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NURTURING the SOUL of YOUR FAMILY

10 Ways to Reconnect and
Find Peace in Everyday Life

author of *The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal*

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Introduction

A CALL for a NEW WAY of BEING

It's 6:45 Monday morning. Your kids are arguing over the iPad, and your phone keeps chiming with new messages. You feel exhausted and overwhelmed; things are moving too fast. Your weekend was a blur of activity, and now you watch your distracted partner rush out the door to work as you make lunches and get the kids ready for their day. You glance at your weekly calendar, overflowing with appointments and kids' activities, and your chest tightens. Everyone seems to be moving in different directions at once. You crave a slower, simpler, more spacious life. You long to feel more connected to your family and to experience more peace and harmony in the everyday. But it feels like too much work, too impossible. You're not even sure where to begin.

Nurturing the Soul of Your Family is a call to explore a new way of being. It's an invitation to live an awakened life in the midst of the ordinary tasks of everyday living. It's a guidebook to help you and your family learn to nurture your hearts and souls by slowing down, reconnecting, and beginning to live the life you desire.

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An infinite river of well-being runs through each of us. Whether we call it God, our intuition, or a higher power, it's innate, true, and wise. It's always present, ready to guide and restore us. When we consciously choose to return to this source, we feel connected to everyone and everything around us — life flows. But we need reminders that this ever-present wisdom exists, waiting to be tapped. It's our birthright to feel good and to be able to access this sense of peace — no matter how crazy things around us may get.

This book was created to help you stay connected to — and live from — this source and to support you in helping those you love do the same.

OUR DESIRE for CHANGE

We live today with unprecedented levels of change and uncertainty. During the past twelve years, I've coached thousands of men and women from their thirties to their sixties, and several dominant themes have emerged. Here are some of the ways my clients have characterized their challenges and desires:

- “I crave community — real community, heartfelt connection, and meaningful dialogue.”
- “Things are moving too fast. I feel overscheduled and overextended. I want more space in my life, more time to just be. And I know my kids and partner want this, too!”
- “Since losing my job and wrangling with all the economic uncertainty, I feel like I'm in limbo. I'm so tired of living in the unknown.”
- “I'm stretched so thin. I don't feel successful at work or in my family life. I'm just paddling to keep my head above water.”
- “I often wonder how I ended up where I am. In hindsight, I did what I thought I was ‘supposed’ to do. I'm now realizing I'm not living the life I desire, so whose life is this?”
- “I feel like I've created a monster. I'm working really hard to pay for a lifestyle and home that leave me with very little freedom, time, or financial breathing room!”
- “I'm depressed or anxious a lot of the time. I feel like I've lost that joie de vivre, like the ‘joy train’ is passing me by.”

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- “I’m craving meaning and spirituality in my life, but I have no idea what this looks like or where to begin. My religious upbringing turned me off to ‘God’ and left me wondering what I truly believe.”

As I was writing this book, I surveyed hundreds of families through the Personal Renewal Groups (PRGs) that I’ve developed. I created PRGs after the birth of my son, as a response to my personal need for self-nurturance and based on my first book, *The Mother’s Guide to Self-Renewal*. PRGs are self-renewal circles for mothers, and they are now led by trained facilitators worldwide. I asked participants to share what derails their family’s emotional and spiritual well-being. The predominant themes mirrored those voiced by my clients:

- the overuse and misuse of technology, or feeling plugged in 24/7;
- being too busy, overscheduled, always rushing from one thing to the next;
- losing the ability to find joy in family life;
- letting things that matter least take precedence over things that matter most; and
- Mom and Dad not taking time for self-care and parenting from an empty cup.

As we navigate and raise families in this crazy-busy disconnected world, how do we enhance our emotional well-being and experience more harmony in our everyday moments? What would this look like?

A SHIFT in PERSPECTIVE

Imagine experiencing more simplicity and spaciousness in your life — in how you think, work, parent, and connect to those you love. Imagine your family as your greatest source of joy. Imagine having the ability to transform and more easily navigate the challenges you face each day, so you feel less hurried and rushed. Envision a life that is slower, more relaxed — with plenty of time for those things that matter most. Imagine embracing a new

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way of being in the world that supports you in experiencing more trust and flow and happiness.

