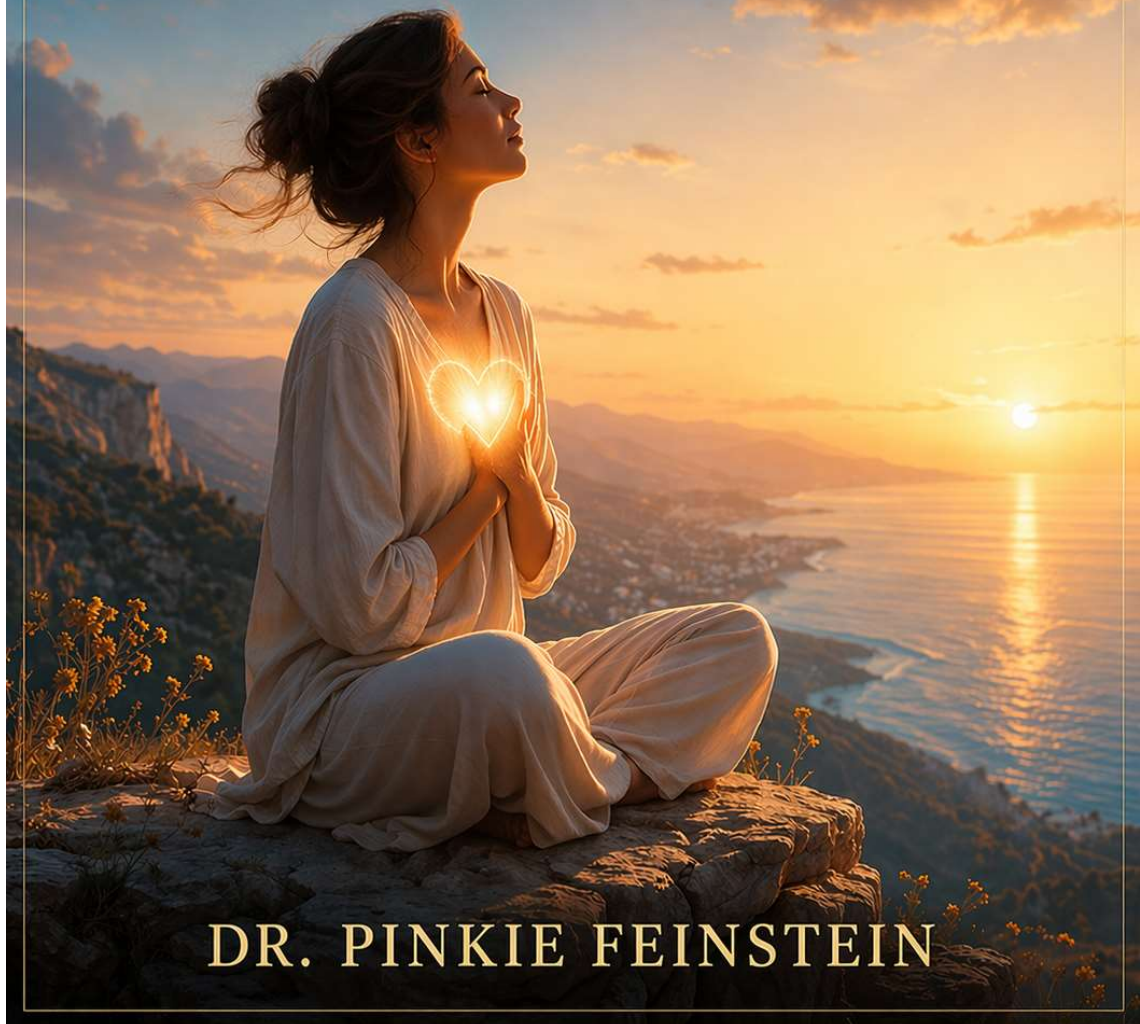


Self-Love

The Sacred Commitment



DR. PINKIE FEINSTEIN

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The Sacred Commitment

Dr. Pinkie Feinstein



The Psycho-Creative World

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Introduction

Self-love is not a luxury. It is not a slogan, not a trend, and not a vague idea meant to make us feel better for a moment. Self-love is a commitment. A sacred commitment. It is the commitment to build a living, breathing, evolving relationship with the most important person in your life, yourself.

This book invites you into a deep and continuous journey. A journey that does not begin with changing your life on the outside, but with transforming the way you relate to yourself on the inside. Because everything begins there. Every thought, every emotion, every relationship, every decision, every success and every difficulty, all emerge from the relationship you have with yourself.

Throughout this journey, we will explore self-love from many angles. Not as a concept to understand, but as an experience to develop. We will question familiar beliefs, challenge deeply rooted fears, and gradually open the possibility of a different inner reality, one in which you are not against yourself, but with yourself.

We will meet the parts of you that struggle to love. We will meet the fears, the resistance, the confusion, and the habits that keep self-love at a distance. And we will discover that none of these are obstacles, they are invitations.

Again and again, we will return to simple yet powerful actions.

To attention.

To inner dialogue.

To presence.

To small moments that accumulate into a profound shift.

Self-love is not something you either have or do not have.

It is something you practice.

It is something you grow.

It is something you choose, again and again.

As this commitment deepens, something remarkable begins to happen. The relationship with yourself becomes a source of stability, clarity, strength, and even pleasure. The need to struggle, to prove, to chase, or to collapse begins to soften. A new kind of inner support becomes available — one that does not depend on external approval or changing circumstances.

From this place, everything changes. Relationships become more honest and less dependent. Choices become clearer. Creativity begins to flow more naturally. And life, even with its challenges, becomes a space you can meet with more openness and less fear.

This is not a perfect path. It is a real path. A human path. A path that includes difficulty, resistance, and moments of doubt, but also moments of connection, expansion, relief, and even true joy.

If you are here, it is not by coincidence. Something in you is already moving toward this commitment. Something in you is ready to remember what has always been there.

This book is here to support that movement. To give it direction. To give it language. And most importantly, to help you turn self-love into a living reality in your daily life.

You are not starting from nothing. You are returning to something essential. And this return may change many things in a most natural way, the way of love knows to make changes.

Chapter 1: The Reason and the Way

Self-love is one of the most important missions in human life and one of the most significant challenges that can be imagined. Everything that exists within a person, everything they will be able to do, change, or face, all are derived from their level of self-love. Self-love is the inner home, the main engine, the foundation for setting out to any place, and the condition for the existence of every other kind of love a person may wish to feel and deepen.

This book will touch on various aspects of the concept of “self-love,” aiming to bring readers and listeners closer to the truth about self-love, and more importantly, to their own ability to build within themselves a relationship based on growing amounts of clean, genuine, courageous, and uncompromising love.

Self-love is a universal challenge. The more people truly love themselves, the more wars, poverty, hardship, environmental pollution, diseases, suffering, and pain will be reduced. As people love themselves more, they become more relaxed, more focused on what is truly needed for their growth, and less preoccupied with unnecessary struggles or with causing harm to themselves and to their surroundings.

We begin this journey with the most complex yet essential question: what is love? This question is difficult to answer, and perhaps it cannot be answered fully or completely. Yet the question itself, and the reflections it evokes, are crucial in a person’s journey toward their own truth, toward their mental health, and toward their ability to build within themselves an inner space that allows them to move through life’s path in a more joyful and fulfilling way.

Deep inside, we do not need to ask this question, because we already know what love is. The problem is that what exists within us is not easily accessible and is not included in the toolbox we use in our daily lives. Deep inside, there is an ancient, vast, and limitless wisdom. Deep inside, we already know everything we need to know about love, but here, on this earth, in these lives, we tend to forget what our wise heart already knows. Instead, we create doubts, fears, and countless thoughts and behaviors that distance us from what quietly exists there, behind the noise, deep within the emotional DNA of our being.

This is precisely why we are going to dedicate significant effort to getting to know self-love, to practicing it, applying it, understanding it, increasing it, and strengthening it. We will do so because only through the experience of self-love can we remember and reconnect to the original love that exists within us, the one that brought us here and continues to accompany us quietly behind the scenes from the day of our birth until our departure from this life cycle.

If love is important to you, then self-love must be your number one goal, because only through self-love can we fully and clearly touch the original essence of love, the immense, boundless, energetic essence that is love itself. Here, as human beings, as mortals, we have limitations that allow us to live here but also reduce the depth of experience we can contain. One of the “side effects” of these limitations is the

significant distance we have developed from the ability to contain, carry, and work with love.

The only way to reduce these limitations, without disrupting the existing emotional balance or the essential functioning required for life, is through the gradual and consistent cultivation of self-love, through practice, renewal of core beliefs, application, and much ongoing repetition. Self-love allows us to make changes at the right pace and to refresh our emotional capacities without experiencing deep disruption or instability.

Love, or the absence of it, is the source, the reason, and the way to everything, even if it is not immediately visible. Deep within our hearts, we wake up each morning to look for our love, to work for it, to meet others for it, to feed ourselves out of the search for love, to move homes because of love, and even to change our relationship status if that is what is required to continue the journey toward love.

Love is also connected negatively to the ways things happen, through its absence or lack. With considerable confidence, one can assume that everything in human and community life that involves harm, illness, suffering, conflicts, stagnation, or various forms of entanglement is connected to a lack of love. When love is present, things flow better. They develop, change for the better, evolve, and improve. When love is absent, the opposite occurs. Excessive effort, obsession, misunderstanding, lack of listening, lack of empathy, excessive focus on fear, and ultimately manifestations of violence between a person and their environment, between humans and animals, and of course between one person and another.

From this understanding arises the profound responsibility of the individual. To know love from within, from the most authentic and pure place possible, from inside themselves. A person who cannot love themselves limits their ability to love others. A person who cannot love themselves limits their ability to give to others from the right, healthy, and empowering place. A person who struggles to love themselves expects others to feel as they do and influences them not to love themselves either.

If you have a wish you want to fulfill, self-love is the first factor you will want to enlist, to give yourself the best chances of succeeding in your new path.

If there are things you need to change, self-love is the supportive and stabilizing force that will help you overcome resistance to change and will grant you the spirit and optimism needed to take the right action despite fear or uncertainty.

Even if at this moment it may sound unclear or illogical, I invite you to feel this possibility: love is the source, the reason, and the way to every place.

Our logical mind naturally demands evidence and precise explanations before accepting any assumption, statement, or worldview. Yet at this moment, when we want to cultivate self-love because we already know it is the right thing to do, we may allow ourselves a pause, just for this period, to contemplate an idea that cannot always be scientifically proven: love is the source, the reason, and the way to every place.

This means that love has sent you here to read or to listen to me. It means that love has brought you to where you are, even to those places that seem undesirable or unpleasant.

Love is the reason we meet here, and it is also the quiet and hidden reason behind everything that happens, or everything that falls apart, whether due to its absence or due to its beneficial presence that causes what has expired to dissolve and transform.

Love is the way and the path toward a better life, and perhaps you already know this. Yet what turns love into a practical tool and an accessible force in human hands is self-love. Self-love is your entry ticket into the healthiest and wisest space on Earth. It is yours, it is ours, and we are here to make it an inseparable part of our lives and the lives of those close to us.

Practice Questions (Please answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel right now about the expression **“self-love”**?
2. What are you most curious or interested to discover in this process?
3. How do you feel about the expression **“I came from love and I am constantly on my way toward love”**?
4. What might happen in your life if you were to love yourself a little more than you love yourself today?
5. What change do you wish for yourself to take place in your life after you deepen and grow through learning about the love within you?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 2: Your "God"

The concept of "God," in certain contexts, can become a source of tension, argument, misunderstanding, and even violence among human beings.

Some people hold a secular worldview and prefer to avoid including concepts such as "God" or "divinity" in their thoughts, language, or the areas to which they feel connected. Some are even sharply and explicitly averse to the inclusion of any matters that remind them of a theological or religious dimension.

Others hold a less defined sense of divinity and do not reject anything outright. Some describe themselves as one type or another of "religious," and from that self-definition arises their particular view of what the concept of "God" means to them.

And then there are people, and I count myself among them, who regard the concept of "God" as a deeply personal and private worldview, one that does not follow any particular rules or definitions about how "God" is supposed to be. This worldview does not necessarily include certain actions, such as prayers or rituals.

But this is not really our subject here, at least not directly. We are here to prepare the inner ground for cultivating self-love in the deepest and most beneficial way possible.

Along this journey, we ask ourselves: what is love? We may not always be able to answer with precision or clarity. On this path, we will try to open our hearts rather than close them. We will strive to expand our inner space as we explore the concept of love within us and in general. We will try to move away from limiting myths, narrowing prejudices, and stereotypes that only perpetuate our fears.

So why does "God" enter this conversation? What is the role of this concept, representing what is greater and vaster than us, as we deepen our exploration of love and prepare ourselves for the journey that offers us the foundations of self-love?

Quite simply, in truth. Simple, yet challenging.

For now, I would like to suggest something you may have already heard before, yet it is important to examine it again to refine our understanding of love. I would like to invite you to link the concept of "God" with the concept of "Love," and to assume, for the purpose of our discussion and inner growth, that in many ways these two concepts are actually the same: God is Love, and Love is God.

Indeed, many times love, like God, feels larger than life.

It often seems that love can never truly be attained, and that it is difficult to hold onto it for long. Love, like God, can be found almost everywhere if we search for it and look deeply enough. Even within your enemy there is love, and even in those who are now angry with you, who have withdrawn from you, belittled you, hurt you, were hurt by you, or simply disappeared. In all of them, some form of love resides, and it can be found if we open our hearts, soften them a little, and allow ourselves to relax the emotional tension that has built up toward certain people.

Love, like God, transcends boundaries and exists not only in human beings. There is love among animals, and even plants respond positively to expressions of love. Love, like God, is in many ways infinite, without beginning and without end. It was here before us, and it will remain here after us.

Love, like God, is a concept that is very hard to understand and is surrounded by many opinions. Love, like God, fascinates millions and represents, like the concept of “God,” a human longing for something more exalted, broader, greater, and more encompassing.

For some people, love represents the place where the chaos of human life on Earth gains perspective, a simpler explanation, and guidance toward the right path, just as, for many, concepts of divinity serve that very function. We need love, and we probably also need some kind of personal God, whether or not that seems logical, or whether it appears to us as a great and foolish invention.

Let us expand this concept, which may later serve us well in our journey toward strengthening self-love. This exploration of divinity and God is not meant to convince, influence, or present any particular approach as the correct way to relate to this highly sensitive and charged concept.

There are secular intellectuals who describe faith in God as the creation of an “imaginary friend.” Such a view often carries a tone of condescension or dismissal, and sometimes it reflects the discomfort of intelligent people when they encounter ideas that do not align with their way of understanding life. These concepts may seem to them baseless, and therefore unnecessary.

But for us, in this journey, the imaginary friend is one of the most important and critical elements in understanding what love is, and in growing from it into an ever-expanding, ever-deepening, and ever-strengthening self-love, forming one of the most profound and effective tools for self-healing that a person can give themselves.

For us, regardless of personal belief or non-belief, the concept of an imaginary friend who lives within us and loves us unconditionally, in an ever-growing way, a friend we can consult with, cry to, and eventually, as we evolve, listen to their words of love, this concept only serves our interest. It helps open our hearts to love and to the meaning of love itself.

So what is the name of your God?

Is it a gentle and tender God? Is it a God who knows you completely, with all your parts, and yet loves you, supports you, contains you, accepts you, and nourishes you?

I believe that the ability to feel love is also the ability to feel the God within us, the wondrous, the universal, the infinite and vast presence that lives somewhere deep inside. As we progress toward self-love, it is that inner God who, through our actions and thoughts, will express boundless and total love toward us. This love will be like that of a parent who delights in their child and does everything possible to provide the conditions for meaningful growth and a fulfilling life. All of this has nothing to do with belief or disbelief. It is not dependent on whether you define yourself as secular,

traditional, religious, or atheist. Rather, it is a way to challenge the soul to contemplate the comparison between the two concepts: love and God.

Whether we wish it or not, our soul has touched the matter of God many times and has formed its own inner worldview. Somewhere deep inside, there is always a quiet discussion taking place about this topic, and many questions continue to arise, as they should.

We are not required to continue asking ourselves questions about integrating this supposedly religious concept into our journey toward cultivating self-love. We may forget about it and move on, and that would be perfectly fine and would not harm the process. But there are those among us who need this comparison, this gentle reflection between the most wondrous emotion of all and the symbol of what is greater than humankind. For them, it is worthwhile to let this question, which quietly guides us toward understanding love, remain alive: What is the name of your God?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What kind of relationship do you currently have with your **“God”**?
2. What do you think about the possibility of having a **“pleasant meeting”** with the God within you?
3. What is the first thing you would like to say to God when you **“meet”** her?
4. What do you think about the possibility that God has always been within you, always part of you, and that in fact there are no real differences between you?
5. What do you think about the possibility that getting to know the God within you is the same as getting to know the love within you?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 3: Pleasure

One of the things that occupies human beings more than almost anything else is pleasure. Freud wrote extensively about the decisive role of pleasure and the search for it in human life and in our sense of emotional stability. He saw pleasure as a force connected to the fulfillment of basic drives, especially in the realm of sexuality. Yet the human being is far more developed than the animal, and can receive and generate pleasure from diverse and profound sources that do not include the satisfaction of bodily appetites.

For the human being, one of the purest, healthiest, and cleanest sources of pleasure is found in the full and powerful experience that arrives with an inner connection to the feeling of love. There is probably no pleasure more important and meaningful for a person than the pleasure connected to the most sought-after feeling on Earth. From this perspective, self-love is a unique capacity within the individual to connect with sources of pleasure that live within the person, even before they join with another person, even before they touch or are touched, even before they speak, connect, taste, feel, or kiss.

There are not enough words to describe the exceptionally high, satisfying, and healing pleasure that accompanies those moments in which a person succeeds, truly and sincerely, in a clean, simple, and direct way, to love themselves. In such moments, the person relaxes from the hunger for other needs that are tied to the search for pleasure and inner peace. In such moments the person connects with themselves and separates from any sense of lack, worry, fear, or distress. The pleasure of self-love is immeasurable, unprecedented, and incomparable with any other type of pleasure. To receive this pleasure, however, one must walk a meaningful path that places self-love in its rightful place and encourages its practice and cultivation.

When a person begins to recognize the love that exists within them toward themselves, there are no limits. This feeling of self-love is like a pleasant and sweet air that expands from within, warms body and soul, comforts every corner of pain, and makes one forget any frustration about not receiving love or attention from the environment. When a person begins to realize the natural ability to love themselves, without wasting resources on the need to please others or to share parts of their private pleasure, they become the owner of their own pleasure, a person who feels a positive sense of control in their capacity to strengthen their life and to create joy out of seemingly nothing.

It is important to state already in the early stages of the process that self-love does not separate or isolate a person from their surroundings and does not render unnecessary the wonderful sources of pleasure that the environment gives to a person, such as contact with another person, loving relationships, and sensual pleasure of all kinds. The opposite is true. Self-love can allow a person to experience all of these from a more stable and powerful place, one that can contain greater pleasure and satisfaction without addiction, dependence, alienation, or fear.

The more a person practices self-love and the more they are able to experience it fully, the more they learn to recognize it as a kind of source and foundation for all

other forms of pleasure. Self-love teaches a person to experience fully, to lose boundaries in a precise way without losing control, and then to return to a stable and mature base after the intensity of pleasure has passed and faded.

This is the place to emphasize the importance of smiling in the mirror. Smiling at the mirror is an action that seems simple, an action that contains immense portions of pleasure if we surrender to it and repeat it despite cynicism and fear, despite doubts and despite prejudices.

A mirror smile can immediately and unequivocally show a person the current level of self-love that exists or the degree of ability to cultivate and strengthen it. It is important to note that smiling at the mirror can also develop this ability regardless of its current measure. Smiling at the mirror can greatly help us become people who truly love themselves. A simple smile, without great difficulty, toward ourselves, through the mirror, and great pleasure.

When one smiles at the mirror for a few seconds, one may feel a slightly pleasant sensation, but not much beyond that. When one smiles for 15 to 20 consecutive seconds, the resistances begin to fade. It is that simple. When one smiles at the mirror for 30 seconds, and even more, excessive self-criticism, the need to run away, and other fears subside, and at a certain moment, streams of pleasure from self-love begin to appear. The person begins to remember emotionally that love exists within, and then can connect to the fact that this love is a vital current that renews optimism, hope, self-compassion, humor, and inner peace.

When one smiles at the mirror for at least a full minute without interruption, including returning the smile if it tires, an authentic and very meaningful excitement can appear, the kind of excitement that people search for over long periods in many places without much success. In the end, this is what we are looking for without noticing it. We are searching for those moments of whole and perfect connection in which the soul feels that it has arrived home, that it is full and stabilized and has no reason to be anxious, worried, or restless.

As the art and skill of self-love become a principled and practical commitment in a person's life, the person understands the high importance of pleasure and the ability to reach it more frequently and with higher quality.

A person who loves themselves asks, rightly, for frequent and available times of pleasure. A person who loves themselves does not become entangled in guilt for enjoying life more than before and does not calculate within their soul how much pleasure others are experiencing. A person who recognizes the place of self-love in the experience of pleasure finally understands that depriving themselves of pleasure will not serve others, and that the best thing they can do for others is to encourage them to find their own self-love.

Many people struggle to internalize the sharp, simple, and profoundly important message that it is essential to increase positive experiences of pleasure in daily life as a condition for healthier, more satisfying, and more empowering living. When a person experiences positive pleasure, their body reorganizes, heals itself, calms itself, balances itself, and renews itself. A person who cannot grant themselves increasing

measures of pleasure suffers more, contracts more, and becomes more vulnerable. When choosing the path of self-love, which is a demanding path that requires a mature and consistent decision to give to oneself and to cultivate oneself, one also chooses a way that includes less pain, less suffering, and many more possibilities for joy and for the release of long-standing conflicts.

This is the task: to find within us and within ourselves the special pleasure that comes from reviving and realizing the love that exists in us, regardless of the presence of another person, regardless of what is given to someone else or what we receive from someone else. Self-love emerges from within us, grows stronger thanks to our own initiatives of self-love, fills us with the right kind of pleasure that does not allow collapse or heartbreak, and teaches us how to experience the positive parts of life in the right and nourishing way.

Human life is filled with possibilities for negative pleasure that are connected to addictions and to harm. Many times we will discover that the tendency toward negative pleasure is closely linked to a lack of self-love. This lack causes a person to feel constantly dependent on the environment in order to experience pleasure and to feel devoid of self-confidence in their ability to feel stable and lasting satisfaction. Mirror smiles, repeated and lengthened, begin to return the person to their abilities for positive pleasure, a pleasure that will always be available and that can be improved and intensified from time to time. This is self-love, and this is the reason for every effort we will devote to attaining and developing it from now and forever.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the word “**pleasure**”?
2. Do you recognize within yourself experiences of “**spiritual pleasure**” that are not connected to a physical situation at all?
3. How do you currently connect the **increase of self-love** with the **expansion of possibilities for pleasure** in your life?
4. As part of the **mirror smiling practice**, you are invited to practice a particularly long smile right now. Stand in front of a mirror and hold a full, wide smile for **20 to 30 seconds**. There is a chance that at some moment during this practice you may experience pleasure. If not this time, then another time. It is a matter of practice and repetition. **Write about the experience you encountered there.**
5. What do you think about the possibility that connecting to the pleasure within you is **one of the important keys to your growth and development in general**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 4: Narcissism and All the Other Nonsense

Before I address in detail the false, distorted, and confusing notions about self-love, along with the many stereotypes and prejudices about the most wonderful thing a person can do for themselves, I will first state what is far from self-evident, not well known, not sufficiently familiar, and not sufficiently discussed.

There exists a personal and public fear of self-love. Parts of this fear can be partially explained, yet other parts will remain unclear and may only be clarified through a spiritual and comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon. Before we try to understand this fear, we will want to look at it, to get to know it, to acknowledge it, and not to flee from its existence or from its far-reaching implications. Human beings are afraid to love themselves. People learn to recoil from loving themselves. People fear doing the most important and decisive thing in their life, which is to strengthen their positive feelings, first and foremost toward themselves, toward the most important person in their life.

This fear, which can indeed be investigated and explored, determines a large part of the shape and quality of a person's life when it is not sufficiently exposed and is not a subject for engagement and inner work. A lack of self-love leads a person into a kind of addiction in which they do not notice the lack at all. They live in narrow circles of limitation and frustration, while assuming that it is impossible to live in a more benevolent way. The fear of self-love shapes people who are not aware at all of the possibility of such an experience, and certainly not of the path by which it can be strengthened, cultivated, and used as a wondrous tool for better coping with life's challenges.

This is the time to explain and emphasize that precisely in our difficult, frustrating, and lowest moments, we have the ability to use self-love to improve the situation, not only for that moment but also as a way to improve how we will cope later, thanks to the precedent we create when we dedicate a little positive attention to ourselves in the heart of a crisis. The soul remembers for good the small gestures of love, like a stolen smile in the mirror, precisely when we are angry, sad, or even despairing. That small effort to restore self-love is recorded in the system, strengthens the person in the long term, and shortens the duration of the present crisis.

As long as we fear self-love, and from that fear remain ignorant and lacking insight about it, self-love will not be within our reach, and we will suffer more from every conflict, every misunderstanding, and every friction that will occur in any case between us and what life places before us. We must address this fear through explanations and through the very practice of self-love, since where love is present, there is no possibility for fear to exist.

So what is narcissism?

Narcissism is an emotional phenomenon that was described long ago and is linked to a literary myth about someone who fell deeply in love with himself and, when he saw his reflection in the stream, wanted to come so close to it that he drowned. It can be

understood that this myth is also a projection of human fears about self-love, a projection that creates distortions, exaggerations, and many inaccuracies.

The narcissist is a person who is empty inside. He is a person who is in pain and lacking, in whom there is almost no love or trust in love. The narcissist is in such great distress and so lacking in love or self-esteem that he invents a story about himself that he is wonderful, charming, and significant. The narcissist asks for and even demands excessive attention from others and behaves with an exaggerated sense of self-importance, not because he possesses great self-love, but precisely the opposite, because of its deep and unfillable absence. Narcissists are the worst example of self-love, and they are also one of the reasons that we are so afraid to love ourselves, lest we become like them.

Exactly the opposite will happen. The more we love ourselves, the more we will feel full, calm, relaxed, confident, and less dependent on social approval in order to exist or to feel more significant or more liked. Anyone who wants to distance themselves from their own narcissistic tendencies, which exist to some degree in everyone, can do one thing: practice and strengthen self-love. Learn how to fill oneself with positive, light-filled feelings from within, from the abundant source that has always existed within us.

