

Gillian Routledge



A JOURNEY
TO LOVE

EMBRACING YOUR SHADOW ON THE
PATH TO THE LIGHT

Illustrations by Amy Routledge

A Journey to Love

*Embracing your Shadow on the
Path to the Light*

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Illustrations by Amy Routledge

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Dedicated to the memory of my mum.

This Journey started because of you ...

I am free in the knowledge that who I am is not what I pretend to be.

When I drop all pretence, only love remains.

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Endorsements for 'A Journey to Love'

Gillian uses her own direct experiences and realisations to turn your attention inwards to uncover and clear anything keeping you from the truth of who you really are. Her practical, accessible and straightforward tools and exercises can be effortlessly incorporated into your daily life and guide you on your own journey to freedom, that which is your true nature.

Brandon Bays - Founder of The Journey Method, Best Selling Author of The Journey

What I love about 'A Journey to Love'

Gill's words make the inner 'emotional life' visible and show her journey from suffering to the freedom found in the exploration of the inner-self. The message is raw, honest, vulnerable yet gentle. This beautiful book triggers inspiration and exemplifies a process of growth that can help many in their quest to live from love.

Patricia Patterson-Vanegas

I'm a writer but it is hard to find the words to begin to do justice to 'A Journey to Love' as there is just so much in it and so many things that will resonate with many, many people. It is a beautiful book of poetry and contemplation but with extremely honest, hard-hitting and personal reflections that make you look deeply into your own soul. Take time to read it again and again as you will find new nuggets of wisdom and support every time. You will be taken on a journey to your own forgiveness and love.

Mary Atkinson

Acknowledgements

I owe so much gratitude, especially to all my family, who were able to see the love in me even when I could not and I am particularly grateful to my patient husband, who has stuck by me through challenging times and the whole process of the birth and development of this book. He has also contributed a short poem of his own that touches my heart each time I read it.

I express a big 'Thank You' to my daughter, Amy, for her artistic input, her drawings perfectly complement the words and depict the essence of each poem.

My mother was a catalyst for many of my learnings, realisations and connections. Our writing together helped us to find a common bond and heal rifts within our relationship. I value deeply the short story she wrote, which is included in this book.

The Journey and Brandon Bays have been a source of inspiration and support during my personal journey. Without the skills learnt over the past decade working with The Journey these words would have remained unwritten. More than that, I have been given the opportunity to connect to a deeper sense of meaning in life and to my true purpose.

I am grateful to practitioners and friends whose heart-warming support has encouraged me to share these poems with a wider audience. The whole experience has been a journey in itself for all those who have been part of the process.

My appreciation for a friend who suggested that it would be good to expand the stories behind the poems and which enabled an unpicking of the content to reveal more insights deserves mention. My gratitude goes out to Susan for her guidance on the layout of the poems. For more recent contributions of proofreading and editing I would like to thank Sally for her generosity of spirit, Ron for her expertise and Nancy for her wealth of experience and belief in this book. Thanks to Patricia Patterson-Vanegas for her work behind the scenes, her expertise in structural editing and for gleaning finer details from me. Thanks also to Helen for editorial support. Last, but not least, thanks to Sunita, Nina, Angela and my niece, Ellie, for help with the final fine-tuning.

A JOURNEY TO LOVE

"I don't care what you do for a living, I want to know what your heart aches for."
Oriah Mountain Dreamer

To the Reader

A Journey to Love provides an insight into how experiences in my childhood played a part in influencing my relationship with myself and others. The poetry highlights how shedding light on specific tendencies has enabled me to make different choices, break free from debilitating behaviours and drop into a place of stillness and peace. This has facilitated an awakening to a more joyful and creative life in which I have grown to build healthier relationships with my family and myself — a life where my work makes a real difference to peoples' lives and my emotions are a trusted guide towards a continuous and deeper learning about who I am. This was not always the case. I witnessed violence and verbal abuse in my childhood, adopted strategies that didn't serve me in later years and experienced deep depression.

I grew up witnessing my father's eruptions of anger along with my mother's emotional outbursts. On one occasion this left me feeling as if stuck in a warzone where no-one was going to win and any survivors were going to be scarred forever. It seemed so futile and I felt helpless to change anything. Internally there was something screaming inside wanting my parents to wake up and see what was really important in life. In that moment my breath seemed to be gripped in a vice and my body froze. The thoughts rushed through my head 'if my breath stopped for long enough, I could die'. Would they then realise the significance of life and love for their children? At that time there were no thoughts of whether this was an over-reaction or egotistical response, it was just there and seemed to imprint on my body to go to a place of freezing followed by a strong desire to run each time I felt stuck in a place of conflict.

The instances became repeated at times through my life and the triggers could be as simple as anyone from a parent, teacher or partner raising their voice to being unable to hold my own in a conversation when there might be a difference of opinion. As a child my go to place of escape was to find solace in nature and to this day still offers a nurturing and safe place of peace and solitude. When this option is not available, writing and poetry has been my saving grace and a cathartic outlet in times of conflict and confusion. I owe so much gratitude to whatever it is that flows from thoughts and through pen and paper. Much of my writing has helped me to link my childhood experiences to patterns and behaviours I have adopted throughout my life. Gradually and through what many would call "Through the Grace of God" has highlighted how dysfunctional these tendencies have become, along with the ability to make incremental steps to letting go of unhealthy ways of reacting in certain situations has made a real difference in the long term. There are too many instances of these behaviours to recall and I have mentioned a few below which maybe you the reader can relate to, either for yourself or they are visible in others.

