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Preface

I could have called this e-book:

Love Your Inner Critics, But Don't Invite them into Your Bed Head.

I decided against that title, as you can see. But I bring it up because doubt has been an intimate companion in my life's journey—to say the least.

I could write volumes, digital pages galore on the topic of doubt and our inner critics, rambling on about doubt's disguises, bravado, abuse and about how, at the core, Doubt is a mush.

I tell you this to let you know that my e-book FROM DOUBT TO FREEDOM is a hint of more to come—a larger project, which may be, in fact, to love the hell out of doubt, literally and figuratively.

In the meantime, enjoy our whirl with doubt in the coming pages. The dance goes on and we are all in it together. Nice when we can reach our hands to each other at those dizzy moments.

Ani Tuzman
Massachusetts, USA
July 2013
Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.

When the wind lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase, each other
doesn’t make any sense.

Rumi
Introduction

*(the version rejected by inner critics)*

One of my greatest challenges in writing has always been having too many ideas.

I sit to write and there are so many possible ways to start. It's as if I'm under a peach tree whose fruit is blushing ripe and I want to reach in more directions than I have arms to pluck this delicious one and that. Meanwhile, soft fuzzy orbs the size of tennis balls are falling from the tree on their own, clunking me on the head, while I'm figuring out how to arrange them, my ideas, one behind the other in tidy sentences, stacked into tidy paragraphs. I can't put the ideas in the "right" order fast enough, can't line them up into straight lines of obedient little letters marching in an orderly fashion across a page.

But if I don't do it right, the inner critics insist, I will go round in circles, will confuse instead of elucidate, might even give myself and others a headache. I feel more like a juggler than a writer.

This overwhelm happens all the time, especially when there are a lot of ideas and words simultaneously pushing their way through the floodgates (to mix metaphors). That's how it feels right now writing to you about those notorious inner critics who tend to hang out as close as my shadow.

There is just so much to share about this loyal companion.

I have known doubt intimately. I know doubt's armpits and doubt's pitfalls. Doubt has seduced me, deluded me, tired me out, left me down for the count on the floor of our boxing ring and when I was there, cooed lies into my ears. Doubt and I have been duking it out for decades.
One thing I can tell you for starters: fighting with doubt doesn’t work.

Thinking we can outsmart doubt is futile. It doesn’t work to attack the critics when they are attacking us is because to fight inner doubt is to fight ourselves. Doubt has become part of us. Rejecting any part of us, no matter how unlikeable can’t heal or free us, because it doesn’t support wholeness. The only way out is in: we get to greet doubt (with our boxing gloves off so we don’t hurt ourselves) and with our hearts open.

Because we can love doubt. And no, I’m not crazy. Trust me. I’m a veteran. Besides, what have you got to lose but a dysfunctional relationship with doubt?

And what have you got to gain? The world— which includes the joy, freedom and fulfillment of writing the way only you can write. Now, doubt may have just whispered “Yeah, right” or some other disparaging remark about valuing the way only you can write or in reply to putting writing and joy in the same sentence. But that’s because doubt is afraid.

How can such a self-assured force that claims to have the facts and that presents them so authoritatively—when not whining—be afraid?

Doubt doesn’t know that writing and joy can co-exist not only in the same sentence, but also in the same life. Your life.

The inner critics have been trained to see the small picture, although they will deny this and insist they know The Truth, aka Reality. Because you don’t know the truth and they do, they must protect you.

Good news: you can retrain doubt.

And doubt transformed is rocket fuel.
The poet Rumi writes:

*Beyond any ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field, I’ll meet you there.*

That field—an inner place—is beyond the reach of doubt and the inner critics. You can’t pin it on any paper or digital map, but you can find your way there, because it’s home.

Call it the heart, the soul, the inner, higher or deeper Self, however you describe that place, when you write, when you live from that place, everything changes. Where there was constriction, there is flow. Where there was discouragement, inspiration shows up, guiding you to express what’s within you.

