

THE SPIRAL KORU



Since childhood, I've drawn spirals. It has been one of the constants in my life. Whenever I was stressed, bored, or lost, I would spontaneously draw these shapes, which would evolve, grow, and eventually take over the whole page. I did this quite subconsciously until in graduate school when I began reading about the archetypal meaning of spirals. I discovered that there are five ancient petroglyphs found throughout the world, but the spiral is the only one found in every continent of the ancient world. Not only that, but it's widely considered the archetypal symbol of the soul's journey.

Many years later, when I was going through a very difficult period in my life, I had a dream where I 'heard' a voice telling me to paint spirals. So I did. Since then, I have painted spirals of all types, in all colors and shapes and sizes. These have played a crucial part in lifting me whenever I fall into darkness and putting me back on the road to light heartedness again.

When I began working on this project I wanted a symbol to express the simplicity and depth of the *Peace Within* process. I finally settled on an image inspired by the Koru spiral of the New Zealand Māori people. It is at once a spiral, a circle, a wave and the image of growth, birth and new life. The spiral shape is inspired by the

first stages of the unfurling of the silver fern frond. It symbolizes new life, growth, strength, and peace. The spiral, enclosed within a circle, also expresses the idea of perpetual movement, while the inner coil suggests a constant return to the point of origin.

In this way, it is also a fractal for me—an infinitely complex, never-ending pattern. I always liked the way my early drawings also resembled a fern perpetually growing, one frond after another — beautiful, changing, while its essence remains the same. For me, this is also how the breath works: a perpetual movement, with a constant return to a center of peace.

The Māori Koru image highlights key points throughout the book, and at the introduction of each chapter. I'm thrilled to have it featured so prominently in this work and to share its deep meaning with you.

The Māori Koru represents peace, tranquility, personal growth, positive change, new life, and harmony. My prayer is that these blessings will come your way.

PRELUDE

In 2004, at the age of 42, I found myself plunged into a spiritual and emotional emergency, an all-encompassing dissolution that impacted every area of my being. My life as a successful author, teacher, and psychotherapist seemed over. I didn't know where to turn for help. I thought I'd hit rock bottom, and then the waters came. A hurricane slammed into our Gulf Coast town, and a fifteen-foot wall of water engulfed our neighborhood and destroyed most of what my family and I called home.

I'd dedicated my life to helping others, but none of my experience or degrees were of any help to me. Within hours the flood had come and gone, leaving in its wake the devastated rubble of my former existence.

As I surveyed the ruins, I was unsure whether I'd ever be able to rebuild my life or regain the peace I'd lost even before the storm's devastation. But, as I was to discover, breakdowns often lead to extraordinary breakthroughs.

Everything flows. From the smallest sub-atomic particle to the largest galaxy whirling through the vastness of space, all is in motion. In our daily lives, we encounter what appear to be solid objects, but are, in fact, configurations of energy. Our very earth spins at

an incredible speed, yet appears to be perfectly still. Ancient cultures understood this fluidity of reality through the simple process of meditation and the close observation of consciousness.

The health of our bodies also depends on a constant circulation of blood and air in order to maintain balance and health. Our emotional and physical selves are a sublime arrangement of thoughts, feelings, and sensations. We become ill when we resist or become attached to these emotions instead of allowing them to flow through our consciousness. This simple principle has informed my personal and professional life.

The best way to tend to our bodies, minds, and hearts is not by trying to control their innate wisdom, but by trusting it. In this way, we unite the components of ourselves in an elegant, orchestrated microcosm — just as the dance of Earth, water, sky, and sun converges to produce life on our planet.

While everything flows, life also grows, transforms, then dies, like the life cycle of a butterfly or the endless seasons of the year. We move through ever-unfolding stages of growth, shedding what no longer serves us. We go within to transform, then reemerge—renewed, wiser, and more compassionate. Eventually, we're ready to take flight—freeing our minds, opening our hearts, and flowing with the music of all creation.

This was what I had to learn all over again.

INTRODUCTION

The source of peace resides within each of us. The great struggle and tragedy of modern life is that we continually seek outside of us instead.

Our culture perpetuates the great lie that peace can be found elsewhere. The seduction of the outside world is greater than ever before, with smart phones, cars, and televisions. Our lives are so fast paced, hectic, and overwhelming that we suffer from future shock, data smog, and information overload.

*“The only
journey is the
one within.”*

*-Rainer Maria
Rilke*

We repeatedly seek, search, and hope that perhaps this time, this job, relationship, home, or experience will bring us the lasting peace we need; yet these devices and possessions only distance us and keep the focus outside of ourselves.