Therefore, self-love is not narcissism. It represents the very opposite. The narcissist is a person who suffers from emotional emptiness. In contrast, a person who loves themselves enjoys emotional fullness and the power to cope in a more effective and creative way with life's challenges.

And what is the relationship between self-love and selfishness?

How many times have we heard ourselves or others rebuke or be rebuked because of actions or choices that seemed to have a tone or quality of selfishness, meaning excessive attention to our own interests, sometimes even before the interests of others?

This is one of the greatest falsehoods that we have invented for ourselves, especially at the social level. It is a falsehood that blurs the authentic emotional reality of every person. It serves a distorted social need to keep all the members of the tribe or group obedient to social codes while neglecting their personal needs. According to many views, society can continue to exist thanks to the consistent contribution of people who supposedly prefer the good of the collective over their personal good. This is the message in public, family, and group arenas about what is supposed to be, what is right to be, and what ought to be. It is not so. It is nonsense, distorted and even dangerous nonsense.

Every person, everywhere and in every situation, is first and foremost self-interested. Every person is built to think of themselves before all else, and that is right and proper. A mother who sacrifices herself for her children does so because otherwise she would not be able to look herself in the eye in the mirror. She acts according to her values. Every person, even the greatest altruist and volunteer, does everything they do for themselves under the cover of contributing to the environment. They do it because that is what is right and proper for them, because that is what will make them

feel that they are good people, and because that is what their soul wants to do. It is their choice, and it is always driven by self-interested needs and values, and there is nothing wrong with that.

We can examine the same issue from a perspective that is even more important and practical.

If the society in which we live, or any group to which we relate, truly wants our good, it should help us strengthen and develop our self-love. If the society that cultivated in us a fear of selfishness really wants us to serve it in the best way, wants us not to distance ourselves from it and not to leave it, and wants us to give it the best within us, it would be better if it stopped demanding repeated proofs of loyalty and consideration for others. Instead, it should encourage us toward greater self-esteem, greater self-consideration, greater self-compassion, and greater self-understanding.

Only then will the result be far better. A person who loves themselves feels fullness, satisfaction, and a desire to give, to help, and to have a positive influence. Such a person will gladly contribute their energy to others without sacrificing their needs. Such a person, who is self-interested in the positive sense of the term, is the best person for themselves, for their family, and for the society in which they live. This is a person who understands the depth of self-love, and this is the person we would all wish to become, someone who directs positive feelings inward in the right way, and from there can flourish beautifully outward.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Can you now see the importance of placing **yourself at the top of your own priorities**?
2. Can you now notice that the more you **nurture and nourish yourself**, the more you can also be available to others from a **better and more balanced place**?
3. What is the **next gift** you are going to give yourself soon? Write several possibilities.
4. Are you willing to encounter **environmental reactions that may not accept the choices of self-love** you may make going forward? Will you be able to explain this path of yours **with patience and compassion**, even if at first you encounter impatience toward it?
5. What do you think might happen if **more people around you improve their ability to love themselves**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 5: Self Love = "Not Loving Others"?

The exact opposite.

Someone who does not love themselves expresses feelings toward others from relative emptiness, from a basic misunderstanding of the experience of love, and many times from hidden motives that have no connection to love at all. It seems that most people feel more comfortable loving another person than loving themselves. This is a social norm that distances people from the knowledge, the tools, and the understanding of the importance of self-love.

Self-love is the foundation of every form of love. It is the root, the basic charge, and the inner example of the essence of love, of its principles, and of the possibilities involved in it. All of these take shape and direction when cultivating self-love becomes an important goal for the individual.

A person who does not devote attention, focus, practice, and motivation to self-love will, in one way or another, find themselves involved in actions, systems, agreements, or conditions that harm them again and again. The reason is simple. There is no empty space in the human soul. Where self-love is lacking, an emotional "pit" forms that quickly becomes a source of negative feelings that inevitably pull the person into paths of pain and suffering. The absence of self-love means difficulty with self-esteem, difficulty with self-nurturing, difficulty with self-support, difficulty with self-trust, and more.

A person who lacks self-love is inevitably led toward growing and widespread damage to their self-image and, as a result, toward involvement in harm to the quality of their life in various domains, including health, family, finances, and work. They bring their deficits with them to every place they go and into every contact they have with others.

When such a person wishes to love another and to build a relationship, they will be forced to waste too many resources on dealing with the absence of self-love and all of its consequences. There is not much left for that person to give, and their ability to provide full and steady love to another will, in all likelihood, be greatly impaired.

Let us not be confused. People with low awareness of self-love and with low implementation of it, and whose presence is accordingly shaped, may at times behave with great devotion and giving within a relationship. Such people, who are ready to give of themselves and even to sacrifice themselves for another, while at the same time holding very low self-esteem and regarding it as unimportant or unnecessary, will in the end cause harm both to themselves and to anyone who comes into contact with their so-called love.

A person who lacks self-love will express that lack in one way or another everywhere they go. They will never be able to completely hide the gaping hole, and both they and others will suffer from this condition. To call such a system "love" is a fundamental problem in understanding the human soul and the way it connects to its surroundings.

In contrast, the person who loves themselves more and more, who persists with mirror smiles, with self-talk that includes as much love, support, and tolerance as possible, who continues with self-support and with activities that cultivate the self, arrives at a relationship rich in inner content that is connected to love, to the inner work involved in it, to its genuine language, and to the unique experiences it brings when one meets it within.

It is true that someone whose self-love is growing may sometimes be not very nice and even assertive. Such a person can refuse to do or to remain in situations that many others would accept when those situations do not align with their inner values regarding what is worthy and what is not worthy to be or to participate in. Such a person may regard common norms and accepted ways of doing and maintaining things as irrelevant for them when these are not in sync with their self-love and with the inner requirement to align their personal needs with what occurs wherever they are.

Therefore, people for whom self-love is a foreign and threatening concept may perceive those who hold self-love as a central and supreme value as people who do not truly love them and do not truly give them the attention they deserve. They may even see them as not quite normal or as not belonging to the kind of reasonable people they usually encounter.

Among people who do not cultivate or value self-love, interpersonal love cannot exist so long as those individuals are focused on their own needs and place them high on their list of priorities. Such people will complain that you supposedly do not love them. You will need to choose whether it is worthwhile for you to remain in relationships with those for whom your path of healing and change does not seem important or meaningful.

When self-love develops, many positive changes occur at a pace and in a style that match that person. Self-love gradually leads a person to love larger parts of their surroundings, because the love that grows within tends to move outward naturally. The person becomes full of love and a close friend of love, because it exists within them and they can meet it, feel it, and benefit from it, without any dependence on the presence, approval, or satisfaction of another person.

As self-love develops and takes up more space in the personality, it gradually replaces fears, hesitations, doubts, and the very common tendency toward self-harm through addiction to an unkind and non-nurturing lifestyle. It becomes a personal and private experience that cannot be removed. Self-love can be quickly reawakened and strengthened through attention and a few simple gestures. It provides excellent nourishment and a perfect tool for helping to meet life's challenges. As it grows within a person, it strengthens their self-confidence and, through its clear values, guides them to connect with people who are more suitable and more right for them, with those who can connect in the right way with someone who comes to relationships equipped with self-love and with a benevolent inner bond that does not depend on another person.

Where does the confusion begin? It begins where people expect those who enter an intimate relationship with them to be dependent on them. Many times, without

admitting it, we would prefer that someone who loves us not have too strong a backbone, not hold firm opinions, and not have fully formed desires. People like that, it is claimed, will not be able to surrender to love, will not be eager to give of themselves, will not compromise, will not yield, and will not negotiate where there is conflict and misunderstanding.

This is only confusion and the blurring of concepts. Everything here is reversed in a polar way. Precisely the people who enter an intimate relationship with a good inner connection and with clear boundaries regarding what they allow in the spaces where they are involved are the ones with whom there is a chance to maintain a nourishing relationship that can blossom and thrive. Precisely the people who will not agree to hurt themselves and will not sacrifice themselves on the altar of the relationship are the ones who can ensure that the relationship will be conducted according to principles of respect, appreciation, and mutual cultivation.

They are the ones who are able to love more, because they contain within themselves an abundance of love and are not dependent on another in-order to encounter love within themselves. Such people can enjoy love that arrives, and they will never fear the supposed waste of their love resources, because they can renew those resources at any moment they choose. Let us seek those for whom self-love is important, those in whom self-love already bubbles within. They are the more rewarding partners. They are the ones with whom we can find love, strengthen love, and make love that carries significant personal value and contribution.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you currently connect **“love for yourself”** and **“love for others”**?
2. How do you feel about the possibility that **love is your private asset**, something that can never disappear and can never be taken away from you?
3. What do you think about the possibility that you are actually the **producer of the love within you**, and therefore you are also the **primary person responsible for it**?
4. How do you feel about the possibility, which eventually always manifests, that **the more you love yourself, the more the people around you will recognize you and accept you as you truly are**?
5. How do you feel about the sentence **“There is no place for stinginess in love”**? How do you intend to apply this sentence **toward yourself in the near future**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 6: Fear of Environmental Disconnection

One of the concerns that occupies people who fear increasing self-love in their lives, whether consciously or not, is the possibility that strengthening a person's relationship with themselves will lead to distancing and even breaks with those close to them, with family, with friends, and with the surrounding environment. According to this view, there is apparently a price to self-love, and it involves losing or damaging relationships that have accompanied us for a long time.

Why do we come to the thought, the fear, or the assumption that greater self-love means distance, separation, or even parting? What is the connection between these things? How does the sophisticated human mind reach conclusions that repeatedly prevent it from enjoying the most important gifts of life, which arrive when more love flows through the person's body?

This likely stems from the inner codes that shape many of the relationships in which we were raised or that surround us. If we look closely, almost everywhere we can encounter expectations and even demands that a person give up parts of their needs, desires, longings, and preferences as a condition for society to exist, as a condition for the family to remain intact, and as a condition for friendships not to break.

There is indeed some measure of validity in this worldview and in this prevalent way of understanding and conducting relationships. As long as a person cannot negotiate effectively, is not attentive to the needs of their environment, and does not act accordingly, they will not be able to take part in meaningful, nourishing, and stable relationships. The importance of compromise, of patient listening to differences, and of searching for ways that several people can share one space without it coming at the expense of any one of them, forms the building blocks for the existence of a group and of a social system.

However, when such demands become excessive and cross the boundary of the individual, when they cut off the person's path, unique voice, and personal approach to every matter, the family framework becomes hostile to the development of the individual. Such a condition, which people are usually unaware of, carries a very heavy price with respect to the person's relationship with themselves, which is gradually harmed over time. Worse still, social systems in which the individual increasingly forgets their unique path and the statement that only they can speak to themselves and to their environment suffer from chronic damage and from a disturbance in the quality of the social framework, in its stability, and in its ability to meet various challenges.

Indeed, there are situations in which, as a result of healthy development that a person undergoes, of growth and sobering, during which the person stops giving up what matters to them and adopts a way of life in which they listen, with love, to their real priorities, changes occur in one relationship or another. People close to that person who struggle to contain the change and to see its goodness and usefulness may be gripped by fear and may respond unpleasantly, even distancing themselves from that person, at least for a time.

Sometimes, when self-love grows and becomes present and consistent, some of the people with whom we had a certain kind of connection suddenly become less relevant, because being in their company becomes less pleasant, less nourishing, less supportive of the process of growth, and sometimes simply boring. In the framework of developing self-love, we can find ourselves more authentic and more courageous, and from that we may change certain kinds of relationships or connections that turn out to contradict the soul's path toward healing, positive change, growth, and self-discovery.

Yet what occurs in most cases, whether immediately or after some time, is exactly the opposite. The more a person loves themselves, the easier it becomes for them to be more tolerant of the non-harmonious parts within their family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Self-love grants an inner space of flexibility and creativity that gradually replaces the places where there were blocks or ongoing conflicts with certain people nearby.

As self-love develops and becomes more stable and consistent, the people around tend to yield to it and learn to resist less the changes that the individual undergoes. After all, if someone truly loves us, why would they fear our feeling better about ourselves and representing our true interests more clearly. On the other hand, what harm is there if people who struggle to see us more joyful and at ease choose to distance themselves and retreat into their rigid beliefs about what a person may or may not say to themselves or do with themselves.

Love, in all of its healthy and nourishing forms, can never be a bad thing. Love is the embodiment of good, the source of good, and the expression of good on Earth. Love is the way to good, it is the answer of good, and it is the safe path toward what is better in life. Love is the highest attainment, the most helpful comfort, the essence of self-confidence, the most important component of mental and physical health, and the best source of healing and change.

In the long term, as self-love develops within the individual and within their environment, interpersonal connections become more positive, more direct, and more open. A person who loves themselves and can successfully contain their less beautiful and less aesthetic sides develops within themselves an ability to contain, to love, and to accept with understanding and tolerance the stuck, unlovely, and unpleasant parts in others. Such a person is a precious asset to the environment, while continuing to place themselves at the top of their priorities and at the same time being able to grant more gifts and positive influence to those around them.

When we set out to cultivate our self-love, which is without any doubt the greatest commitment that stands before the mature person, we must look directly at a somewhat saddening but unavoidable fact. There are people who are very afraid of any phenomenon, expression, or attitude that is connected to cultivating the inner bond. Such people may be found in our family, among our friends, at work, and in other places we go. These people understand very little of what self-love truly is, if anything at all, and they are captive to prejudices that separate them from the best thing they could ever give themselves.

Such people may express their position directly or indirectly, and some of them may be important and dear to us. They will place before us a significant challenge on our way toward increasing self-love and on our way to establishing an inner relationship based on commitment to listening, tolerance, empathy, and support. They may lead us to deal better with our own blocks and with our fears about deeper self-love. They will grant us a kind of test in which the soul examines us to see how determined we are to become people who truly love themselves or whether we are not yet ready.

As stated, most of the fears or potential problems do not materialize. Self-love mainly brings about blessed changes, even if along the way it encourages some dismantling or ending that has long been waiting to happen but was avoided due to fear of change and growth. Self-love enhances families, dissolves conflicts, renders ego wars unnecessary, and helps a person arrive in social settings with reduced tendencies toward dependence on others and on their capacity to grant us attention or love. Self-love is one of the most important tools for the stability of any social framework, and this is a fact that many people have not yet internalized. We are here to learn how this can work, and we can spread this message further, out of the healthy and developing self-love that we will discover and cultivate within us.

Practice Questions (Please answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Have you experienced situations with people close to you where there was a **conflict between your self-love and their expectations, demands, or requests**?
2. Do you remember a situation in which you had to **firmly refuse something you were used to doing for others**, but were no longer willing to do?
3. Can you now see how a **developed sense of self love** may help you when you want things that are **different from what your environment expects or prefers**?
4. Self-love can sometimes take a person, temporarily, to a place where **a certain sense of belonging no longer feels suitable**. Have you experienced something like this? Do you fear such a possibility in the future?
5. In which areas does your **love for yourself sometimes not fully align with the circles of belonging** that you are currently part of? How are you dealing with these gaps at the moment?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 7: Do for Yourself Today

Self-love is a project, and it should always be seen that way. Self-love is a way of life to which one commits, devotes oneself, and directs attention, time, and intention. Self-love is a partnership in every sense, and as with any relationship that we want to develop and thrive, we must invest in it consistently, maintain it, strengthen it, nourish it, and cultivate it.

Self-love, the relationship of a person with themselves, is a space that can develop and exist only if appropriate work is done regularly, work that turns theory into practice, fantasy into reality, and challenge into a viable and present fact. Self-love is something one does. One initiates well, responds well, decides well, and chooses well, all by the light of self-love, for its sake, and as a result of its guidance. Self-love can never remain merely a good idea or a recommended approach to life. Self-love happens, intensifies, is built, and is realized through clear actions that influence what exists in a way that arouses the powers of the soul to love from within what is.

The encouraging news is that the work required to sustain, cultivate, and strengthen self-love is quite simple. One can even say it is surprisingly simple. It is so simple that it is shocking to see how many people invest great energies in paths and spaces that yield little benefit, while if they invested far fewer resources in cultivating self-love they would gain far more.

If you were told that you must smile at the mirror every day in order to prevent dangerous diseases and perhaps even prolong your life expectancy, would you devote yourself to the simple work of mirror smiles, a work that requires almost no effort beyond briefly activating a few muscles around the lips?

We know it is advisable to brush our teeth before sleep. Why? Because we were told it would protect our teeth. Brushing has already become a norm, and it is difficult today to find a person who goes to sleep without brushing. What challenges us more? Brushing teeth or smiling at the mirror? Brushing teeth or saying loving words to ourselves on a daily and committed basis?

The deeper we go into the matter, the greater the astonishment may become. In the end, there is nothing more important for a person than to feel good with themselves and in general. Moreover, there is nothing more important than to seek the sweet and victorious feeling of love within. Yet a person does almost nothing to feel better with themselves and does almost nothing to intensify the experiences of love within.

Why?

First, because the person is not aware of this possibility and of the very high effectiveness of practicing self-love.

Second, because the person is afraid. People are afraid to smile at themselves in the mirror and are afraid to say words of love to themselves. They have become accustomed to limiting everything related to expressions or feelings of love to a very specific place and toward very specific people. It frightens them to express and

generate love toward themselves, and it seems unnecessary or even strange. Yet we will continue to brush our teeth every morning and evening, because that is what one is supposed to do.

Self-love is something one does and then feels. Self-love is expressed not only in the work of smiling at the mirror. Yes, it is indeed strange to link the concept of work with the concept of smiles, but it is stranger to feel bad because we are not doing the work of self-love. Self-love is also expressed in self-appreciation, self-support, self-forgiveness, loving self-talk, self-esteem, and self-backup. All of these must be carried out physically. That means we perform appreciation, forgiveness, esteem, and self-backup in ways the senses can perceive, either by speaking to ourselves in a way we can hear or by writing the words so we can read them.

In an environment where there are many expectations for us to act for the sake of family, work, and society, the essential principle often shrinks. That principle says a person must act for their own sake, fill themselves, and strengthen themselves so that they can ever give anything meaningful to others. One must ask oneself at the end of each day:

“What did I do for myself today?”

This question must be asked with honesty and courage. It must demand a serious, appropriate, and direct answer that describes what truly occurred during the day. When a person does things for themselves, they will not forget it and will surely remember that act at the end of that day. Self-love is not a passing state that slips under the radar of our awareness. Self-love is etched within and leaves a positive and hope-giving memory.

So what did you do for yourself today?

How much did you devote to what you need most right now?

To what extent did you fight for your principles when faced with forces that try to suppress them?

Did you address an issue that had been neglected for a long time and had delayed your progress toward a better place?

Did you refuse today something that is not right and no longer suits you?

What did you do for yourself today?

Did you choose a different path than usual for your own sake?

Did you try things that interest you simply because they interest you?

Not many understand deeply how important doing for oneself is for mental health and for the health of every social framework one can imagine. When a person does not do enough for themselves, they enter a state of self-neglect. From there, the way is short to excessive compromises that harm them and distance them from what matters to them. This self-neglect, expressed in the reduction of action for the self, is quite common and is even considered a kind of cultural norm.

This does not have to be our way. We are the beacons of light who demonstrate how to live better and healthier. We are the ones who insist on exploring the love within, who do not give up on initiatives and actions meant to cultivate the self, who are not

afraid that others will call us selfish or narcissistic. We are the ones who will ask ourselves every day and will look directly:

What did I do for myself today? How did self-love express itself in me today? Finally, what do I intend to do for myself tomorrow? These questions cultivate self-love and give it validity and legitimacy. Such questions are among the most important materials in this journey.

Practice Questions (Please answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How could you **pamper yourself in a special way today**, in your opinion?
2. How do you feel about the question “**What did you do for yourself today?**”
3. What did you do **for yourself yesterday?**
4. Do you think there are things that, if you decided to do them **for yourself**, might come **at the expense of someone or something that is important to you?**
5. Listen quietly to your **desire right now**. It may want to suggest that you do something for yourself that you have not done for a long time, or perhaps never done before. **What might that be, in your opinion?**
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 8: The Best Investment Ever

This is one of the most important and confusing messages to recognize and to face on this journey. One may marvel at the fact that this message is, on the one hand, so true and important, and on the other hand, it is very rare to find people who live by it or who make use of the essential possibilities for improving quality of life that accompany its implementation.

This message presents one of the important paradoxes in human life and explains the way we preserve our problems, become stuck in states of unnecessary suffering, and distance ourselves from possibilities for healing change, development, and growth. As long as this message is not internalized and put into practice, a person will remain far from their natural powers to heal themselves and to bring forth the best that their body and soul can produce.

It is not simple to devote oneself in a committed and consistent way to the work of self-love. It is a challenging undertaking that requires a person to recruit from within, at every possible moment, the strength to smile at the mirror, even when the situation is not pleasant or does not seem suited to smiling. It is a new habit of creating an inner language that will constantly feed the person with content of love, encouragement, support, appreciation, trust, and hope. It is work. It is initiative and effort.

Inner speech of self-love is something one does and chooses to do again and again. We can forgo it and allow critical and hostile voices to take over our awareness. It is important to know that we can operate differently. We can stream within ourselves new voices of gentleness, inclusion, tolerance, and empathy. These voices will gradually fill more and more parts of our inner space and reshape it into a kind of nourishing and safe environment where we can rest, recover, reorganize, refresh, and improve in any domain we desire.

The work required to sustain and increase self-love, work that never truly ends and that will continue to be challenging and not always very comfortable, is the very thing each of us should do while placing this task at the top of our priorities. The reason is simple and clear. Despite persuasive explanations, we often prefer to forget this work and the solid reasons to do it, reasons that everyone would accept.

Why is it recommended to do the required work, which can be somewhat uncomfortable at the beginning, the work that will preserve, cultivate, and increase self-love? Simply because every other way of conducting life will be harder, more painful, more complicated, more boring, and more disappointing.

Simple, is it not?

When we love ourselves, almost everything in our life becomes more possible, more flowing, more interesting, more creative, and more stimulating. This happens when we stream love from within us into us. The energy of love increases its flow in us, and with it arrive warmth, optimism, passion, hope, enthusiasm, and other good things.

When we love ourselves, problems turn into challenges, and stuck situations turn into subjects for immediate treatment and change. When we do not love ourselves, our self-confidence is low, our self-image is harmed, and we become enslaved to cynicism, to lack of trust, to excessive conservatism, to fears, to norms, and to the expectations of the environment. In the end, life is much more difficult when we love ourselves less. This sounds self-evident.

Why then, although the facts are beyond dispute, do most people avoid doing the not complicated work of cultivating self-love and increasing it consistently?

This also has a rather simple answer, a professional answer that is sharp and clear, which many people do not recognize and are unaware of in terms of its important implications.

When we distance ourselves from our natural ability to love ourselves, we are swept, without choosing it, into inner spaces that are not very different from any addiction one can imagine. It follows that we not only avoid practicing and cultivating love within us, we also become addicted to this state, to the state of non-self-love, to the state of not recognizing the ability to maintain within us a nourishing and supportive relationship, to the state of alienation from some of the cornerstones of all forms of love. These cornerstones include recognizing love within us, with ourselves, as a personal, private, high quality, and highly potent experience.

This is the message. It is worthwhile to do the work of self-love regularly and with commitment and to face the moments in which it is more challenging to implement, because every other way of conducting life is more painful, more difficult, and more complicated, even if at the beginning it seems easier and more comfortable.

When we love ourselves less, we are forced to run away from ourselves.

If there is no inner place where it is pleasant for us to be, is it not reasonable that we will want to run away from ourselves for most of the day?

Some will run away to overwork.

Some will run away to overeating.

Some will run away to problems in relationships.

Some will run away to excessive use of substances that dull most experiences of life.

Some will run away to other forms of self-harm and addictions.

Some will run away into frustration, into lack of self-fulfillment, into anger, into burnout, into resentment, into cynicism, into pessimism, and into fatigue.

This is how it works, and the choice is entirely in our hands.

Either we do the work required to maintain and cultivate self-love, or life becomes harder and less rewarding. Either we do the right work, or life becomes harder work that pays less.

Here is the message, and it is very important.

Self-love is the most economical, effective, and reliable way to sustain a healthy and delightful life. Avoiding the work of self-love, and as noted in the previous chapter, self-love is something one feels after doing it, turns life into all those things we would prefer not to experience. If we do not do the work of self-love, we become servants of a low quality of life, servants who must exert much more effort than in places where the work of self-love is done consistently.

The choice in the end is yours, but the facts must be clear. Choose self-love and devote yourself to its work, or everything will be harder and more painful. The choice is yours. The smile is yours. The words are yours. The time has come to choose well. The time has come for ever-increasing self-love thanks to the right work we do for its sake.

Practice Questions (Please answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel today when you **smile at yourself in the mirror**?
2. Can you recognize that **smiling at the mirror** is a kind of **long term investment in your growth and development**?
3. In what other ways can you now **invest in yourself** by expanding **joy, freedom, lightness, and pleasure** in your life?
4. Which commitments that you currently have are **not truly connected to love for yourself**?
5. Are you willing to take on the commitment to **do everything you can to improve the love you have for yourself every day**? How do you feel about such a commitment?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 9: The Beautiful Duty

Self-love is a personal duty. A person must love themselves, unless they prefer to live a life of suffering and difficulty that could be avoided if they harnessed themselves with a high level of commitment to the most important thing one can think of that does not create dependence on another person: self-love, inner-love, self-liking, self-empathy, and all that follows from them.

A person who does not accept self-love as a commitment sentences themselves to a life of self-neglect. There is and will be no better way to describe the situation. It does not matter what we have in life from any perspective, whether work, family, partnership, residence, assets, or friends. All of these will remain forever "not enough" and "not satisfying." Something essential will always be missing, like an emotional pit. In the absence of self-love, life is barren of the special spark that can give a person deep meaning and a true reason for existence.

Why must we use the word "duty" when we speak about a subject that is spiritual, tender, moving, and important, like love? How can a word that seems constricting and perhaps threatening connect to one of the most delicate and elevated actions in which a person can take part?

The answer is simple. That is how it works. If we do not commit to self-love in a deep and full way, we are likely to find ourselves captive to everything that is not self-love: self-doubt, self-cancellation, cynicism toward the self, lack of compassion toward the self, inner rigidity, and even self-harm.

A person has no friend as close as themselves. The last thing that can disappear, abandon, die, fade, or disappoint a person is the person themselves. There is nowhere to run from oneself, even if one travels to the end of the world. The self will still come along. Everything else in life is an addition, an important addition, yet it is always connected to the relationship that a person has with themselves.