As a child I learned to earn love and respect by doing things that would please my parents. Even though it was confusing at times because when my father lavished attention on me and called me a 'good girl' my mother seemed to become moody or resentful. In an attempt to please my mother, I would do my best to help her at home, not realising that I was somehow adding to her feelings of inadequacy. I continued striving to fit the 'good girl' label for

decades of my life, and even when I became aware that it was an unhealthy pattern, I could witness myself continuing to play it out and it seemed far beyond my control to change it.

The identification of being *good* and other protective and defensive mechanisms adopted in childhood shaped how I could or couldn't behave in my relationships as an adult and stopped me from being honest with others and with myself. I struggled for a long time to identify my purpose in life and couldn't find contentment with work. Other people's needs always came before mine, which led to a sense of unworthiness, lack of self-respect and ultimately depression.

When I became a mother of two daughters, worked night shifts as a nurse and was juggling all the commitments of being a parent and wife, I felt a constant and all-pervading lack of fulfilment in most things I tried to do, as if something was missing in my life. Nothing seemed to matter. I was operating on automatic pilot, every daily action seemed robotic and eventually I reached a point where even functioning in this way was impossible. I had been depressed for a while but had tried to ignore it and carry on with my roles and duties. I clearly recall one morning struggling to get my body to take slow painful steps across the kitchen to reach the kettle. I realised then that something was seriously wrong. I hit rock bottom. Even though I knew I needed help, I couldn't think of anyone in my life I could turn to and even if I had thought of someone, I would not have been able to pick up the phone to call. This was the beginning of a long period of recovery that has been messy, painful and, at times, extremely challenging, a journey with setbacks intertwined with inspiration and a driving motivation to heal.

Moving on from depression towards a life lived in Love has been a path of discovery that has engaged me at all levels of my being. It has required humility and willingness to see how I create my reality, courage to accept responsibility for my life, make conscious choices to take different actions, surrender to follow my inner guidance and, most importantly of all, sing my own unique song.

The Journey therapy has helped me access and release traumatic memories and dissolve negative beliefs. During my training with the founder of this work, the barriers I had erected to protect myself fell away slowly and incrementally over a period of years thus enabling me to receive love. The Journey work has given me permission to express my emotions and validate my feelings. Over time, more and more layers have fallen away revealing a true sense of who I truly am. It is a relief to let go of the 'trying' to be someone I thought I had to be to please others. It is easier to speak naturally and effortlessly from my heart rather than editing and being fearful of saying the wrong thing.

Since I embarked on what I see as my journey to the soul, poems have arisen from within and flow through my body into written form. I have allowed the words to emerge as they will and many of the poems appear in this book in their 'raw', unaltered state, free of the censorship of my conscious mind. Poetry has been a guiding light along the way, sometimes as a cathartic release to help me express the pain stemming from childhood memories or past experiences and at other times allowing me to put into words new understandings that arise as I shed unnecessary behaviours that prevent me from living my life to the full.

It isn't easy to describe how these poems appear, but I can identify certain elements that have allowed my creativity to flow; they arise when in silent solitude, on spiritual retreats or outside in Nature. When an emotion arises, I have chosen to be still (whenever possible), breathe and acknowledge the feeling with my full attention as I let go of any judgement as to

whether the emotion is good or bad. Sometimes just staying in the moment and being present to the feelings, however intense, has seemed the only way forward; attempting to push them away or 'pull myself together' has not been an option. Often the initial discomfort dissipates and this somehow has enabled my mind to be more at ease. The willingness to be with 'what is' in the moment whilst accepting the possibility of 'not knowing' has taken me to a place within where I experience love, joy, bliss — my true nature, deeper self or consciousness. Poetry sometimes arises spontaneously when I am in this space. The process of welcoming uncomfortable feelings in me and accepting, rather than denying them has helped me realise that everything I have searched for has been within me all along.

I have slowly discovered that writing poems is a gift that makes my heart sing. A journey that began as an outpouring from an emotional place has become a discovery of my inner self. The ability to put my feelings on paper has somehow affected a release that has had a knock-on effect in my life, freeing me to truly forgive, heal old trauma and let go of stories, which in truth seems to unleash my creativity. If some of these poems are prayers, then I have faith that, somewhere, they are being heard and answered.

My evolving understanding ...

I believe now that we are all interconnected and our story is a product, not just of our parents but also of our ancestors and their experiences. Beliefs and patterns of behaviour are passed down by our parents and as children, often we not only take what our elders say as the truth, but also take on these same behaviours and replicate them.

My mother experienced a lack of love in her life stemming from the stoic nature of her parents' generation and, although she tried to make changes with her own children, I always felt that being tactile did not come naturally to her. As I see it today, the absence of a loving touch or any explicit signs of affection contributed to a lack of self-worth and inability to feel loved in both my mother and me. This, in turn, led to patterns of neediness and unhealthy attention-seeking behaviours that only served to drive away the love we sought.