Doesn’t mean there is no tension in that field Rumi describes, that there is no weather. Skies get overcast. But the tension is not the strain and drain of inner battle with oneself; the tension is creative. As a storm cleanses the air, creative turmoil crystallizes fine writing. This is not the same kind of effort as trying to punch your way out of a paper bag every time some inner critic whacks you one (ever so helpfully for your own good.)

How much more fun to write in an expansive field than to try to create cooped up in your head with a repetitive committee of all knowing inner critics.

Some final words before you meet, greet, and transform doubt of the inner critics:

No matter how defeated you’ve felt, no matter how defeating the arguments hurled by doubt, you are stronger than your doubts. Because love is stronger.
The Voices of Doubt

There are lots of them—those voices on autoplay.

We are going to amplify the nastiest right now—the ones that ambush you, those that can make you double over, or, at least, that stop in your tracks and get waylaid in the thickets of the past and your mind.

The point to bringing on the voices right now, is not to muck around in pain or “poor me,” nor is it to strike a defensive karate pose. The point is rather to shine a light into the dark corners. Bringing light to darkness is always a good thing.

So let’s go ahead and get in touch with the most sabotaging inner messages. Just for fun.

Perhaps you don’t need to turn up the volume because they are talking loud enough. (*I hear quite clearly the yakking warning me of the perils of repetition, misplaced commas and other writing treacheries.*)
Your critics may be looking over your shoulder, doing their thing, which will make it easier to catch their remarks in the butterfly net of your mind. Or if you aren’t feeling in touch with their shenanigans, scan a bit. Call them out of hiding.

I’ll set the scene a bit in case it helps...

You’re writing or you’re thinking of sharing what you’ve written or you’re wishing you could get yourself to write in the first place...and BAM, a blow is delivered, stopping you in your tracks. It’s for your own good, of course.

The blow might come as a very reasonable thought, constructive even. Polite. You might be detoured by a wagging finger warning that you’re doing it wrong. Questions slither like serpents into your attempt at the Eden of writing: Who do you think you are anyway? Who are you kidding? Who is going to want to read this anyway?

To compare you and your writing (or your lack of writing) to more successful writers is another of doubt’s prime tactics.

Accusations pose as lifesavers: If you’re not careful, you might wind up a laughing-stock or _______ (fill in the blank).

Dubious conclusions dress up as facts: If you had studied writing, then you would be published by now and successful.

Lies masquerade as truths your life depends on: You’ll never_______. Face it.

Your inner judges may work different angles with you than the above. They parade in whatever guise will catch our attention, being masters at camouflage. They specialize in waylaying you on the path to the treasure.

For most of us, there are some doozies, some phrases or beliefs that hit us like punches in the gut. These zingers are also repetitive.
One of the habits of the inner critics—you could call it an addiction—is to repeat themselves. Maybe that way, we'll get it and change? Is that what they think?

How can someone who's getting pummeled feel motivated to change?

When doubt, not letting up on the punches, just keeps pointing out what's wrong, how are you supposed to know what or how to improve? It's kind of like being pinned on the mat with your opponent bent over you shouting all the mistakes you made to get yourself there.

You get the picture.

So now, write down some of the zingers in your life (just 3 for now). Zoom in on the thoughts that ambush you regularly, that have taken such hold you pretty much believe they're true.

We'll talk later about when and how the seeds for these weedy beliefs got sown when we get to THE FACES OF DOUBT. But for now, let's harvest the thoughts that do the best job of choking off the joy and ease of writing.

Go ahead and take a few moments; list the doozies.

Now I am going to invite you to do some creative play that gives you, not doubt and the critics, the power.

We are going to question our thoughts. Because that's what they are, all these indictments: just thoughts. And they're not even ours in the first place though they have become ours.

NOTE: We are not going to argue with our thoughts.

To fight with doubt is a losing battle, because doubt is mechanical. It's kind of like arguing with a wind up toy programmed to say the same thing over and over.
The voices persist, saying what they say in countless different ways, but always adhering to the same arguments.

The practice we are going to do that I am calling play is inspired by what is known as “The Work,” developed by Byron Katie.

The Work of Byron Katie, a free PDF distributed by Byron Katie describes The Work as “a way to identify and question the thoughts that cause all of the suffering in the world. It is a way to find peace with yourself and with the world. Anyone with an open mind can do this Work.”