Moreover, human life mirrors the relationship a person has with themselves. As long as there is no inner peace, self-understanding, inner caress, and self-listening, a person will not be able to receive peace, understanding, kindness, or listening from any external source. What is not present within cannot recognize something similar that arrives from without. All of a person's life depends on their relationship with themselves. Everything that a person has is a product of what is happening within. Everything that a person lacks is a product of inner lacks. The outer world is a reflection of the inner world.

We human beings are experts at pointing an accusing finger at the circumstances of our life, at our enemies, at our country, at high prices, at bad luck, at those who stole from us, cut us off, did not consider us, did not think of us, and did not give us a worthy place. We can produce an impressive list of reasons that our life does not work out because of various factors that supposedly do not depend on us.

Yet self-love will always be the main reason for the form of life of the mature person. What exists outside is always a reflection of what exists inside. Always. We will not

start to accuse ourselves. We usually know how to do that quite well, but it will be of no use. Complaints are not what can create change or heal an unharmonious state.

Only love can heal, and it is best that it fills, and grows within the core from which all things emerge and grow. From the seed of the self, from the beginning of beginnings of every person. Within, with oneself, in one's inner-space, in one's quiet, and in one's truth. Only when love that grows and develops dwells there, in the inner spaces, can the other things, which are nothing but products of a person's behavior and thoughts, also change for the better.

Therefore, it is your duty. It is not a matter of choice, unless you truly have no interest in a life of growth, of genuine joy, of healing what hurts, and of self-fulfillment. If these are truly important to you, it is worth beginning today the journey home, the right work that creates the healthy reality in which love is first understood within, first felt within, first developed within, and then it ripens to go out into the world in any form with which a person wishes to touch and take part.

There are moments in a person's life in which one must stop asking, stop hesitating, stop circling around, and stop wondering. There are moments in which we must relate to certain matters in a sharp, clear, and uncompromising way. There is and will be nothing more important for a person than the possibility of experiencing love within, in one's inner-world, and from there bringing it outward to wherever one desires. There is no argument about this, nor should there be. There are no doubts and no questions. This is one of those matters that a person must decide about in a way that cannot be interpreted in two ways, because there is no other possibility.

When we are in an intimate relationship, it is clear to both sides that each has feelings of love toward the other. There is no other option. If a question arises regarding the place of love between partners, it expresses an inner contradiction and an undermining of the foundations of close human connection. If there is no love, there is no meaningful intimate relationship, and it has no existence and no future. More than that, such a relationship constitutes ongoing harm and erosion of a person's ability to enjoy the depths of intimacy and all the good that it brings.

All of us will always be in an intimate relationship with ourselves. The level of this intimacy is unprecedented and cannot be truly described or explained. We live inside ourselves, with ourselves, next to ourselves, and around ourselves. We are always with ourselves, and there is no other way. We are in an inner partnership from the moment we are born until the moment we complete the current cycle. Is it possible that this intimacy will not be based on meaningful and growing love? Is there any other way at all?

Therefore, it is your duty, because in every period of your life, your presence will remain attached to you. Your reflection will insist on appearing again whenever your gaze meets the mirror. You will have no other way to pass the barriers and hurdles that have been built around you on the way to a better life, to self-fulfillment, and to healing what hurts. There will be no other way but to generate within yourself a foundation of love that is not dependent on any external factor, a love that invents itself from within itself, and that belongs to you with full and exclusive ownership.

Self-love is not a nice addition or a luxury, only when there is free time after all the supposedly more important things. Self-love is the oxygen of the developing soul, and it is the chance of the recovering soul to face what truly hurts. Approaching life without a supply of self-love means working too hard, getting results that are too poor, and being caught in cycles of addiction and clinging to completely unnecessary suffering.

Therefore, it is your duty not to give up, and to activate mechanisms of self-love even when it is hard and uncomfortable. Cultivating self-love must be seen as a great commitment, the greatest commitment that exists, because no other commitment will bear fruit unless self-love stands at the top of the priorities. First of all, we must love from within, and then it will be much easier to love, and at times even to tolerate, the people close to us. When something so beautiful lives within us, no external event, even a difficult one, will defeat us, collapse us, or shake us. Inside, whole love awaits us, our love for ourselves.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Can you now connect the expressions “**obligation**” and “**self-love**”?
2. What happens to you when you **forget to love yourself**?
3. Is there really any reason for you to **be unkind to yourself** or **not smile at yourself in the mirror**, and in general?
4. Can you identify **problematic areas in your life** as places where **love toward yourself is also missing**? Can you imagine that there may be a connection between **a lack of self-love and the persistence of problems**?
5. Do you believe that **love can create miracles**? And if so, would you like to be **the magician who changes your life through the magic wand of self-love**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 10: Inner Relationship

One of the important and essential ways to understand self-love, and the reason for the attention we wish to give it, is the recognition that a person always lives in a kind of inner partnership. I live with myself. Each person lives with themselves.

Whenever such an expression, or one similar to it, is mentioned, the reaction tends to repeat itself, because in many respects these actions can seem closed off and without meaning. A person speaks with themselves. A person lives with themselves. A person reports to themselves. A person listens to themselves, is angry with themselves, goes for a walk with themselves, reflects with themselves, and more.

Regardless of our spiritual or psychological outlook, it seems that almost every person will eventually admit that they exist emotionally in a space that feels like two, if not more. Whether these are two parts or two aspects of the human personality that can, in one way or another, communicate with each other, or whether it is simply that we cannot live otherwise than in the form of inner communication between two sides, the bottom line will be the same. A person is in a relationship with themselves.

Surprisingly and even movingly, many aspects of what we regard as the right way to conduct a partnered relationship apply very much to this relationship of a person with themselves. Almost everything required to sustain a meaningful, stable, and flourishing partnership is also required when cultivating a person's relationship with themselves, a relationship that should likewise exist in harmony, in dialogue, in mutual enrichment, in cooperation, and in growth.

Before we deepen the comparison between relationships with an external other and the relationship with ourselves, it is worthwhile to clarify this conception, the fact that within us, there is always communication. We like to talk to ourselves, although socially it is not considered very normal to speak to oneself out loud. In many ways, we hide the fact that we are in a complex relationship with ourselves. We hide from others the inner arguments, the disagreements, the negotiations we conduct with ourselves, and our reactions toward ourselves in certain situations, at certain events, or among certain people.

For the purpose of discussion, we can view every person as a kind of pair, a duo, a two. From the outside, each person appears as a single individual, yet deep within this person is in unceasing contact with themselves. They are in a relationship, in communication, in ongoing reference to themselves, and very often also in a state of escape from themselves.

At times when we say that we are truly running away from ourselves, what do we mean? Who is running from whom? Are there two figures here? With which of them do we identify more? Did we forget for a moment that these two figures are in fact both us?

If we take this a step forward, we can safely estimate that a person lives with themselves in a kind of ongoing partnership, and more than that, that this partnership often generates restlessness, inner noise, worries, fears, hindrances, complications,

and pains. It is not for nothing that it is often said that the person one fears most is oneself. There is the person and their pangs of conscience, the person and their guilt, the person and their excessive expectations, the person and their excessive self-criticism. It is the person facing various forces that dwell within, in the other side, in the other figure that lives within the person and whose existence cannot be ignored. Never.

Let us now return to the important connection between what we regard as right partnership and what occurs within a person, between the person and their partner, which is themselves. Self-love enters exactly into this space and comes to bring about a profound, fundamental, and long term change unlike any other. This can occur only when we understand that we are always within a relationship with ourselves. There is not a single moment in which this relationship goes to sleep or takes a break. It happens at all times, perhaps from birth. It is alive, present, and very influential. We must acknowledge this and examine whether we have fears about engaging with this matter.

When we agree with two principles, the first being that a person is always within a partnered experience with themselves, and the second being that this relationship has many points of contact with what we regard as happening or as supposed to happen in a relationship with another person, then we can understand and implement the self-love within us and act in a way that will change the essence of our emotional system, our ability to meet challenges, and our level of creativity.

Let us begin with the mirror. It appears to be a banal, daily, and non-essential event. It is the encounter with oneself in the mirror.

Why do most people not see themselves in a positive way when they meet their image in the mirror? Is it because it is difficult for them to look honestly and directly at their relationship with themselves? Is it because it is uncomfortable to be reminded, through the gaze of the present moment, that their relationship with themselves is not good? Why is it so complicated to be gentle, kind, patient, and containing when we see ourselves? Why is it hard for us to tolerate our appearance, who we are, and our truth? Why do we feel embarrassed when we smile at ourselves in the mirror? Why do so many prefer to look for flaws in their reflection instead of granting themselves a sense of security, faith, support, and appreciation? Why do so many prefer to maintain a grinding relationship with themselves and become alarmed at the possibility that essential peace and quiet could dwell within?

The deeper we enter this subject and try to understand what is happening between us and ourselves, we will likely discover a quiet, behind the scenes ache. It is a vague, old, and constant emotional pain that awakens when we deepen our gaze into ourselves and try to come a little closer to ourselves.

As we continue to deepen, we will likely discover emotional memories from which we have been trying to escape for most of our adult lives, because it is too difficult for us to engage with them and to feel them again. We probably fear that these memories could harm our functioning and our quality of life. Looking at ourselves in the mirror and smiling can cause us to stop avoiding, to stop hiding, and to stop circumventing ourselves and what we feel. This means that we must be ready to experience

challenging feelings that may flood us, especially at the beginning period when we train ourselves to restore love to the partnered space within us.

Therefore, your partnership with yourself, which is about to undergo significant development as self-love begins to operate regularly within you, now stands at the center of attention and calls you to reexamine it, to touch it, and to approach it just as we expect of ourselves within a relationship with someone who is especially important to us.

Self-love will therefore require you to consider yourself more. Self-love will require you to take your own side, to support your version first, and never to speak negatively toward yourself, exactly as with someone you love very much. Self-love will require you to appreciate yourself more and to grant yourself more quality time with yourself. Self-love will require you to be more deeply honest with yourself, as in a partnership with someone especially beloved. Self-love will require you to pause, to sit with yourself, and to breathe. Self-love will require you to say in the middle of the day for no particular reason, "I love you." Self-love will require you to court yourself, to buy yourself flowers, and to hug yourself.

This is self-love. When touched and activated, it is irreversible. Once more, a reminder. What we perceive as "I" is in fact "We". This "We" is something we want to make better, more delightful, and more satisfying.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the expression **"inner relationship"**?
2. In what ways do you know how to **be your own best friend**?
3. In which areas would you like to **improve your ability to be your own best friend**?
4. When was the last time you **took yourself on a "date" or on an interesting outing**?
5. What is the **next thing you would like to do just with yourself** that might improve your **inner relationship**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 11: Cultivating the Relationship

Partners are meant to cultivate one another. That is their role within the relationship, and if cultivation does not take place more or less consistently, it reflects a problem in the relationship, a problem that may erode its very foundations until the bond collapses, unless a change occurs.

So it is with a person and themselves. One must cultivate oneself; otherwise, the relationship one has with oneself will fade, regress, and deteriorate into less healthy, less pleasant versions of self-relationship.

Before we deepen this worldview, it is worth clarifying the concept of cultivation, so that we can be sure we are all referring to the same idea when we speak about it.

Cultivation is a kind of intentional engagement that encourages development, positive change, growth, and improvement. A person who experiences cultivation expands their abilities and possibilities, reaching places they could not reach without it. Cultivation is characterized by continuity and consistency. It cannot occur only occasionally. It reflects an ongoing attitude, a desire to help a person bring out the best in themselves, without pressure or unrealistic expectations for rapid progress, and without pushing beyond what that person can handle at a given time.

Cultivation can also be seen as a protective and nourishing environment, a kind of womb that improves environmental conditions and ensures they are suited to a person's developmental needs. Cultivation requires intention, attention, willingness, and of course... love.

One can cultivate only someone who is willing to receive cultivation. One can cultivate someone who agrees to undergo change and to face their weaker points. One can cultivate someone who is open to some help yet will not become dependent on it nor negate themselves in order to receive the cultivation. Cultivation benefits not only the one who is cultivated; in optimal conditions, the one who cultivates also gains from the process and delights in its results.

Now we must ask a fundamental and essential question, one that profoundly echoes the foundations of self-love within every person:

Am I ready to be cultivated? Am I truly willing to undergo cultivation? Do I have enough love for myself to receive additions, help, inspiration, and encouragement for positive changes, growth, and transformation?

Are you ready to be cultivated?

Do not answer this question too quickly.

It is better to pause, to linger, and to examine. As long as we lack sufficient self-love, our capacity to receive cultivation remains limited. A person who is ready to be cultivated is a person who believes they deserve it. Such a person is ready to be at the center of attention, to declare their innate and permanent right to receive whatever is

necessary to feel better, to be happy, to fulfill themselves, and to free themselves from what holds them back.

Self-love is measured exactly here. It is tested in this point of readiness.

Too many people are convinced that they do not deserve to receive much more in life than they have now. Too many struggle to allow cultivation that could come easily and without excessive effort, simply because their love for themselves is underdeveloped and not at the top of their priorities.

Do you have enough love for yourself to be cultivated? And if yes, is it clear to you that the one who is meant to give you that cultivation and the atmosphere for it is you yourself?

Moreover, do you have the readiness to take upon yourself the commitment to self-cultivation? Is it clear to you that this is a long term commitment that must be taken seriously, studied in depth, and practiced with devotion? Are we truly ready for self-cultivation?

There is no need to answer all these questions right away. They are meant mainly to awaken the muscles of self-love within us. Readiness and the ability to cultivate ourselves develop over time, becoming clearer as the journey unfolds, until they turn into practical and available tools. For now, all we need to do is to ask the questions and explore the matter of self-cultivation more deeply.

As we allow ourselves to explore these questions, over time we can observe everything that self-cultivation entails, the work of self-love that must be done to turn this idea and worldview into a living, tangible reality.

How will you cultivate yourself more? What are the ways you need for self-cultivation?

Before answering this question, it is wise to pause, because the answers lie within you and only within you. What works for others may not work for you? What promotes others may not promote you? What others need in order to develop may not be what you need? Your path of self-cultivation is known to you alone, even if at this moment it is not entirely clear.

And what can help you know your path of cultivation better?

You may have guessed... self-love. Only self-love. Self-love that contains self-loyalty, self-listening, self-understanding, and self-preference will guide you toward your right path, your ways of cultivation, your authentic passions, and the directions of change that suit you and only you. The more we love ourselves in a healthy and conscious way, paying attention again and again to our need for self-support, to the daily smile in the mirror, to consideration for ourselves, and to kind words from ourselves to ourselves, the easier it becomes to sense what is right for us, what we deserve, what is worthy for us, and what nourishes our soul.

Your self-cultivation might also involve ending certain patterns and habits. How can you discover that? How can you know what is right to stop, and whether it is time to do so?

You learn this from self-love. From self-love we learn to trust our inner voices and to criticize them less. From self-love we discover our basic need and right to broad and generous cultivation, cultivation that does not have to come at anyone else's expense, yet whose absence signals that our soul remains hungry and in distress. From self-love we understand that without cultivation we are weaker, more vulnerable, and less joyful.

Therefore, this is your task. Your task is to cultivate the relationship with yourself and to regard it as a project of great importance. You are to appreciate yourself a bit more each day, to make efforts for your own sake, to stop unnecessary overexertion, and to be more considerate toward yourself. Soften your criticism, expand your tolerance toward yourself, and speak to yourself more gently and kindly. From here everything will begin to evolve. From here the path of self-cultivation opens wide and becomes ever more practical and tangible.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the expression “**self-cultivation**”?
2. Which things would you like to **no longer be part of your life**, for example **one year from today**?
3. What do you think might happen if you **place more trust in your inner voice** and **stop criticizing it**?
4. What do you most need right now in terms of **strengthening or improving your self-cultivation**, in any area that may be relevant?
5. What **gift** would you like to **buy for yourself or provide for yourself** today or in the coming days?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 12: Love Yourself When It Is Hard

This chapter largely represents one of the important, challenging, and complex parts of self-love. The subject we address here reflects the less glamorous, less sensational, and less enticing sides of self-love. It represents our less pleasant moments, the painful, gray, depressing, and anxiety-provoking moments.

Within those difficult places, where life becomes heavier and more complicated, we will clarify the vital role of self-love. In those harder places through which a person must pass, we will think together about how self-love can change the picture when we bravely draw on our remaining emotional strength.

When we are in hard moments, when reality collides with us and shakes our stability, when almost everything is getting tangled, changing, and breaking down, one of the last things we will likely think about is self-love. In those moments, when pain, fear, worry, and frustration are so dominant and present, it is not simple, and sometimes it is impossible, to find within ourselves points of softness, empathy, and self-understanding.

Yet these are exactly the moments when self-love is needed like air to breathe.

These are exactly the moments when we forget the good, the encouraging, the optimistic, and the successful in our lives. These are exactly the moments when we add to the difficulty an excessive self-criticism, a despair that exceeds the boundaries of the event, a pessimism that distorts the picture, and an over-focus on what is problematic while almost completely neglecting other aspects of our inner world that could help us, stabilize us, and provide a healthier perspective around the challenge in front of us.

These are exactly the moments when self-love is so important and becomes reality-changing.

Here is how it works. When we feel very bad or when things are moving toward directions we do not want, there arises within us, alongside the unpleasant experience, an atmosphere of inner distancing up to self-alienation. This atmosphere is not a decree of fate and is not necessarily connected to what is happening around us. Moreover, this atmosphere only intensifies the difficulty, lengthens it, exaggerates it, and reduces our ability to cope with it creatively. Worse than that, such an atmosphere pushes us toward behavior that closely resembles addiction, toward behaviors that repeat the errors of the past, toward a tendency for self-harm, and toward an excessive wallowing in pain.

When in such moments we manage, even briefly, to stop the surge, face a mirror, smile lightly, and say something like, “Yes, it is hard now, yet nonetheless I love you,” we create a highly significant long-term shift. Over time, this shift is expected to equip us with tools that can take us out of the repeating circles of pain, frustration, and the return to behaviors that inevitably lead us to unwanted places.

It is important to note that in most cases, an act of self-love performed in a crisis will not change the feelings in any immediate and dramatic way. Sometimes we will indeed feel a measure of relief and a small addition of a good atmosphere within us. Yet often nothing substantial will seem to happen in response to the gesture. We will smile at the mirror and say something kind to ourselves, but the difficulty and pain will continue. They have their own lifespan and their own pace of fading.

What matters most when we add an act of self-love during a hard time is what happens next, and how the soul builds its emotional future. When we plant elements of self-love into a difficult event, the soul records a positive precedent. It will remember in the future that this event was handled differently than usual. Despite the pain and difficulty, there were also sparks of healthy and positive behavior. This memory will help it later to respond differently when a similar event repeats.

When our memory of an event is entirely negative, the likelihood that such an event will recur in the same form, and even with greater intensity, is high. This is a circle of addiction and a return to the painful place, as long as we do not make far-reaching changes that alter the reality associated with that issue. We human beings have a tendency to return to the places where we made mistakes and where our inner world encountered difficulty and distress. You can see this as a recurring opportunity to correct, and you can also see it as a form of addiction.

By contrast, when we manage, despite the difficulty and the weight, to lift ourselves for a short time, to ignore the commotion, to smile at the mirror, and even to speak words of love toward ourselves, the drama and what remains of it change greatly. We are no longer victims of the event, and we are not fully controlled by it. We found within ourselves the ability to respond, even for a few moments, with tools of self-love. When we act in this way, the soul recognizes that something is changing, that reality is no longer composed of dark and oppressive events only, but of events that simultaneously contain bad and good, pain and courage, sadness and love.

One crucial point about such behavior in a hard event is that it requires considerable courage. Negative drama is a sweeping state, persuasive and uncompromising, that leaves almost no room for doubt, for wondering, or for broad and creative thinking about what is happening. Such drama causes us to feel that reality is absolute and too painful. Such drama distances us from our positive strengths quickly and efficiently. We surrender to it and grant it the mandate to manage us in a negative way. We become addicted to it.

To stand against the surge and against the pain, and precisely then to encourage, to support, and to appreciate is not simple. It means going against what is, rebelling against it, standing face to face before the sharp and sweeping pain, and saying to it, "No." Such action requires courage that emerges from a deep and quiet place that has already met self-love, has known it, has recognized it, and has adopted it as a necessary mechanism for creating a healthier and more meaningful life.

Courage of this kind is greater and more important than many actions and decisions that are usually regarded as brave or daring. There, within the routine of our lives, occur the events that most determine our emotional and physical health. There, inside the irritating and repetitive events that frustrate us so deeply, lie the greatest treasures

for personal growth, self-realization, and change. Within those hard places also dwell our barriers to a freer, more released, and more satisfying life. We should not understand these situations otherwise. These are exactly the places where our soul gets stuck again and again, and these are exactly the places where life offers us an opportunity for change.

How will the change take place?

The change will take place gradually, through the persistent introduction of self-love into the dark, unrewarding, and unsuitable places in our lives. When we bring self-love into them again and again, the soul will remember and will treat the next event with a little more positivity and creativity. When this becomes a habit, the intensity of the difficulty will decrease, and new options for change and a more balanced perspective on the problem will appear and become more available.

We need self-love in the hard moments and also in the easy moments. When self-love becomes an inseparable part of our lives, everything becomes simpler, clearer, less frightening, and more manageable. Self-love is the foundation of change, and sometimes it is the change itself. Do you have the courage to smile at yourself even when it is hard?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Name one of the issues that is **particularly challenging or troubling for you these days**.
2. Examine this: **To what extent do you support yourself, stand by yourself, and love yourself** in relation to this issue?
3. Do you remember a situation in which you encountered difficulty and **part of the way you coped was through self-love or self-support**? Write a few lines about it.
4. How does it feel to **recall the event you mentioned in the previous question**?
5. In which area of your life do you feel there is now a need for a **significant increase in self-love**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 13: Loneliness, A Lack of Self-Love

Loneliness is likely one of the most common and significant problems of our contemporary human culture. This problem is far more widespread, influential, and troubling than we might assume. It circles around the person in many forms and dimensions, and as I will show, it is closely related to a lack of self-love.

Before we connect loneliness to self-love, it is helpful to clarify the concept of “loneliness,” because it likely represents the roots of human anxieties and their possible consequences.

Human beings, in principle, are anxious about losing.

We fear losing our friends, our families, our health, our livelihood, our homes, our values, our habits, and almost anything else that we feel belongs to us or is part of us. We fear losing things.

More than anything, we fear losing the emotional connection to the place and environment in which we live. When we wake up in the morning, we arise into a reality that is mostly familiar. We move around our familiar home, eat our familiar food, walk our familiar streets, work at our familiar job, and maintain relationships with family and friends whom we have known for a long time.

Imagine for a moment that everything familiar, known, and connected to us disappears, and we find ourselves in a completely different environment, with a different language, with no one who knows us, with customs that are entirely different and not understood, with no place of our own, no profession of our own, and no connection to our surroundings. If we imagine such a situation, we can estimate the level of anxiety and helplessness that would accompany such a feeling. In certain psychiatric conditions, a person may temporarily feel that he is losing connection with what has always been in his life, and this further destabilizes his mental state.

This imaginary and of course impossible scenario reflects what we know as the experience of loneliness and the anxiety that surrounds it. If a person is left without a place and without people with whom he can communicate, relate, negotiate, share, consult, love, feel, and touch, he becomes a person who is very deprived, almost without value. In such a state, his presence appears to have no meaning or importance. Such a person is, in effect, alone.

Clearly, such a scenario is almost impossible. It describes the great dependence we have on the existence of relationships to which we are connected and through which we express much of who we are and what we can be. As long as we do not understand this unavoidable dependence, we have no tools to truly understand where we live and what guides us unconsciously. We will do almost anything to avoid such a state, including very strange and unexpected things. We absolutely do not want to lose what keeps us part of the general network. We do not want to be lonely.

What happens in practice, however, is a complication of our need to be connected.

That part of our personality that can develop only if we allow ourselves a certain measure of existing, functioning, and coping completely alone develops in many people only partially. We have become people who are very afraid to meet themselves, lest we lose all our social, family, and professional ties. We have flipped the situation and magnified a normal and reasonable dependence on the environment into a pathological, exaggerated, and distorted dependence. We have become people who struggle to know and recognize themselves, out of fear of losing what in reality cannot be lost except in entirely imaginary scenarios.

Thus people flee from themselves to every possible stimulus and distraction. Instead of enjoying social encounters, they turn interactions into a lifeline to avoid an intimate and essential meeting with themselves. They flick through their smartphones, which makes them less wise, they remain in unhelpful relationships only because they fear being alone with themselves, they work too much, tidy the house when there is no need, watch too much television, and surf the internet excessively, simply because it is hard for them to be with themselves, because being with themselves is perceived as a catastrophic loss which, as mentioned, can happen only in imaginary scripts.

The escape from true intimacy with ourselves only worsens our loneliness, reduces our positive social abilities, and makes us weaker and more fearful.

As long as we do not deal with the anxiety of losing everything, an anxiety that does not reflect a realistic scenario but strongly affects our quality of life, we condemn ourselves to living largely through various methods of escaping from ourselves and from our truth. We may reach a state in which we do not truly know ourselves, our desires, the path that is right for us, and the real promises that life holds for us.

Exactly here, self-love stands by our side, confident and strong.

That same self-love can always be restored, cultivated, and amplified. It reflects the foundation of love, the most direct and authentic connection of a person to himself or herself, the connection to spirit, to emotion, and to reason at the same time, in the most positive, constructive, and healthy way imaginable.

Self-love is the thread that links that deep anxiety about the lack of connection and the loss of all that exists to a creative, joyful, and optimistic way of life. Self-love is the true and primary answer to the experience of loneliness. Self-love is what is missing when a person finds himself in a state of excessive torment about what he perceives as oppressive loneliness.

We humans, like most creatures, are social and tend to connect, gather, organize, and create varied affiliations in-order to survive and develop. Yet all the interpersonal connections we create cannot truly nourish us and benefit us as long as their main essence is protection from what we perceive as the terror of loneliness.

To be genuinely social with the people and groups around us in a way that is right for us, we must first cultivate the social system we have with ourselves. As long as we are empty inside and there is no love between us and ourselves, we will always feel threatened by the painful and unavoidable encounter with ourselves. As long as self-

love is absent, a person cannot feel comfortable with himself, and he will suffer in situations where he is alone, interpreting them as loneliness and even as depression.