In my mother's story, the effects of a lifetime of feeling unloved played out in dramatic and self-destructive ways. During my childhood, her frustrations were released at times of severe stress and I felt scared and ill-equipped to cope. I truly wanted to help, but it seemed impossible for me to reach out and offer any love because of the impenetrable walls of defensive behaviour that she displayed. These ways of acting can continue to be recreated through the generations. Displaying defensive behaviours became a strategy that I adopted and truly believed would serve me.

The combination of inherited traits and negative mind-talk prevented me from embarking on new relationships or receiving love from others because of past hurts. Unconsciously, I was probably protecting myself from being hurt again. I shut down and often distanced myself from men because of an instinctive need for self-protection. These tendencies and behaviours, learnt from my mother and grandparents, were coping strategies. I also adopted other unhealthy behaviours such as 'people-pleasing', being a victim with endless stories of 'poor me', which stood in the way of the loving connection I longed for.

We always have a choice when we suddenly become aware of undesirable feelings that we may have suppressed for many years. We can do what we have automatically and consistently done through our life to avoid them or we can act differently. In that moment, we might choose to dwell on our problems, resent and blame other people, think that we are the victim of our circumstances or look for faults in others and, as a result, try to change their

behaviour. Alternatively, we can look at ourselves: explore our inner world and the messages that our emotions convey. On a daily basis, we can take the opportunity to see in other people the reflection of our challenging patterns of behaviour. We can choose to be with our emotions, look inwards and 'let go' of blaming or controlling others. It seems to me that the first step on a journey to healing is to strengthen our awareness and disposition to change. For me, the true catalyst for change was hitting rock-bottom and uncovering the willingness to take the first step.

Reading and reflecting on this, is a precursor to putting in the real work that comes with the commitment to release our unhealthy and ingrained patterns of behaviour. Using the mind to change these patterns seems to be impossible because they are usually adopted at a young age as coping mechanisms that may have served us at that particular time in our lives; for example, a child who cries to get attention and continues to use this as a manipulative trait into adulthood. Unhealthy behaviours that we consistently use to meet our needs are often rooted somewhere in our past. If we give time to noticing what is going on in the moment and identifying the root causes that created blocks in the first place, we can start to unravel our story and free ourselves. Unless we know the root cause we might not have any idea where to start or what to work on. This inner work is not about dwelling on our past but about having the understanding that we can learn from all of life's experiences and relationships.

My experiences are not unique ...

I have learnt that my story of emotional pain is not unique and that we are not alone. We all experience traumas that affect us in different ways. The loss of a parent or a child, physical or emotional abuse, witnessing traumatic events, growing up in a violent household or living in a war-torn country all leave their mark but life experiences need not be as distressing as these examples to have a lasting impact. For example, as I have previously mentioned, the label of being a 'good girl' made me lose sight of who I really was or how I wanted to be. I often felt like a fraud in playing out this role because I was denying the darker side of myself.

Even though our lives and relationships are meant to be fulfilling and connected to a deep sense of love, this is not always the case. The stories I hear in my professional practice are full of frustration, longing for a more loving partner or a sense of disconnection and of not knowing what one's purpose is meant to be; It seems that daily life conspires to pull us along a treadmill of duties, tasks and commitments and we wonder why it feels as if our very life force is being sucked from us. One day, if we are lucky enough to recognise it when it comes knocking, a wake-up call might help us to re-evaluate life and implement new ways to make a real difference.

My work as a therapist has been enriched by my story of growth and healing. It has given me a sense of freedom that allows me to support clients to find release from their traumas, assist in tapping into their motivation to make healthier lifestyle choices and reach a place of peace. I have witnessed how individuals can find the love in their hearts that has been repressed and frozen, sometimes for decades. I find that shedding light on our issues renders them less scary or life-threatening than we at first imagined.

Guide to the Book

Although my poems and writing were not originally intended for publication, it seems as though this book had a life of its own. Its creation became a beautiful project that speaks of the importance of connecting to our essence and being our authentic selves.

The purpose of the book is to share what I have learnt, with the hope that it will help those seeking to discover how to acknowledge the pain in their lives and find a way to move beyond it into a place of love and purpose. It aims to facilitate a deeper connection to the love that is within all of us. It also illustrates my search for love as well as the lessons that led me to realise that love lay within me the whole time.

My prayer is, that with some guidance, self-effort and a little grace, we can all learn to connect to the love within ourselves, unleash our creativity and see in others the reflection of our own natural qualities.

A Journey to Love is a tapestry that honours my inner artist by combining poetry, snippets of my story, helpful skills that I have collected along the way and playful mnemonics created to highlight those elements that have been essential in my journey of discovery. I enjoyed precious moments of connection with my mum, daughters and husband in the making of the book and so I chose to include some of their poetry to communicate a sense of that process of connection and learning for us all.

The book is divided into three main chapters: Love, Relationships and Life. The chapters include sections with a mix of poems, explanations about the relationship between my story and the poems, mnemonics, skills and illustrations. Each section invites the reader to bypass the mind, acknowledge any feelings that may arise and hopefully arrive at a thought-free place within. Ultimately, coming to peace happens when unwanted feelings are recognised, felt and accepted.

The seven-step mnemonics are designed to help us acknowledge the limiting beliefs, tendencies and behaviours that we may have adopted through life. The aim is to offer ways of letting them go, while facilitating a journey to the wisdom of ourselves and who we are beyond the pressures and trials of life.

The poems have been written at times when barriers that appeared to stifle my creative ability broke down. They allude to a long and often painful journey that, in hindsight, I would not change as I look back with gratitude for the learning opportunities provided by my experiences.