So let’s do it, take one of those thoughts and do the playful work of questioning. Play full out. Engaging with our inner critics and transforming our relationship with doubt is a full contact sport, not an intellectual process. What we’re about to do is full body.

Choose one critical thought that really gets to you.

Write or type it at the top of a clean page.

Tip: distill it to a phrase or short sentence. Here’s an example, number one on my hit parade of discouraging inner refrains: “You can’t possibly make a living writing what you want to write.”
Now, ask yourself if it’s true.

You might be tempted to say, well yeah. If you haven’t already, go ahead and ask yourself: Is it true?

Ask again, this time though: Can I absolutely know this is true?

*Me:* Is it true that I can’t make a living writing what I want to write?

Sure, seems that way from what I can see in my life. Can I absolutely know it’s true that I can’t make a living writing what I want to write?

*Well, it sure seems true.*

*But can I know that it is absolutely true?*

*Well, no, I can’t absolutely know.*

Now, ask yourself: How do you feel when you believe this thought?

Let yourself really feel this—the impact of this thought on all of you, your body, mind, feelings and even outer life. This is not a time to censor or to impose spiritually correct principles on what arises (e.g., *I shouldn’t desire anything or I am not what I do anyway.*)

Just become as aware as possible of how you feel when you believe this thought!

*Me: How do I feel when I believe I can’t possibly make a living (and a life) writing what I want to write?*

*I feel discouraged. Angry. Resentful at a culture that doesn’t value what I value most. I feel like not even trying. Like giving*
up. Jealous of those who seem to be doing it. Hopeless.
Not energized. Headachy, like my head is stuffed with
garbage. Lump in my throat...

How do you feel when you don’t believe
that thought?

Really get into it. Body mind and heart. How do you feel when you
just don’t belief that thought?

If you don’t feel anything at first, don’t quit. Stick with it. Allow
yourself to pretend, if you just can’t let go of the thought that
has had you in its grip. If you SO believe the thought, then just
experiment with “what if.” What if that’s wrong, that thought. Let yourself hang out and revel a bit in being free of the debilitating thought.

Take a deep breath, maybe a few. Feel your body. Be present with your freedom from being under the influence of this thought.

Me: When I don’t believe that I can’t make a living writing what I want to write, I feel so excited. Enthused. I feel curious to see what I am going to come up with. I feel aligned with my purpose. Lucky that I get to do what I love.

I feel compassion for those who live their entire lives believing it’s impossible to do what they love. I feel excited and moved about inspiring my students by being an example of being able to do what one loves... and making not only a living but a life. I’m happy to think this could inspire my daughter, a singer-songwriter.

I feel more space in my chest, like I can breathe more freely. Feel like smiling. Free, I feel free...

Now take the original thought and turn it around.

There might be a few, or maybe all you can think of now is one turnaround. Do a simple turnaround of the words and meaning. Note: some turnarounds might at first seem to make no sense. Try it on anyway.

After identifying your turnaround or turnarounds, the next step will be to “find three specific, genuine examples of how each turnaround is true in your life—already true.”

The clip below from the site Byron Katie site offers examples of turnarounds and examples of the truth of each.
About Turnarounds (from The Work)

“After you have investigated your statement with the four questions, you’re ready to turn around the concept you’re questioning.

Each turnaround is an opportunity to experience the opposite of what you originally believed.

A statement can be turned around to the self, to the other, and to the opposite (and sometimes to “my thinking,” when that feels appropriate). Find at least three specific, genuine examples of how each turnaround is true in your life, and then allow yourself the time and presence to feel them deeply.

For example, “Paul doesn’t understand me” turns around to “I don’t understand me.” Find at least three specific, genuine examples of times that you have not understood yourself.

Another turnaround is “I don’t understand Paul.” Relax, close your eyes, and with an open mind witness as the images and feelings within you begin to show you, example by example, where you have not understood Paul. Be very gentle and thorough.

