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## **Inward Bound**

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*“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”* This quote from Thoreau’s life on Walden Pond was the impetus for my own personal journey inward, and has laid the foundation for my life and my life’s work: to live a life well lived.

For many years I had been feeling that something was not quite right. I was not living the life I was meant to live. I was experiencing dis-ease within my body, my mind and heart. It was an inner nudging requiring my attention. My body was letting me know that I was not living in alignment with who I was, and in fact I was living a life unexpressed. Staying on this same trajectory I would

come to the end of my life to “*discover that I had not lived.*” Pay attention, it said. Your life is calling you.

Taking an honest inventory of myself and my life, I discovered, I was indeed lost. Somewhere along the way I had disconnected from my own truth. My inner and outer worlds were not aligned. And so I found myself standing in the middle of a life I did not recognize myself in.

I was on the edge. The edge of change.

Change is initiated in two ways: from an external circumstance beyond our control such as a death, divorce, job loss, empty nest etc., where we must internally re-orient ourselves to our new external reality, or it is initiated from an internal prompting, signaling that it is time, for the evolution of ourselves, to make a change.

My dis-ease was signaling that I was on the threshold of changing my life and I would need to venture from the known to the unknown. I needed to take my own solitary journey into the wilderness, relying on my own inner guidance. With no roadmap, I began my journey of transition through to transformation. I was Inward Bound.

I began to study transitions to understand the process that I was in, and how writing through my transition would help me to navigate my inner thoughts, feelings and emotions associated with making the necessary changes to create the life I desired. Writing in my journal provided me with a safe space to unravel and view the raw data of my life in order to gain clarity and deepen my understanding of who I am and what was being asked of me.

Whether we are making a change to ourselves, our lives, our careers, having a framework for transitions allows us to ground ourselves in a process when we feel lost in the wilderness. As we explore ourselves through journaling, we are able to find deeper meaning to the changes we are going through. And as we record our transitions it allows us to reflect on the successes we have had in the past and to know that each ending has brought us an opportunity for personal growth.

There are many factors that influence our ability to successfully make a change: our age and stage of life, state of health, psychological resources, optimism,

commitment, values, spirituality and resiliency. We also need to have a good support system in place through family, friends, as well as professional resources when needed.

Everyone experiences stress in their lives, how we cope with these stresses has a direct correlation to how we will experience the pain and uncertainty of the transition process.

Through journaling it is important to take inventory of the scope of the change in front of us, our own coping abilities, and the support available to us, and to begin to put some strategies in place to help us successfully navigate this change.

When a change is initiated, it begins with an *ending* of something. In the process of writing we begin to name what is ending and as we explore deeper, there may be many endings within an initiated ending that needs to be worked through. We begin by letting go of our known reality, creating space for the new to emerge.

In between the old reality and the new, we find ourselves in the wilderness. Having left the known, but not having yet stepped into our new reality, this in-between time holds the creative chaos through which our clarity will emerge.

The internal landscape of change covers a wide terrain of emotions. It is important for us to have support and encouragement at this most vulnerable time. We are in the darkness, where we are re-orienting and preparing ourselves for our new reality. It can be a fearful time and a creative time as we are immersed in the creation/creative process where all possibilities exist.

So how do we move from *here* to *there*, when we don't know what *there* looks like yet? We begin with exploring the question who am I? When we gain a deep understanding and appreciation of who we are, our choices become clearer.

We begin by exploring our thoughts, perceptions, desires, values and beliefs that operate under the surface of our everyday lives. We observe our thinking that has led to the choices we have made that have brought us to this moment in time.

Awareness is essential to making a change. We must be aware of our thoughts, feelings and patterns to be able to catch them when they occur and replace them with a new thought, generating a new pattern and a new feeling, creating a new choice.

Journaling is a great tool to see what is on our mind. It provides perspective as we lay ourselves out on the page. It is the door to the interior world where we can make visible what lies beneath the surface.

This is the inner work: to observe ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses and to unlearn our learned behavior and patterns that no longer serve us. This is the challenge, this is where we need support, because we are comfortable in the known, even when it feels uncomfortable. Most people do not make a change until the fear of staying the same outweighs the fear of changing.

When we write in our journal we can give a voice to our fears allowing the space to work through them in order to take our next steps forward.

While in the wilderness we are to face into the darkness of ourselves, of our fears and live there for a while. We navigate our days blindly, and learn to trust in a process greater than ourselves. And as we open ourselves up and become still within the unknown, we are emitting a signal for creativity that we are now a space for its work.

This is a time of trying on new realities, and new ideas to see what fits for us. There is a creative energy, looking for direction, focus, expression. It is looking to be birthed into the physical world through us. Our job is to create the space for this birth. To remain open, and receptive to the ideas that come to us.

Our new reality may not be in focus yet, but we can be committed and trust that the process of change that we are in is for our higher purpose and will be of benefit to ourselves and to others. We can begin to pay close attention to the people and opportunities that come to us, as well as paying attention to what lights us up inside.

