

Introduction – ‘The Middle Pillar’

The purpose of this book is to shed light on personal growth in order to promote inner peace and harmony. The practical and informative content will be of benefit to anyone who is searching for more fulfilment, or who is questioning who they are or what the purpose of their existence is. The material that is covered in this book is equally applicable across the broad spectrum of personal issues, or for anyone who is yearning for more from their life. This can vary from experiencing a difficult or painful period of change, a mid-life crisis, or being diagnosed with depression, anxiety or a nervous breakdown.

The psycho-spiritual framework that forms the basis of this book is the middle pillar of Kabbalah's Tree of Life. Kabbalah is the esoteric tradition of Jewish mysticism. 'Esoteric' refers to a tradition of beliefs and knowledge that aims to understand the path to higher consciousness, which transcends the physical plane of existence. The basis of Kabbalah is the Tree of Life, which is a tree with ten branches arranged on seven levels. Kabbalah teaches that we exist with four living trees within each of us. We contain a physical, psychological, spiritual and divine tree. The model of the psyche that will be shown in chapter one represents the psychological Tree of Life.

We will also explore how the four worlds of physical, psychological, spiritual and divine interrelate, and the greater implication this holds for our lives. The peace and harmony of the middle pillar creates stillness of the mind, which is obtained through a balance of our masculine and feminine psychological energies. Becoming oriented to your inner world is vital to increase self-knowledge of your inner realms. This includes your physical feelings, your emotional state and your inner guidance. Conscious living promotes greater inner peace and your capacity to 'be' happy and 'be' filled with love, which are vital to live in a state of beingness.

This book is based on the perspective that we exist on multiple levels: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Happiness is achieved from balance and self-knowledge across of all these levels of being, and to that end, this book draws on knowledge from the fields of physiotherapy, psychology and spirituality. These areas will be explored to provide information and practical tools to assist in expanding self-awareness and promote inner peace.

Happiness requires adequate harmony in our everyday existence. This is achieved by developing awareness of any thoughts and feelings that create sensitivities to similar issues or people, resulting in automatic and repetitive behaviours, which are less than helpful. Adequate self-knowledge is required to cope with stress and change, so as to benefit from your own internal guidance – that intuitive inner voice which can be readily drowned-out by keeping too busy or succumbing to stress.

Throughout this book I shall continually refer to the principles of balance, which are a cornerstone of this book, and I hope that the repetition of this theme reinforces the message. For happiness to be achieved, it is necessary to maintain balance in all areas of your life: work, home, socially and intimate relationships. You need to ensure there is a balance of your time and energy, a balance between demands from work and home, and a balance of your values with society's values. This may feel like a great juggling feat – a challenge that may be a struggle to meet. Current lifestyles typically do not provide adequate time to perfect this balancing act.

However, the good news is that you do not need to find happiness – instead, you need to shed unhappiness. This book is dedicated to identifying and removing what makes happiness elusive and often difficult to obtain and maintain. Once you remove the impediments to happiness, you will find it waiting for you, buried under all the complexity we tend to create. This is not to say it is easy, but human beings tend to make life more complex than it needs to be.

For everyone, a personal journey will unfold as a consequence of both emotional healing and personal development. Estimating or predicting how long your own journey will take is of little benefit, as it typically takes longer than you would hope for, due to the desire to ease your inner discomfort as soon as possible. However, an important way to shorten the journey is not to try too hard to find happiness, but to let it unfold. You cannot force the rate of change. It requires patience to be able to tolerate troubling feelings or inner conflict, while taking one step at a time.

The book is presented in four parts, which models the advice offered: that it is important to quieten the mind through managing everyday stress, live with an internal focus with values that reflect your true self, while consciously flowing with life to create the reality that is aligned with your life purpose – achieving fulfilment.

Part one is entitled 'Preparing for Balance'. An important preparation for balance in life is to stop trying too hard to be happy. This is explored in the first chapter and refers to falling prey to attempting to extract happiness from each moment of life, instead of being in the moment. You will also learn about the repression of psychologically injurious events during childhood, which also represses vital parts of who we are – along with the relevant memories and emotions. We will explore how this is related to stress, which impacts on the body, emotions and mind. On this basis, you will be able to identify the effects of stress, the removal of which allows feelings to be more readily experienced. Feelings are felt physically in the body, and having greater awareness of them creates a deeper experience. Finally, the Self Awareness Calming Technique (SACT) is introduced as a powerful tool to calm the body, mind and emotions by reducing physical, mental and emotional tension.