As self-love grows and takes its place, a person finds more and more situations in which it is more comfortable to be with oneself than with others. As self-love develops and consolidates, options expand, and the anxieties about something or someone leaving, breaking apart, or disappearing become weaker. In such a state, the fear of loneliness shrinks, and in its place comes a courageous relationship that challenges social messages based on a compulsive need to flee from ourselves into togetherness, and gives us the freedom to choose quality time with ourselves, with friends, and with family, and any other way to express ourselves. Everything will begin with self-love, and everything will develop correctly only out of self-love. This is how it works.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What do you think is the connection between a **lack of self-love** and the **experience of loneliness**?
2. Have you experienced moments of “**togetherness with yourself**”, in which you felt comfortable with who you are and with what you were doing? Write a few lines about it.
3. Pay attention to moments or places in which you feel **lonelier**. What do you think might happen if, in those very places, you are able to **significantly increase the love you have for yourself**?
4. Loneliness can be seen as an expression of parts within us that are **isolated and not connected to one another**. Try to imagine a situation in which the different parts of your personality **connect with love and cooperation**. How does such a state feel to you?
5. How do you feel about the statement:
“**I always have myself, and I will never choose to leave myself without my own loving and supportive presence**”?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 14: Smile at the Mirror: The Magic

At first glance, this is an easy, symbolic, quick, and insignificant gesture. Smile at the mirror. Seemingly, no meaningful change could result from simply smiling at the mirror whenever we see ourselves in it. What could possibly develop from a few quick smiles a day?

Why is it that for most people, simply looking at themselves in the mirror is not easy, and even more so, why is it hard to smile at themselves without criticism and judgment?

Most likely because they feel embarrassed. They are not used to such blunt intimacy with themselves. They are not used to seeing themselves, and perhaps not even their friends, beyond the masks of normality and through the social expectations that distance us so much from ourselves. We are not used to seeing ourselves truly. We are used to seeing the person we invented while fleeing from our essence and our source.

What is embarrassing or unpleasant or difficult about a smile? It is **strange** that a pleasant gesture that is the basis of close, constructive, and friendly communication becomes something awkward that we avoid using regularly. What could be uncomfortable about seeing ourselves smiling at ourselves? Why does the smile in the mirror arouse anxiety and rejection? Where is the problem?

Perhaps we have become addicted to a rigid, critical, and gray lifestyle. In such a style our emotional commitment to ourselves is low. We fix ourselves in a relatively low place in our struggle with what burdens us, and we do not dare to break free with actions and gestures that could change the picture.

I want to ask you now, and I suggest you let the question resonate for a while.

Is a self-meeting at the mirror like a meeting with a person who is very important and dear to us?

Can we imagine a situation in which we meet someone who is important and dear to us, and we receive them with a gloomy, worried, critical, and cold face?

There is no chance. In such situations, and even in less pleasant ones, we always smile when we meet someone, except in very specific cases when we must meet someone we are angry with or hurt by. In all other situations, a small or large smile, according to the context, is one of the codes for opening dialogue and connection.

Why then, when we meet the most important and dearest person to us in the world, do we not receive that person with warmth and perhaps even with some loving and appreciative words?

Why do we alienate ourselves from the person who determines more than anything our fate, our present, and our future?

Why do we not invest in ourselves the right thing, a repeated smile to ourselves that will gradually build an ever-increasing self-love?

These are not easy questions to answer quickly. They invite us to take hold of the reins of our emotional life and to initiate change, a change that will lead to positive events arising from a shift in awareness and from a more positive regard toward ourselves.

Self-love and its growth begin in the place that understands, or is willing to appreciate, that deep inside it already exists and is not a subject for theoretical study, but a subject for practice, training, implementation, and restoration. Self-love is there inside, along with other good things that we have a remarkable ability to hide or minimize. Self-love lies in the cellars of the soul and is one of the features of our true self.

When we smile at the mirror consistently, again and again, with insistence and without compromise, we send a message to the person standing before us, to ourselves. The message repeats itself, insistent and unwavering. It is a message of loyalty, love, dedication, and responsibility toward ourselves. It expresses that always, in every situation, the positive candle will continue to burn, the candle that knows what is good in us, that represents our healthy desire, and that knows we are worthy, unique, and of course deeply loved.

Messages of this kind sometimes come from the environment, but often not in the form we need, or in a way that makes us dependent on the “supply” of warm feelings from another person, and that will always be interrupted or changed. Only love that comes from within can maintain its stability and will never create dependency or addiction. When we smile at the mirror, we supply ourselves, from a first source that is also the most qualitative and reliable available to us, the very things we chase unsuccessfully through the people around us, who will never be able to replace the source and core of the love that lies deep within us.

Smiling at the mirror lets us glimpse what is beautiful in us, both physically and spiritually. When we struggle to look at our smiling face, it is a clear sign that we struggle to perceive the natural and divine beauty we brought with us here. A person is always more beautiful and more moving when he smiles. A person will always bring his sweetest gifts to the environment when he smiles. A person is always at his best when he smiles, and this is true even when circumstances do not seem to justify a smile.

Smile at the mirror for thirty seconds and see what happens. Smile for a full minute and see what happens.

Smile for two minutes, and you will feel your inner beauty entering your awareness by connecting to your cute and special smile. When you smile for longer, you will first pass through pains, fears, doubts, anger, and cynicism. They are there, and they drain out when we smile continuously at the mirror. Let those negative parts rise, and keep smiling. Your determination to keep looking at yourself in this way will gradually push away the masks of resistance and will eventually connect you to a pleasurable and special feeling, the feeling of love that naturally wells up from within.

Smiling at the mirror is a matter of choice, and it also expresses the beauty of a simple and much underappreciated act. We can, by decision, in almost any situation, remind ourselves that we aspire to increase self-love. We can do it now with one more broad and brave smile at the mirror. We can express our love in this way, and it will be very significant in the short term and even more in the long term.

And as I like to say, we meet ourselves in the mirror every day anyway. Is it not a pity to waste this wonderful opportunity to increase self-love? Is it not a pity to merely look at ourselves and add nothing to our lives, instead of enriching them with a clear gesture of self-love?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel in your body when you **smile at yourself in the mirror with a brief smile**?
2. How do you feel in your body when you **smile at yourself in the mirror with a prolonged smile**?
3. Try to guess: what is the thing we are **choosing unconsciously** when we practice smiling at the mirror? What **deeper decision** does this actually reflect?
4. Pay attention to the changes in the **“figure” you encounter** when you smile at the mirror. What happens to it when you see it move from a **“serious” or “neutral” expression** to a smile? Do you notice changes in its **energy or appearance**?
5. Go for a moment to the nearest mirror, smile at yourself for **20 to 30 seconds continuously**, and then come back here and share. How do you feel after this smile? How does your body respond to this **small yet meaningful gesture**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 15: Travel Alone with Yourself

One of the clearest markers of a person's ability to connect better with himself, and one of the definitive tools for improving a person's existing relationship with himself, is the solo walk or solo outing. Travel alone outside, in an urban setting, or in nature, by public transport, or by private car. Simply take yourself out for a walk. Go out with yourself into the world, just me and me walking out there, enjoying each other's company.

Someone who has not yet tried a solo outing may initially feel strange and uncomfortable moving around alone without a clear goal, without a defined destination, only with himself amongst people or only with nature and the world.

The habits that distanced us from ourselves and from the great pleasure of connecting to the environment while we are only in our own company have taken from us essential parts of the inner relationship and have left us not only very far from ourselves but also ignorant and lacking understanding of what happens inside when a person meets himself, listens to himself, sees himself, and becomes his own closest friend.

In fact, one of the places where we can listen to ourselves and flow with ourselves better is anywhere outside the home, when we are there without the constant presence of someone at our side. Just us and the world. Just us and the surroundings. There is something about encountering the environment, and the way it resonates within us, that lets us reach a better quality of inner communication and a deeper familiarity with what truly resides inside.

Moreover, a person often discovers that the best way to connect with the environment and with people outside begins with moving without accompaniment. When we remain in the company of a certain person from the outset, much of our attention is directed to that person and to our communication with them. Without noticing, most of the communication we could have created with ourselves disappears, and everything that will happen during the time outside will derive more from the relationship between us and that person and less from the relationship between us and ourselves.

Go out from home sometimes, go out without a defined destination. Give yourself this time, an hour or two. Notice the resistances. Notice the anxieties. Notice the excuses that suddenly pop up to deter you from going out alone for no specific reason. Notice any embarrassment when you begin to move outside and feel the difference between your solo outing and most other people who go to very defined places, such as work, shopping, errands, or family. Allow yourselves to be different. Allow yourselves for a while to be "strange." The truth is that you are not the strange ones, and you are not doing anything beyond reason. The truth is that you are the saner, the healthier, the bolder, and the more interesting. Go out for a walk alone. Start with an hour, and perhaps later for a week or two or more.

And no, you will not truly be alone.

The common word “alone” is confusing and misleading, and often it expresses the opposite. A person who is not able to be with himself does not truly know the experience of “together.” A person who does not experience the “together” with himself cannot feel it in the company of others. Such a person is so frightened to be with himself, so afraid to experience intimacy with himself, that he constantly surrounds himself with family, with friends, with work, and with various tasks, all in order not to be with himself. Such a person is far lonelier than you are and does not know the deep pleasure of togetherness. Such a person is very far from you, from those who are climbing the mountain of self-love. You are doing the right thing; most people are not yet doing so.

As you practice the solo outing, you will enjoy it more and will return from it more satisfied and happier. In time, you will begin to feel that while you are moving, the world begins to “speak” with you. Suddenly, you will notice more details that previously passed you by. A particular flower will make you stop and look. You may sit on a bench and watch the people in a hurry and the cars passing, and you will be able to listen to the dialogues that people conduct with themselves as they walk by you, unaware that you are in a fascinating drama. You are out alone with yourself, with no rush and no supposedly important task.

Until the “together” with yourself becomes enjoyable, it can be demanding. At first, it can be difficult and strange, because you are not used to placing yourself outside without the masks of something you are supposedly busy with. When was the last time you met someone in the street who told you they were just walking outside, simply connecting to nature, and not in a hurry to anywhere. Can you imagine that one day you will be the person who smiles knowingly at an acquaintance and says you are simply strolling with yourself, without a defined goal.

You might initially feel it is a waste of time. We are programmed. We are bound to a restless and noisy mindset that makes us use our free time in a limited and specific way. Many people feel ashamed to spend a whole day that was not officially defined as a vacation, without work or without some contribution to a particular effort, such as house cleaning, car maintenance, or family care. We struggle to see quality time with ourselves as a worthy and even sacred space, a time that deserves extra attention and careful planning.

We are ultimately programmed to be as little as possible with ourselves. When we are with ourselves, while still untrained in this, we may feel we are doing something unworthy, unnecessary, and perhaps even foolish. We have surrendered so much to this programming that it has nothing to do with self-love.

So let us go out. We will never truly be alone; quite the opposite. As we get used to going out only with ourselves and as we learn to move past the anxieties that accompany such a step, we will discover within us experiences of “togetherness” that we did not know before and that we will never want to miss. We will be the ones who use our free time better, because what we do will contribute greatly to our inner order and to our emotional calm with ourselves, a calm we seek so much, but which we often look for in the wrong places.

Do not be alarmed by the alarm, and do not be surprised by the anxiety. They reflect the walls we have built between us and ourselves, and they will be expressed strongly at the beginning. Keep walking alone. Allow your feet to carry you, step by step, away from your overly protected and familiar place. Do not take out the phone at every moment; let yourself move. Give yourself the right to improvise along the way and to choose routes and paths in surprising and spontaneous ways. No one is there to influence your direction or to dictate where to stop. The whole space is yours; it is entirely open, inviting you to try, to experience, and to discover. This space will help you a great deal to maintain the inner relationship and to feel self-love as you never have before.

Out there, with no one looking, you can, even for a brief moment, hug yourself.

This can be nice, though it is not required, but a kind of bonus. You may decide to stop somewhere and buy yourself something tasty to eat or drink. You may begin a spontaneous dialogue with a stranger and be surprised to discover your openness and flow toward someone who, in that moment, joins your personal and free journey with yourself.

Go out with yourself in order to meet yourself through the world outside. Do not be surprised by the initial difficulties. It is a kind of cleansing from the bad habits you acquired. It will pass. Trust that you will feel great and subtle pleasure only when you walk alone, with yourself. This is the pleasure of self-love in its full glory, the pleasure of a true connection of a person with himself.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Do you enjoy **going on walks by yourself**, in nature or in other environments?
2. When you are in nature, what changes do you feel **taking place within you**?
3. Spending time in nature, especially alone, offers **excellent opportunities for intimate encounters with yourself**. Have you experienced something like this? If so, please write a few lines about it.
4. What do you think about the option of **“going out for a spontaneous walk in the middle of the day, just me with myself, without a clear destination”**?
5. Complete the following sentence six times:
“When I go out more often on spontaneous walks by myself, then surely...”
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 16: Authenticity

If a person wishes to know themselves better, they must love themselves better.

The concept of “authenticity” can be very confusing. What is authenticity? What is the human expression that reflects authenticity, and what does not? When is a person authentic, meaning more real, and when are they not? Is it even possible for a person to be inauthentic? After all, everything a person expresses at any given moment is what they are authentically capable of expressing at that moment, is it not?

Somewhere, deep in human consciousness, the concept of authenticity evokes a longing for something that we usually feel is missing. Indeed, most people feel frustrated because, in the present, they are far from the parts within them that reflect inner truth and purity.

What makes a person feel they are living in a kind of lie or concealment?

What makes a person feel that they are not as authentic as they could be?

What makes a person feel they are hiding from themselves, running away from themselves, not knowing themselves enough, and not expressing what truly exists deep inside?

What is the thing that a person seeks so much and calls “authenticity”?

What are we truly looking for, and why, when we imagine a state of authenticity, do we feel that in it lies the missing, elusive, and precise part of us?

The answer to these questions is more or less the same, even though it can be expressed in many ways. The answer is not found in the place where logical explanations give a complete response to what is unclear to us. The answer to these questions lies in the places where we allow ourselves to let go, for a while, of the need to understand logically and fully. The answer to these questions is possible only when we release some of our cynicism and our need to organize what is happening in our minds. The answer requires openness and a creative, flexible mindset that allows new ideas to receive space and opportunity.

The answer lies in a knowing that exists within every person who has begun walking any path of self-awareness. The answer exists within the motivation behind all the searching people do from the moment they realize that their lives do not revolve solely around the routine and immediate factors of survival and daily existence, but that there is something beyond what they usually see and hear. The answer connects to our desire to seek, to explore, to experience, and to question.

The developing person knows, even if they cannot explain precisely, that there are parts within them that reflect what is special, essential, and worthy in their life. Sometimes they understand that these things are connected to love, self-realization, satisfaction, and excitement. Sometimes they realize that they do not fully understand what it is they are looking for, yet this fact will not stop them from continuing to search for what is wondrous, moving, and meaningful in their complex life.

What is even more wondrous, though perhaps initially hard to grasp, is that the more we become skilled and deepened in our self-love, the more the unclear paths within us

become clear and transparent. Self-love does not inform us of who we are, nor does it bring with it a special revelation of knowledge and insights about our self-realization or about the things that could change our lives and give them greater meaning than we currently experience.

All that self-love does, and that is immense, is connect us to the place in our personality that is often attributed to the right hemisphere of the brain, the place that has always known without ever being taught.

It is the place from which intuition emerges and from which strange ideas arise that later prove to be genius. It is the place where we feel, and often avoid approaching, because we fear entering a whirlpool of change, uncertainty, and too many surprises. We usually prefer the familiar, the known, the logical, the safe, and the routine. We prefer less to know ourselves and our deeper truths because we fear that things may emerge from there that, in our opinion, are better left hidden in the basements of our repression.

In vain we will try to penetrate our truth through ways that are not based on self-love. The sophisticated defense systems of the psyche will not allow us even to peek inside, and we will remain with more or less the same data, the same abilities, and the same modes of expression we have always had. Without self-love, we are crippled, limited, and narrow, and worst of all, ignorant of our inability to move to a better place within ourselves and in life.

This can confuse almost anyone. The concept of “truth”, derived from “authenticity”, sounds logical and clear enough. Why can we not know our authenticity through the familiar paths of reason and understanding? If it is our truth, why can we not simply explore it through conversation, reflection, and logical calculation of everything we have accumulated and understood about ourselves so far? Why should that not work for us?

The answer is simple, because this is how things work.

Our logical mind does not contain the tools required to pass through the barriers that separate it from the deeper and more hidden parts of us. These parts are not hidden because they cannot be seen or heard, but because what we consider logical, practical, and even scientific does not contain the tools, mostly emotional rather than intellectual, necessary to see what is always available to anyone who observes through the right lens.

Somewhere deep inside, we know that our lives can offer us experiences that are more exciting, more meaningful, and more fitting for us. That knowing is what drives people toward processes of learning and awareness that never end. Somewhere within is the “I” that we do not fully know, yet we know well that it exists and longs for freer and broader expression.

When we cultivate self-love through various tools that turn it into a practical and consistent way of life, we begin to dissolve the wall between our reason and the mystery of our deeper truth. Self-love releases us from the need to defend ourselves or to play it safe. Self-love dismantles the fears that limit us only to what is familiar,

accepted, or fashionable. Self-love connects us to the deep desire to create change that leads to a truer and more accurate life. Self-love is the main path to authenticity, the very authenticity that is so desired but remains so vague as long as we do not look at it with loving eyes that do not push for immediate understanding and that are willing to enter the fog without knowing what awaits there.

Even if a person considers themselves honest and not manipulative, that does not necessarily indicate high authenticity, because anyone who lacks self-love has significant parts of their truth hidden from them, and they are not even aware of it. Self-love opens gates for us, and without it, we remain outside and are not allowed entry into our inner world. Self-love is the gateway to authenticity, and over time and with practice, this new authenticity becomes a tool that in turn enhances self-love.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the expression “**my full authenticity**”?
2. How do you currently see the connection between **self-love** and **authenticity**?
3. Self-love allows us to **improve our ability to get to know ourselves**, including the parts that are sometimes difficult for us. How do you feel about this possibility?
4. What new things are you going to **discover within yourself** as you significantly increase the love you have for yourself?
5. When you connect the concepts of “**authenticity**” and “**love**”, what happens? What is “**born**” from this connection, in your experience?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 17: Love the Unlovable Parts in You

This part of self-love is among the most challenging, difficult, and controversial. Many people succeed in applying quite a few principles of self-love, yet when they want to face this particular part of their personality, they encounter a solid wall separating them from one of the most important and life-changing qualities of self-love, the ability to love precisely what they find hardest to like within themselves.

In vain we will try to cleanse ourselves or to ignore it. In vain we will try to present ourselves as moral or enlightened beings. In vain we will distance ourselves from bad or unworthy people and separate ourselves from anyone who represents what we see as wrong, abnormal, dirty, repulsive, inferior, or not of our culture or our neighborhood. In vain we will try to purify ourselves through what we perceive as good deeds, helping others, contributing to society, or speaking beautifully. None of these will ever change the true reality that resides in the depths of our psyche and that sometimes emerges in ways that may shame or sadden us.

In every person, without exception, there are parts that repel them. In every person, without exception, there are parts they will do everything not to express or even share with themselves. Every person has parts that contradict their own basic beliefs and norms. In every person, there is a potential criminal, even if they are certain that such a thing is not possible. In every person dwell dark, difficult, and irritating elements, sides that they would prefer, if only possible, to keep forever locked away in the closed basements of the soul.

That is why the human psyche developed the marvelous mechanism of repression, to try to forget, to make others forget, to divert attention, and to live along a path that constantly bypasses the silent monsters that exist within every human being.

This way of living carries a high price. To keep these negative parts quiet and contained, a person must recruit great mental energy to silence and suppress the hidden and unwanted drives and desires. The energy we invest in maintaining this state is very expensive, and when it is devoted primarily to keeping the internal prisons of our “ugly” parts locked, it is missing from other areas where our inner forces are needed, for flexibility, creativity, and openness to handle challenges and focus on growth.

The equation is simple and indisputable, if too many resources are mobilized to keep large portions of ourselves that we consciously or unconsciously perceive as negative, forbidden, or dangerous under control, it comes at the expense of other situations where we could achieve more, realize more of our potential, and experience greater satisfaction, joy, and frequent moments of calm and fulfillment. The person who invests great energy to maintain this suppression is more tense, more anxious, and more vulnerable to emotional and physical disturbances.

This is the price we pay for the accepted lifestyle. But this price can be significantly reduced when we bring into the picture, with courage and honesty, self-love as a way to cope more effectively with the parts we usually see as unnecessary or unworthy.

Self-love can connect us to places we could hardly approach without it. In the end, self-love offers us a deal that is hard to refuse, to save ourselves from ourselves.

As enlightened, intelligent, sensitive, and caring people, the last thing that comes to mind is that there are dark, threatening, ugly, unpleasant, or even slightly malicious sides within us. We do not want to believe that somewhere inside us there exists the potential to harm ourselves or others. We refuse to accept that we share certain elements with great criminals or master deceivers. We do not want to believe that part of our humanity includes elements that the mind cannot tolerate and will do anything to push away or erase. But in vain, we all have these parts, and we can never truly escape them.

If human beings, mortals like us, are capable of committing atrocities, causing harm, pain, and destruction, then it is clear that the potential for such actions exists in every person. Most normative people choose and prefer not to harm or to suffer from harm, and therefore they are not criminals. Usually, life rewards them reasonably well for that choice, the choice of a moral, considerate, and tolerant lifestyle. Society embraces these normative people and presents them as normal, sane, and belonging to the healthy segment of humanity. It prefers to confine, silence, remove, or eliminate criminals, the mentally ill, and others considered useless or harmful, in order to see itself as clean, enlightened, and healthy.

But no distancing, exclusion, imprisonment, or denial can hide the truth, from society or from its individuals. Within every person dwell violence, fears, and thoughts they prefer not to contemplate. They will do everything to avoid expressing some of their urges. Sometimes one feels like killing someone but calms down and regains proportion before doing harm to oneself or others. Sometimes one feels like stealing, but chooses not to do so, even though the “inner thief” still exists within, wishing to take everything for themselves without limits or restraint. That thief remains part of us. It is not as terrible as it sounds. In fact, it can be amusing and even beneficial to get to know the unwanted parts of our psyche, to befriend them without fear, and to transform them into something positive and useful. Such a process is called *emotional transformation*, and it helps us live fuller lives instead of constantly running away from ourselves.

Self-love can help us bring about a profound change in our attitude toward the difficult parts within us. Self-love can help us develop compassion and understanding for the fact that we carry within us deep, primal fears that also create quiet and inactive tendencies toward aggression or other harmful expressions, and that these are part of who we are. We may succeed in restraining these negative sides, but this does not bring us peace or balance, it only brings constant tension and the need to stay on guard to maintain that balance. Only when we dare to look inward through the eyes of self-love can we make peace with these parts and discover that it is better to have a relationship with them than to invest so much energy in repressing or ignoring them.

So instead of running away from ourselves and paying the high price of not knowing who we are and not being able to realize our true potential, because ignoring essential parts of ourselves limits our capacity for expression and growth, we can love. Love fearlessly. Love it all. Love everything that exists within us. Love everything that is repulsive, disgusting, unreasonable, immoral, inhuman, unkind, and inconsiderate.

Because whatever we do not love within us will continue to drain our strength and resources as a reaction to our neglect and alienation from it.

To love ourselves is a kind of habit, a kind of muscle that must be strengthened. Many times, this marks the beginning of a revolution that causes a person to transform their relationship with themselves, to reach a state where they no longer feel anger or aversion toward their negative parts and are ready to work, to learn, to observe, and to transform. All of this can happen only when self-love becomes an inseparable part of our regular attention. Then we will learn to embrace what is difficult within us until it begins to soften, until the fears that created it begin to dissolve and disappear. This is one of the miracles of self-love, one of the most important ones.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the expression **“to love what I do not love in myself”**?
2. Do you agree with the possibility that the **weaker parts within us need love more than any other part of us**?
3. What happens when you try to be with **compassion, listening, and understanding** toward the less pleasant and less developed parts of yourself?
4. Do you recognize that there may be **some potential level of aggression within you**, even if it is never expressed in a concrete way?
5. What do you think might happen if you **wrap the aggressive part within you with gentleness, love, listening, and compassion**?
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 18: The Real Truth

Everything that is not love is a rather convincing illusion that arises only from a lack of love, nothing more. When we experience love, we usually do not wonder what within us is true and what within us is false. Such questions arise only when we distance ourselves from the love within us. The concept of “truth”, which sometimes stands opposite words like “lie”, “evasion”, or “concealment”, is not special or exceptional when we are within the experience of self-love. In this experience, truth is the only existing factor. Every other factor disappears in moments when we truly succeed in loving ourselves.

The need to pretend, to lie, to evade, or to distract attention arises when we are afraid, and when the environment forces us to react out of fear or excessive caution. The need to explain in an orderly, logical, and clear way what the truth is or what the real story is in a given situation stems from not using the tools of self-love and from not understanding their significant role in human consciousness.

When we connect to the natural, simple, and innate ability to love ourselves, we no longer need explanations or proof. In that state, our doubts dissolve, our worries weaken, and feelings of uncertainty no longer frighten us or require immediate action to make them disappear. When self-love is present, nothing exists except our truth, even if it is not entirely clear or understood. In those moments, we feel it, we know it exists, and we do not feel the need to hold on to it tightly. It does not run away anywhere.

Suppose we are sitting in front of a particular person and wish to know as much as possible about them. They intrigue us deeply, and we want to know the whole truth about them, who they are, their age, their family situation, their interests, their profession, their weaknesses, their desires, and more. Toward this person, we likely have positive feelings that drive us to want to know the secrets of their heart and to understand all that exists within them. The possibility of gracefully entering their life and knowing every detail about them seems delightful. Does this kind of feeling sound familiar from certain encounters?

Well, beyond our curiosity about that person, there is within us a deep and important need to love them. The need to remove their masks and mysteries is a genuine, natural, and blessed desire to come closer, to love. The more we improve our ability to love that person, the more their truth peels itself away and is revealed.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, when we begin a journey of meaningful acquaintance with someone who is important to us, and we do so out of deep love for them, we will receive most of what we discover about them more positively, less judgmentally, and less fearfully. Through love for that person, we learn to accept their difficult sides and even those we disagree with. Love allows us to see the truth from the right angle. Love brings truth, because within judgment and criticism there is an element of falsehood, cowardice, and separation between people, precisely where connection and listening are most needed.