Every single choice we encounter, needs to be held up against the change we want to make. Will this choice move me closer or farther away from my desired outcome? We need to ask ourselves this each day, sometimes each moment. Will eating this particular food hurt my body? Will it bring me closer to my

desired state of health or farther away? Will buying this item bring me closer or farther away from my desired state of wealth? Will these thoughts bring me closer or farther away from my desired state of wellness?

Living with mindfulness, means that we have to be fully awake in our life. We must pay attention to the details, for the changes we wish to make are held within the details of our everyday life, our everyday choices.

We will be tested and challenged along the way to show us the level of our commitment to our desired outcome. Change does not happen in a straight line, with one decision to change and then everything falls into place. The *decision* is the first step, a big step, now begins the work of making each choice align with that decision. This is why having a support system and effective tools in place is crucial for lasting change.

Our *intention* needs to be harnessed with the *desire*, the *discipline* and the *commitment* to make the changes that we desire. When our body, mind and heart are engaged in the process, it is an *action* in the manifestation of the change we desire.

If thoughts are things, and we create our reality by our thoughts and intention, writing captures the thought to be made manifest in the physical world. It starts with a thought, so observe your thoughts, and write them down to see what you are thinking.

As we gain more clarity about ourselves, our vision will become clearer.

Vision + intentional thought + action = manifestation. We need to become crystal clear on what it is we want to manifest, and formulate our plan.

Harness your desire with vision, with commitment, with belief, with action, being mindful of the roadblocks along the way.

What blocks us from change? Why is it so hard to change? Why do we do the things we don't want to do and don't do the things we need to do? We are creatures of habit. Our same thoughts lead to the same actions which lead to the same outcomes. We must be willing to step outside of our comfort zone in order to grow into a new reality. This requires new thoughts generating new feelings, along with new actions.

It is in the repetition as well as the engagement on all levels. Our whole selves, our mind, our body, and our heart have to be in alignment, in order to be integrated into the new reality. The mind cannot do it alone.

As we move towards our new reality, we must move towards those things that make us come alive inside. As we listen to the wisdom of our body, we will know the choices that are best for us. There will be a resonating with outer experience and inner purpose.

When we are in alignment, we are nourished from the inside out. We feel connected to our core, and our choices grow organically from this place.

For what flower can thrive and blossom when it is not planted in the proper soil, receiving its natural soul/soil food, where it can receive the life force organic and specific to its fullest potential?

Changing my life meant, changing the choices, changing the experiences, stepping out from the edge. Moving beyond the borders of my perceived, limited self. I had to seek out the healthy soil in order to grow and blossom.

For me, this entailed completely uprooting myself from my life. I sold my home, I let go of my material possessions, and did my own version of going off into the woods both internally and externally.

I needed to unravel myself from a prescribed version of what success looked like, to come to know the truth of who I am, in order to achieve inner and outer alignment to be successful. It is not attached to a salary or to square footage or any external measurement, rather it is measured in the authenticity that I can bring to each moment, living in the fullness of my own truth.

I had to face all of my fears, and live in the darkness of the unknown. To feel my way through. Was I scared? Absolutely, the fear was paralyzing at times. But I had to learn to be comfortable within the uncomfortable.

My instinct was to relieve the tension by taking a step back to the known. But I came to realize that when I felt the fear, it was a good sign. It was a sign that I was stepping out of my comfort zone, my pattern, my

road fully travelled. This road was so traveled it was etched into my brain, so stepping off of this path felt like death.

But I knew that this was the only way for me to grow, the only way for me to not be the same person over and over again every day.

I was removed from all the familiar roles I had, with no distractions. I had myself, my journal, and I had support in place for those dark times when the fear seemed to be taking over.

I tethered myself to my writing, and trusting in the process, knowing that I could live no other way than from the heart of who I am. But first, I had to discover who that was.

As I step into my new reality, I read through my journals where I have recorded the unfolding of my story, my truth. Using the contemplative tool of writing, I have been able to successfully write through to a brand new chapter in my life. A chapter that now reflects my true nature.

Within the pages of my journal which hold my most vulnerable, beautiful, painful and precious moments, I am able to look back and see the twists and turns, the ups and downs of the journey through transition. I am able to see how even though at times I could not see the path in front of me, I was indeed being led by an inner intuition and a higher knowing and as I trusted and believed in the process I was in, and as I devoted myself to and embraced the process of change, I would come through the other side.

In using the contemplative tools of writing, awareness, and mindfulness I was able to allow my true nature to emerge. I was able to feel a sense of connectedness and belonging to myself and to life.

As Thoreau needed to remove himself, in order to come to know himself, I needed to remove myself from my patterned story. In doing this, I was able to begin my new chapter with new awareness, creating my new story, my new life.

I now assist seekers on the path to finding their true north. To come alongside, to encourage, support and guide their journey through the wilderness, with pen and paper in hand, their journey to the heart, their journey, inward bound.