

How to use this book

Speed reading

This is a book written and designed to give you a wide choice of entry points. I would love you to begin with the Introduction so that you get some sense of its evolution. But after that there are almost as many entry points as there are individual entries.

A single entry may be all that you will need to read (at least for the moment). In fact, as the book grew I envisaged you reaching towards it for psychological or spiritual ‘first aid’ in large and small cases of emergency. (‘Ah, the life and soul *essentials!*’) Using the descriptive titles of the entries, or the Smart Index as your guide, you should easily find what you are seeking.

What you seek out first may be the entries that offer the specific skills and strategies you most urgently need. These are intended to be as useful in your workplace as at home, and in your dealings with your six-year-old as with your best friend, peers or parents. They offer ideas in areas as various as how to listen; choosing values; soothing yourself; forgiving yourself and other people; how to be more encouraging and less critical; how to respond rather than react; how to limit aggression, anger and competitiveness; how to be more generous (and why this benefits you); how to get over hurts and difficulties; how to think about love, sex and other people; how to detach from unhelpful moods and emotions; how to think more creatively as well as positively. They also deal very specifically with some of the tough issues of our time: loneliness, depression, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, resentment and aggression.

They (and the many entries like them) *are* the essentials, the psychological and spiritual ‘basics’ that can make such a profound difference as to whether or not you feel in charge of the life you are living. They are also what you need to know in order to lead a decent, self-responsible and *enjoyable* life.

But I see this as a book for your less urgent moments also.

These entries can help to sustain the lifelong journey that you are taking towards greater self-understanding and care for others. So,

although each entry is at least somewhat self-sufficient (which makes this very different from my other longer books), they do also lean together and gather momentum. Moving from one entry to the next, you will certainly notice how the book as a whole encourages you to see your entire life, and life itself, with renewed appreciation.

The book opens with a clear focus on you, on your choices, goals and values, on your self-confidence and self-respect. It then moves on to encourage in very practical and feasible ways greater and more rewarding engagement with other people (people in general; then those closest to you). Finally, it takes you towards considering an inclusively positive attitude to life.

Moving through the book in this way, with diversions back to re-read as feels right, you will experience, I hope, that this is a book not just for reading but for interacting with, talking back to, engaging with as your actual life meets these ideas.

Circling and landing

Because this is a book that only some of you will be reading consecutively, there are some repetitions as key ideas appear in different guises in different places.

I won't apologise for this. Even if you are reading the book page by page, my years of working with people in psychotherapy and my own psychological and spiritual journey have demonstrated to me that often we need to come back to an idea a number of times before it 'works' for us or becomes our own.

Choice, self-responsibility, care for others; living consciously and respectfully; doing your best; being your best; trust, peace of mind, forgiveness, creativity and courage as well as happiness are just some of the themes that I return to many times, knowing how crucial they are in all kinds of situations.

And I return many times also to those themes that are harder to define but that make such a profound difference as to whether or not we think life is going well: how to grow in awareness; how to limit our emotional 'bad habits'; how to relieve our suffering; how to like

Trust who you are

Trust yourself as a source of happiness

Everything you need

Every day is a new day

Your life is your message

What you pay attention to grows stronger in your life

Where to start

How do you see yourself?

What will you find?

No one knows you better than you know yourself

What you gain by understanding yourself better

The self I am and the self you see

Look for patterns

Challenge a familiar pattern

The power of presence

You are responsible for your own happiness

When things go wrong (and they will)

The choice is yours

Mistakes and opportunities

All your experiences can turn to gold

How to reflect

The common denominator

The big picture

Your effect on other people

CHAPTER ONE

You are not the centre of the universe
The world beyond ourselves
Trustworthy for others also
Know what's *right* about yourself
Talking to and about yourself
Maybe he won't call
Loneliness
Loneliness: the way out
A stranger to yourself
How to soothe yourself
Calm the inner chatter
The ultimate gift
Looking for love
Afraid of self-love
The problem with self-love is ...
Love your body (silence your complaints)
You are not a robot
Being, not doing
Body, instincts and expectations
Trust your intuition
Use friendship as your guide
Closer than you know

TRUST YOURSELF AS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

You have the power to choose your own happiness. People, situations, events outside yourself will affect you. But no one can give you happiness.

You may try to find all kinds of things outside yourself that will reassure you that you are happy – or keep unhappiness at bay. But even the most substantial of them will be short-lived.

Romantic love, family, work success, friends, interests, status and wealth can certainly affect your wellbeing. They may, for many years, save you from the need to look harder or further. Yet sometimes even in the midst of ‘everything’, you may have a feeling that ‘something’ is missing.

A happy person can have everything that the world regards as important. But someone can also have all those things, and not be happy. What makes the difference?

Inner trust makes the difference, I believe, not trust only in what the world can see, but in who you most fundamentally are: a being of intrinsic value, with everything else ‘adding on’.

This not only makes it possible to experience happiness; it also makes it possible to go on believing in happiness (connection, contentment, optimism, peace of mind) during the times it is out of reach or even out of sight.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

You already have the strengths and qualities that you need.

Yet, if your life is anything like mine, there will be times when you overlook or forget this, when your strengths seem obscured by self-doubt, anxieties, fears, disappointments or losses. But those strengths remain. While you are living, where else could they go?

Think about them like the sky that never ceases to be blue, even when there are clouds covering it; or like the mountain that is still present, even when dense fog keeps it hidden.

Trusting yourself, and looking at your life from a more engaged and compassionate perspective, you will become more and more familiar with how to meet the world, and what it asks of you, using those strengths.

You will experience how this settles and stabilises you from the inside out.

You will experience how this quite naturally brings peace of mind, clearer choices and greater happiness. And how it changes the way you view other people and see the physical and social worlds around you.

This book speaks directly to your strengths and qualities. It invokes and develops them. It helps them – and you – to come fully alive.

CLOSER THAN YOU KNOW

You are already far closer than you know *to the life that you want to be living, to the happiness that can be yours.*

Only habits of thought stand between you and the person you long to be or the life you long to create.

Any changes you desire are almost certainly a matter of degree only. They might include:

- F To be kinder to yourself and other people
- F To 'mind' less if others criticise you
- F To worry less and laugh more
- F To accept as well as give encouragement and appreciation
- F To trust your capacity to be creative
- F To forgive yourself as well as others for past failings and hurts
- F To be able to enjoy your successes and not talk them down
- F To feel that you have time in your life
- F To be able to say what you mean
- F To stand up for what you care about
- F To know what matters
- F To behave in ways that express your highest values
- F To trust – and love – yourself.

HOW TO TRUST WHO YOU ARE

Essential insights

- F Inner trust brings peace of mind and happiness – and reflects the strengths, abilities and resources you continue to develop throughout your lifetime.

- F Your life – with all its complications and joys – is a priceless gift. Appreciating this, ‘what’s wrong’ becomes far less pressing.

- F As you are *right now*, without making any improvements or changes, your life has value. You *matter*.

- F Often *appreciating your life is the only change needed*. This makes it so much easier to lift your spirits, appreciate other people – and be far less judgemental.

- F In countless small and large moments, you can choose to focus on what is positive, expansive, uplifting and connecting. Those are the choices that make happiness possible and lift the spirits of everyone around you.

- F Happiness is found by claiming the best of who you are and recognising and responding to the best in other people. Putting other people down, or yourself, stifles happiness.

- F You can develop the strengths you need. This, too, is a choice. You can also ‘borrow and use’ strengths that you see and admire in others.

- F Be confident that you know yourself (your true character) better than anyone else ever could. Other people’s opinions of you are of interest; they *don’t determine your self-worth*.