It is worth clarifying this matter, because often we tend to err without realizing the recurring nature of our mistake.

When we think logically and rationally about the word “truth”, we unknowingly bring ourselves to a place where large parts of the truth remain hidden and elusive. What we perceive as the truth will always be just a fragment of the complete truth, and worse, we will delude ourselves into thinking that we have already revealed the full truth and can now move on, calmer, more informed, and less fake.

When we are only logical and cold, trying to be realistic and supposedly accurate, and in doing so try to separate emotion from intellect, we give up a huge portion of our ability to identify, contain, and describe reality and the truth it carries. In vain we rely on the left side of the brain, which supposedly observes reality objectively. In vain we tell ourselves that we are connected to the truth. As long as our emotional filter does not participate in the process of exploration and observation, precious information remains behind the scenes, buried underground, well protected and inaccessible. Only after a certain time do we awaken and realize that the truth has remained vague to us. When we do not include love in certain places, we remain blind and powerless.

That imaginary person we want to know, to get closer to, and to build a special relationship with, will never feel comfortable revealing their full truth to us as long as they do not feel sufficiently safe and emotionally protected to release what is within them. As long as they do not truly feel loved in a way that will not judge any part of them, they will continue to hide parts of the truth. They will have no choice; they must protect themselves.

Thus, in a mysterious and wondrous way, when a person tries to study nature and discover its secrets, every method of learning, observing, and drawing conclusions will always remain limited as long as the mindset of the researcher or the student lacks the component of love. Reality restricts what it reveals to us as long as we do not approach it with love. It may sound strange, but that is how it works. If you were to say this to scientists, they might think you are delusional. But you know that there is a fundamental difference everywhere between a space governed by love and a space that tries to put love aside and neutralize feeling in order to focus supposedly on the one and only truth.

There is no truth without love.

When we turn inward and wish to know our inner world and befriend ourselves, we must understand that as long as our ways of looking at ourselves do not include enough love, they will always be influenced by excessive criticism, prejudice, fear, and distorted thinking. As long as we observe and analyze ourselves without compassion and empathy that arise from self-love, we will always remain alienated and ignorant about our own truth. In vain we will try to present ourselves as understanding, but we will not truly understand. It is impossible to fully understand the emotional world through intellect alone. The intellect does not fully understand emotion. Love understands emotion and its mysteries. Love knows it. Love is an authentic part of it.

So when the word “truth” interests you, when your authenticity fascinates you, when the journey into the depths of your soul excites you, remember that you cannot progress much without self-love. Self-love is the most senior guide for traveling into the depths of our psyche. It holds entry permits to the most complex and mysterious areas and serves as a bridge between parts of the psyche that struggle to coexist and stubbornly fortify themselves in their separate places.

Let self-love serve as your correct lens and your preferred vehicle when you intend to know yourself better. First of all, self-love, because the truth will not reveal itself without it. Only a loving space allows deep content to emerge safely. Only a loving space is a safe place and a foundation for healthy treatment of what lies within. Self-love is the truth, it is the way to truth, and it is one of the essential tools for healing truth itself. That is how it works, and many times it is a miracle. Did we already know that love is one of the greatest miracles on earth?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What do you think is the connection between the word “**love**” and the word “**truth**”?
2. Do you think you can truly **see and understand what is happening within you** without the support of **love toward what exists inside**?
3. What do you think about the statement:
“**When we do not love ourselves, we are actually in a kind of self-deception**”?
4. What new truths have you discovered about yourself so far through the **practice and study of self-love**?
5. Complete the following sentence six times:
“**The truth is that when I love myself more, then...**”
6. Any other thoughts or feelings about this step that you would like to share?

Chapter 19: Wonderful Things Asking to Emerge

One of the most complex tasks is helping a person deeply recognize the special, creative, unique, and meaningful qualities that have always lived within them. For most people, it is not at all simple to accept that there are wonderful things inside them that are asking to break through, to be expressed, and to positively influence the environment through their authentic and singular voice.

Why are people distant from recognizing the wonder within them?

You have likely guessed, they do not love themselves enough.

There are additional forces that create a mindset in which a person drifts away from recognizing their inherent potential. A deeply rooted cultural habit of overusing the left brain has cultivated exaggerated self-criticism that narrows a person's reality into one where access to imagination, fantasy, intuition, and natural creativity is limited, and is even regarded as unreliable, risky, or unserious. Self-criticism demands that a person not err, take fewer risks, and avoid leaning on what cannot be explained neatly and logically.

As a result, culturally and personally, we are programmed to see ourselves as average and ordinary, meant to act and think more or less like others. In contrast, original and creative thinking that relies on imagination and fantasy, which could serve as a channel for expressing what differentiates one person from another, is pushed aside and is not treated as a tool to be used, trusted, and followed. From here arise the mistaken assumptions that only a few people are talented and creative, while the majority are "average." This is what happens where we are trained to feel less, to fly less with imagination and fantasy, and to almost never allow ourselves to be different, odd, and original.

As self-love develops, we learn gradually to release ourselves from the inner barriers we built against our own depths and against what leads us toward the unique spaces that distinguish us. Self-love permits us to be anything we wish to be, and it does not limit or "correct" us when we wander into fantasies that at first may seem impossible or impractical. Self-love helps us step back a little from what familiar logic insists we should think or do. Self-love grants us permission to reach the unknown within us, to roam there as much as we wish, to see, explore, and discover new and interesting inner landscapes, and even to return safely with concrete ideas for combining imagination with practical steps that change life.

We are not there yet. We must begin from the premise that many of the parts that make a person unique, meaningful, and authentic dwell in places we tend not to consider precise or relevant to daily life. This is confusing, because what I am explaining cannot be grasped by the usual route. It is better absorbed when we set aside the tools we normally use to analyze and evaluate information. Those tools are wonderful and central to human learning and research, yet they become an almost impassable barrier on the way to recognizing the marvelous, the different, and the astonishing in each person, in a one-time and very moving way.

Here is how it works. There are wondrous things asking to emerge from you. Perhaps you sometimes feel it, perhaps not. Perhaps you sense a longing for a life that is more rewarding, surprising, and creative, a longing that hints there are elements inside you that your logical mind cannot recognize through its usual channels. These things are asking to be born, yet as long as your stance toward them is skeptical, critical, and overly logical, and demands advance proof that ties them to what is already familiar and known, they will remain hidden and elusive, and will be judged impossible, impractical, unimportant, and irrelevant to everyday life.

In fact, almost everything you are reading here cannot be proven by familiar tools. So we stand before two options:

A. Give this theory a chance, the view that within each of us there is a unique creative seed that longs for authentic expression, and that under certain conditions it can reveal itself and live within us. In other words, we can stay open and grant these ideas provisional trust even if they are not yet clear.

B. Decline to delve into a subject that does not present enough solid arguments to make it seem reasonable.

This tension between what is known and clear, and what is vague, elusive, yet thrilling and captivating, has occupied humanity since the beginning. It is the eternal tension between what exists and what has not yet been discovered, between what is considered correct and what challenges it and sparks revolutions, between the conservatism within us and the adventurousness and creativity within us.

If the phrase “the wonderful things asking to emerge from you” tugs at your heart, then you truly have no choice and there is no real dilemma. To practically and fruitfully explore the excitement that awakens in you and the longing to realize what is not always clear yet very alive, there is no way forward other than the adventurous, rebellious, convention-breaking option, the option that is willing, for a time, to risk a perceptual shake-up in order to reach the impossible. Do not worry, we are not asked to discard the powerful cognitive instruments human consciousness has developed over centuries. We only wish to send them on a short vacation, so that later we can unite them with new tools.

Here self-love comes in to help us make this move. Self-love can grant what you barely dared believe you possess the measure of trust, holding, hope, and faith needed for it to appear and come to light. Self-love will serve you like a loving mother who believes in her child without reservation, even when he fails, and even when he speaks of dreams and wishes that at first sound strange or unrealistic. Self-love will help you rise above the habit of relying only on what is logical and acceptable, and listen warmly and supportively to what wants to emerge from you in a creative, unique way unlike anything anyone else has done so far.

Here is the fascinating catch. To connect more fully with what wants to emerge from us, that unique and creative part we were born with as sophisticated beings carrying very specific DNA, and to understand those inner parts and learn how to use them, we must place more trust in the unclear regions of fantasy, longing, and desire, and less in organizing them too quickly into tidy logic. Self-love is the path that ultimately lets us

put aside, for a while, the limitations, prohibitions, fears, and warnings, and turn up the emotional, imaginative, and “odd” parts within us, slowly turning them into practical instruments that guide us toward places we cannot reach by ordinary means. First we must love, only then can we understand. Are we ready for this new order that gives love the first place and understanding the second?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the expression “**what is wonderful within me**”?
2. How do you feel about the possibility of being toward yourself like a **supportive, encouraging parent who fully believes in their child’s ability to do wonderful things in life**?
3. What happens to you on an **experiential and emotional level** when you say to yourself a sentence such as:
“I would be very happy to express and encounter the wonderful things that are seeking to emerge from me”?
4. Give one example in which you experienced a **very pleasant and special feeling** about something you did, achieved, succeeded in, or coped with.
5. How do you feel now as you **look at that experience**? Can you see that within you there is a **natural ability for wonderful and unique expressions**, even if it is not always clear how they may be expressed?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 20: Courage to Express Your Heart

In this chapter, I address one of the greatest challenges of self-love, perhaps the greatest of all. This point rarely receives the attention it deserves because of a fundamental misunderstanding about the influence of the environment on a person's development, growth, and destiny. A deep understanding of this subject, together with the right kind of work to address its accompanying phenomena, can lead a person to realize self-love correctly and apply it in the channels of self-actualization, success, and the fulfillment of dreams.

Whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or deny it, we are strongly influenced by our environment, by the messages it sends, by the feedback we receive, by the grades it assigns us, by its indifference or its attention, by its recognition of us or its lack thereof, by the sense of being understood or the sense of being unseen. All of this greatly affects our modes of expression, our range of daring, our relationship with ourselves, and our ability to bring forth what is uniquely ours.

We would prefer to believe the environment does not influence us so much. We would prefer to think that everything depends only on us, and if we are sufficiently determined, brave, consistent, and strong, no one will be able to delay the realization of our dreams. We would like to live in a world where unnecessary criticism passes our ear and does not penetrate our heart, where every comment from the environment cannot meaningfully shake our self-confidence or our faith in our authentic path.

This is not how things are. We are always held in an invisible web connecting us with the world around us. That web cannot be torn or erased. We cannot escape it, and we cannot choose to ignore it, even if we tell ourselves a story of unprecedented individuality and mental fortitude. When the world changes, we change, and when we change, the world around us changes. These phenomena are not always immediately visible, and often cannot be detected at first glance. We are influenced because we are part of a complex in which, as modern physics has already shown, everything is connected with everything, everything touches everything, and everything responds to everything.

The human mind, in its ordinary mode, struggles to grasp such concepts that may sound esoteric or overly spiritual. Even if the matter is becoming clearer scientifically, it is hard for us to bridge between the felt separateness of person from person and person from world, and the accumulating evidence that we are connected to each other and to everything around us to a degree far beyond what ordinary thinking can grasp.

Why is this essential to our discussion, and how does self-love enter the equation?

Simply, the people around us, their messages, reactions, choices, opinions, habits, problems, successes, distorted thoughts, courage, and love, none of these stay only with them. They migrate outward, seeding negative or positive influence according to what they emit, and they shape, to a meaningful extent, what will happen in others, and vice versa.

Therefore, we map out many of our statements and fateful choices according to the responses we expect from the environment. It is an illusion to imagine that this influence is marginal. It is a self-deception to think we can do whatever we want without considering what others will say, think, or assume about us. We are part of a larger body composed of expressions from all its parts, like an organism comprised of all its organs, where each part significantly affects the whole.

So, what remains for us to do? If we agree that this is how things work, is there any point in striving to find our authentic voice if we are always influenced and subject to the state of the whole? How can we deal with the enormous mass of people similar to us and streams of people unlike us, perhaps even, so it seems to us, lower than us? If society radiates its energy toward us, what is the point in trying to improve ourselves?

Self-love offers many of the answers to these important questions. Self-love can improve a person, their positive expression, their optimism, their creativity, and their connection to what is good, special, and original inside. Self-love reconnects a person to their compassion, hope, grace, and empathy, first inward, then outward. Self-love reminds us, and this is the central message here, that if we are both influenced and influential, it is wise to choose to influence our surroundings positively by being more friendly and calm within.

Self-love reminds us to connect to our natural desire and to trust it, even if the environment, with its outdated habits, exerts its usual pressure and tries to suppress our path toward something new and refreshing within us. Self-love whispers that there is meaning in our being different, and sometimes even odd, because the more we look inward and express outward what we see, the more people will be positively influenced, even if not immediately, because they, too, have no choice but to absorb what we express. Influence flows in every direction, and we can and should do our part to contribute to a positive change that begins in our small inner plot and, without our knowing how, percolates everywhere.

Imagine that you leave your home hurried and preoccupied, on your way to the car for a day of work, errands, responsibilities, and pressures. On the way, you see a street cleaner sweeping, he looks at you with smiling eyes and says, "Good morning." Although you are rushing to an important meeting, you pause for a moment, smile, exhale, and answer, "Good morning." Suppose this tiny exchange made both of your days better. You bless each other and continue on your way. Is there a chance that meaningful changes will unfold for both of you, and for others, because of this brief encounter? Clearly yes. That is how it works.

There will always be people who do not like something we bring or express. You might say they are part of the whole system, a somewhat annoying part. They are there to reflect the state of the environment. They are there, in a sense, to oblige us to love ourselves enough not to give up, to recruit self-love and courage that help us, despite the influence, to bring what we have without delay.

That vast, endless complex that connects everything with everything is not only a network that keeps us constantly influencing and influenced. It is also a flexible, dynamic space with limitless possibilities for development, positive change, growth, and healing.

When we cultivate self-love and bring ourselves forward from a cleaner, braver place, despite some people's unpleasant reactions, we contribute to the ecosystem we belong to, helping it advance. When others like us walk around with the smile of self-love, courage, and the desire to share what is unique in them, a group forms, one we belong to without realizing it, a group that helps create a healthier, friendlier space for all of us. Does it feel good to belong to this special and select group? Do you have the courage to smile at yourself to strengthen your bond with the group that is changing the environment for the better? Do you have the courage to speak your words with love, even if someone frowns or rolls their eyes?

What does your self-love answer to these questions?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel about the task of **loving yourself even when others do not respond to you in ways that feel right for you?**
2. How do you see the conflict that sometimes exists between **self-love** and the tendency to **please others**?
3. Many times we give others the privilege of granting us **“approval” that we are “okay” or “desirable”**. How does your **self-love** respond to this human tendency?
4. Complete the following sentence six times:
“I now give myself full approval even when...”
5. Can you see the **inspiration you may become** when people learn that you **support yourself even when your environment does not fully support your choices**?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 21: You Truly Have Amazing Talents

This is one of the challenging and demanding topics that accompanies any deep process regarding a person's relationship with themselves, especially when the focus is self-love and nothing less. To address effectively the subject of the truly amazing talents every person possesses, a subject that can open vital possibilities for human expression and growth, I wish to clarify the essential differences between the phrases "self-love" and "self-acceptance."

Knowing the differences between these concepts, and how they shape the way we relate to ourselves and our inner makeup, is central to the journey of increasing self-love and to the path by which a person comes to recognize what truly exists within and what they can truly do with it.

Before we analyze, let us feel the difference. Sense the phrase "self-acceptance." Imagine accepting yourself without criticism or reservation, accepting everything you do, think, choose, and feel. Accepting everything as it is, without judgment, without remarks, without an immediate need to correct, and even without offering a strong opinion. Simply accept. Let things be. For a moment, connect with this state that refrains from reacting or from trying to adjust to certain norms. Try to accept yourself as you are, in quiet and calm. Be with what is, that is all.

Now, make a sharp turn to "self-love." Try not merely to "accept" yourself as you are, but actually to "love" yourself exactly as you are. Do not observe without remarks or responses. Generate within you a loving, embracing gaze toward everything you encounter inside, toward your thoughts, emotions, actions, past choices, and what will be in the future. Love it all. Love everything you are, every single part, including the parts you are ashamed of and prefer not to mention. Try to locate each inner part, especially the less pleasant or desired ones. Try to love them, really love, as you would love your infant or a person very dear to your heart. Love everything, without limit and without conditions. Everything.

You likely noticed the differences, at least at the experiential level.

"Accepting ourselves" as we are, is often considered a therapeutic ideal worth pursuing, a state in which we try not to feel. We allow everything to exist without a strong emotional response to one part or another. This stance leans more on the left brain, temporarily dampening emotional flow in order to avoid a negative or rejecting attitude toward some inner parts.

"Loving ourselves," by contrast, reflects a more emotionally active position that arises more from the right brain, a stance that initiates a clear, decisive response, one of love, from which naturally flow compassion, empathy, and the desire to hold and include.

At first glance, it may seem simpler and less challenging to "accept" everything within us without judgment and without emotional response, especially the parts we regard as negative, unworthy, shameful, or misaligned with our worldview. At first glance, to "love" those parts may appear to create a conflict of values. How could we

love our aggressive, hostile, manipulative, or fearful sides, and why should we love what we want to reduce or even remove from our lives? What message do we send ourselves and the environment if we choose to love the impatient, aggressive, or frightened parts within us? Seemingly, if we love those parts, will they not only harden and grow?

This potential clash between the two approaches reflects a fork in the road. When we choose to accept ourselves rather than love ourselves as we are, we give up using our feelings as part of the way we engage with who we are and with what lives within us. When we choose to love ourselves, we give up the option of cool, purely logical observation that quiets the chaotic currents of our unpredictable emotional system.

We can, of course, try both approaches at once, to love and accept ourselves simultaneously, yet this attempt can become complicated and confusing.

A small secret, perhaps the most important of all, self-love contains self-acceptance. When we love, we also accept, but not the other way around. One can certainly accept without loving. That stance tries to be neutral and non-involved, yet it does not allow emotional colors to participate in the experience and the coping.

Why is this crucial now? Because only when we consistently and resolutely choose self-love will we slowly connect to the understanding that within each person, in a personal and unique way, there are truly amazing, very specific talents. Without self-love and healthy self-appreciation, these talents will never emerge into the light, will never receive a chance or a stage, will never be implemented, and will never be integrated into the ways we think, do, work, and relate.

Self-acceptance leaves little room for surprises, because it does not expect them. It is a kind of attempt to halt the inner system, freeze it, and prevent it from flowing with vitality and desire. Self-acceptance does not allow us to connect to the marvel within, to the odd, the funny, the original, and the surprising. In self-acceptance, there is caution and reservation, and missing are the courage and the wingspan of self-love.

When we practice the mindset of self-love, life becomes a kind of thrilling and unpredictable adventure. The more we love ourselves, the more the inner parts that are hard to accept and identify with receive the chance to soften, dissolve, and become a legitimate piece of our personality. The more we love ourselves, the less we fear meeting anything within us, including what leads us to discover what was once hidden and repressed, the things that make us wondrous beings rather than people who merely wake, work, and sleep.

The more you connect to your heart, the more it tells you the true and surprising story of your amazing talents. There is so much to discover within, in a kind of endless journey of peeling away the barriers and limits we developed over the years. If you try simply to relax and balance yourself, then “accept” what is within without the involvement of love and admiration for yourself, you will discover very little, and perhaps gain a few moments of calm that will quickly be replaced by a new wave of feeling that bypasses the wall of self-acceptance you tried to build. Emotions are wiser than we are, and as long as we try to dictate their agenda, we will later discover that such an attempt does not hold.

A divine spark exists in every person. You are free not to believe this, if you wish. But if your heart signals that there is something to these words, and that you, too, possess amazing talents that will greatly satisfy you when they are expressed, even if you do not yet fully know what they are or how they operate, then there is nothing left but to choose the path of more and more self-love. Those exceptional inner parts, when they sense that the inner environment holds more love than before, will feel safe and comfortable to be expressed and to join the game of your life. Are you ready for them?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What are the **special talents** that you particularly love about yourself?
2. Are you able to say about yourself, **with pride and without unnecessary modesty**, in what ways you are **wonderful, creative, and positively different**, in your own view?
3. Why is it worthwhile, in general, for people to **be in your presence and get to know you more deeply**?
4. Complete the following sentence three times:
“I am wonderful because...”
5. What essential things do you feel you have come to **offer or teach others in the coming years**?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 22: Stop Self-Condensation

This chapter and the two that follow explore how self-love helps us deal with excessive self-criticism.

One of the most complex, fascinating, and painful aspects of modern human life is our considerable capacity to live in a mindset that works against ourselves. On its face this sounds paradoxical, strange, puzzling, even absurd. What interest could a person possibly have in acting against themselves? Why would someone condemn themselves, over-criticize themselves, relate to themselves with needless judgment, and at times even belittle themselves, their abilities, and their possibilities to cope, succeed, change, and grow?

Most people we meet declare that they wish for themselves the most comfortable, healthy, enjoyable, and fulfilling life possible within existing limits. It is hard to assume that a person would wish themselves a gloomy, painful, tormenting, or chaotic future. And yet, why do almost all people harbor excessive self-criticism that can reach very high levels of self-condemnation, self-flagellation, self-blame, self-disappointment, and self-pity? How does it happen that a person becomes hostile toward themselves and behaves in their inner dialogue like a harsh, arbitrary officer who struggles to encourage, to adapt, or to feel compassion for themselves?

How does it happen that in many cases we are furious with ourselves for having erred, failed, forgotten, missed, or fallen short, without accounting for our being human with pressures and with emotional and other limits? Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves, while it is relatively easy to scold and reprimand ourselves because something in us did not go, supposedly, as it should?

All of these descriptions may sound strange and unclear. How was an efficient, active, and consistent mechanism built within a person that narrows their steps, weakens them, harms their self-image, and limits their freedom of action? How did it come to be that the most intelligent, talented, and developed creature on the planet must routinely face inner parts that cause them to feel that something in them is almost always not quite right?

From a theoretical psychological perspective, several models could be developed to explain this odd phenomenon in which, on the one hand, a person declares the intention to live as meaningful and successful a life as possible, and on the other hand an inner mechanism operates that blocks almost every dream or wish for change, improvement, progress, or development. One might compare the phenomenon to the “superego” as Freud described, and from there continue investigating the ways people tend to over-criticize themselves.

This, however, is not the right or relevant place for complex theoretical models that would sidetrack us from the central discussion and from this important path, the path of self-love. Here we need to examine the main connection between self-love and excessive self-criticism with its unreasonable tendency toward self-condemnation. Here we need to focus on the emotional process that must be undertaken in order to improve our lives and reposition them in a new place where the inner relationship is

composed more of expressions of love, compassion, consideration, and understanding, and less of negative expressions that contain a strong element of self-harm.

Before we deepen the link between the level of inner love and the level of inner criticism, it is worth clarifying what is not obvious. In many cases of self-condemnation, excessive self-criticism, self-judgment, or self-flagellation, there is very little essential connection to truth. Exaggerated disappointment in ourselves combined with a demand that next time we will not err is not based on the reasonable reality in which human beings tend to make mistakes and to act while under load, fatigue, and stress. Failing to acknowledge the real and imperfect context in which we live, and being intolerant of the predictable messy outcomes, is a clear deviation from truth and from what is actually happening.

There is almost no situation in which a person truly undergoes deep, beneficial change as a result of self-condemnation. Self-condemnation does not help us improve or correct ourselves, it mainly weakens us and amplifies guilt. Therefore, we cannot truly advance and make our conduct more efficient, and the opposite will occur. Excessive self-condemnation creates an atmosphere that is overly hesitant, impotent, frightened, and apologetic. We do not need many reprimands when something goes awry. We need something else that genuinely helps. We need, more than anything, self-love.

A lack of understanding about what actually helps a person move forward, grow, and focus better, together with the outdated and rigid worldview that mistakenly asserts that only a deterrent and painful response prevents future failures, are central to the shift a person can make toward a life in which self-love is a large and influential part.

A person injured by themselves and by their surroundings cannot take the better action, the more precise action, the more creative action, or the higher action. A hurt person is a suffering person, a fearful person, enslaved to impossible standards, limited in flexibility and in the capacity to change, to be changed, and to develop. Such a person will meet the same problems and will repeat more or less the same mistakes despite countless self-condemnations and self-reproaches that supposedly call them to strict order.

To the question, “Why are we capable of condemning ourselves so much?” we can answer: because we do not love ourselves enough.

A shortage of self-love, from which most people suffer, creates in the soul an empty space that should be filled with content that is encouraging, supportive, and holding. In place of these, self-hostility, self-suspicion, self-distrust, and a tendency to respond rigidly and inflexibly arise whenever things do not proceed, supposedly or actually, as they should.

This point is important and highlights what appears in the title of this book, Self-Love, The Highest Commitment. It is not for nothing that we attribute such great importance to self-love and to the commitment of anyone who wishes for a better life to amplify it, to develop it, to nurture it, and to make it the core of inner communication.

Here is how it works. When we do not infuse our consciousness and daily inner discourse with love, and together with it support, compassion, empathy, holding, self-forgiveness, self-encouragement, self-appreciation, and self-protection, the opposing pole grows stronger. A hostile, non-encouraging, non-nurturing, intolerant, and even non-understanding stance takes hold. There is no empty vacuum. When the good is absent, the not good grows in its place. When we do not invest resources in strengthening self-love, and when we neglect the emotional space and take no initiative to improve our relationship with ourselves, we will find within us a hostile, intolerant, overly critical, condemning reality.

Self-love is a role and a weighty responsibility, because neglecting this commitment costs us dearly. Instead of coldly and logically wondering why we fell into an unkind inner dialogue, and instead of trying unsuccessfully to appease excessive self-criticism, it is better that we rouse ourselves to turn on the light and infuse components of self-love within. If we do not do this, we will be forced to live in an inner space not very different from a drumhead court where we are accused again and again without being given a genuine chance to defend ourselves and perhaps be found innocent. This is what happens when self-love is too weak. To change it, the more we internalize and implement the highest commitment, the more we must practice, apply, and breathe self-love. Here and now.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel when you **fall into a state of self-condemnation**?
2. Have you experienced a situation in which you were able to **stop self-condemnation by increasing self-love**?
3. Can you now see the connection between moments of **forgetting self-love** and an **inner attack of self-intolerance and lack of self-acceptance**?
4. What do you currently do, both **physically and mentally**, when you find yourself in a state of **self-judgment**?
5. Can you now say with satisfaction that your level of **self-condemnation has decreased in recent months or years**?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 23: Love Dissolves Excessive Self-Criticism

One of the most confusing aspects of excessive self-criticism is the feeling that it is a reasonable and correct voice, that despite its harsh words it tells an unpleasant truth that we must hear in order to improve, to change, or to be freed from something. Many people get stuck in this trap of repeated encounters with their excessive self-criticism while feeling that they must absorb the remarks and judgments that arise from within, because they supposedly reflect mature, practical, and correct sides that direct them toward a path they have not yet managed to take, due to weakness or lack of understanding regarding choosing the good.