This has been the core dilemma faced by most of the people I’ve worked with over the last thirty years, from every walk of life. However, there is an antidote: *Turn within*, for that is where the path to true peace abides.

I have also struggled deeply with letting go of the cultural conditioning that told me peace had to be created on the outside. However, time and self-compassion eventually renewed my connection to the deep, inward ocean of peace I had thought was lost.

How do we journey to the source of peace that is available to us

each moment of the day? This is the question I have heard from clients and students for over three decades. It is the question I had to once again ask myself, and I had to rediscover the answer one step at a time.

This is the reason I'm writing this book and sharing some personal accounts of my own journey. I know the most deeply personal often resonates with what is most universal. My hope is that these will serve as touchstones to your own journey.

I am honored to share my path with you. Come take the most amazing, most adventurous journey of your lifetime and explore the ocean of peace that lies within *you*!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I have used the term *module* instead of chapter to reinforce the fact that this is a hands-on guidebook. You may start anywhere within it, anyplace you desire.

Although working through the modules sequentially is recommended, each can be explored individually, depending upon the issues you are confronting. Perhaps you're struggling in a relationship and are drawn to Module 6, on *Peace Within Your Relationship*. By all means, jump in and start there! As you work through, make a concerted effort to eventually complete the other modules as well.

Modules may also be completed at your own pace so you can fit them into your life in a way that works for you. It is possible to spend a week, two weeks, or even a month on the practices within each module. At the very least, I suggest that you allow a week per module. It takes about thirty days for something to become a habit, and my hope is many of these practices will stay with you for the rest of your life. I ask you to make a commitment to your health and well-being by making a contract with yourself to try these practices and complete the program and see what a difference they can make.¹

CONTRACT

I _____ make a commitment to myself to do the exercises, readings and meditations on a regular basis for the duration of the *Peace Within Program*.

In order to maximize the *Peace Within Program* and healing process, I commit myself to self-nurturance and care through adequate sleep, healthy diet and exercise.

(signature)

(date)

(completion date)

CORE PRINCIPLES

The Core Principles of the Peace Within Process that follow are the essence of the program. Keeping them in mind will help you maneuver through the details of each module and exercise. These serve as the foundation of the journey to find and experience peace in each moment. I'd like you to read them each day during your self-paced *Peace Within Program* and see how your understanding of them grows and develops over the next three months.

1. Peace is our natural state and our true nature.
2. We lose our connection to this natural state through living in a world of duality and polarization (culturally and socially).
3. This natural state of peace remains, like a hidden underground sea, beneath conditioned thoughts, feelings and beliefs inherited from culture, family, and society, as well as from trauma and wounding.
4. This natural indwelling peace is as dynamic and fluid as water and has the character of energy that animates the body.
5. We can't will ourselves to experience this natural indwelling peace, but we can create the conditions where it arises, like a spring in the desert.
6. This natural state is very similar to a childlike openness to what is present in each moment and has the quality of curiosity and compassion (receptivity, openness, and welcoming).
7. Peace dependent upon external circumstances is fleeting.
8. Peace grounded from within (arising from knowing and connecting to our natural state) is freeing and healing and helps us discover who we really are.
9. The breath is a river that we can travel at any time, back to the ocean of peace, which is its source. This is experienced as a deep sense of interconnection and love for self, others, and life at large.

MY STORY

At the age of 42, my life began coming apart at the seams: personally, professionally, and emotionally. From the outside, I appeared to be the model of success. I had a thriving psychotherapy practice, a lovely wife of 22 years, an amazing 17-year-old daughter, and a beautiful home on the Florida Gulf Coast.

I'd grown up a whiz kid who loved an intellectual and physical challenge: I earned two B.A. degrees in philosophy and psychology by the age of 20, a M.A. in psychology at 21, and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at 25. I was also a black belt who taught martial arts and meditation.

The middle of three sons of an immigrant father and a mother who'd grown up in foster homes, I was definitely my father's son. He was an Italian overachiever who'd survived World War II, dodging bullets, bombs and starvation before finding his way to America—his life-long dream—at the ripe age of 19. Arriving in Brooklyn, barely knowing English, he sold rags on the streets to survive, and in nine short years had earned a Ph.D. in chemical engineering. He was my hero and role model.