As parents, we focus so much attention on our kids' academic and physical development. Imagine devoting that same level of energy to nurturing their hearts and spirits, so that our family's emotional and spiritual well-being is the top priority. Imagine exploring how to truly nurture our soul and the soul of our family in order to awaken to a deeper level of connection — to ourselves and others?

Just for a minute shift your perspective and picture your family as a sacred tribe. Think of your loved ones as a carefully chosen collective of souls who have joined — not by accident, but intentionally — for an important reason: to support one another's collective growth. Does that change how you see things and how you relate to them?

Everything we truly desire — love, connection, meaning, purpose, joy — is available to us right here, right now, through the people we live, eat, and sleep with every day.

MY TEACHERS, MY CLASSROOM

It's 1984, and I'm sitting in my cold, third-floor dorm room. The door is locked; the room feels small. Down the hall I can hear the whirring of blenders, Bruce Springsteen on the stereo, and girls yelling, running from room to room preparing for a sixties-themed dorm party that evening.

I'm eighteen, a freshman in college. I have just received a call from my paternal grandmother. My forty-four-year-old father is in intensive care. He's had a massive heart attack. Worse, it turns out that my self-employed dad's office manager forgot to pay his health and life insurance premiums, and this news has sent my mother over the edge. She has been taken to a mental hospital. Meanwhile, my six siblings, ranging in age from four to seventeen, are... God only knows.

I want to vomit. My body feels frozen. I don't know whether to cry, jump in my car and drive home to San Antonio, or bury my head under the covers of my faded pink comforter. Finals week starts in ten hours.

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Numb with pain, I eat some chocolate chip cookies as my thoughts and nervous system spiral out of control.

In my wild, highly creative, and adventurous upbringing, chaos and uncertainty were constant companions, and childhood experiences like this inspired me to pursue the work I'm doing now: *helping families awaken and access their innate well-being*. I believe that it's our birthright to experience a safe, loving, communicative environment that provides everyone — parents and kids alike — with the nourishment and support we need to bravely head out in the world to do our work. It also satisfies our deep yearning and desire for unshakable inner peace.

I was born in Houston, Texas, in 1966, the oldest of seven children. My youngest siblings — a pair of boy/girl twins — were an unplanned “surprise” who arrived shortly after my mother's fortieth birthday. I was then fourteen, and by the time I left for college four years later, I had changed thousands of diapers.

My mother was a gifted artist and musician, but she suffered from clinical depression, which arrived on the wings of postpartum blues just after the birth of her second child, my oldest brother. At that time, we were stationed in Japan during the Vietnam War, since my father, a physician, was paying his dues to the Air Force for putting him through medical school. I was fourteen months old when this dark visitor first came knocking.

My dad was an intellectual, generous man, but he was constantly in his head. Perhaps he retreated there to make sense of all the crazy activity of his seven children. Much of the time it felt like we were the Swiss Family Robinson, questing for solid ground, looking for clear guidance and anchors, yet swimming in a sea of uncertainty.

My childhood was an emotional roller coaster. My parents both came from families with histories of alcoholism, depression, addiction, heart disease and diabetes, infidelity, and divorce. They used to joke that they had no business having children — let alone seven of us! They did the best they could, though, to create a healthy family dynamic. They were always experimenting with new parenting modalities and approaches. They just didn't have the support or the tools needed to create consistency. The baggage from their own childhoods and marriage was, I believe, just too overwhelming,

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heavy, and difficult for them to let Goodwill haul it all away. Like many of us, they were a bit lost and unsure how to find their way home.

Yet along with the pain, loss, disconnection, and missteps, our family provided many beautiful gifts.

When we were kids, our creativity was nourished daily. There was an unwavering focus on spiritual nourishment and how we connect to the Divine. We were exposed to many unique cultural and educational experiences. We feasted on art and music; we were encouraged to be very independent, to try new things, to make mistakes, and to find our own path in the world. I recall friends' parents quizzing us when we would come over for a play date: "So your parents actually let you loose in the kitchen to cook *alone*? And you go to what kind of school again?"

Growing up, I fought a lot with my brother Kert. When this happened, my dad would stop what he was doing, call us over, and ask us to look each other in the eye. Then he'd say, "You are flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, and you'll always have each other. Remember this."