But as noted, this is only a deception, a confusion, a distraction, a diversion of attention, and a perfect misdirection. It is a kind of inner manipulation of the psyche that turns deep fear into words of criticism. Pessimism, skepticism, and cynicism are different expressions of excessive self-criticism that express fear, fear of feeling, fear of surrendering, fear of risking, fear of experiencing pain, fear of innocence, fear of disappointment, of rejection, and more.

We are not truly criticizing ourselves efficiently. There is hardly such a thing, and the proof is that most of the criticism we absorb from ourselves does not turn into productive action of change and learning lessons so that in the future there will be no need for that criticism. We will usually feel the criticism as pain, we will contract, we will feel that something in us is not okay, we will feel guilty and unworthy, and we will promise ourselves that in the future it will not happen again. But in vain. It will happen, and not once, many times.

This is what happens when we allow our fears to receive an exaggerated stage, a stage that exploits our reason in a harmful way and turns it into a condemning voice that always sounds right and leaves us with an uncomfortable, non-flowing feeling that does not allow us to get up and repair what broke or change what loosened. Fears are not an energy that leads to helpful action. Fears distance us from the path that will benefit us and cause us to remain in a kind of emotional fog regarding the tools available to us for self-healing, for self-understanding, and for better adaptation to what stands before us in the present.

It is not simple to forgive ourselves generously when we err or fail. It is not simple to be our own best friends when our project collapses or when our partner decides that the time has come to leave us. It is not easy to deal with childhood pains that surface within us with love and gentleness. It is not simple to be alone, to fail in business, to be rejected from the course of study we dreamed of, and to discover that even after years we still have the same overdraft at the bank. It is not easy in all these situations and in many others to be our own greatest supporters, our own loyal friends, our own loving and caring parents, our own stable and safe support on which we can always lean when things are hard.

And what seems simpler than this? What seems easier?

To be harsh and strict with ourselves in such moments and in other situations where things do not work out as we would like. This is the default that we have grown

accustomed to, and we activate it far too easily and far too often when it seems to us that we failed or that we deserve a scolding for not being as wonderful as we thought we should be. It is easy for us to retreat into the contracted, fearful, pessimistic, despairing place, a place where we stop taking real and helpful responsibility for our lives. We get stuck there with the criticism, telling ourselves a story about how we are not good enough, and we do not pause for a moment to wonder whether we are doing what is truly right and necessary for us.

No one has not experienced this in one version or another. But what is often not clear enough and is not discussed enough is that this state is born of fear. When we apply excessive criticism to ourselves and allow it to stay and to speak loudly without refuting it, we surrender to our fears, we become addicted to them, and we convince ourselves that there is no choice but to remain inside this unpleasant experience with all the words of condemnation that accompany it.

In such moments we usually do not notice that the main thing we need, that is missing and has disappeared from our emotional landscape, is self-love. When we love ourselves we cannot be cruel to ourselves. That is how it works, quite simply.

When we experience love there is no room for fear. Love fills, fear empties. Love empowers, fear contracts. Love expands, fear narrows. How difficult it is for us, precisely when things go wrong, to be there for ourselves, to support and to encourage that it will be better soon. How easy it is for us, by contrast, to surrender to disappointment and to the voices that seem very reasonable and that try to convince us that something truly is not right in us.

Excessive self-criticism presents to the enlightened, modern person who wishes to heal and to empower their life two main signs from which they can learn important things about how they conduct their daily life.

The first sign is this, if at present there is excessive and nagging self-criticism that sounds very reasonable in its arguments, and in its messages it seasons the emotional experience with various forms of guilt, this is a sign that we have recently forgotten to invest love in ourselves. The current criticism tells less a concrete story about a specific matter that we did not handle well and that requires change, refreshing, or correction, and more presents the real failure, the one we do not notice, the one that slips under the radar, the failure of self-love.

When there is no love, fear will come. There is no other option. The empty space left by a lack of self-love is filled and cannot remain without content. That empty space is always filled with something negative that is connected in one way or another to fear. This is the equation and this is how things work in the human psyche. If there is no investment in the positive, the negative will grow. If we forget to appreciate ourselves, to support ourselves, to hold ourselves, and to value ourselves, we will soon be forced to face waves of criticism and self-condemnation that are the products of fear that has grown in a space where there is not enough love. This is the first sign, we have not loved ourselves enough recently and this is the result.

The second sign is this, when excessive self-criticism appears in full splendor in the present, and against all the messages that are sounding inside now and against the

persuasive voices that accuse us apologetically, logically, and eloquently that we are truly not right and not okay, precisely in those moments we must stop everything. Truly stop everything, step away from the situation, and renew the practice of self-love at that very moment. We must take an action that will confront the murky tornado that our fear is creating, a tornado that presents itself as necessary and important criticism intended to educate us and show us how not to do things. This is the second sign, we must now stop and grant ourselves self-love instead of believing the criticism and surrendering to it in a negative way.

This is real courage, and this is the place where a person begins to create deep change in their life. Not by responding in a way that appeases the criticism and the guilt, but by increasing awareness of the fact that what is managing the situation now is fear, and fear can be dealt with only by love that dissolves it, softens it, causes it to disappear, and renews a more optimistic perspective. The crushing response to excessive self-criticism is strange, paradoxical, and a bit amusing, a smile at the mirror. We are not so guilty, perhaps we simply missed something. In precisely such a situation, love is needed. When this is understood, life moves to a new place.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Have you experienced a situation in which **fear dissolved when you brought more love into your inner space?**
2. Which fears from your past **no longer influence you?**
3. Which fears have not yet reached a point where you can **smile at them with love and move through them?**
4. Do you now see that **excessive self-criticism is actually a form of expression of fear?**
5. What happens when you **wrap your excessive self-criticism with abundant and generous amounts of love?**
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

Chapter 24 :Self-Criticism Is the Real Mistake

This subject is not easy to explain logically, but it is essential to try and to advance understanding in this matter. What ultimately creates a full grasp of the principles presented here is the emotional development that arises from increasing self-love and establishing it in a person's life.

One of the main things our self-criticism is very occupied with is the error, the mistake. Excessive self-criticism presents to us, unpleasantly, what it considers to be the mistakes we made in the past and instructs us how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. The occupation of this part of our awareness is very large and seems as if its role is to warn us constantly and to prevent from us what is considered incorrect, imprecise, and unacceptable.

Moreover, it is necessary to mention the atmosphere that excessive self-criticism creates, because this is the severe component of the damage it causes. Excessive self-criticism does not serve as a helpful teacher who charts for us a right path to walk. The methods it employs, reprimands and the creation of an atmosphere of anxiety and fear of spontaneous initiative or taking risks, are not methods that encourage change and learning, they mainly create a feeling of contraction and a harmed self-image. Excessive self-criticism cannot help us because it places us in a paralyzed, ashamed, and fearful place.

Thus, without our noticing, that very component that criticizes us so much and that always watches us, and whose supposed purpose is to save us from mistakes and missteps, itself creates the greatest mistake, a mistake that can be corrected through self-love and additional tools, but only after prolonged practice and a change in consciousness. Until that change in consciousness occurs, there exists within us a routine mistake that is difficult for us to identify regularly and to point out. This mistake influences many planes and sets a narrow, fearful perception of reality that is less able to drive changes, to improve what exists, to release what is stuck, and to build things better than what there is now.

It is not simple to grasp that we are repeating precisely the same mistake day after day, especially when we strain our minds with questions about how not to make mistakes and how not to ruin what exists. It is not easy to point to such a familiar and daily part of our awareness, a part that sounds reasonable, responsible, and measured, and to present it as the central mistake, one whose influence and presence we should find ways to reduce. Are we ready for the real change, for parting from excessive self-criticism?

This is precisely the decisive point that generates the healthier and more helpful reality, the one that transforms the familiar concepts in our relationship with ourselves and that sets new standards, managed decisively by our growing self-love.

Here is how it works. The more we connect to self-love, the more we understand that what we need most are support, trust, appreciation, encouragement, empathy, understanding, recognition, holding, and courage to change and to develop. The more we learn to think in the terms of self-love, the less willing we are to tolerate self-condemnations and external condemnations, as well as the excessive pressures that come from both inside and outside.

As we internalize the standards of self-love, we become less tolerant of anything not connected to it or of anything that does not follow its path. When we love ourselves more, we no longer have a reason or a possibility to act against ourselves and to prevent from ourselves all the good that is possible for us. When this happens, we identify, and this can be a very dramatic identification, that the greatest mistake we habitually make is listening to excessive criticism and surrendering to its pressures.

To grasp, to understand, and to internalize these concepts, we usually must undergo a deep change. The prevailing social perception that overly supports the use of criticism at many points and processes of human life plants in us the problematic habit of granting broad permission to the inner critic to examine us and to give us grades and remarks in a quantity that does not add tools for improvement or progress, but rather fixes us in exactly the same place while we contract into a feeling of missing out.

Self-love is the rule, it is the foundation, it is the way, it is the support, it is the teacher, and it is the direction. There is no justification for any other style of self-relationship. There is no benefit in self-condemnation or in repeated remarks that cause us to feel that something is not right or not functioning properly in us. The recurring falsehood that causes us to feel that if we are not excelling, and if we are average in a certain domain, like most people of course, then we are not truly significant or important, blurs our truth and our uniqueness and causes us to perceive reality in a distorted and even irresponsible manner.

In a world of self-love, a concept like “mediocrity” has no value and no place. In a world of self-love, the very fact that a person tries, strives, searches, and acts according to their ability is the true excellence and is the very thing that should be at the center of a person’s attention, that they are truly and sincerely deserving of appreciation and encouragement for every effort, attempt, initiative, experience, and choice. And as obvious as this may sound, it is not obvious at all. We tend to repeat that fundamental and tragic mistake without noticing it, we surrender to the rule of excessive self-criticism that hides from us the truth about the real achievements that are our lot day by day and sometimes even hour by hour.

There is no benefit in a lifestyle in which the self-image is frequently harmed. There is no benefit in a lifestyle in which we receive too much accounting for what we did not do right and too little information about what we did do well and worthily, which apparently became self-evident.

It is not simple to be a mature and responsible person in the times and spaces in which we live. The ongoing demands on every person are many and sometimes impossible. It is not easy to be a parent, to be a manager, to be a worker, to be a neighbor, to be a citizen, to meet payments and taxes, to deal with family and environmental tensions, to absorb the lack of justice and the lack of consideration in many places, as well as to absorb the tension, the danger, and the possible hazards on the roads and sometimes even at home. The very fact of our lives and the dealing with them, including the success to extract from them from time to time a special taste and joy, deserve praise and admiration. This is the truth.

A person does not have to be number one in every matter to deserve a lifetime achievement award. The very fact that they are here and that they try to do their best is already a notable achievement. Excessive self-criticism will not tell us this. Self-love will proclaim this to us. We have already succeeded. We have already done it. Of course we can do more and improve what exists, but not through repeated, impatient, and demanding condemnation, but rather through appreciation and encouragement for what there is, for what we managed, for what we touched, and for what we influenced.

Let there be no doubt, excessive self-criticism will never know satisfaction. It cannot be appeased or calmed. It will always find a reason to cause us to feel discomfort. It does not matter what our achievements are or where we reach in any ranking. Until we help self-love to occupy most of the space, and until we understand that excessive self-criticism is the greatest mistake and is the reason for our problems and for our states of stuck-ness, we will be slaves to its whims. Excessive criticism is a mistake. Self-love is the correction. The mind sometimes does not understand this, but the heart knows well what is at stake. And that heart is ready and prepared to help us shut down this traditional mistake and learn to enjoy more of what we already have, out of great and sincere love for ourselves.

:Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group)

1. Does your self-love currently allow you to be more tolerant of your mistakes?
2. Do you sometimes recognize that you were mistaken when you did not appreciate yourself or support yourself?
3. In which areas of your life would it be beneficial for you to focus more in the near future in order to reduce self-criticism and instead create a loving and patient space?
4. What is a good and intriguing mistake you would like to make soon?
5. Can you now turn, at least some of your mistakes, into humor, laughter, and a playful attitude that softens and neutralizes excessive seriousness?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 25: Your Prime Motive

One of the prominent domains in recent decades that has gained momentum and a very impressive change in consciousness is the human attempt to live healthier lives. Usually the intention is to improve bodily health, and often this is entirely separate from improving mental health, which is intertwined with bodily health, influences it, and largely determines the body's ability to function, to exist, and to respond appropriately.

Today people talk a lot about "healthy food." This subject has become so broad that people are sometimes confused and embarrassed in light of changing information that sometimes even contradicts itself regarding which foods are recommended to consume. Many link their bodily health almost exclusively with the food that enters their mouths. Others focus on physical activity that they consider healthy or healing, on various treatments they enjoy receiving, on a variety of cleansing workshops, and so on.

This phenomenon, which is more aware of the link between the food that enters the body and bodily health, can only be welcomed.

But does a person truly secure a healthier life when they focus on the body alone? Can a life without self-love be considered a healthy life? Does the fact that in the absence of self-love, self-hostility grows, hint at possible harm to the immune system and to the resilience of body and soul in the face of potential hazards and changes?

Your mental health, which is not directly tied to habits or choices that are bodily, determines your health much more than can be described. Your mental health, especially if you have motivation to deepen self-awareness and your capacity for unique expression, is the essential and most vital component you need. In the absence of mental health, all the actions, workshops, treatments, and new concepts that enter the language will not grant you the good things they can offer.

Your mental health is the basic condition for everything you will wish to receive or to do. Your mental health is what will determine your ability to grow, to bring about changes, to choose, to make positive decisions, and to stand before life's difficulties with courage and without needing to flee into pretense or into denial that something essential is happening.

And what is that mental health? How can you assess that your soul is healthy and functioning in the right and fitting way for it and for you? This is a question that can confuse, and it is advisable to consider it in a journey that focuses on self-love and in every journey of the development of human consciousness. What is your mental health, and how can it be characterized, are questions very much worth asking, wondering about, and investigating, because some of the concepts tied to them may change over the years in accordance with our changing values and needs.

We must deal with what we think about the concept “mental health.”

Many people link mental health with psychiatry and with psychologists and are tempted to think that anyone who is not “mentally healthy” is a person with a serious problem, that is, “crazy.” We tend to recoil from closely examining the degree of our own mental health. We find it difficult to quantify and assess it, so we make do with creating a crude category between those who are emotionally exceptional, whose problems stand out greatly and require much intervention, and the others, certainly including us, who are somewhere on the spectrum of the “normal.”

When we become accustomed to thinking, expressing ourselves, and acting under the shelter of self-love, and when we dare to implement self-love and to look for it in many places in our lives, we also cultivate the courage to look closely at what is probably not so healthy in our psyche, and this is true for every person. In every person conflicts develop that cause them to be hurt during various periods. Every soul carries wounds with it, whether the person is aware of this or whether they think that overall they are fine and there is no reason to dig or to look for matters that will only disturb their functioning.

Self-love, as it develops and takes root in your awareness and leads you to a place where the quality of your emotional life becomes more important, will create in your awareness a desire and a wish to explore your mental health and to raise your expectations of what can be achieved and received emotionally in the coming years.

Self-love will remind you that being happier is part of the traits of a healthy soul. Self-love will remind you that dealing with the pains of the present and of the past is a kind of responsibility and a kind of work whose reward follows it. Self-love will help you stop neglecting the places where relationships are not proper, the places where enjoyment from work is not high enough, the places where the feeling of satisfaction does not exist, and the places where the soul becomes worn down due to unworthy compromises that do not advance you to any better place. Self-love will expose your addictions and will grant you a good opportunity to part from them. It will not let you, and it will not allow you to live in a kind of fool’s paradise composed mainly of an inability to deal with difficult emotions. On the contrary, it will guide you to look at residues and dark things directly, with compassion and with tolerance, with the intention to bring about change in them. These are the things self-love will cause you to do, and more.

It is very possible that these changes will be the greatest gift that self-love can grant you, the ability to deal better with the places where your soul is not as healthy as you may have thought before, the ability to approach pains without fear and without recoil, the ability to identify the emotional weaknesses and the small obstacles that the soul constantly sets for itself due to its limitations and the places where it is stuck. Self-love will help you stop hiding from truths and will grant you a new dimension of relating to your mental health. It is not the world around you that will determine

according to its norms what your mental health is. Your soul, your heart, and their true needs are the ones that will determine this more reliably and more precisely.

When your motive is mental health, without which every effort to improve the health of the body will not succeed much in improving the quality of life, there arises within you a motivation to better the relationship between you and yourself, up to the level of self-love. When the recognition develops in you that without mental health almost everything goes wrong or will go wrong, including what will happen to your body, you have little choice but to invest much in increasing your self-love. This is what will distinguish you from people who will not understand what real health is and what must be done to cultivate it.

Fulfilling your passions and identifying the right goals in which it is worthwhile to invest life energy are a substantial part of mental health, even if a person does not suffer from anxiety or from depression. A life without passion is not a healthy life, it is a life without much joy, optimism, creativity, daring to change, and capacity to contain changing emotions and situations. All these are connected to true mental health. All these can be cultivated. All these will move in the right direction with the help of self-love that goes on increasing. Your true mental health should become your most interesting and important factor. Your mental health will only continue to grow as self-love becomes the central subject and the first priority. Are we ready to treat our soul with love and to treat the places where it is not so healthy?

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Is your mental health currently at the top of your priorities?
2. Try to recall a few decisions or choices in which you prioritized other matters over what was truly good for you emotionally or mentally.
3. If we now place your mental health truly at the top of your priorities, what new decisions might be worth considering in the near future?
4. How is your overall feeling, in every sense, when you experience within yourself the experiential flow of self-love?
5. Can you say that increasing your self-love has helped you become happier, optimistic, calm, light, or in any other positive way?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 26 :The Most Effective Armor

Whether we acknowledge it or ignore it, whether we agree or do not agree, reality will not completely change regarding the environmental harms that befall us and will befall us in the future. We live in a space in which, both emotionally and physically, there is potential for injury and for negative changes, and there is no way to change this. What we can do is prepare ourselves better for these unpleasant surprises, and arrive equipped with the best tools that will help us be harmed less, and face these stimuli in a way that will improve our ability to cope.

Self-love is one of the most important means available to us for preparing for the unpleasant things we will meet over the course of our lives and for the immediate response we can provide when such things occur.

However, it is important to emphasize and to place matters in the right proportions, self-love does not mean closing our eyes and it does not mean trying to evade what is unpleasant, incorrect, dangerous, or not nice. Self-love does not create for us a quiet space that is free of problems and free of disturbances. Self-love does not erase hatred within us or within others. Self-love does not perform a kind of hocus pocus that turns the world into a place empty of crimes, of wars, of injustice, and of destruction. We are still very far from that.

What self-love can do, and quickly, is change the way we feel and respond when we encounter the not so beautiful sides of the world.

The dangers will remain the same dangers. The distortions will continue to be the same distortions. The criminals will continue to commit crimes and the corrupt will continue to corrupt. Yet self-love can help us greatly reduce the injury, the pain, and the suffering that these may cause us, and lead us to a position in which we can give a helpful response to the difficulties and the troubles that accompany the place in which we live.

It is important to emphasize this point, because not a few people err in the way they evaluate a tool like self-love and in the way they try to use it as a means of escaping the difficult truths of our lives. With all the wonderful feelings that self-love can provide a person, and it does so abundantly and generously, it never causes a quick and sharp erasure of the great problems that have arisen in human society, among other reasons due to its chronic and great distancing from values of love in its various forms. The road to deep social change is very long and will certainly take many years. We are here to make the small possible changes within a comprehensive journey of healing and of changing what exists.

A failure to understand this subject greatly undermines the way in which self-love can positively influence our lives. It does not seek an easy life for itself, it does not ask to bypass the dark, the ugly, the harmful, the painful, the injurious, and the destructive, it does not ignore them and it does not try to create quick magic solutions, rather it

confronts the most difficult factors in life. Self-love grants us a better way to look at the bleak reality we sometimes encounter, not in order to leap over it or to tell ourselves that we can distance ourselves very far from environmental problems because we have self-love, but because we cannot.

Through self-love we can look at reality with open eyes, and at the same time equip ourselves with an endless supply of self-love, and it will stabilize us, shake us free of unnecessary fears and self-judgment, and grant us the right inner space to face what exists with courage and with creativity. This is what self-love does for us, while the bad continues to be bad, and while the vulnerabilities of life continue to burden us as they always have.

Why is this so important?

How can self-love so significantly change the way we face environmental harms?

To answer this question, we must understand a strange yet important mechanism that operates within us. At times when we experience distress or difficulty we tend not to love ourselves, not to appreciate ourselves, and not to support ourselves. We can rather easily be swept into drama, feel heartache and sorrow, feel that once again we were wronged, become stressed and confused. Dramas have a power of their own. We are influenced by what happens, and certainly by events connected to us. Yet what is most important in this negative influence is our moving away from the beneficial connection with ourselves and the tendency to respond, to think, and to act from a mood that contains only a little love, a little self-confidence, a little faith that the situation can be improved, and a little self-support.

Self-love is usually the main factor that we lack when we are facing a problem, even if we did not generate the difficulty and even if we did nothing that created this problem. A lack of self-love is the central factor that causes us emotional distress and greatly narrows our repertoire of responses. Due to this lack we become victims of the situation, and accordingly the injury will intensify. When we fill ourselves with self-love, the pain will not be spared us, but the speed of healing and the effectiveness of our coping will increase greatly.

Hidden within this message is an essential code for healthy and satisfying life. The code presents an equation connected to the role of self-love in our lives.

The presence or absence of self-love largely determines the root of the problem and the level of harm done to us. A problem tests, as it were, our resilience and our level of self-love. When self-love increases within us, a large portion of problems pass by us and we do not notice them at all. The problems that do pass through us and affect us cause little damage. Self-love helps us not only to overcome problems more quickly, but also to remain with a positive residue and with optimism for a deeper change in the future.

When we face problems and environmental harms, we understand that self-love is lacking, and the very lack intensifies the problem. When we pause for a moment the flow of thoughts and restore self-love to ourselves even when we are at the height of negative drama, we change reality and turn what is bad, dangerous, and distorted into a state that we can contain, look at, recruit toward it courage, compassion, and empathy, and protect our values and our interests effectively.

There is fear, there is difficulty, there is violence, there are unnecessary wars, there are arbitrary injuries, there are dangers and accidents. All these are part of life. Yet when self-love becomes stronger, these factors disturb us less and undermine less the stability and the meaning of our lives. Self-love saves our lives.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Have you already made important self-love choices or decisions that helped you get out of a complicated or difficult situation?
2. How can self-love currently protect you from unwanted situations or experiences?
3. Pay attention to a certain area in your life that is not functioning well. What is the state of your self-love there? Are you willing to try making a deliberate increase in that area?
4. What social advantages do you think a person has when their self-love is well developed?
5. Does your self-love sometimes invite you to challenge yourself with a future change that feels a bit far reaching for you?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 27 : The Victory Is Yours

When public figures take their own lives we are shocked, because despite their sweeping success, their wealth, their recognition, their self-fulfillment, their fame, their ability to do it, the realization of their dream, their touch of glory and the admiration of the masses, they do the worst of all.

We ask ourselves, where was the self-love of these public figures? It is possible that we will not want to hear the answer and will prefer to preserve the dream along with the disappointment from these cultural heroes.

By contrast, people in difficult situations, in states of loss, dismissal from work, poverty, the breaking up of a family, and more, most of them continue to live despite the difficulty, despite failures, despite deprivation, and despite humiliation. Why do these continue to choose life while others who succeeded beyond measure, a certain percentage of them, reach the lowest point a person can be in?

Self-love and love of life in their simplest place, without comparison to others and without needing external approval, are the greatest victory a person can wish for. There are people whose given characteristics may lead them to fame or to financial wealth or to other outstanding achievements. There are others who receive less attention, about whom we will hear little, and who will not impress us when they pass by us on the street. We will think to ourselves that they are just ordinary people in whom there is nothing special and from whom we cannot learn, admire, appreciate, or give thanks.

In every situation, hard or easy, with conflicts or without them, with confrontations with other people or without, the same challenge stands before a person, regardless of what is happening, to love themselves more. Others may think that you failed because you are not meeting what they fantasize as success or victory. Yet if the smile dwells within you, if faith in yourself is gradually developing, if support for yourself is steadily growing, and if appreciation for your efforts is not harmed and may even be improving, then the true victory resides within you, the great victory in the most significant challenge that exists for human beings.

There are many modest people around us who do not stand out in social gatherings and who do not try to display their assets or their ideas. Some of them are people who feel no need to prove themselves or to surpass others in any race whatsoever. These quiet people apparently love themselves and feel at ease with themselves even if they do not harvest thunderous applause. They are the principal winners and they are the ones from whom we can learn and from whom we can receive very great inspiration.

Self-love is not connected to how much a person stands out compared to others and it does not belong to the competitions through which society ranks people with scores in which there are always people who succeeded or who won and all the others are average. This evaluation by which society defines people is done with tools of

evaluation that are very limited. Self-love is not connected to this drama and does not cooperate with systems and frameworks that do not truly support the cultivation of the individual, rather they create a kind of cheap show in which there is a sharp and shallow distinction between winners and losers, between good and bad, and between those who excel and those who fail.

The greatest achievements of self-love are not successes to which others will pay attention, at least not at the beginning. If most people around you do not understand the importance of self-love and are not connected to it on the level of experience, commitment, and worldview, then the chance that achievements of self-love will receive appreciation from them is negligible. Furthermore, many times negative and dismissive responses from the environment to changes made by a person who possesses self-love increase the knowing that what that person is doing is right, fitting, and worthy.

Self-love does not need headlines. When a person loves themselves, that person does not need feedback from others in order to feel worthy, respected, good, and loved. That person needs touch and loving communication for other reasons, no less important, that person needs emotional connections, nourishing relationships, and mutual enrichment. Yet none of these will define the person who loves themselves and none of these will be a condition without which that person cannot feel worthy, victorious, and significant. These feelings will be developed from within and will be found, invented, and cultivated while discovering the wondrous power of self-love.