A third turnaround is “Paul does understand me.” Be still and witness as your mind reveals to you examples of how this turnaround is true. Those examples might look like:

1. He understands that when I’m angry I always get over it.

2. He understood me last week when we laughed at the joke I was telling him.

3. He understood me yesterday when I told him I really needed to get away with friends. He even stayed home with the kids.”
So if you have not yet: identify the turnaround or turnarounds of the thought that you started with.

My turnarounds?

*I can definitely make a living writing what I want to write.*

*It is precisely writing what I want to write that will lead to my thriving livelihood.*

Your turnaround might prompt a sigh of relief or even a little jig. Or trying out your turnaround might feel like putting on a piece of clothing that doesn’t fit or that you don’t feel worthy of wearing.

Whether you are thrilled, skeptical or a blend of both, engage with the new thoughts, turning your old thought on its head

Next: Find the examples of how this new thought is already true in your life.

*Re-reading the passage on Katie’s site, I’ve become aware of something I missed before. I thought we were to give three examples were of how the new thought could be true, i.e., a possibility in the future. What an invitation and transformative opportunity to find the ways the turnaround is actually already true in my life.*

So...what are three specific true examples of how I’m making a living writing what I want to write?

*A stretch indeed. I reach for proof that what I have believed to be impossible is actually not impossible because it’s happening.*

*Doubt, mumbling under its breath, slinks in as I reach for my examples. Dressed up as a savvy internet marketing coach, Doubt points out that I must capture people’s attention on*
my website in some amount of milliseconds before they click away forever. What chance do I have (I who like to write into things) in this modern world of attention spans the length of commas.

I turn away from doubt’s warnings to one of my turnarounds.

Tentatively, then: I will always make a living writing what I want to write. (A slightly altered turnaround that just popped out). How is this true in my life right now?

*I am enjoying writing to you now. Just took a break for a healthy meal. It’s luscious summer in New England. I have a roof over my head and splendid shelter in this lovely farmhouse that is home. This is good living.

*I write in ways I love in my journals. I turn within, lead my mind to rest in my heart, and emerge into the light with jewels mined from the depths.

*I am launching Harvesting Love, a new blog, a place for me to not only write from the heart, but also to be continually aware of the riches in my life.

Questioning my thoughts feels like knocking down walls that weren’t real in the first place, but that were made real and held in place by habit.

The spiritual guide Abraham says a belief is a thought that we have practiced and nothing more. We can choose to “reach for better feeling thoughts” as Abraham calls them—especially when the ones we’re choosing don’t feel that good.

We have more choices than we have been taught to realize. We don’t have to stay locked in the closets of our minds, forgetting that we are holding the keys.
But forgetting is so easy.

Practices like The Work, meditation, EFT tapping and other body-mind-heart paths remind us; they wake us up, help us see when we are operating under the influence.

When someone drives under the influence of alcohol, if they are lucky they get stopped and given a DUI: Driving Under the Influence. But we have to stop ourselves when we are writing, not able to write or otherwise living under the influence of self-doubt and negative self-talk.
POETIC INTERLUDE:
St Francis and the Sow

In his stunning poem, St Francis and the Sow, Galway Kinnell writes:

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  everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing:
  though sometimes it is necessary
  to reteach a thing its loveliness
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We are re-teaching ourselves our loveliness when we see through the veils of doubt—whether through questioning our thoughts, meditating, or just getting up from under the weight of self-criticism doubt to go outside and up at the sky.

Reading a poem like this is another fabulous way to hit the refresh button. To be reminded and to get a glimpse of our “perfect loveliness” goes a long way.
ST. FRANCIS AND THE SOW
by Galway Kinnell

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on the brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking
and blowing beneath them:
the long perfect loveliness of sow.
The Faces of Doubt

Now, let’s invite onto the stage, a few characters who could get Oscars for how well and convincingly they have played their roles in our lives.

These are the memorable ones whose cautionary tales, reprimands, world-views, well-meaning lessons and more, helped us define who we are and are not, who we can be and can’t be.

They sowed in us the seeds of doubt and fear, usually when we were young, fertile fields easy to plant things in. Many of these seeds have become overgrown, tenacious weeds that often choke off the slower growing seedlings of our creative ideas and visions.