Part two is entitled 'Aligning Yourself for Balance'. Themes that will be discussed include the pitfall of looking for happiness outside of ourselves instead of within, which is fuelled by our fears and desires. These are often linked and represent how we may avoid our fears, while pursuing our desires, causing mental busy-ness and/or an excess of 'doing'. Examining who you are is important as personal values are linked to happiness, therefore aligning and affirming your values with your goals will focus your life in the right direction.

Part three is entitled 'Creating Balance for Life'. Having aligned your state of being with who you are, we will explore how to connect to your inner guidance of feelings, compassion and intuition. This inner voice knows all – your truths, your pain and how to guide you forward through the maze of life. In order to develop this ability, the development of an internal focus will be outlined. This requires increasing awareness of your physical self through observation of your physical sensations, and by connecting to a fluidity of movement. This forms a basis to orient yourself internally, to more clearly hear the inner voice of your inner child that holds the truth of your emotional state. Through a reduction of inner chaos, you will be better able to hear the voice of your inner guidance and develop your own wisdom.

Part four is entitled 'Maintaining Balance'. Learning to meditate facilitates peace in your daily life, thereby assisting internal awareness. Finally, the development of patience is

necessary during times of difficulty and struggle, in order to maintain focus and belief while undergoing the ups and downs of life. Therefore, the aim is to moderate any cycling of mood.

This book draws on my professional physiotherapy and counselling-psychotherapy experience, as well as on my own philosophies of the human journey. From my personal life learning and varied readings, I feel I am able to present a variety of perspectives from many sources and weave them into a framework to assist you to develop an understanding of your own personal journey. This results in a plain-speaking style which I hope presents as relevant and down-to-earth. The information and practical aspects are relevant to all degrees of personal pain, confusion and crisis, therefore I invite you to find your own level at which this information resonates with you.

Having been a physiotherapist for many years, I have used my knowledge of the musculo-skeletal system to present the interrelation between the body, mind and emotions – they are intimately linked. Awareness of your physicality is the basis for connecting to your feelings, as they are felt physically in your gut and chest. This is often referred to as the visceral aspect of feeling. For example, when feeling nervous, empty, sad or peaceful, these feelings manifest in the upper abdomen or chest as butterflies, emptiness, heaviness or warmth respectively. Focusing on and understanding your body is a very important means to connect to your feelings.

When I assist a client through a significant change there is one caution I always give: that embarking on a journey of personal growth involves change and often a reassessment of their life, relationships and values. As you read-on, be mindful that creating change will alter the status quo of your life. However, if something feels right, do not let fear stop you. Take a deep breath and do it, knowing that you have made an informed and conscious decision. However, others may need time to adjust to the change, as they may not initially understand what is happening, which can generate fear and temporary turmoil.

Throughout any prolonged period of personal change, a diary can be of great benefit to gather all your thoughts and ideas. As you write, you are required to give your ideas a structure, which often results in a clearer understanding. Often you never have to read them again. Instead, the exercise of taking stray thoughts and forming them into a diary entry more firmly fixes them in your mind and allows you to continually build your understanding. A diary can take two forms. The first is a dated diary, but do not feel the pressure to write every day – only when ideas and events of significance occur. The other form is having a book without dates to write significant thoughts and ideas. This can often be a special book with a hardcover, which can be used for personal reflection. Often a diary assists a person's learning and therefore also their self-awareness – but it is not for everyone.

At the end of each chapter you will find a Personal Learning Questionnaire (PLQ). These are a series of questions or points to contemplate to assist you to reflect on how the content covered in each chapter relates to you and your life. If you choose to complete the PLQ, I suggest you do it as you go while what you have read is fresh in your mind. Completing the PLQ can also help you understand the content more clearly, freeing you to focus on the next chapter.

Finally, there is one more thing that I want to emphasise. Personal growth is the development of a partnership with yourself – not a fight. So as you read on, do so with a positive sense of exploration and journey. As you contemplate how each part of the book is useful to you, maintain a sense of discovery, letting your journey unfold as you go.