

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Now who said this was going to be easy? This crazy rollercoaster of life which takes us up and down, through twists and turns. Showing us the greatest panoramic vistas, before seemingly plunging us downwards at great speed, forcing us to shut our eyes when it all gets too much

But, what if there were some sort of purpose to it all? What if being spun around, and seeing the world from all angles, actually helped us to discover who we *really* are. To better understand what we are supposed to be doing here?

Through these pages I am going to explore just that possibility. I want to shine a new light on what your emotions may really be trying to tell you. To explore how to use that light to better understand just where your life's roller coaster may be trying to take you. Are you merely surviving the ride or thriving from it? Suffering it or living it?

I invite you to use this book as an opportunity to take a step back from your life right now. To begin to view it from a different perspective. To resist just seeking answers. To contemplate the bigger questions:

- Why does the same thing keep happening to me?
- What is life trying to show me about who I *really* am?
- Is *my* treatment of *my* problems benefitting me or destroying me?

Having been a counsellor and therapist for more than 25 years, I have had the privilege of sitting for many hours with many people who have asked themselves these very questions. The longer I have done this work, the more I have come to realise it is not what happens to us that determines who we are and how we come to understand the world, it's what we *do* with what happens to us. This is what ultimately defines the sort of human being we believe ourselves to be. And the one we wish to strive to become.

If we want to develop a better, fitter, physical body we go to the gym. We work against resistance or lift weights to challenge ourselves, so that our bodies grow muscle and lose unnecessary fat. This is exactly what happens if we begin to understand the deeper messages in our everyday emotional and psychological challenges. We let go of the parts of ourselves that no longer serve us. We build up our spiritual 'muscle'.

Unlike physical muscle, spiritual muscle may not be visible in a mirror. Yet, once we become aware of its true strength, we see more of the 'why' of what happens. Our lives take on a new meaning. A greater purpose.

The subject matter of each of the following chapters could probably warrant a whole book in themselves. But, by viewing our emotional complexities through the clarifying lens of our spiritual self, I aim to make the material concise, easily digestible and personally meaningful to you. My hope is that you will be stirred beyond simply reading the words. That you will start to see yourself as something more than just your currently known 'ego self'.

I will explore the hidden power that is contained within our emotions and how we use that power to either build ourselves up or bring ourselves down. I look at how we can better respond to the emotional pain that arises when we allow ourselves to fully feel whatever's troubling us. And understand why we develop unhelpful coping mechanisms to block this pain: addictions, compulsions, manipulations, denial, blame, victimhood.

I also devote chapters to the various feeling states that we enter into when we over-rely on these coping strategies: anger, sadness, stuck grief, low self-esteem, fear, depression, shame, guilt, anxiety, stress.

By separating out our differing emotional states, coping mechanisms and spiritual endeavours into a natural evolutionary flow, there is a connective thread running through this book from beginning to end. Whilst you may wish to hang onto this thread to help navigate your journey, each chapter does also stand alone in its own right.

I suggest that you read all of Part One - which sets out my spiritually inspired philosophy - as a foundational springboard off which to jump into any chapter in Part Two. So, if you wish, you can also think of Part Two as a quick reference section and refer easily to a particular emotional theme which may be relevant for you currently.

To work out your spiritual muscle at regular intervals, I will hold up a psychological mirror in the form of soul-searching questions, personal reflections and interactive exercises. To help these stand out, they will be written in *italics*. For those of you who want specific suggestions as to how to put into immediate practice the ideas I discuss, I highlight these in ***bold italics***.

At these points you will have the opportunity to stop and reflect on how the material relates to you personally. I encourage you to pause. To contemplate the questions, exercises, visualisations and suggestions and to listen to what your deeper spiritual self may be saying to you as you read. You may want to write down these inner thoughts and feelings, so you can later reflect back on your self-awareness journey.

To add some different thought flavours into the mix I'll sprinkle in quotes from counsellors, healers, philosophers, New Age thinkers, authors, poets, playwrights, spiritual teachers, theologians and inspirational speakers from around the world.

And finally, to breathe in some everyday life I'll share some counselling clients' therapeutic journeys who have passed through my doors over the years. With thanks to them for allowing their enlightening stories to be shared. I have changed their names to ensure their anonymity.

From the outset, my hope is to encourage you to start to think about where you inhibit or restrict yourself. When you fear to look into the psychological mirror at the reflection of who you really are. As I write these words, I am aware of the times in my life when this was difficult for me. And where and when this is still difficult. Increasingly, I've come to realise that I refuse to look when there is something about myself that I have difficulty in accepting or loving. The moments when I fear to know myself fully.

For more on my own inner work of spiritual growth and awakening, please join me via the blog page of my website at www.chrisjpartridge.com

It is by no coincidence that 'know thyself' are the words inscribed at the entrance to the sacred oracle of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in Ancient Greece; the birthplace of western culture. But do we take enough time to really get to know ourselves? Or do we spend too much time trying to work out, and understand, others?

The great Greek philosopher Plato claimed that, 'the essence of knowledge is self-knowledge'. He suggested that we can better understand our experience of the world by becoming more knowledgeable of, and about, ourselves. Buddhist philosophy professes that self-knowledge is the key that unlocks the place within us where true joy and bliss reside. Yet we convince ourselves that we are anything but the key. That it lies somewhere outside, waiting for us to discover it.

The last paragraph sums up my motivation for wanting to write this book. I want to stress that it is not intended to diagnose, or treat, any specific mental health issue. My intention is that you can use it as an interactive guide to help navigate your emotions. A tool for unravelling the complex world of feelings. Particularly as we face the post COVID-19 world together.

The material I cover here is what I have personally learnt about the nature of human nature, as I have come to understand it, through my therapy work with clients over the years. My hope is that by sharing it in the pages that follow it will help you to illuminate your own true nature. To discover that *you* hold the key. Somewhere inside. The key to your own greater understanding. Come on let's get cracking:

"Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes."

Carl Jung (Swiss founder of analytical psychology, psychoanalyst and psychiatrist)