The structure of the book invites you to pick and choose. "Life is like a box of chocolates" and to consume the whole box at once might leave one feeling rather sick. I recommend that you select one or two sections that appeal to you, savour them individually, digest them slowly and enjoy. My intention is that the verses will facilitate a daily opening to an authentic outlook on life.

Note: If you are experiencing intense or traumatic issues please seek professional help or contact an experienced accredited Journey Practitioner. (See Resources.)

The Journey method pioneered by Brandon Bays, is a powerful, transformational and practical healing method that has helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to heal all sorts of issues, including physical and mental illness, addictions and career underperformance. See Resources.

Find support materials and more information about my work and The Journey at www.gillianroutledge.com

LOVE

A Loving partner or connecting to a deep sense of love for ourselves and life is fundamental. Countless love songs and romantic films are testament to the challenges we all can face along our own tightrope to finding the love we long for. Why then do so many of us find it so painful or even a heart-breaking affair? My discovery has been that some of the answers lie hidden within the language we use and the behaviours, beliefs and even energetic responses we have adopted along our own individual journey to love. Yet, when we take a closer look, many of the tendencies and experiences can be similar.

From the moment we are born we begin to learn to look for love outside of ourselves, for nourishment and care from our mothers. What if this sets us up to believe that love comes from someone else. Often it can feel like there is a shortfall of the love and a neediness can develop. When we have experienced what we perceive to be a lack of love from, say our parents, this pattern continues when we 'want' love to come from a partner. The problem with this, is when the desire to get our needs met from another, that neediness literally drives others away. It is so much easier to see when others are behaving this way and yet we can often be blind to our own traits. In my life I played out these games and often ended up in personality power struggles. My personal journey 'to love' is highlighted below and how the pain has led me to discover a more infinite source.

'No matter how hard I searched for love from others, it often slipped from my grasp as though it was seemingly out of reach. There was a time when I would not have been able to define love. In fact, when loved ones in my life said the words "I love you" I felt an inability to reciprocate because I had an overriding sense of being incapable of feeling any love and the words would get stuck in my throat.'

I tried to block out unwanted emotions of my childhood, in part, because it was what was expected at home and also in an attempt to protect myself from traumatic experiences. I remember that at about the age of nine, the only times when I could feel and express sadness were when I was on my own, in my bedroom, reading melancholic books like *Black Beauty*, *Heidi* or *Great Expectations*. Expressing emotions seemed to be banned in other areas of our house and it was a great relief to have this outlet. Suppressing my emotions did not always work and sadly I have learnt that blocking out 'negative' emotions also meant that I probably shut down to all emotions, including love.'

People in my life from whom I wanted love couldn't always 'give it' to me or 'express it genuinely' because, as I have discovered, painful experiences and a perceived lack of love in their own lives had driven them to shut down. So, the cycle continued.

There are those who believe that the strategy of shutting down emotions is cultural or goes back to the war generations who used it to survive traumas of loss and grief — a strategy that has unconsciously been passed down to the next generations. Could this go further back through millennia or even reflect a global consciousness? Perhaps, but I'd rather focus on the issues in the present moment and the only place to start from is this lifetime.

As a child, I accepted the way things were as normal and part of life. It was in later years that I took on judgements and formed opinions about what I thought was right or wrong without fully understanding the bigger picture. These judgements contributed to a critical mindset that caused confusion and, ultimately, isolation from my family and also from myself. For example, as the eldest and only girl in a family of four children I assumed and took on roles of being mum, helping in the home, housework and cooking while my mother was at work. I built up resentments towards my younger brothers who had more freedom to play and watch

football. This contributed to feeling isolated. Since then, there has been a further unravelling of what there was to learn from my childhood experiences.

The ability to reflect and understand how the past impacted on my capacity to love and feel loved has been invaluable. Writing poems and using skills acquired over the years has helped me not only to connect with much of my stored emotional pain, but also to release it. I increasingly understand about the core patterns of behaviour that I adopted and also the strategies I used to protect myself.

A rational understanding of old behaviours has not always prevented my tendency to continue to act them out, so watching old habits lessen and change has been both a challenging and liberating process. Paradoxically, being stuck in painful and destructive patterns of behaviour took me to a place of willingness to acknowledge the shadow part I had denied. When I was able to feel self-compassion and realise the futility of trying to pretend this aspect of me didn't exist, there was more ability to allow love into the whole of me. A love that is unconditional and holds no expectations or demands, unlike the love I tended to search for in relationships.

Learning how to dive into my pain and feel it fully has been the doorway into my deepest loving self. This, I now know is the place I longed to reach. Ironically, I discovered that it had been within me the whole time and what had kept me from it was the coping strategy of running from or avoiding any feelings that my mind judged to be bad, wrong or painful. In reality, it was the pain that triggered my desire to reconnect to this life-force and my love for life.

I now realise that there is a way to heal the grief, from the loss of love that many of us have experienced and from the painful search for love outside ourselves. If we all learned to access the love within us, perhaps there would be far less heartache or separation, be it between lovers, parents and children or within our own selves. The ability to tap into this love, in turn, helps us to naturally attract love from others, receive abundance and make our wildest dreams come true. It opens the gates for our inner wisdom to flow out into the world. The key is to connect in the present moment to the love within, which goes beyond personal or conditional love.