We remember and have forgotten the ones who sowed the weed seeds, so identified have we become with the tangle. In truth it has become our tangle. It’s only ghosts who live in our heads, not the flesh and blood doubters and critics.

For these next few pages and whenever else it might prove helpful, we are going to turn the ghosts back into the less flimsy, transparent versions of themselves.
We shared a roof with some of these beings. Others we “met” on screens: TV, movie and computer. Some lingered; others passed through.

Make a list of three (to five) big gun critics in your life. These could be figures of yore (your youth) or those encountered at any stage in your journey. Call forth those who wielded power and still do to some extent. These are the ones who you know or suspect have taken up residence in your head. These are honorary members of the panel of judges who preside over your life.

Now, some of you reading this may have done a lot of inner emotional and spiritual work and have perhaps evicted these unwanted tenants of your mind.

For others, the critics may feel more formless at this point. Doubt may show up as a sense of discouragement that comes over you, rather than a message or attitude you can trace to someone in particular.

But chances are there is at least one figure, past or present, exerting an influence—perhaps even from the grave—curtailing your freedom.

That said, you are not anyone’s victim. Nor is it too late for us to free ourselves from patterns that started long ago and have lasted a long time. The greater the grip, the more life energy is available to be released into the present.

So now, scan your mind, your feelings, your past and your present and call forth a few notable critics who have taken up residence inside of you.

Name or describe them. Three to five individuals who played and perhaps still play an inner role of doubter, finger-wagger, Realist, cynic, fault finder, perfectionist. Who were or are these forces in your life?

If they have no name and are a more generic entity, e.g., *intellectuals, confident New Yorkers*, name that “type” as best you can. Let this not just be words. Feel the charge.

If it helps, you might want to close your eyes and gently scan your inner world to see if you can get in touch with a recurring fear or doubt pattern, some way you get stuck in a mental or emotional rut.
can you recall a familiar breakdown on the highway of your creative self-expression, and if not a total breakdown, how you stall out on dark roads at times?

One of the ways to access these faces of doubt is to return to the voices of doubt you recorded and see if that jogs your memory as to their initial sources.

Now write down the primary message or messages of these influencers. Some may have had many opinions about your life and life in general. Try to distill the key beliefs or concerns of these formative characters.

Note: Take your time and be in the presence of each, listening and gleaning. Be in as much of a receptive state as you possibly can. No need to defend or resist, just witness. Witness and record.

Write the primary messages, beliefs or refrains of each of these critics. This may be a warning, a summary of what's possible or not, or ridicule. You can do this in short phrases. Or you can write out your critic's worldview, their gestalt, at more length. There is no wrong way to do this.

If something emerges you weren't expecting, like seeing the vulnerability of one of your harshest critics (in my case, my father), fear or vulnerability that you couldn't see when a child, let it bloom in your awareness.

Now, take a few deep breaths. We are going to have a brief but profound dialogue with each. For now, choose one.

Approach (and sit with, if you like) the harsh critic you chose.

With loving detachment, ask: Why did you tell me that? or Why are you telling me this?

These are not rhetorical questions. Not: Hey, why did you tell me that, you jerk. This is genuine compassionate inquiry. We are trying to actually touch their hearts even if that was not possible before.

Ask more than once if you have too. Why did you tell me that? Allow yourself to really listen for an answer. Such deep asking and listening are rare.
Probably, the most significant critics of our past (often parents or teachers) did not listen, could not listen—usually because their fear was too vital a guard to lower.

Our willingness to listen is an act of love. Love transforms. Love dissolves fear. Fear is at the root of doubt, of judgment, of separation from what we love.

In listening, try not to analyze or draw conclusions, at least not now. Just listen.

(One discovery may be that the primary message is less booming, absolute, or poisonous than it has been in our minds and lives.

Thank your judge for sharing, if that feels right.

Now, pausing in between to breathe, it is your time to speak.

Without fighting them in any way at all, without trying to convince or change them, tell them why you don’t agree.