At this very moment a person can conquer their world and attain the greatest and most important thing in a split second and without turning it into a dramatic and exceptional event. Self-love is the greatest achievement a person can aspire to, and it is the important victory for which a person can labor and realize in full. The one who loves themselves is the true winner, not the one whom society has crowned as the popular public figure of the moment or as the best singer in the neighborhood.

Many people, as noted, reach very impressive achievements in their field, but discover within themselves a frightening emptiness that becomes a tangible danger to their lives, only because they lack the minimal conditions for cultivating a connection with themselves. This is because they are very busy with satisfying a crowd of admirers that demands more and more without considering the human needs of the star they created, who apparently has no life of their own, the one onto whom they project wild fantasies, the one whose quality of life does not matter to anyone.

Therefore, when the thought creeps into your mind that you did not do enough, did not succeed enough, did not try enough, and did not excel enough, it is advisable to refresh these outdated concepts that our primitive society has planted within us. The one who always gets the highest scores is not the more developed and advanced person. The person who finds true compassion within, the person who can feel love toward themselves and afterwards toward others, the person who can be in friendship

with themselves in every situation and in every outcome, the person who can speak to themselves with tolerance and appreciation, that is the more developed person, the higher person, and the true winner by a significant margin over others.

Concepts such as happiness, joy, and satisfaction are devoid of any validity and meaning when they are not essentially and practically connected to self-love. There is no happiness without self-love. There is no joy without self-love and there is no true satisfaction without self-love. We are not able to feel good and to grow stronger without self-love. We cannot live in an inner space of intolerance and still be happy. It is impossible. This is a falsehood that we have heard too many times.

Let us attain our great victory now. The true victory is not connected to the fact that we preceded someone else or that we displayed an ability superior to theirs. Here there is no benefit in the fact that we arrived before our friend or that we left that friend disappointed in their loss. Here the true, essential, authentic, and profound victory is that each individual finds within themselves the way home, the way to love within, the way to a brave friendship that stands with courage before the waves of negativity and difficulty that befall us many times. Self-love is the ultimate victory, in principle, spiritually, and emotionally. This is the right victory, we are at most competing with ourselves, improving upon our previous achievements in love, breaking records of self-love, and insisting on continuing to improve tomorrow as well. This is our victory, the only victory that truly exists.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you connect the concept of self-love with success or victory?
2. Can a process occur in your life that others may not appreciate, yet for you feels blessed and deeply appropriate?
3. How do you feel when you are not understood? Do you rely more on self-love when this happens?
4. What are your most authentic and genuine wishes for your life?
5. How do you think self-love can help you move closer to fulfilling these wishes?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 28: Bloom with The Nourishment of Self-Love

The people who are progressive in human society are people who aspire to progress. It does not matter to which field they direct this passion, but their aspiration usually places them among the high quality ranks of human beings and among the human group in which more positive changes, growth, and development take place.

Ideally, a person wishes to progress in every domain in which they are involved, both in domains in which it is easy for them to progress and in areas in which they feel stuck, cumbersome, and not radiant or talented. There are people for whom the work domain is their home field, and there they have more self-confidence and the ability to aspire to progress and implementation. There are others for whom the emotional or interpersonal domain is strong, and they can develop and advance this domain in their lives with greater ease and grace.

By contrast, those who do not regard their life as a path in which progress is very important and in which it is necessary to give attention to development, to upgrading, to correcting what exists and improving it, are forced to make do with a sparse lifestyle, even if they apparently live the most desirable and sought after life according to existing social codes.

Those who are in a journey to increase self-love have most likely set themselves a goal to progress and to heal the inner relationship as much as possible. It is a blessing that people take upon themselves the responsibility to face what does not flow within them or what is seeking renewal, cultivation, and an addition of knowledge and tools.

All of this brings us to emphasize the connection between self-love and the ability to develop, to promote, and to advance, to improve, to remove obstacles from the way, to keep the vision alive even in difficult times, and to continue to adhere to the path toward a new place even when the conditions of the course are not friendly.

The connection between self-love and progress, development, growth, and upgrading is so decisive and so fundamental, yet many people are not aware of this. Therefore, they greatly limit their ability to realize their passion to move from the first grade of their life to the second grade and from there to places that are even more sophisticated, abundant, and right. As long as self-love is not an essential part of the tools and of the components of the process, we will not be able to break the glass ceiling that we have placed above ourselves, we will not be able to leave the boxes into which we have put ourselves, we will not be able to see beyond what we are accustomed to seeing, we will not be able to challenge the incorrect norms, and we will not be able to do the special thing for which we yearn.

It is not simple to understand, because we usually want to fix what is not correct and to improve what is not improved. Yet as long as we are not able to love what exists, as it is, even before it has changed, healed, or been upgraded, nothing will move.

Here we make a fundamental mistake. We tend to regard the weak or unsophisticated parts within us as faulty or inferior parts. We place upon them excessive criticism and lethal judgment and assume that if we relate to them in this way, we can overcome them and eradicate them. We tend to condemn what we do not like in ourselves, exactly as we condemn what we do not like in others. It is the same mechanism and the same mistake.

Change cannot develop through force and cannot change a problem that must be erased and overcome. Change does not develop without love, compassion, understanding, and empathy for what exists. What exists in its current state, with our distortions and our lack of harmony, is the very thing we have at present, it is the place from which we begin our journeys of healing, it is the truth that we must recognize and reveal, and it is the thing that with time will dissolve through proper awareness and through various therapeutic and healing tools that we will choose to adopt.

In that stuck place in which we tend to repeat our mistakes, love is missing at a critical level. Many times the problem and the stuck-ness connected with it reflect more a lack of love and less a lack of ability or knowledge. In the place where the lack of love is too great, the greatest, most bleeding, and most difficult to heal wounds will develop.

Until we love what is not developed within us, what does not go well, what does not flow, and what is not graceful, we will not be able to do anything with it, we will remain in a state of not understanding ourselves, we will invest many resources and perform manipulations to bypass or to eradicate this limitation, and we will not succeed. There is no chance.

And why is that? Because in a place where love is missing, nothing that is not love can set matters right. In a place where love is missing, the energy required for transformation, for healing, for release, and for the opening of the eyes is also missing. In a place where love is missing, pain is too dominant and cannot be softened. This is the place in which we are rigid, constrained, and not aware of the way we can act more beneficially.

When we review lists of what to do or review goals, a vision, aims, and wishes that we set before us, and we form plans of action to promote, to advance, and to achieve, it is worthwhile to remember an important rule, as long as we cannot love what exists, the broken, the injured, and the nonfunctioning, we cannot move from it to something better.

The human soul is not able to improve something inner and to train it without the involvement of full and unconditional love without qualifications. That is, we must love what there is so that it will be possible to change what there is. As long as this does not exist, nothing else will grow.

This is difficult. It is truly not simple. How will we succeed in loving what we do not love?

How will we support those parts in us that the surrounding society is not ready to accept, is not ready to see, and is not ready to reconcile with their existence?

How will we give ourselves a hand when we fail and do the most serious errors?

How will we look with compassion at places in which we are not radiant, not talented, and not creative? How will we develop positive feelings toward what does not seem to us positive?

The answer to these questions is one, self-love. When we internalize self-love we understand that it has no limits. A person who knows the love within understands that it is possible to transfer it wherever they wish, even if the target is something for which there seems to be no reason to give loving and positive attention.

We are able to love everything, including what we abhor. This sounds paradoxical, yet it is the truth. The muscle of self-love and its channels can direct its energy anywhere, even toward things with which we do not agree and which we do not want. We will do this and we will love everything if we understand that love is a very important component in every process of change, healing, and development. We will do this even more after once or twice we notice that this wonder indeed works.

Development is a beautiful thing. Growth is a wonderful thing. Healing is a lovely thing. These are the things we seek. They will not exist and will not be possible without self-love. Every effort that is not accompanied by this basic component is a pity. In order to change we must love, and now. Everything. From here it is possible to continue and to see how we can move mountains and bring about real revolutions.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Can you now see self-love as a source of high quality nourishment for yourself?
2. Do you recognize how self-love is an essential tool for progress, growth, flourishing, and meaningful change?
3. What price have you paid, in terms of personal development, when you did not pay attention to your need to increase self-love?

4. Take a moment to focus on your inner child, who is part of the source of your imagination and desire. Can you recognize how much she needs consistent love from you?
5. Have you tried so far to strengthen the tools of self-love in relation to something you would like to grow or change? Can you elaborate on that?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 29 :Listen to Your Passion

Many people feel excitement when they hear expressions like self-fulfillment. This feeling that there is a sweet potential that, if only we succeed in realizing it, we will be the happiest in the world, does not leave us even if we try to be realistic or sober.

Something inside, deep inside, longs for the opportunity and for the tools to connect what resonates in the inner spaces of a person's soul with action, attainment, arrival, and encounter with the truth of what a person can become, if only they connect to the elusive potential that at times disappears and at times emerges and invites that person to draw near.

This worldview, that every person has a unique path for expression and contribution to the environment, a view to which I am wholly committed, touches the integration of spiritual, creative, emotional, and practical parts in a person. It also integrates elements such as thought, planning, vision, courage, willingness to be unusual and different, perseverance, patience, tolerance for mistakes, misunderstandings, and unflattering feedback from a conservative environment that does not encourage development, changes, and surprises.

One of the most important factors without which there will be no self-fulfillment is human passion. Passion alone cannot advance a person anywhere, but without it, without the burning fire that warms the muscles of the soul for movement and action, it is impossible to connect to the inner calling and to every expression that reflects a person's wish to attain self-fulfillment.

Human passion is a controversial subject. There are prejudices and unflattering approaches toward it. Many times passion is perceived as a factor that one must beware of and relate to with a suspicious respect. At times passion is seen as a destructive component that may cause a person to do things that are incorrect, unworthy, and improper. Passion is often perceived as a factor that may release a person too much, cause lawlessness, distance that person from the right path and from responsibility, disconnect that person from social conventions and from emotional balance.

Often the negative stigma attached to passion expresses what happens when we feel and express our negative passion. Negative passion is indeed connected to destructive and addictive behavior that brings no benefit in its wings, passion that diminishes a person, weakens that person, makes that person dependent and lacking in judgment, magnifies childish parts, and distances that person from paths of growth, development, and healing. Negative passion causes people to harm themselves and others, and can create situations that cause suffering, distress, despair, and loss.

Negative passion is indeed a factor from which it is advisable to beware and to distance oneself.

Negative passion is one of the things that self-love can heal.

Yet everything I have mentioned about negative passion is a kind of deception and distraction from what is essential. Negative passion is the product of a vacuum, of lack, and of a lack of awareness. Negative passion is an expression of what happens when we do not wisely listen to our positive passion, to the passion that directs us toward the most special and fascinating places in our soul and toward the most unique and creative paths that allow us to realize what we call our potential.

But as long as we do not connect to our positive passion and set it in motion, an act that requires courage, determination, and adventurousness, we will receive by default the mirror image of the positive, sweet, and promising passion. As long as our life is not led by positive passion that will help us do the unbelievable and change what must be changed, our life will be led by our negative passion.

This is a kind of spiritual law that operates often, when we neglect the positive, the negative comes in its stead and expresses the very opposite, which causes harm, difficulty, and destruction. When love is not cultivated, fear comes in its place. When optimism is not encouraged, pessimism comes in its place. When creativity is not developed, stuck-ness comes in its place. When we do not invest in positive passion, negative, painful, and unnecessary passion comes in its place. This is how it works.

It is not simple to connect correctly to positive passion, to adhere to it, to believe in it, to follow it even when others mock or wonder about the strange things we suddenly feel like doing and about the new and unexpected changes we decide to bring about on a clear day. Joining with positive passion is a worthy, important, essential, and principled challenge that connects a person to their emotional health. This challenge is possible to implement only when self-love is present, cultivated, practiced, and forms a significant part of the mood and of the tools a person uses in everyday life.

It is quite easy not to believe the signals of our positive passion. It is easy to doubt it, to ignore it, and to regard it as illogical, unreasonable, and inaccurate. It is easy to think that if we do not have clear proof that it is worthwhile to listen to our positive passion, and if we do not believe it is positive and reliable, then we should not give it a proper place and fitting attention. It is easy to condemn and to ignore the inner tingles that suggest that we change, do something a bit differently, embark on an adventure, stop waiting, and take a risk in order to advance in life.

Self-love is one of the factors that allows us to gradually move from negative passion to positive passion. This is a kind of detox process in which we slowly learn to give up harmful habits, and their place is taken by helpful, nurturing, and healing habits. Self-love can teach us to distance ourselves from our negative passion and at the same time teach us to rejoin what we knew as children but have had time to forget, how to listen precisely to passion so that it will have a chance to grant us its wonderful gifts, gifts that are a necessary factor on the way to self-fulfillment.

Self-love gives us a bit of healthy naivety, a necessary naivety in order to redevelop trust in our positive passion. Self-love guides us to listen to what stimulates us to break through a barrier, to leap over the excessive criticism from within and from without, to ignore doubts, and to jump into the water even if we are not sure we are ready to swim in the cold water. We need self-love that is steadily growing so that we can support positive passion, that intuitive current that tells us the story we refuse to listen to.

The more we love ourselves, the more we will believe the seemingly crazy parts within us that make us envy others who dared to follow them, even though it would have been advisable to wait a little longer and a little longer and a little longer until we are supposedly ready. The more we love ourselves, the more we will cultivate within us a special kind of courage that is characteristic only of those who have grown their capacity for self-love, and of those who understand that if one seeks the inner voice, tries it, gives it a space for experimentation, and believes there is substance in it, special and important things will happen in their life, blessed changes will occur, and their soul will taste more and more of self-fulfillment. All of this is possible on condition that we listen more to positive passion. All of this is possible if we learn to love ourselves more. And this is exactly what we are doing here and now.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. To what extent are you currently connected to the healthy desire within you?
2. Are you able to distinguish within yourself between a healthy desire and an unhealthy desire?
3. What does it mean for you to “listen to my desire” with deep love?
4. What changes might occur in your life as you learn to listen more deeply to your healthy desires with greater love?
5. Are you now willing to support yourself even if many people say that what you want or plan to do is strange or unusual?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 30 :Take Risks

Self-love is not only a mood that reflects a pleasant, nourishing, loving, supportive, and friendly inner relationship. When self-love develops and grows, everything that takes place in a person's soul is only a part, indeed an important part, but no more than a part of the overall picture that is gradually revealed as one deepens the skill of self-love and moves with it to the places to which the soul wants to grow and expand.

Every person, in every life circumstance, must sometimes take a risk in order to face a particular challenge better or in order to bring about a change that is most essential for living the right, healthy, and more rewarding life. Taking risks is not a right to be realized only in extreme situations or a right that is given only to exceptional people. Taking risks is an inseparable part of a life that is worthy, abundant, balanced, and more enjoyable.

Why must we sometimes take risks and why, without them, might our situation become worse?

On the one hand, there is within us a drive for growth, development, and creative expression, and on the other hand there are fears, excessive criticism, delaying environmental influences, and general norms of procrastination, little unique self-expression, and pressure not to change, not to be changed, and not to deviate from what the collective is doing. Therefore, if we do not take risks that bring to the front of the stage what we feel we must do, yet fear, we will not only remain in place but will retreat. The reason for this is simple, in the place where there is no development, growth, and positive change, the opposite factors grow, erosion, stuck-ness, and unwanted changes. The energy of life operates in any case and exerts an influence. If we do not cause the energy to realize its power in the right direction, it will be forced to realize it in the wrong direction. This is what happens when we fear taking risks.

Seemingly it is safer not to take a risk. I know what I have, so why should I set out on an unknown path that may or may not succeed? Why do I need the worries and the tensions when I take a risk? Is it not preferable to pass another day without upheavals and challenges that are too large, and simply return home safely to what I have accumulated, created, done, and built? Why should I risk everything with various actions and initiatives that I have no idea where they will lead me in the end?

Because a person is like a tree. A person grows branches, and from them fruits develop, the fruits of fulfillment and the unique expression of every person. To reach the ability to bear from the self juicy and special fruits, a person must grow branches, expand their contact with the environment, seek more, move more, cultivate curiosity, and a passion to get to know and to learn, strengthen the need for new experiences, and never rest on their laurels.

The branches of personal growth, at least some of them, at least at the beginning of their path, are the products of risks that must be taken. These risks respond to healthy

passion that bubbles from within and tries to lead us to new places, more interesting, broader and deeper, where we can experience, express, live, and receive from life more than we are receiving now.

If we almost never take risks, then our situation becomes more dangerous, because if we suppress our natural urge to grow, to expand, to grow branches, and to move into new spaces, then we become weak, vulnerable, predictable, boring, fearful, and hesitant. As a result, we will find ourselves in an embarrassing and undesirable place, and we will not understand how it happened. After all, we are doing exactly what is required, are we not? We eat healthy food, we try to avoid negative thoughts, we are kind and generous to friends and family, we do what is required of us at work, and overall we are rather good people. And yet things go wrong, and yet something within us feels lacking, feels that there is an inner space that remains empty and spoils the celebration we thought we were part of.

This is what happens when we do not take risks and continue to move along the same paths for a long period without daring to deviate from them. We then become dull, less and less able to notice important things that we can change in ourselves, we retreat into the bubble of what is familiar to us, and we develop an antagonism toward everything that does not belong to our space. Creativity gradually fades, and with it our spontaneity, our imaginative reach, our passion, and our emotional balance.

Self-love is here to help us learn how to take healthy risks, how to respond better if the risk does not prove itself, how to accompany ourselves in moments of fear when we set out on a new and unusual path, how to cultivate vision and determination while we are groping in the dark of a new initiative of which we have no idea where it will lead us.

Self-love helps us cultivate a natural and necessary optimism in order to take risks that will allow the soul to move forward. Optimism is a component that exists within every person, but in the absence of self-love and in the absence of proper cultivation of the ability to see positive possibilities now and later, pessimism grows in its place. When we are pessimistic we weaken and we are terrified of change. Self-love can correct this situation. Self-love, through its softness and wisdom, transfers us gently, safely, and in small steps, from pessimistic and cynical worldviews to worldviews that contain hope, adventurousness, and healthy naivety.

Self-love ensures that we truly serve our good. It does not allow us to remain in place, because one who loves oneself wants the best life possible to live, and that is possible only with the integration of some risks as part of the routine of life.

Moreover, taking risks is important not only for the change to which it leads, but also for refreshing the soul and strengthening it. Taking risks is good in and of itself and good also in order to get used to it, to learn not to fear it, and to see in it an adventure and an experience even if sometimes the story fails and does not succeed. Taking risks is a skill that every person whose life matters to them must feel that their ability

to take risks is reaching a satisfying level. As long as we are afraid to take risks, we will find it difficult to cultivate a positive self-image that allows us to find within us joy, satisfaction, and a taste for life.

From our self-love we will enter adventures that in the past we would not have dared even to consider. From our self-love we will forgive ourselves in advance with a smile and a hug for risks that will not yield worthy fruits. From our self-love we will be moved by the very fact that we dare and do something new and different. From our self-love we will choose not to be people who pass day after day trying to avoid trouble, but to be people who see every day as an opportunity for renewal, growth, and healing. These things will indeed happen, and faster than can be imagined, when under the protection of self-love, we follow healthy passion, take a risk, and see that not only is the demon not so terrible, but that we already feel like sketching and cooking up the next risk.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Do you consider yourself a person who likes to take risks, in general?
2. Which risks you have taken in the past stand out to you the most? How do you feel when you recall them?
3. Why do you think it is sometimes very important for a person to take certain risks?
4. What do you think happens if one completely avoids taking risks?
5. How can your self-love support you when you decide to take a risk that feels important and worthwhile, even though it is still a risk?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 31 :The Child Within You Needs Endless Self-Love

We all agree that children need a great deal of love in order to develop properly. Children and young people are nourished by love no less than by food. Love is what plants in them security, develops within them a positive self-image, moves their creativity, and grants them a sense of belonging and the power to face a variety of challenges.

So too the child within you. The primal and basic parts of your soul, those parts in your personality that have remained as they were, with the spirit of a child, with the innocence of a child, and with the sensitivity and needs of a child. These children are within us, and they are our direct access to the sources of inspiration, creativity, vision, dream, and revolution. Without a connection to our inner child, our life lacks the color, the taste, the passion, and the playfulness that are so necessary in order to realize goals and to heal what is stuck, irritating, and uncomfortable.

Yet the inner child, for various reasons, also carries the wounds of the past, their traumas, and their moments of helplessness in which arbitrary decisions were made about them that did not match their needs and wishes. This child experienced in one way or another judgmental response that blocked their vitality and originality. This girl experienced in varied situations a lack of social belonging, insults, losses, and disappointments. The inner children within us often encountered unpleasant situations, and they did not have the tools or the ability to change their influence and the way in which they harmed them.

The inner children within us, who can lead us to the highest and most fascinating places in life, who are very connected to intuition and imagination, carry within them the quiet scars that remind them of the places where the world did not know how to recognize them properly and even exploited them for its needs in an improper and unhelpful way. These inner children of us all can receive a new opportunity to address what was lacking, irritating, painful, and humiliating. They can receive from us endless love that will grant them the right, healing, and nourishing space to dissolve traumas one by one in a creative and original way.

This is the task of the adult, to recognize the inner child that exists within and to grant that child endless, boundless, abundant, and increasing love. It is not always easy to take these two steps, and the purpose of the process of learning and increasing self-love is to make these challenges more practical, available, and clear.

In fact, the best way to understand what self-love is, is by likening our feelings to our feelings toward small children, whether they are our children or nieces and nephews, grandchildren, or the neighbors' children. Small children, even animal cubs, awaken in us pure love, breathe into us the peak of compassion and the summit of empathy.

We have the ability to feel elevated and clean emotions toward small children, and this is one of the great contributions of these tiny beings to the life of the adult human.

When we want to understand deeply what self-love is, it is advisable to recall the feelings we have or had toward a small child or toward a baby to whom we were connected in the past or to whom we are connected in the present. The warm and strong feelings toward these children are those same feelings that awaken within us when self-love increasingly takes a larger place in our awareness. Self-love means those very feelings we feel toward small and sweet children. Self-love means recognizing that small and sweet child within us and the love that automatically wells up within us when we see a particularly beloved child.

Here we can recognize the place where we have moved away, as a general humanity, from the sources of love within us, while we encourage people to grow up and get over things too quickly. We run upward, we learn to operate and to manipulate, to meet tasks, to postpone gratifications, and to meet the expectations of society, family, workplace, partners, and more. The child within us we quickly forget and abandon, because that child is supposedly too childish, too naive, too innocent, and of course too sensitive and vulnerable, and that does not suit us when we so want to advance and to attain what is expected of us to attain. We learn to restrain ourselves, to wait patiently, to please, to respond only when permitted, and not to disturb the neighbors' rest. We learn to be adults and at the same time we very quickly forget that there is within us a child who needs a slightly different kind of attention.

In this sense self-love is one of the efficient and practical solutions that bridge the need to meet the expectations and demands of society with the need to maintain a healthy and beneficial connection with the inner child within us. To give the child within us the rightful place and the correct space for continued growth and contribution to our life as adults, all we need to do is cultivate toward that child a deep and endless love that is not conditioned on good behavior. We must learn to be our own loving parents, who will always receive us warmly and with understanding, who will not judge us for our mistakes, and who will embrace us even if we deviated from the right path.

Every day in which there is no reference, even symbolic, to the child within us and to that child's need for endless love is a day in which life grants us much less than it could have given. We can live our life and perform our routine actions without giving attention to the fact that there are within us childish parts that need a hug, containment, recognition, and a place to return to and be received there in welcome. We can forget the inner child within us, but so we may also forget the realization of many dreams we carry with us, dreams that without the energy of the primal child have no chance to be advanced toward practical implementation.

Again it is important to emphasize the simple message, all that the inner child within us needs is to know that the child is loved. Always. This sounds basic and not

complicated, but it is not so at all. We learned to be angry at the child within us, we learned to dismiss that child or to attribute to that child characteristics that supposedly interfere with our growth or existence. We learned to move away from the childish needs within us because we were educated that to be childish means to be undeveloped, unworthy, and perhaps even retarded or crazy.

The art of self-love is also the art of connection with the child within us. This is the reason that many people still relate to self-love with dismissal or with alarm. Self-love revives those primal parts, clean and untouched, those that are not biased or influenced by prejudices and can see the good in every person and the hope in every situation. The inner children grant us the optimism that was forgotten and the vision for change that is often hidden behind walls of cynicism and excessive doubts.

The inner child within us can grant us many gifts, some of them priceless. These gifts can be received almost without payment and almost without great investment. All that is required is to focus our capacity for love inward, toward the child within us, to stop coming to that child with complaints and demands, and only to grant that child a friendly and containing space, exactly as it is right to give to any baby we love. When we do this and the inner child feels sufficiently loved and safe, that child will stand on their feet, join the adult parts within us, and contribute that child's unique contribution. But for this, as has been said many times here, love is required. Self-love that can be applied through practice, attention, another smile at the mirror, and another self-hug. The inner child feels this and is nourished by all these actions. Our role is to continue to grant that child what is needed, beginning with once a day and continuing with an increasing quantity of gestures that will help the child recover safely.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What would you like to write right now to the child within you?
2. What kind of ongoing communication, if any, do you have with your inner child?
3. Can you see the connection between self-love and the way we love young children?
4. What are some things your inner child would like you to do, but you tend to do less often?
5. What kind of special gesture or surprise could you offer soon to the child within you?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 32: Open Traumas for Healing

It is customary to say that sunlight reveals, disinfects, and heals.

This is usually connected to the exposure of things that people tend to hide and because of that concealment they suffer. It is also about revealing crimes, corruption, and dark things that occur quietly in our society and harm most decent and honest people. In any case, exposing unpleasant things and ending the period of concealment and hiding usually signal an exit from the complicated, harmful, and sick place toward a new place that is cleaner, freer, and healthier.

The traumas we carry are like stuck masses of energy into which we invest resources, without noticing it, so that they will not completely overwhelm us. We spend a large part of our time in an unconscious emotional survival battle in which we try to pass one more day and one more day in the shadow of deep wounds that continue to create conflicts, difficulties, blockages, entanglements, anxieties, pains, heaviness, and more.

Part of our mental forces are regularly mobilized to protect us from the heavy mass of unpleasant memories that we were forced to repress and set aside when we did not have tools to cope with them and with the pain they left in us.