The act of expressing myself on paper has helped me to release past hurts and find love in my own heart, instead of expecting and needing love to come from outside. A number of poems in this section speak about the fruitless search for receiving love from someone else. Other poems tap into a wisdom much greater than me, which will hopefully take you on a journey into a place of peace, connection and love— a love that is always there and knows no boundaries, conditions or opinions. May we all ultimately experience the truth that love is who we truly are.

Diving Deeper

Divine Love

Your love is wrapped
around me
Held in a warm
embrace
This touch caresses
gently
Tears fall
across my face.

This love
like molten lava
rushing through
Melting this rock
I've mistaken
for a heart.

As it cracks and
crumbles
I disappear
from view
What is left
to replace it
is an infinite
you.

A more expansive
vision
of what we came to be
Who we are is love
and
ecstasy.

Divine Love was written after a meditation when I experienced a profound sense of connection with an infinite love deep within myself. I did not believe I could put this into words, but the poem came from the depths of that source of connection. The words seemed to appear from nowhere. Somewhere in this 'nowhere space' resides a kind of wisdom far

beyond anything the mind can conjure up. Sentences arose giving birth to an expression that allowed me to convey the essence of the connection to a love that has been and is always present. The second verse highlights the initial stages of releasing blocks or a sense of where I had shut off to love.

A common issue after such an experience might be the wish to recreate the same feelings in a meditation practice. This aim can become a trap because when we sit again, maybe in the same place and same meditative position, we may well be expecting a similar experience. I know from many failed attempts that expectation can bring disappointment and I therefore offer some simple guidelines and steps to experiencing a deeper meditation.

Guidelines to Meditation

“The energy of the mind is the essence of life.”
Aristotle

Meditation lessens the tendency to be stuck in our busy minds and helps us to be present to the body. This practice is helpful for people who struggle with stress, reactivity, overwhelm and a cluttered mind or persistent and unwanted thoughts.

The following guidelines and steps are a brief outline. If you are a beginner start with baby steps of establishing a meditation practice of five minutes building up slowly, this will require patience and persistence. Over a period of time this will become an effortless and blissful experience. If you have experience with meditation, these steps might already be part of your routine and will flow easily and naturally.

Create a space that is as clean and uncluttered as possible for you. Our external space can mirror the internal and vice versa, so clearing a space before sitting for meditation can support our practice. Lighting a candle, having fresh flowers and spraying essential oils can all enliven the senses. Although these preparations can be helpful, they are not essential, because, with practice, meditation is possible almost anywhere. Nature also offers a supportive and nurturing space and we can use the senses to focus on sounds, sensations and smells.

Sometimes the body and the mind can become busy or fidgety prior to meditation, this is normal and just observe or witness the thoughts without engaging in them.

It is advised, but not necessary, to sit in a cross-legged or lotus position. You might prefer to sit upright in a supportive chair. Keeping a soft and upright body will allow the energy to move more freely. Close your eyes, follow your breath in and out, and in your mind's eye, visualise a nurturing and safe place for yourself, such as your favourite place in Nature. If visualising images is not easy for you, you might wish to focus on feeling relaxed and spacious. Or notice the areas of the body which may be holding tension and give yourself instructions to relax and soften the body. What is essential is that you do what works for you.

When you give the mind a job, it will work with you to aid your meditation. For example, counting the breath can help distract the mind and the counting will eventually fall away naturally. You can also practise focusing on the space between the in-breath and the out-breath. This helps to be in the present moment and enables the mind to become still as it expands into a more spacious awareness.

When thoughts come in, as they will, either imagine putting them to one side or invite the persistent thoughts 'in' as if opening the door and welcoming them as guests. In this way, miraculously, thoughts are free to come and go and often leave spontaneously. It is the struggle to push unwanted thoughts away (or to judge them as wrong) that gives them power.

Acknowledging, accepting and allowing so-called negative thoughts and feelings will lead to a suspension of judgement. Witnessing the thoughts and focusing on the space behind them helps guide the mind to a thought-free place.

Let go of any expectations or experiences from the past and remain in the present moment. Similarly, if emotions arise, allow yourself to feel them; in this way, they will dissipate or disappear altogether. Smiling will release endorphins or even imagining an inner smile will enhance the whole experience, aid relaxation and promote a sense of calm and peace. We live in a world of energy and to connect with or plug into this energy is as important as breathing.

It might be a good idea to take a few moments to release physical tension. I love to use a shaking technique such as Ecstatic Awakening Dance or bounce on my trampoline just before my practice. In Ecstatic Awakening Dance the idea is to dance with eyes closed which enables more freedom to move with the music without feeling inhibited or self-conscious. This process releases stuck energies in the body and awakens the life force and natural vitality. Generally, music is used without lyrics to avoid the mind becoming engaged with the words.

Seven Steps to a Deeper Meditation

- Find or create a sacred space in your external and internal environment
- Occupy and expand into the space between the in-breath and the out-breath
- Connect to the space behind the thoughts
- Upright and relaxed position allows the energy to flow
- Smile inwardly with the whole body
- Open into the energy inside and outside the body
- Now expand into the awareness in the present moment

Some of the above are widely used suggestions for adopting a good posture and creating a conducive environment for a meditation practice, while other points are elements that may need a little more practice. With practice and sometimes over a period of time often a deeper experience follows of what is called present moment awareness.