Remember, no trying to persuade, prove wrong or otherwise “triumph.” We are powerless over the beliefs of others, no matter how they are. We are powerless over the past. But we can in the present, change. We are neither powerless over the present nor does the past truly have power over the present unless we allow it.

Without any expectation, even that this being will pay attention or will care: tell this one what your truth is.

No matter what their response or lack of, listen deeply to yourself, listen with love to what is stirring in you.

Rinse and repeat with each of the major perpetrators of criticism and limitation in your life, not arguing or teaching, just being in touch with your truth.

We’ve been locked in our minds and the past with the key in our pockets. That key is compassion.
Compassion: Loving the Inner Critic(s) and The One They Pick On

Loving my inner critics? Isn’t that like pouring glazed frosting over a sharp knife and thinking it won’t cut?

Those inner critics can be vicious, relentless, devastating. They wreak havoc. Destroy lives. They abort books before they are born. Talk about crimes against life. Creations that could change the world or, at least feed me, don’t have a chance.

This is the enemy we are talking about. Love them? Isn’t skillful self-defense what’s called for instead? Methods for outsmarting and conquering these insidious worms of doubt that infiltrate our minds and turn us against ourselves. How’s about a handbook that shows how to weaken the inner critic’s stranglehold on the spirit and imagination, how to get out from under their influence?

We need tools for battle not reconciliation, don’t we?

We need it all. Love and tools. Methods and reconciliation.
But sappy love, the kind that sugarcoats, won’t do the job. Our weapon of choice in heart-to-heart combat with the inner foes has to be the love that gets to the heart of things, including the heart of the enemy. Because, truth is, doubt and the relentless inner chorus of critics are scared.

No matter how dominating and powerful those inner critics, they are actually like the Wizard of Oz, putting on a great thunderous show when deep down they feel hollow. Their power is an illusion; their power is the power we give them.

However, this is not a power struggle, not a war. This is about loving the enemy as yourself, because, although we talk about the inner critics as “they”—they are us. As Pogo put it in the comic by Walt Kelly: *We have met the enemy and he is us.*

Try this when you catch yourself writing under the influence of limiting judgments:

Stop.

Breathe.

With compassion, turn towards the one in the driver’s seat (you). See her or him with the eyes of love. No blame, just compassion.
You might notice the monkey on your back, e.g., fear of failure, perfectionism, slack, shame, hopelessness, or other behaviors, feelings or beliefs.

Notice any thoughts on repeat. Lift the needle out of its groove. Gently push the Off button.

Now love the you are who is none of those things—not flawed, not a failure, not wrong...

See the pure one who just is.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk and teacher, talks about the practice of caring for our pain like a mother cares for her infant. In his book, *True Love, A Practice for Awakening the Heart*, he writes:

“So every time you have an energy that needs to be transformed, like jealousy or fear, do something to care for this energy, if you do not want this energy to destroy you.”

He continues:

“When the mother hears her baby crying, she puts down whatever she has in her hands, she goes into its room and takes the baby into her arms. The moment the baby is lifted into her arms, the energy of wisdom already begins to penetrate into the baby’s body. The mother does not know yet what is the matter with the baby but the fact that she has it in her arms already gives the child some relief. The baby stops crying. Then the mother continues to hold the baby in her arms. She continues to offer it the energy of tenderness and during this time, the mother practices deep looking....”

You are baby and mother.

In the middle of your meltdown, practice holding yourself with compassion. You don’t have to understand what triggered your distress. Just hold yourself with tenderness.
Thich Nhat Hanh goes on to talk about the mother practicing deep looking to learn what is going on with her baby, but only after picking up the baby without knowing the cause of its distress. He compares this to bringing the energy of mindfulness to embrace our own pain. “I know that you are there, little anger [doubt, fear], my old friend. Breathe, I am taking care of you now.”

What an amazing way to greet our own dismay, instead of tighten against it.

*I know that you are there fear, my old friend. Breathe, I am taking care of you now.*
The Art of Freeing Ourselves (again and again)

Michelangelo, when asked how he could fashion something as beautiful and elegant as his statue David from an unhewn rough piece of stone, replied that he just kept carving away everything that wasn’t David.

