

CHAPTER ONE



TURNING INWARD

It is rewarding to find someone whom you like, but it is essential to like yourself. It is quickening to recognize that someone is a good and decent human being, but it is indispensable to view yourself as acceptable. It is a delight to discover people who are worthy of respect and admiration and love, but it is vital to believe yourself deserving of these things. For you cannot live in someone else. You cannot find yourself in someone else. You cannot be given a life by someone else. Of all the people you will know in a lifetime, you are the only one you will never leave nor lose. To the question of your life, you are the only answer. To the problems of life, you are the only solution.

— JO COUDERT¹

Reading these words in 1978, I had a Magic Eye experience. I blinked, reread them, saw myself getting to know the real “me,” and thought, *What an odd concept. What good could possibly come from having a relationship with myself?* To my mind at age twenty-seven, this sounded suspect and selfish. Influential people

in my southern provincial hometown flashed before my eyes. Did my beloved music teacher know herself? What about the eloquent minister at my church—did he know himself?

Society as I knew it was changing. Women were gathering in meeting places throughout the country, talking about roles, relationships, careers, mothering, their bodies. Nearly all my women friends were intent on sculpting lives different from their mothers'. Many of our husbands were skeptical. Some were hostile. Most kept their thoughts to themselves.

Accustomed to living from the outside in, I identified with the prosperous neighborhood I lived in, my husband's successful business, our standing in the community, and our material wealth. As for my inner world, I expected it to hum along; I'd learned to hold it together no matter what, quickly patching up whatever didn't look good. Well trained in fixing things, I'd become proficient at keeping personal matters under control and running smoothly. So Jo Coudert's words came as a shock. But I liked the picture they inspired, and there awakened within me a gnawing desire to stop obsessing over appearances and start exploring my life from the inside out—getting in touch with my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, expectations, and fears.

Excited and curiously shy, I turned my attention inward to learn how I "ticked." Startled at times by a myriad of anxieties, insecurities, and self-abasing opinions I never knew I had, I would soften my gaze and catch a glimmer of the picture hidden beyond these perceptions. Inadvertently, I launched a seismic shift in my worldview, and with it, a slowly dawning realization that the more my picture of reality expanded, the easier it was to implement change in my life.

GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF

Today, while it is more socially acceptable to acknowledge our inner terrain, the thought of actually entering it can be just as daunting. For example, my clients never plan to set foot in this

territory; rather, they have come up against an obstacle resisting all the gadgets and adhesives at their disposal, and they want help “fixing” their lives. “I’m here because my relationship’s coming apart,” they will say, or “I want my career decisions mapped out,” or “Help me get my partner (spouse, child) back on course,” or “I need my body healed, my mind quieted, my fears vanquished.”

“What a great opportunity to get to know who you are,” I explain gently. “Let’s explore your thoughts, feelings, past conditioning, dreams, even the dark places inside, and find out what you’re looking for.” I pause for feedback.

Some clients smile politely and excuse themselves, never to return. Others ask questions but remain skeptical. Some toy with the idea of turning inward as if fumbling with a box of Cracker Jacks, wondering, *Will the prize inside be worth it?* If their eyes brim with tears and an *aha!* rises from somewhere deep inside, we smile at each other in recognition. Here the journey begins.

But because the inner landscape is one of our last frontiers, doubts quickly surface. *What on earth supports me in looking within? I never learned how to take stock of myself—what if I run into something I can’t handle?* People whose loved ones insist that too much introspection is a bad thing soon want to know how to make it a good thing. Still, the adventure seems scary, even dangerous.

At this point, I often recount a two-week rafting trip I took after venturing inward. That summer, I explain, I set off for the Grand Canyon with plans to descend into its innermost recesses and raft the Colorado River. But after visiting the canyon’s South Rim and hiking valiantly to the bottom and up again, the thought of rafting through some of the fiercest white water in the Northern Hemisphere began pushing my comfort zone. A voice inside told me the experience would be incredible. Another voice said I was out of my mind—after all, I had to sign a waiver of release in case I didn’t make it out alive!

The first morning, the river guides described the dangers, telling our group how to take care of ourselves and one another. They displayed maps showing where we would encounter the

white water. Every morning we were briefed on what the day would bring. In some places we could get out of the boats, walk along the shore, and look at the rapids ahead before charting our course. As soon as I realized I was in capable hands, all my fears but one evaporated. The remaining terror—navigating the white water—was something I overcame only by securing my position in the boat and holding on for life.

Journeying inward to get to know who you are is a similar adventure. You will most likely embark with varying degrees of trepidation. While plumbing the twists and turns of the unknown, you'll release these fears. At last you'll meet your hidden self and discover that, perhaps much to your surprise, there is nothing to fix, for nothing is broken. You'll see that your true self is quite whole and capable of dealing with all sorts of difficulties. Using its divine energy to manifest what you most desire, you can then begin constructing a more satisfying life.

GEARING UP

To gear up for the journey inward, you will need three items: a general map of the terrain, a good light, and a competent guide. The terrain you will be exploring is your current worldview—the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, expectations, and fears you harbor based on everything you have experienced until now. Rather than judge any component of your worldview, you will simply observe it. Awareness alone may prompt you to release a perception that no longer serves you. If awareness fails to dissolve it, you can count on a truer perception taking its place the moment you have achieved an expanded sense of who you are.

As for a light, your best illumination will come from your intention to seek the highest truth that can be revealed at that time. Its beam will help you venture beyond the boundaries you are presently accustomed to. The human ego, invested in preserving the “story” of our lives, puts up a fuss when challenged with such new information. But it flees from the bright glow pointing the way to clarity and truth.

Finally, you must enlist a competent guide. You will want to choose carefully from among the many that present you with information. Good guides do not coerce, manipulate, overpower, or proclaim their truth as “the only way.” Instead, they continually support you, uplift you, refuse to judge you, and encourage you to confirm all information for yourself. Some guides will approach you from the outside, such as books of all sorts and instructors of one discipline or another. Inside, you have an ever-present guide—a consciousness that urges you on to become who you really are. You can find its voice by working with the dialogues in this book, by asking questions of the wind and other forces of nature, or by inquiring silently or aloud in the shower. If a reply expands your perception of reality, reveals a possibility worth considering, or prompts you to increase your loving toward yourself and others, you can trust it is coming from your inner guide.

With map in hand, your bright light shining, and a reliable guide a breath away, you are equipped to turn safely inward on your adventure. Prepare to unburden yourself of numerous misconceptions and to be pleasantly surprised. Around each bend, a place inside you will open up while another will relax deeply, perhaps for the first time.