Sing Angel Sing

Sing Angel sing
the language of the soul
You sing beyond the words
Only mind
can comprehend.

Sing Angel sing
Stronger than before
Sing with all your heart
of joy and sadness
the hunger
and the pain
Sing of freedom
and nothing left
to lose.

Sing darling Angel
of this love you keep
Waken up the world
with this longing
Unable now
to sleep.

Sing wondrous child
of fun and laughter
Mountains climbed
so steep.

Sing of all your passions
running free and wild
Sing from your
wanderings
of where you came from
and who you
came to be.

Sing and awaken
everyone in me.



Sing Angel Sing was the first poem written at the end of my first year of training with The Journey. It emerged during a residential Journey seminar following a conversation over lunch with a fellow participant from Sweden. When I asked what she did for a living I was excited to hear that she was a singer. As she explained where I could get hold of her CDs, I candidly asked why I would want to hear her voice on a CD when she was sitting in front of me. She graciously offered to sing for the group and when she did it was a joyful and meaningful experience. My body reacted to her voice in a way that seemed strange at that time because, even though I didn't understand the words being sung, the vibrations of the music and her energy moved me to tears of joy. The words of the poem arose spontaneously that night at about three in the morning; it was as if something would not allow me to sleep until the words that were flooding through my mind were written down.

The poem is a reminder that we all have our own song to sing, whatever form it may take. It calls for the expression of all aspects of ourselves, including all the emotions that move through us. When we welcome any emotion such as sadness, grief or pain, allow it to move through the body, realise its impermanence and release it, we are then able to connect with ourselves as a whole, with the richness of life and with the beautiful childlike qualities within us that seem to get suppressed as we *learn to grow up*.

Guidelines to Singing Your Song

Reflect back on what made your heart sing as a child.

Close your eyes. Practice taking yourself, in your mind's eye, to a place of tranquillity that inspired you or you felt safe in as a child: for example, a beach, waterfall or special garden. You might imagine yourself walking in the countryside, bringing your attention to birdsong, or listening a waterfall as the water cascades over the smooth rocks, feeling the cool spray on your skin, taking in the smell of dampness of the moss-covered stones and fallen logs at the side of the pool, immersing in your own energy as you watch the swirling eddies. This can help you to relax by being present in the experience. At times of stress it can offer a reconnection to a sense of peace in the world.

Create a habit of doing something wild and carefree each day, such as dancing or singing to your favourite music; Try something completely new that takes you out of your comfort zone and notice what happens. Losing yourself in books that stirred your emotions as a child can feel strangely comforting.

If emotions such as sadness, irritation or even anger arise, allow yourself to be with them. Notice any tendency to judge, ignore or use distracting strategies. Maybe ask yourself, "What is this feeling?" "Where do I feel it?" "What message does it have for me?" When we learn to listen to our emotions, it's as though our inner child feels heard.

Take time to sit and look out of a window, daydream or gaze at the moon, losing yourself in watching the clouds drifting across, or observing the beautiful colours of the aura around it. Notice if this changes your perspective on what is and what is not important. Actively aim to intensify any sense of contentment, spaciousness or being with what is in the moment.

The ability to look at a child and see angelic qualities in them, for example, when they are sleeping, seeing the contentment and peace in their face can warm even the hardest of hearts. What if we could notice these beautiful traits within ourselves at any moment in time and be aware of how our perspective changes?

Seven Steps to Singing Your Song

- **S**ing, dance and be playful
- **I**ndulge in one thing you loved to do or be as a child
- **N**otice how you feel when you go to your place of tranquillity
- **G**row the feel-good feelings inside your body
- **I**nvite your angel or inner child to be in charge for a portion of the day
- **N**urture yourself with soothing or evocative music
- **G**aze at the moon

These playful mnemonics offer an insight into what has helped me and are suggestions only and open to being adapted to each individual who may wish to reflect, journal and journey further by allowing their own inspiration and inner guidance to take them on their own path. Even practicing this for just 10 minutes a day can make a huge difference in our lives.

Seeking and Journeying

Dying for Love

Realisation now as I
stand close to you
All this longing
for your love still
while your limbs
are all dead.

*“Come love be with me and share
all this pain
Nothing to lose
and everything to gain.”*

How can I be with you
with all this
attachment
and strain.

What needs to
be done
What
can be said
While I project
and need
your love
While you die
alone in this bed.

Leaving
possibilities of
our future
unread.



Imagine this scene: a woman and a man embracing, music playing, moonlight reflecting on a calm sea. Her head is resting on a strong shoulder; she feels held, safe and loved; her eyes are closed and everyone around them seems to have disappeared. She feels sensations of love flooding through her whole body and nothing else matters. Not her life a week ago: her other man seems like a distant memory of what she had called home. All that matters in the moment is connecting and melting into the love she feels. Fast-forward a day or two. They are sitting on a café terrace overlooking a lagoon with the sunshine glinting on the still water. Her thoughts and attention, though, are on the memory of that magical night and a wanting to re-create those feelings. Conversation seems pointless to her even if they did speak the same language. He makes his excuses and indicates that he will return soon. Many hours later, still no sign. Midnight comes and goes until news of a car accident reaches her; she finds herself at his bedside clutching a hand he is unable to move and all she can think of is the need of the love she felt, from him, whose life is hanging by a thread.