As adults we are not sufficiently aware that we have possibilities to heal, to soften, to dissolve, and to reduce the load of inner burdens that manage our life. It begins with a lack of awareness that quiet traumas indeed dwell in the depths of our soul, it continues with a lack of awareness that it is worthwhile to apply healing moves to them, and finally there are alienation and a lack of motivation to open our Pandora's boxes for fear that we will not withstand the repulsive and painful flood that will wash over us when the concealment mechanisms are shaken.

One of the reasons we find it difficult to create changes in our life is the lack of understanding of the decisive role of love in processes of emotional cleansing and in saying goodbye to what has bothered us for a long time. As long as we do not grasp the contribution of love, which is so important in addressing what is stuck within us, we will not be able to do anything for ourselves and we will not be able to free ourselves from what has narrowed our steps for many years. Without proper use of self-love, we will not succeed in changing anything, even if we insist very much on doing so.

Traumas are traumas and one cannot belittle this fact. Traumas are contents that contain great anxiety and a real sense of danger toward the body and the soul, even though the danger belongs to the past and is no longer present here. Traumas are a kind of inner demons that we do not feel like meeting, confronting, and listening to. Traumas are a place where we are weaker, more childlike, more frightened, and more confused.

As long as we do not use self-love to heal distresses of the past that have remained in the present and continue to influence in unwanted ways, and as long as we try to approach the dark and frightening areas in the soul in ways that do not use self-love, we will not truly be able to begin a move that will create change. Nothing will happen. All the defense mechanisms, the blockages, the warnings, the smoke screens, and the misunderstandings will intensify quickly and push us away from the danger zone. But when we approach those places under the guidance of our self-love, doors will begin to open, slowly and carefully, and we will be able to do what we could never do before, open the traumas to a state of healing.

There is no benefit in trying to be brave in order to withstand the shock waves of our defense mechanisms. It will not help us; we will remain outside. When we get close to the roots of our traumas, the wounded child within us awakens and we are filled with that child's experience and difficult feelings. We connect to that child and experience the helplessness. In this way we will not be able to progress. Even if we muster courage and determination from within us, it will not succeed. We will remain outside. The soul is sophisticated enough not to allow us to do the wrong thing. The soul will insist that we come with great love; otherwise it is better to go back and return only when we are more ready for this important move.

I will illustrate this with the case of guilt feelings. A substantial part of the traumas we carry is the feeling that we are guilty for what happened to us, even if we did nothing and were in fact victims of a harsh reality that hurt us arbitrarily and unfairly, meaning guilt feelings were cultivated there. In any case there exists quietly, in a childlike and primitive manner, self-flagellation over the fact that the event occurred, even if as children we could not prevent what happened. A child takes upon themselves guilt because the child experiences that the whole world is connected to the child, to the child's actions, thoughts, and very existence. If something bad happened to a child, and of course if the event was repeated and not corrected, the child interprets the event as connected to the fact that something in the child was not all right. The child supposedly could have prevented what happened, although this is not the case.

Guilt feelings are a very significant part of the trauma drama and of our difficulty in saying goodbye to the heavy burdens that are stuck deep in the expanses of our unconscious. Guilt feelings are one of the elusive components that keep us stuck in the painful memories without giving us a real escape option.

When we try, supposedly with tools of logic and realistic and adult thinking, to trace the painful memories, we are not capable of grasping the depth of the guilt that exists within us in connection to the repressed traumas. As adults there is no reason to feel guilty for something others did to us. It is difficult for us to feel that something is defective in us only because we were hurt and only because we did not manage to prevent the harm. As long as we do not succeed in joining emotionally to this guilt, which we experienced as real as children, we will not be able to progress. We will not

be able to air out the wounds, we will not be able to enjoy the disinfecting and healing sunlight that will allow them to scab and to finish their historical role.

But when we connect to ourselves equipped with self-love, with great compassion, with empathy, with consideration toward ourselves, with a willingness to forgive ourselves even though we did not do wrong, with the ability to contain, to listen, to caress, and to truly understand the intensity of guilt feelings that are not logical but are very present, then there is a chance that the soul will permit us to see and reveal what it has always carefully hidden from us.

For us to be able to reach this state, self-love is supposed to flow in our veins with ease. We have work to do, the work of a lifetime, the continuous increase of self-love so that it will rise to levels at which we can rely on it to do what in the past there was no chance to do. Self-love will gradually cancel the guilt feelings, allow us to be again innocent children who deserve to receive full warmth, nourishment, and protection, and deserve to be as they are, children who love to live, to play, to experience, and to try. Self-love will allow us to visit the children within us, to listen to what remains painful and burdensome, and to offer a patient and healing touch that will move the soul to activate its natural recovery mechanisms.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Are you aware of traumas that still weigh on you somewhere within?
2. Do you recognize that within these traumas there is a lack of love?
3. Can you now “send” powerful rays of love toward the points of pain in your heart?
4. Do you remember a situation in which self-love helped you heal emotional pain?
5. What is the first area in your life where you feel there is a strong need to greatly increase self-love, where it is currently lacking?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 33: The Primary Healers of Ourselves

Self-healing is one of the most wonderful and fascinating qualities in every biological system, from the smallest creatures to the complex, experienced, and wise mechanism of the human body. The human body contains many components and sophisticated tools to cope with states of injury and illness while rehabilitating and reactivating systems that were damaged.

Moreover, there is the great human capacity to heal the pains of the soul such as conflicts, complexities, traumas that have accumulated in the body and the soul, depression, anxieties, sadness, and helplessness. All these and more can in many cases be changed through processes of self-healing, and the differences between the state before healing and the state after healing may be dramatic and very surprising.

But there is an elusive and unclear factor that will often make the difference between realizing the natural healing capacity of the human soul and remaining alien and ignorant of the possibilities to escape crises and uncomfortable states that befall a person, self-trust. The degree of belief a person has regarding the ability to respond creatively and originally when encountering an unexpected and unwanted event or change. The degree of belief a person has regarding their tools, skills, and coping ability will determine whether that person will be able to utilize their unique qualities and heal themselves or will remain without understanding and experience in this.

Self-trust is a product of self-love. The more a person experiences moments of self-love, self-friendship, and self-support, the easier it is to cultivate belief in one's powers, adaptability, range of responses available in the face of a challenging stimulus, and resilience to states of difficulty, pain, and suffering. The more a person loves oneself, the more that person believes in oneself. The more a person believes in oneself, the body and the soul respond accordingly and produce extensive healing forces. In general, the more a person believes in oneself, the environment responds well, abounds toward that person, pampers that person, and enables that person to get to know ways to care for oneself and attain the things needed.

In a state of crisis and pain a person receives a clear message that something is not all right. The complications, the misunderstandings, the distress, the heaviness, the difficulties, and the awkwardness declare to a person that something in the person's life is not conducted properly. When a person loves oneself enough, that person can reach a state in which gentle and patient questions are asked, "The problem I have now, this difficulty, what is it coming to remind me? What message is it asking to convey to me now?" A person who loves oneself enough reminds oneself that if there is a weighty problem, its purpose is probably to remind where self-love is still lacking and where that person still runs away from oneself. A person who loves oneself enough will see in the problem an opportunity and will blame the environment and external factors less as the exclusive responsible parties for the crises.

Self-healing is a natural and automatic process. We are not supposed to activate it or direct it; it occurs by itself. We, as people who strive to explain what self-love is, can assist natural healing to occur by creating the right conditions. We can stop disturbing it, can nurture it, and grant it security. But we cannot activate it with the press of a button and demand the type of healing and its pace. All we can do is develop trust in it. When there is self-love and self-support within us, we can cultivate within us the magnanimity that contains a measure of humility and perspective regarding what we are capable of doing through planning and understanding in relation to what can happen by itself.

It is not simple to become the healers of ourselves, because most of the healing work will be done within us spontaneously and without control by sophisticated systems with which we were born and of which we are almost unaware.

When self-love intensifies, we will learn to feel within us the simple truth, the astonishing fact, the human soul knows how to heal itself and to move it toward growth, change, and development.

The role of the conscious person is to help the soul heal itself often. The role of the conscious person is to till the soil from which the most wonderful things in life grow and to cope with fear, doubt, cynicism, excessive reliance on logic, excessive criticism, pessimism, and skepticism. All these qualities distance a person from the person's natural healing ability. All these will consistently diminish as self-love grows and will become less important, less considered, and less desirable. All this will occur as self-love takes its place across human awareness and in the way a person speaks to oneself, relates to oneself, presents oneself, and perceives oneself.

In continuation of what was described in previous chapters, one can return to the inner child who on the one hand contains creativity, intuition, and imagination, and on the other hand contains the traumas, wounds, and scratches that so influence the soul. That inner child, that soft, innocent, and light part, is also that part which knows well the self-healing qualities of the human soul. In other words, the more we increase love toward the parts that represent in us the years of childhood, the years of innocence, and the years of wonder, the more we will invite into our life opportunities for healing, for change, and for the removal of prolonged problems.

It is necessary to note again what is not self-evident, self-healing of the human soul occurs by itself, at an unexpected pace and in a way that cannot be planned in advance. Even if we consider ourselves wise and sophisticated, the depths of the soul will always be one step ahead of us, wiser, more holistic, and more precise. We will not be able to determine for those depths how healing will look and in what the change will be expressed. The little that we can do is to understand our place and our role with humility and with a deep view of the way in which things truly occur.

We can only be helpers of our natural healing forces, a kind of assistants and supporters who allow the deep and sophisticated part of the soul to do its work

without interference, without blockages, and without restraints. When we will learn to understand this place properly, without arrogance and without attempting to take over, then we will be able to become the primary healers of ourselves who know how to orient the soul to the right place, who succeed, through better cooperation, in realizing the potential inherent in the soul and in its expression.

Self-love will help us remove from our shoulders a burden that is too heavy and excessive responsibility for what happens and will help us forgive ourselves instead of returning again to blame ourselves. Self-blame creates a false and unreliable atmosphere regarding what is happening. Self-love will pave the way to a faster self-reconciliation, to empathy toward processes we must go through, and to an increased ability to accept without panic the problems and the frictions of life. Self-love will grant us the gift of self-healing, a quality that exists in every person but almost never finds expression in an inner environment that lacks love. We will contribute our part in the deal, we will grant ourselves love and a supportive and forgiving space. The soul, for its part, will reward us with self-healing processes that will multiply as it becomes clear that we no longer intend to prevent ourselves from this miracle, a miracle that, the more we love ourselves, will seem to us less foreign, less surprising, and less one time only.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Are you aware of your self-healing abilities?
2. Do you have examples of situations or areas in which you have healed yourself?
3. How does self-love support your natural healing abilities?
4. In which areas do you feel you have less access to your self-healing abilities?
5. Can you now embrace with love those areas that are still stuck and not yet healed?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 34: Optimism, A Super-Task

I want to offer you a friendly and generous suggestion that is worthwhile to remember, a suggestion that will accompany you everywhere and with time becomes more and more rewarding, mainly for people who understand how important self-love is and how worthy is the effort we invest in order to cultivate it and to amplify it. This suggestion is one of the foundations of the positive and healthy human spirit and of the power of a person to create important changes that make life, one's own life and the life of others, better and more worthy.

I suggest that you place your optimism on a regular basis in a very high place in your priorities, your goals, your aims, and your values. Optimism is one of the most important tools available to a person, and without it one's life is more difficult, more complicated, more frustrating, and more painful than the life of one who has identified the possibility and the ability to promote optimism to a central and stable place in one's life.

Optimism is a super-task for people of self-love, and it is one of the central reasons for excitement in matters of self-love. We are here, in this journey, not only to learn to live better with ourselves, but to receive the right and effective tools for cultivating optimism. Optimism, or its absence, will determine what we do, what we choose, what we decide, where we can grow, and what we can face in a more correct and faster manner.

It is important to clarify that optimism is not a defective or unrealistic perception of reality. Optimism is not an escape from reality and not an attempt to forcibly paint hard life in pink colors that do not match what exists. Absolutely not. Optimism is a kind of ability, a kind of choice that comes from a healthy and positive charge within a person, to see the positive and hope-inspiring parts within reality.

The mature and developed optimistic person does not ignore problems, pains, dangers, or fears. The optimistic person does not try forcibly to escape from a pessimistic mood. The optimistic person learns to see sparks of light in the darkness without ignoring the existence of the darkness. That person sees what exists, but interprets it differently. That person understands exactly what is happening, but does not hasten to despair and to flee into a gloomy mood that reflects helplessness, lack of ability, and lack of creative ways to cope with what exists. The optimistic person is the braver and the more inspiring one, in that this person does not rush to eulogize oneself or the situation and continues to seek, despite the difficulty, reasons to believe that there is a chance that things will improve.

Optimism is the force that moves human creativity, ingenuity, originality, and the aspiration for development and positive changes. When there is no optimism it will be very difficult for us to move, to try, to cope, and to give of our good and healthier parts when we come to address the challenges of our life. Without optimism we will

not see the horizon toward which we can advance, a horizon in which things will be more worthy and more worthwhile. Without optimism our possibilities narrow and with them the tools available to us for self-realization and for other things we would like to receive in life.

Optimism, contrary to what many think, is a skill and an ability that can and must be cultivated. Optimism does not arise by itself in a few lucky people. Optimism can be attained through self-work that always includes the mission of increasing self-love, now and in the future. Optimism is a kind of muscle whose functioning capacity can be strengthened, and when this is not done, a person is flooded by cynical pessimism that we have all met within us and encountered in others.

Those people who claim passionately that self-love is silly and too spiritual, that it is cultivated only by strange people, tree huggers, or people who are not grounded, also claim with the same degree of inner conviction that optimism is the lot of only the naive, people who do not understand what really happens, who ignore real problems, who supposedly run away from coping and avoid the hard and gray work of life. These people do not notice that their arguments are weak and that the truth is entirely the opposite. It will be very difficult, if at all possible, to convince them of their mistake, but at least we, the people of self-love, should understand what is right and who is correct.

As stated, the truth is entirely the opposite. Pessimism is the lot of the weaker. Pessimism is a place of fear to which people flee who are too lazy to cultivate their positive qualities, first and foremost of course self-love. Self-love, love in general, hope, and optimism are risks that some people avoid taking for fear that something will not work out for them. They fear the pains of love, so they flee from it. They fear failure or loss, so they do not take risks. They fear cultivating hope lest they be disappointed. They fear optimism because it requires courage, determination, and the ability to confront the environment that tries to persuade them that things cannot work out for them beyond what society plans for them.

The pain that these people experienced when sometimes optimism did not justify itself presents to them a kind of proof, so they think, that there is no point in hoping and aspiring for good, because bad will come. These people are the weaker ones and they are the ones who lose broad parts of what realistic reality offers. They are the ones who narrow their life to a narrow range, without risks and without chances, in which their pessimism proves itself, and the optimism of others is perceived as foreign, frightening, and dangerous. They do not have enough self-love to question the state into which they have fallen. They do not have enough self-love to understand that they themselves created this false reality in which pessimism has much more space than optimism.

The adherents of positive psychology claim that this is indeed the case and that it is advisable to adopt more optimistic thinking patterns and to eliminate from our awareness the pessimistic, cynical, and hopeless components, because optimism is healthier and benefits a person. Thus the recognition spreads among many people that it is worthwhile to accustom themselves to think positively because then it will be positive.

But many times this does not succeed because it is not enough. As long as we do not create within us the emotional infrastructure for positive thinking and for optimism, we will not succeed in rooting such habits in our awareness. These habits will crumble and disappear in the first crisis that befalls us or when we experience a gloomy, critical, and unfriendly mood.

In other words, as long as the soul does not undergo a change whose meaning is softening and a deep connection to the natural love that exists within it, long-term habits of optimism cannot be adopted. Self-love nourishes optimism and causes it to grow and to remain stable in the face of the many negative stimuli. Self-love is an inseparable part of optimism, and optimism is an inseparable part of self-love. These two factors are elevated expressions of the human soul and constitute the healthiest, most successful, and most rewarding way to live. They will not be understood and accepted by those who have not yet internalized them. If these two factors exist within us, they constitute the main markers that we are properly developing the soul and nourishing ourselves with the finest materials.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What is your level of optimism these days, in general?
2. Were you equally optimistic five or ten years ago? If not, what has changed?
3. How does self-love help you connect to the optimism within you?
4. Can you forgive and be compassionate toward the areas within you that are still too pessimistic?
5. Have you ever tried to “practice” optimism? How do you think self-love can support this kind of practice going forward?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 35 :Making Peace Within Me

The concept of “peace” is often heard in our region, and it reflects a state that is too complex, too confusing, and at times even impossible. When we speak about self-love and the price of its absence, the concept of “peace,” and everything that stands in opposition to it, can be defined more precisely and can lead to practical steps that every person can take in order to contribute to the reduction of violence in one’s surroundings.

In different places in the world people fight one another, kill one another, pursue other people, and exercise great creativity when they harm or take revenge on others. At times the human race is unique and different from other creatures in that it inflicts very severe harm on members of its own species.

Human beings are the greatest danger to human beings. This is completely contrary to the basic rule upon which the survival of species in nature is based, that one does not harm and does not kill members of one’s own species unless one must and under very specific circumstances. Harm by a person to other human beings is a kind of evolutionary foolishness, irresponsibility, and self-harm. The killing of a person by another person is a kind of suicide.

How did it happen that human beings, the most sophisticated creatures, have behaved from the dawn of their existence in a manner that grossly violates primary laws of nature? Where did we lose the important code that enables people to feel safe near other people and caused us to be wary of one another instead of supporting our collective and personal needs?

If we wish to examine this phenomenon in connection with self-love, we can identify several factors that explain how a person reaches such a low point and a mode of behavior that shames human wisdom, creativity, spirit, and deeds.

A basic rule in the psycho-creative theory, which is based among other things on viewing self-love as an essential part of the quality of human life, is that when we do not cultivate a certain trait within us, the opposite trait will dwell within us. If we do not cultivate enough optimism, we will suffer from pessimism, cynicism, and distrust. If we do not cultivate our enthusiasm, we will suffer from heaviness, a lack of vision, and a lack of ability to realize interesting ideas. If we do not grow love within us, fear will dwell within us and inner wars will break out between different parts of our personality.

A person who loves oneself is not capable of harming oneself or others, and certainly not intentionally. The more self-love increases, the more a person finds it difficult to harm others, because self-love does not only improve the connection of a person with oneself, it also improves the connection to the environment. The more a person loves

oneself, the more that person feels that the other is part of oneself and that one is part of the other. Therefore, it is clear that any harm one causes another person is in fact harm to oneself.

From here we can conclude that a person who harms other people, or wants to harm others, or fears that others will harm that person, is in a substantial lack of self-love. Self-love neutralizes the parts in awareness that are based on practical or potential violence. The more a person loves oneself, the less that person is flooded by exaggerated fears, and the more that person holds on to hope and to connection with people, including people who in the past were considered dangerous, enemy, and harmful.

The word “peace” reflects the transformation and healing that a person must do when wishing to move away from zones of violence within and to connect to the contents of love, connection, hope, and shared creation.

The word “peace” is connected, according to the rules of our journey, to self-love with a strong bond that cannot be untied. As long as we are in a conflict with violent characteristics with another person or with another group, it is a sign that we lack self-love and are enslaved to what happens when it is lacking within us.

As long as we are physically or emotionally involved in a state of ongoing hostility, suspicion, and fear of meeting certain people, it is a sign that in that place there is an inner war between parts of us and our emotional structure. That inner war reflects a considerable lack of self-love and even an addiction to this state, to the unpleasant friction between us and ourselves, which will later be reflected as friction between us and the people around us.

“Inner peace” is a concept you may have already heard. “Peace begins within me” is a familiar slogan. These concepts receive meaning only when they are tied and connected to the mission of self-love, which is the highest commitment of a person. Here we can understand why. The price we pay for a shortage of self-love includes also what does not occur to us, harm by one person to another. As long as we do not become acquainted with the path of self-love that will help us more than anything to abandon the options of mutual harm and instead to seek constructive, courageous, and creative ways for dialogue, agreements, accords, and joint work, we will not arrive at inner peace.

It is always possible to blame the other side for being more harmful, more suspicious, and more violent. It is always possible to claim that others started and we are only defending ourselves. We are sophisticated and wise and we will always find a convincing argument that explains why we have no control over the violence around us, and that if the others come to their senses everything will be fine. This is a gross falsehood and a lack of responsibility on our part.

When we grow self-love, and when more people do so, human awareness will reject the option of war outright, because people will not want to harm themselves through harming others. This is the clear message that will be sent by me, by you, and by many people when self-love grows within us. Let us end the war with ourselves and turn to a new and healthier era, and in it we will also end the wars with all our fellow human beings, because this is the right and better way to live.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. What are your associations with the concept of inner peace?
2. In which situations might you find yourself in a kind of inner conflict or self-war?
3. Self-love aims to connect the different, even disconnected, parts within us. How does this show up in your experience?
4. Regarding which things from your past or present do you feel it would be beneficial for you to forgive more than before?
5. Go to a mirror and say to yourself in a soft yet clear voice: “I would like you and me to be much more at peace.” Continue to look at yourself. How does it feel?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 36: Jump The Cliff, Delight The Safe Descent

It is finished and it is not finished. The last chapter of this book aims to raise awareness of the very high importance of self-love and of the work that must be done in order to cultivate it. This book is one of those books that provide knowledge and tools through the “back door,” which means that something occurs in the soul of the person who reads and practices with the materials in the book without being fully aware of it.

Self-love is a way of life and the highest commitment. Self-love is the summit of feelings as it is the summit of spiritual experiences. Despite its importance and the essential consequences of its presence or absence, self-love is very available, practical, clear, and close to the reach of every person. Exactly as we are required to cultivate every relationship that we want by means of actions, initiatives, attention, coping, and ongoing updates, so must be the relationship that a person has with oneself.

Smiles to the mirror are not a trivial matter. They are the ongoing reminder of self-love; they are the simple gesture that changes reality. One must smile to the mirror, because if we do not do so, the figure we will see in the mirror will not send anything to the world, certainly not love or anything similar. Not only smiles to the mirror, but also the choice of self-love, self-protection, self-support, self-forgiveness, self-empathy, and self-compassion. All these and additional versions of love and affection are the factors necessary to maintain and amplify self-love. This journey never ends, unless we truly wish to slide into places in which we will forget the taste of true love and we will also be angry at others for not giving us its goodness.

Self-love grants us life. Life without enthusiasm are very partial life. If you do not experience enthusiasm from time to time about something, it is a sign that there are extinguished zones in your soul in which you do not allow yourself the freedom to be swept away and to fly to places that are wonderful and better. Self-love is the essential fuel and nourishment so that a person will allow oneself to be enthused and to enjoy the intensity of experience in moments when adrenaline flows more and when energy increases.

Life without experiences, without attempts, and without experiments are narrowed, limited, closed, and unsatisfying life. The role of a person is to experience a variety of experiences, although one is not obligated to experience everything in the world. A large part of personal growth, learning, and development is directly connected to experiences, to tasting, to trial and error, to failures that follow bold experiences, to becoming acquainted with what is different and strange, and to walking also on paths that not everyone walks.

Self-love is what gives the legitimacy and the push to experience and to try. When a person knows that within there is support and a safety net that will forgive and caress even in cases of failures, then the person will dare to experience more, to stretch boundaries, to expand horizons, to succeed and to fail, to excel and to be average, to spend and to save, to be confused and to be focused. Self-love will give us the green light for all possibilities and will lead us to the recognition that experiencing all these things and many others, more pleasant or less pleasant, is essential for our growth, for the healing of our pains, and for the realization of our overt and covert wishes.

A person who does not experience enough is similar to a person who chooses not to move forward to the next station on the journey. Experience causes a person to understand oneself and one's life better. Nothing will replace direct experience in the material world, not lectures, not books, and not screens that provide virtual reality. Nothing will replace the excitement of true experience. Nothing will resemble the emotional processes and the direct coping that occur when a person experiences, meets, rubs against, mixes, gets dirty, and is exposed.

For everything mentioned here to occur, we need an ever increasing measure of self-love. Everything that we did not take and did not receive from life even though it was necessary for us, remained distant from us because there was not enough self-love within us to support taking a risk, making a decision, and setting out without delaying too much. When self-love is present we know that the risk is not as great as we think, because there is always within us a warm home to return to, the home that we are building and maintaining through our self-love.

Yes, at times we must jump from the cliff. At times we must trust that good things will happen following a bold act that we do even though we have no complete certainty regarding the results that the act will bring. Sometimes we must leave someone or something despite discomfort. From time to time we must decide quickly about a trip or about studies without having tools to examine the consequences of the choice. At times we must be a little hastier, exactly as at times we must be a little more considered. Here and there we must do soon something that most people are still not capable of doing, but within us it is already calling out, even though we will not receive support and approval from the environment to do it.

At times we must jump from the cliff and discover after a few bumps that the parachute indeed opens and that a better reality is waiting for us below. But if we do not jump from the cliff, we will never know. We will not be able to assess what will happen by looking from above, and the future will remain unclear. We will simply have to jump from the cliff, and if we do not jump we will suffer from the delay, but through self-love we will be able to receive additional opportunities.

Self-love is here to encourage us to change into a healthier and better person according to our inner aims. Self-love is not only the cultivation of a good relationship with ourselves, it is an essential foundation on the path of turning a

person into what one only dreams of being. The wonderful potential in our genetics can be realized only if self-love is present and allows us to experience, to be enthused, and to jump from the cliff when necessary.

There is and there will be no true love in the absence of self-love. In every place in which self-love is lacking, a person causes oneself harm and addictions. In the absence of self-love fear and worries increase, restraints grow, and the illusion of lack of ability, pessimism, and helplessness increase. When there is no self-love we think that we are practical, normal, not unusual, and not crazy, but deep inside we reach a place that is more painful, stuck, and complicated.

This is your choice and this is your opportunity. Every gram of self-love will save you one hundred grams of pain and suffering. Every gesture of self-consideration and self-protection will bring you closer to the deeper, higher, and healthier people in their soul. Together with them we will gradually create a community that is based on the primary and most important love of all, self-love, which naturally flows outward and gladly gives the message of love from one person to another.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. Do you think it is possible to connect the concepts of love and obligation?
2. In light of what you are learning here, how do you see your new commitment from this point forward?
3. Give an example of a price you paid in the past when you did not understand that self-love is actually your responsibility toward yourself.
4. What is the deep and fundamental mental shift that takes place when we define self-love as a kind of personal obligation?
5. What, in your view, follows from this obligation? Where does it lead you in terms of actions, attention toward yourself and others, and choices about what to do and where to be?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?