I would roll my eyes at this dramatic statement and count the seconds until I could pull away. What I believe he sensed on a deep level — and tried to find validation for through his study of family-centric religions like Catholicism — is how sacred the family experience is. Families don't come together by accident. They aren't science experiments that might go well or awry. We're here to consciously grow, learn, expand, and support one another's spiritual and personal growth.

THE INVITATION to AWAKEN

I believe the deep connection available to us through our family experience is sacred. Our spouse and our children are not just people we share laundry duty and cereal with; they are wise souls and fellow sojourners who happen to be in human bodies.

Everything you want to experience with your family you already possess. There's no need to create, craft, cook, farm, buy, or become something new in order to experience what's available to you in the now, in everyday

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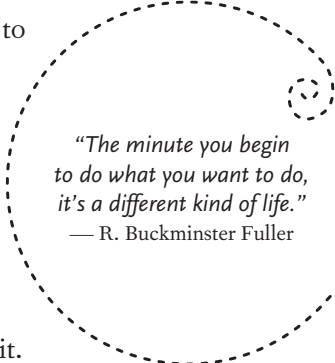
moments. Our family presents us with the opportunity to come into the highest expression of who we are and to experience giving and receiving love in profound and numerous ways.

We underestimate how well equipped we are to do this. And how wise we are.

The external world tells us that happiness is “out there.” If we just work hard enough to figure it out, read the right books, strive harder for our goals, and outmaneuver our circumstances — we’ll get there. Someday.

This couldn’t be further from the truth.

Everything in our being is innately wired to support us in returning to greater harmony and equilibrium, individually and collectively. A revered yoga teacher once told me each of us has thousands of internal systems within our physiology that work continually to bring us back to our natural state of balance. We already possess the innate ability to create this harmony within our family — in fact, we are born with it. We just have to consciously choose to access it.



“The minute you begin to do what you want to do, it’s a different kind of life.”
— R. Buckminster Fuller

It’s time to wake up from this bad dream of continual dis-ease and dis-connection and to consciously craft and embrace a life we love, not one we simply endure.

It takes tremendous courage and desire to live an awakened life: a life where your actions are in alignment with your deepest values, where you’re making decisions that support your family’s emotional and spiritual well-being. Is there anything more important? Is there ever a better time than now?

THE HARDEST JOB on the PLANET

It’s 1976, I’m in fifth grade, and I’m standing by the front door, shouldering my backpack, my eyes darting, watching my family scamper like mice from room to room. My stomach is in knots. It’s 7:45 A.M. We should have left fifteen minutes ago. Lunches are half-made, my brothers are shooting with slingshots at each other, and my mom — never

a morning person — is withdrawn, in a bad mood, and admonishing my dad (our morning chauffeur) about forgetting to pay a bill. I'm filled with anxiety and frustration; my nervous system is shot from all the noise and stress. We finally arrive at school, and the VW van door opens. My siblings and I roll out and run off to our different classrooms with barely a wave — I look back for a minute and see my dad hunched over the wheel eating Grape-Nuts out of a tall, glass measuring cup before starting the car again. His jaw is clenched, and his brow is knit with worry and stress.

Today, I'm a parent. While I do my best to try to keep our mornings peaceful, sometimes they turn into the same kind of three-ring circus — as my son frantically finishes his latest school project and I navigate a business deadline while rescheduling a forgotten dentist appointment, and so on.

One morning several years ago, after a particularly rough start with my then-seven-year-old son, I dropped by his school to deliver an apology note to him. A short while later, his teacher, Deborah, left me a voice-mail message letting me know how deeply my son had been moved by the card. She said they had both shared some tears, and she doubted he would ever forget this action. Knowing mornings are key for setting the tone for the day, I couldn't bear for either of us to begin our day with that much stress! My upbringing left a huge imprint on how I view morning time. That voice-mail message is still saved on my phone to this day.

Many of us are asking, “Where did all the fun go?! I thought having a family was supposed to enhance my life, to offer opportunities for joy and delight! When did things start becoming so tedious? So involved, so complex, so overwhelming? So darn hard?!”