Searching

Always forever
searching
for this love
to impart
Reaching
grasping
at this
all-elusive.

When
where
in whom
may I find it
Forever
tearing me
apart.

What ignorance
veils through
the mind's
delusion?
This that is endless
Lies deep
within
my
own
heart.

Come sit a while
amidst the silence
and honour
Grace
Which is
boundless
infinite
in time
and
space.

Searching contrasts the futility of grasping and seeking love in others to the boundless infinity that we gain when we access the love that lies within each one of us. I used to think that love could only be found in someone else, but I came to realise that such thoughts resulted in losing connection or separating myself from my true essence. From the third verse, something shifts when the mind becomes aware of its own ignorance.

Searching for a Soulmate

Love
Where
can I find it
Where can it be
I look for it in you
and fail to find it
in me.

There is so much longing
Many years
of searching
Where is this to be found.

Now
something
arising
in this space
between us
What is real
amid the mind's
confusion
What 'ifs'
and 'maybes'
mislead.

You hold me lightly
in your tender
embrace and
help me to feel
the one and the same.

Slowly the bars
of disgrace
anger
and shame
All melt away
pain after pain.

The love held
so deeply
within

This love
will forever
remain.

Searching for a Soulmate alludes to my journey towards being able to experience the boundless love that radiates from within without falling into the trap of attaching this infinite

emotion to another person; an attachment that brings with it expectations that most probably will not be fulfilled. On one occasion when I imagined I had fallen in love and expressed my feelings to the other, he replied with great compassion, "This love is real: we are not."

Travelling

This road
often travelled
By foot car or bike
Is a journey
chosen
in stillness
Frequented
any time
I like.

An escape from
so-called reality
A blur wanting to
scream.

Resistance is gone
calling
now
Merging
being
indescribable
sublime.

Early one morning, I escaped into nature just before going to work. Even though I was fairly pleased at stealing a moment for myself, I suddenly felt a surge of suppressed emotions, along with a silent scream, rising from the depths of my being. I allowed my body to do what it needed to do and the subsequent release of stored emotions led me to drop into what the poem describes as a sublime place within.

Sadness

This perpetual sadness
and grieving for
something
seemingly lost
What is the searching
and what does it cost.

What does this give me
Feeling melancholy and blue
What is seen in the
reflection of you.

Where is the comfort
in seeking the
same in another
Yet never
knowing or
diving into the cave
of what's true.



Standing on the Edge

Tiredness
Restlessness
What to do?
Eyes so heavy now
Willing to die
Dead to the world
Alone in my head.

Now freedom
is here
in aloneness
Freedom
to be with those
of a like mind
Searching for
the spiritual to find
Remaining alone
standing on the edge.

Standing alone on the edge
of the world sea and sky
The world is an oyster and
where do I fly?

Fly to the heart
to the centre of the soul
Dying in love while
alone in this bed.



Standing on the Edge highlights my tendency to run away from my relationships, difficult emotions and everyday life. It was written at a time when I escaped to stay with a friend I had met in a spiritual community, believing that I would find the connection I searched for with a like-minded soul. Strangely enough, familiar issues travelled with me. Feelings of aloneness held since childhood and a sense of feeling on the edge and not really being part of anything remained strong within me despite the change in environment. Yet again, I was searching and grasping for something outside of myself.

It was only when I put my head on the pillow in a moment of exhaustion and before falling asleep that a sense of willingness to let go and allow the death of everything I was holding on to flooded over me. Suddenly, all existing thoughts and concepts of what I regarded as being spiritual seemed to dissolve. After this experience, my perspective of ordinary life at home began to change. I felt more able to appreciate the simple and mundane things in my life, to notice and release the need to feel unique or special.

Guidelines to Longing

I have replaced the word 'seeking' for 'longing' because for me it better describes the underlying feeling which resonates internally, rather than seeking which looks more like grasping at something outside of myself. As described in the poem 'Searching', this is elusive. The longing I believe we have for love comes from feeling disconnected to our true source and can only be fully experienced when we re-connect to this within ourselves. For me, I had to discover the hard way that this longing could not be fulfilled totally through another person, even though it was necessary to learn that there were individuals out there who could love unconditionally. Each poem in this section takes the reader on a journey through the various pitfalls we can all make along our individual paths, to discovering the love at the core of our being which, with practice, we can stretch infinitely all around us.

Seven Steps to Longing

- Look inside for what you yearn or long for
- Observe how this feels internally
- Naturally allow the longing to grow inside and outside of your being
- Gracefully expand into this awareness
- Ignite the flame of longing with each breath you take
- Nourish this feeling
- Gift this experience through your actions

Stepping from a place of searching for love from others to connecting to our innate source feels more liberating and empowering thus enabling us to let go of the frustration and disappointments of expecting it from somewhere else.

Connection

Love

This love it awakens through sleep
It's held in this heart and trembles
so deep.

This love in this heart
Beating as one
Where are we going
Where are we from.

There is longing, it's true
To remain in this love and
be right next to you.

This heart knows no boundaries of
so-called time and space.

From the awareness of an eagle
above mountains it soars
Across the plains from the strength
of a lion it roars.

To the depths of the ocean and the
Dolphins that play
it sings us this song
With the freedom of a butterfly
Oh! how I long.