Our work as the sculptors of our lives is to cut away what isn’t us and free what is. When do that, not only our art, but also our lives become imbued with the essence of who we are. Our art becomes soul food.

Remember Galway Kinnell’s verse about it sometimes being “necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness.”

We are re-teaching ourselves our loveliness when we see through the veils of doubt—whether by questioning our thoughts, meditating, or just by getting up from under the weight of self-criticism to go outside and look up at the sky.
Step by step, leap by leap, we become able to break free of the gravitational pull of doubt and soar in our creative work.

All that said, though some may be able to do so, the majority of us will not be able to banish doubt completely from the horizon. Instead most of us will learn to live with doubt, some times prominent, other times creeping along the walls of our mind like Charles, Parcher, and Marcee do in the closing scene of the movie Beautiful Mind.

In this biographical movie, John Nash, a Nobel Laureate in Economics, struggles with distressing, destructive hallucinations. Over time, with the support of loved ones who believe he can do it, Nash learns to ignore the hallucinations—embodied in three characters he finally learns only exist in his mind. He is able to return to his creative work.

In the closing scene, as Nash is leaving the auditorium in Stockholm where he has been presented with the Nobel Prize for Economics, he sees Parcher, Charles and Marcee walking nearby. He turns away, strong and determined enough to resist engaging with them.

I was glued to my seat as the credits rolled and even after the light went on in the emptied theater. All I could think was: You mean they will always be here?

I didn’t want the voices of doubt within me, with their deluding attacks, to always be here. Even after the hard work of learning how to free myself from their pervasive influence, they might easily sneak in and try to get my attention.

I wanted to be free for once and for all, not always be prey to the barrage of inner critics.

However, the movie also reflected that we can heal, love, and create even in the presence of these nemeses. It all depends on what we pay attention to. We can choose to respect our beautiful minds and creations more than doubt's version of reality.

The bad news: it’s not always easy to value our art and ourselves. But we already knew that.
The good news: the work of valuing ourselves is our art, too. We get to create ourselves as the stunningly imperfect works of art we have been taught not to value. *Wabi Sabi.*

In the Japanese art of Wabi Sabi, which is also a worldview, the beauty of imperfection is the focus. In the quiet spaciousness of a museum, a vase with a large crack sits on a pedestal. Rather than rejecting the vase as unworthy, the curators direct a beam of light to the crack.
The Gifts of Doubt: From Doubt to Freedom

Doubt is part enemy part friend. You can love and hate doubt at the same time. Paradox is good for the mind and heart.

We look for blessing in the curse. We find value in weeds. We forgive those who have trespassed against us and we don't allow further trespass.

Imagine contradictions stretching your brain like a wad of gum, making your mind more flexible, less rigid. Our minds become less categorizing machines and more creative force.

Am I saying that doubt can actually fuel our creativity not just shut it down? Yes.

So let’s stretch our minds around the gifts of doubt for a few moments.

Let your mind go soft.
Open your heart.
Land in your body.
Breathe. Nowhere to be but here for now. Breathe.
Now, let this question drop into your open mind like a pebble in a pond of still water:

What gifts has your struggle with inner or outer critics—with doubt and fear—brought you?

You might already know the answer or at least one of the gifts. But if you can’t find any gifts just yet, don’t work hard to figure out an answer. Just sit here and allow what arises to come.

In the meantime, here’s a hint: what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.

How has your life journey, the times you were thrown from the horse, the ditches you’ve landed in, even the wounding of the child you were—how have these formed and transformed you. How have these experience even carved away what was not you and revealed what is—helped you get to essence?

It took me until I was in my fifties to realize that my thirty years of offering writing groups for girls grew out of my being silenced and shamed as a child. It was not safe to be seen, much less have my own voice. I am passionate about protecting the creative spirits of children and creating safe, inspiring containers in which they can give voice freely and joyously to all of who they are.

All those years I struggled with self-worth, with shame and fear led me to create an abiding haven for creativity.