Having children and raising a family is the hardest job on the planet. Give me a challenging client over negotiating media time with my disgruntled adolescent any day! We're ready for a new way. Not a new technique, smart phone app, or the discipline approach du jour, but a real breakthrough. This book offers a chance to start over, to start fresh and really envision, claim, and step into a new way of being.

I once heard Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, speak at my local bookstore. He

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believes one problem many of us have is that we don't envision or imagine a great future. We don't know what it would look like for us. He says when people are asked to envision the future, many describe a teched-out, overdigitized, virtual world in which we're even less connected than we are now (like *Blade Runner*)! Author and futurist Barbara Marx Hubbard, in her documentary *Humanity Ascending*, says that it's crucial for us to envision who we want to be as a people and how we want to use all these gifts and powers that we've developed.

If we don't consciously create the future we desire, we may end up creating something no one wants.

Over the years, my coaching clients have shared that one of the biggest gifts they receive is the opportunity to be challenged to imagine what is possible in their lives and careers: to shed the shackles of their expectations, to dump their old, crunchy, outdated ways of being in the world, and to start anew.

This book presents you with the same challenging question: What would a new way of being look like? What would it look like for you — and your family — to be more conscious, more connected? How do you picture interacting, sharing, and loving right now, and what will this look like when your kids leave the nest? What would your family relationships look like if you stepped into the highest expression of who you are?

To help you answer these questions, this book guides you in exploring the most powerful, essential things you can do right now to bring more peace and harmony to your family, or what I consider the ten paths to peace. I hope this book will help you realize you *do* have the answers you need. You just have to become quiet enough — and create the space — to hear them.

The ten paths to peace mirror the chapter titles. They are:

- Tapping the transformative power of self-care: attune and respond to your needs and desires
- Healing from the inside out: peace begins with me
- Unplugging to plug in: remember, people first, things second
- Unleashing the healing power of nature: the ultimate antidepressant
- Making time for spiritual renewal: return to the river within
- Loving the ones you're with: spend time together (like you mean it!)

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- Defining, celebrating, and honoring your family culture: what do you stand for?
- Slowing down: do less to experience more
- Exploring a new way of being: make hard choices, break free, and do it different
- Building your tribe: ask for and embrace help as you create your support network

These paths to peace are integral to, and they support and build on, one another. I encourage you to read and approach them in the order in which they're presented, but as always, listen to your intuition on how best to explore these teachings.



A CALLING to LIVE INSIDE OUT

When my brother Geoffrey was twenty, he committed suicide; in hindsight, we believe he was probably battling adult-onset schizophrenia. When my gentle, artistic brother left us, the heart of our family was shattered and ran in eight different directions, like mercury hitting a cold bathroom floor.

Four years later my dad died at fifty-six; my mom followed him four years later at age sixty. Both passed suddenly and unexpectedly from heart ailments. I don't think they ever recovered or healed from the heartache of losing Geoffrey. If my mom and dad could have received the support they needed and were reminded of their innate wisdom, I believe it would have radically shifted the culture of our family.

I wrote this book as a call to explore how we can “live inside out.” That is, live in alignment with what matters most and with intention — as opposed to moving through life as if we're in a never-ending tennis match, frantically reacting to whatever is thrown at us.

When our sense of inner peace grows, external conflicts dissipate. When we begin to cultivate and return to our inner state of harmony and our river of well-being, we're able to be less reactive and more present, calm, and heart centered.

Having worked with thousands of parents, I've observed that when

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parents take time to nurture themselves, their families naturally come into greater equilibrium. Cancer survivor Audre Lorde said, “Self-care is not about self-indulgence, it’s about self-preservation.”

Relationships improve when we enhance our state of emotional well-being and perspective. We can’t change others, but we shift the dynamic when we awaken and are willing to work on our own healing. This first became clear to me when I traveled to San Antonio in my early twenties to visit my mother. Afterward, it would take me weeks to recover emotionally from our draining, sometimes toxic encounters. My slow, painful disentanglement from this key relationship began when I finally understood where the opportunity for change really lay — with me.

In our wise moments as parents, we observe and know that we have an enormous impact on the day-to-day “ride” we experience with our families. Will the day be a mile-high carnival roller coaster or will it be a playful river cruise?

