk to a contented woman who has accomplished a lot in her life by her own standards, I feel like I am in the company of someone who is neither burdened nor consumed by life. This woman has some creative energy left at the end of the day, and she radiates optimism with a sense of comfort about who she is.

What does she do differently?