Come sit in this love
Awakening through me
Loving and being for humanity.

As I reflect on the words of this poem, I realise that it helped me to get a glimpse of the depths of love that the heart is capable of feeling and understand that I can reconnect with that love while being on my own, without the need to attach the feeling to someone else.

The qualities of the creatures in the poem allowed me to experience the liberation of soaring like an eagle, having the ability to look down at my life from a higher perspective. The sense of being a free-spirited dolphin, being at one with my environment and having fun. Sensing the lightness of imagining myself as a butterfly, being able to flit from place to place with ease.

Guidelines to Connecting to Love

Connect to the love you feel inside, know that the love you seek is the essence of your being, this is all there is and practice letting go of grasping for it outside.

Connecting to love sounds like a simple thing, yet it has been one of my biggest challenges. I was deeply affected by unhealthy and abusive relationships during my childhood and I built barriers as a way of protecting myself from being hurt. These walls, in turn, shut down my ability to give and receive love.

In my experience, it takes time to let go of blocks, release the hurt and learn to trust enough to let love in, even from my own self. I remember a counselling session when the counsellor invited me to say to myself, "I love you." I felt physically unable to say these simple words and sobbed as if my heart would break, but it was one of many breakthroughs for me. I highly recommend the practice of saying to yourself, "I love you," on a regular basis. If this feels like too much of a stretch then find something you do love and name that, for example "I love my garden" or "I love my grandchild." Perhaps it could be possible to acknowledge and love the parts of you that may feel unlovable and offer it the compassion it longs for. Imagine cradling those parts such as anger or even cancer cells and flooding them with love, the way in which you would love a child.

There might be emotions and old traumas that need to be released or memories that might need to be expressed, let go and forgiven in order to connect to love. The section on relationships explores the topics of letting go and forgiveness. I highly recommend that you seek expert help to deal with deep-seated trauma or abuse.

Seven Steps to Connecting to Love

- Connect to a time, person or instance of feeling love
- Open to a love for yourself or others that goes beyond unhealthy behaviours
- Notice the inner longing and reconnect to the source of this love
- Nurture the feeling of love and allow it to flood your whole being
- Expand the love inside and outside, connecting to universal love
- Create an image in your mind of yourself as ie: a butterfly; connect with its qualities and allow the sensations to wash over you
- Then ask yourself, "Who Am I?" and allow the answer to spontaneously arise from within. Repeat the question a few times and be present to the feelings inside

Although the above are described as steps it is more of an introspection and internal process of diving into the depths of our own divine love. For some, at times this may happen easily and

spontaneously and at other times it may prove to be unattainable. The secret is let go of trying to make it anything other than it is, to have no expectations of what you think love should look like.

Being in Love

Being in love
Is it in you or
is it in me.

How long to wait
When will I know
Is this feeling
all part of a show.

What is love
Who is real
Mind questions
Finding no answers
all seems surreal.

Is this an illusion and
is anyone there
What if no one actually
cared.

Being in love has nowhere to go
Just expanding the heart
and allowing it to grow.

Love, take my hand and
lead me through this
To eternity and infinite bliss.



This poem was written during a retreat where, once again, I was noticing my habit of attaching a feeling of being in love onto someone else. As I witnessed my behaviour and questioned the pattern, an awareness that was beyond personal love took over. This realisation enabled a transition from a confused and contracted state of mind to an expansive and all-encompassing sense of love and bliss.

The tendency to look for love in another can be very strong and I have learnt from bitter experience that when this becomes obsessive or needy it drives away the love I seek. When I realised that seeking love elsewhere is an illusion, I was able to tap into a divine love that is our natural state and feels more real and comes with no conditions attached.

Guidelines to Being in Love

Know that love is in each and every one of us. We have to take responsibility for being in love with ourselves, as no one else can do it for us.

Expanding our awareness to see love everywhere and in everything then inviting an expansion of love within our heart, trusting and allowing will ultimately lead to a deeper connection to love.

Seven Steps to Being in Love

- **Be** with your feelings, whatever they are, allowing them to arise and subside
- **Expand** awareness to go beyond all thoughts, feelings or judgements
- **Invite** all thoughts to come in and allow them to fall away naturally
- **Notice** any kind of not knowing or nowhere space
- **Gently** fall into a sense of love
- **Imagine** the feeling sparked by the words “Love, take me by the hand”
- **Now** adopt a regular practice and notice the benefits

I have found connecting with nature is one of the ways that brings me to a sense of love within. We are all individuals and have our own ways of experiencing ‘*being in love*’ - embrace it.

Fall in Love with Love

Just be love
in love with love.

Love is all
there is
to it all.

Nothing more
Nothing less
Just this.

This is truth
pure and
simple.

Live it
Be it
See it.

Speak from truth
From love
Fall in
love with
love.

The words of *Fall in Love with Love* followed after I experienced falling quite spontaneously into an inner love, without trying, searching, grasping or anything else I had attempted before. It was a revelation for me and since then I have noticed that my relationships have naturally become more loving.

Falling in love is a direct experience we are all capable of choosing to feel and its flavours are unique to each one of us. My prayer is that these words will effortlessly guide you to the deepest truth of love in its simplest and most profound form.

Embracing Your Journey to Love

Gillian Routledge shares many of the approaches from this book through her work with people in one to one sessions, group workshops and courses. Find out more by visiting her website:

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