The greatest gift of doubt and its entourage of fear, unworthiness, etc. is how all this leads us (sometimes through hell) to love. Who would have thought that my heart would be formed in a crucible of childhood experiences that seemed devastating at the time.

We are such resilient beings. Built to love. Meant to create. Designed to evolve. Allowed to choose, again and again, to be free.

What are the gifts your life has bestowed where you might not have thought to look? How have the critics given you freedom? How are you free right now?

There is a field beyond the ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, I’ll meet you there. We can spin together until we fall down laughing, then get up for more.
About Ani Tuzman

The Writer’s Midwife

Ani is a writer and writing mentor dedicated to helping people take their creativity off the backburner and free their voices.

Founder of Dance of the Letters Writing Center, Ani has been guiding people of all ages into deeper levels of authenticity, creativity, and brilliance for more than 30 years. She brings to her work decades of experience as a writer, gifted educator, and meditation teacher.

Ani’s mentoring is infused with her reverence for the transformative power of writing and her exuberant delight in the creative process. Her commitment to helping writers nurture and birth their unique expression has earned Ani the title of Writer’s Midwife.

After years of working with groups, Ani has decided to offer a handful of people the opportunity to work with her one-on-one, from anywhere in the world, in her program Harvest Your Life: A Transformational Writing Journey. This co-creative partnership empowers individuals to transform their relationship with their creative self-expression and with themselves.

Ani has recently completed The Tremble of Love, an historical novel inspired by the life of 18th century mystic, healer, and spiritual master, the Baal Shem Tov. Ani brings this book to life through unique audio recordings.

You can learn more about Ani’s work and subscribe to her new blog, Harvesting Love, chock full of writing tips and other celebrations of life, at www.anituzman.com.
Harvest Your Life:  

*A Transformational Writing Journey*  
*with Ani Tuzman*

Do you want to find and free your voice?  

Are you ready to commit to the realization of your own expression?  

If so, then you’ve come to the right place.

In personalized one-to-one sessions, Ani offers a unique transformational experience that facilitates the deepening, expansion, and expression of one’s voice—and all the miracles that come with that.

Ani is passionate about helping individuals connect with and give voice to their souls through writing. More than a mentor or a coach, Ani is a writing genie. Bringing to her craft a lifetime of experience as a writer and over 30 years experience guiding other writers, Ani inspires and ignites the writer in each person she works with. With great clarity and sensitivity, she masterfully leads people through an unfolding process, helping to unwind the cords that have restrained their voices and limited their capacity for joy and creativity.

In the course of the *Harvest Your Life* journey seemingly familiar territory is experienced in new and exciting ways. Life’s yield of experiences, including loss and grief, become vehicles for awakening and heightened self-expression. Life becomes richer. And so does one’s experience as an artist.

If you want to find your voice, share your wisdom, or write that novel that’s been in the back of your mind— don’t put it off. Reap the harvest of your life today.

If you are interested in personalized mentoring, [contact Ani](#) to request a 45-minute complementary Giving Voice Discovery Session ($200 value) to explore your creative writing goals.

[Email Ani to Request Your Giving Voice Discovery Session](#)
The Tremble of Love.

Ani’s new novel.

The life of the 18th century mystic, healer, and spiritual master, known as the Baal Shem Tov, inspires Ani’s historical novel, THE TREMBLE OF LOVE.

THE TREMBLE OF LOVE illumines the presence and power of love, reflected in the life of a rare teacher who saw love everywhere and beckoned it forth from the hearts of rag pickers, ruby merchants, midwives and murderers.

Rich in the sensual, historical detail of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 1700’s, Ani Tuzman’s novel transports readers to a captivating world where they encounter what is timeless and find sanctuary.

Ani brings this book to life through unique audio recordings available on her website.

For more information about the novel and to download the audio of Ani reading the book’s opening, visit http://www.thetrembleoflove.com
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If you have gleaned value from this ebook, FROM DOUBT TO FREEDOM, please let others know about it by directing them to my website www.anituzman.com where they can download their own copy.

I would love to hear about any experiences inspired by FROM DOUBT TO FREEDOM. You can email me at ani@danceletters.com

Yours in the joy of creating,

Ani

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