Our kids’ behavior is inextricably tied to our emotional well-being. If things around us are in disequilibrium or are out of sync, we need to have the courage to examine if *we’re* in disequilibrium. What’s going on with our inner world, our lens, and how we’re viewing life in general? Often this becomes a wake-up call to begin to parent more consciously and to explore if a course correction is needed on our part.

In my life-coaching work, I’ve observed that we all desire three things:

- to know we’re heard and we matter,
- to feel loved and have opportunities to express our love, and
- to feel like we belong and have a tribe we can count on for support.

Each family has its own beautiful, unique essence or sacred connection. Just as we need to tend to the emotional well-being of any relationship in order for it to thrive, we have to consciously nourish and nurture our family’s sweet, tender soul. What type of daily care, feeding, and love does your family’s essence need in order to grow strong and soar?

When your family is feeling disconnected, stuck, or at odds — and since we’re all human, this will happen a lot — don’t just swallow the pill fed to us

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by TV sitcoms that this is how family life is. Pause. Be willing to open up to other possibilities. Then practice new ways of seeing and being.

THE TIME IS NOW

Challenge your beliefs about being in a family and about being in relationship. Cultivate a sense of curiosity. Ask: What if? Could there be another way? Is it possible I'm seeing this situation from a distorted view? What is my role in this experience? What am I bringing to the relationship? A wise grounded parenting coach told me the most important feeling we can cultivate when relating to our children and exploring our family's interactions is *curiosity*.

There is no greater spiritual work than conscious parenting and agreeing to live with other beings on this level of intimacy. My brother Kert once told me, "Relationships are mirrors for our own stuff. It's much easier to be alone. But if you want to really grow, sign up for a relationship. Intimacy is not for the faint of heart."

More than anything, we all crave connection and community. This starts at home, and it starts right now — not a month or year from now. Now is the time to awaken, heal, open our hearts, and reconnect with the most important people we'll ever know. This book is an invitation to begin your journey. Know you're not alone; we're in this together.

Grab a notebook and pen, keep an open mind and heart, and let's explore what it would look like to embrace a new way of being as we proceed slowly, with a sense of curiosity and lots of self-compassion. Let's begin!

HOW to GET the MOST from THIS BOOK

Most of all, read with the utmost self-compassion — be gentle with yourself. Family work doesn't always come naturally, and at some point you will probably experience strong feelings. So, slip on your lab coat, pick up a clipboard and pen, and observe yourself thoughtfully and with a sense of playful curiosity. Be prepared to be surprised, and expect an occasional conflict or the experience of "contrast." Finally, regard this book as a grand feast or a

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buffet: some things you will find delectable, some may not be your cup of tea, and some you may develop a taste for over time. This is all part of the process as you sort through where your family is now and where you want to be.

In addition, keep in mind the following:

- At the beginning of each chapter is a “Pause for Peace.” These are body-centered exercises to help calm and ground you as you ease into each theme.
- At the end of each chapter is a “Pat on the Back: What’s Working?” section. We often don’t give enough credit where it’s due and are way too hard on ourselves. This section is a prompt to acknowledge everything you’re doing for yourself and your family that is working.
- Each chapter ends with an important “Putting It into Practice” exercise. After absorbing the chapter’s insights and ideas, you’ll be challenged to take action and engage in an activity tied to the chapter theme. These exercises provide a powerful opportunity to come into greater alignment with the life you desire — create time for these.
- To assist your reflections, each chapter also ends with the guided journaling prompt “Imagine a New Way of Being.” These provide questions to help you envision what’s possible for you and your family. But at all times, keep asking, “What if...” Beautiful shifts are born from the space of possibility and potential.
- Be willing to roll up your sleeves and step out of your comfort zone. Real change comes when we “do it different” — when we stretch and try something new, even if it’s a little scary.
- Tread slowly: if you only embraced one of these ideas, that alone could make a huge impact on your day-to-day experience. Big shifts often begin with baby steps.
- Find your tribe: ask for and receive support and build your team. Know that there are thousands of other families out there who, just like you, are ready to birth a new way of being! Also, consider joining a Personal Renewal Group (for more, see chapter 1 and visit www.ReneeTrudeau.com).