I'd also been on a spiritual path for as long as I could remember, eventually working with indigenous and spiritual healers from around the world. Despite this, in midlife, my life had begun crumbling from within and I seemed unable to stop it.

I faced a number of painful challenges that year, but the main cause of my descent was a knee and back injury that required surgery and triggered unresolved trauma from surgeries I'd had as a young child.

I had often been ill as a boy, including undergoing several surgeries that terrified me. Back then, doctors felt it was better *not* to tell a child he was having an operation until the day of the procedure. So, whether it was for a tonsillectomy or abdominal surgery for a double hernia, I was picked up at school by my mother, only to find that she'd packed a bag and we that were headed again to the hospital.

I have vivid memories of moments before the abdominal surgery, of being left on a cold metal gurney outside the operating room, all by myself and feeling as though I was about to die. Masked figures appeared and pressed a mask over my mouth and nose as the noxiously sweet smell of ether poured into my lungs. They asked me to count backwards from ten. I struggled not to take a breath, and felt sure I was dying.

Suddenly, I disappeared into a terrifying vortex and felt the sensation of leaving my body and going off to another world – a near-death like experience. When I awoke, I was in a recovery room, surrounded by screaming children, and in terrible pain. These events all had a profound, traumatic effect on my highly sensitive nature.

Those feelings of panic and dread returned, in the form of a full-blown post-traumatic stress reaction as I approached new surgeries as an adult.

After spending so much of my life specializing in the area of trauma and loss, here I was experiencing it myself, losing control of my mind and emotions. Depression, fear, and anxiety: I felt them all again. Images of clients I had worked with who'd 'lost it' filled my mind as I found myself whirling into the same abyss. It was like being trapped waist deep in quicksand: The harder I struggled, the deeper I sank.

It felt as if my mind, heart and life had turned against me. I struggled to find some solid ground, some sure footing, but I continued spiraling down.

Since the age of 18, I'd practiced a type of meditation to calm my mind and help me deal with dark times. I had created a beautiful meditation space in my home, a large walk in closet with important images and objects from my life journey, as well as my beloved meditation cushion. Unfortunately, my injuries made it impossible for me to sit in my meditation space and on my cushion. So, I simply stopped meditating, which only aggravated the situation.

In the span of a year, I experienced more loss than I had in the previous forty-two years of my life. The year that changed

me forever began when a client of mine committed suicide, an experience that shattered me emotionally. Within a few months, a business associate, professional colleague, and friend who had worked with me for close to a decade was arrested. Their crimes, which I'd known nothing about, were suddenly very public and put my professional reputation, livelihood and family in jeopardy. A few weeks later, I suffered a knee and back injury, which made it very difficult for me to work and required surgery.

Then, one by one, my associates began to leave the large group practice I managed, eventually leaving me alone with my office manager. The day before my surgery, my office manager informed me that she would also be gone when I returned.

I felt completely lost and alone. I didn't think it could get any worse, but it did.

As I began my painful postsurgical rehabilitation, Hurricane Ivan roared up the Gulf Coast. My family had already survived two previous hurricanes, but this was the most devastating: Swirling debris, a tower of water, and winds that sounded like a freight train. The hurricane decimated our entire neighborhood. My family was forced to move into the back rooms of my office downtown. As insurance claims poured in from the disaster, our insurance company fell into bankruptcy. I felt defeated.

My greatest pain during this battle was feeling exiled from the inner peace that had always been readily available to me. I had dealt with plenty of adversity and outward struggle in my life, but my saving grace was that I could always retreat and rejuvenate through meditation, yoga, and time spent in nature. Now, though, with my injuries and post-traumatic stress, I simply could not find my way home to myself.

In the modules that follow, I'll share the steps I took that eventually led me back from the brink to the meaningful, peaceful life I thought I'd lost forever. I share my story, not because I think it's important, but to illustrate how each of us can be undone by events we never imagined possible. Most of all, I want you to see that, we can return to our deep selves again, no matter the trauma and tragedy we have encountered, if we have a way forward.

I'd utilized the core principles I present here many times in the past, but now I had to relearn them, again, in an even deeper way. I also had to come to terms with central components of my own life's traumas, embrace my heart's deepest calling, and heal my life.

As I struggled each day over the next four years, I reevaluated everything about my work and my understanding of who I was. Most importantly, I began to let go of my expectations and beliefs about myself, others, and reality. My pain, grief, and despair eventually led to a powerful transformation.

I experienced blinding moments of insight and awakening over the coming weeks and months, as well as painful setbacks and new challenges. Through it all, something new grew within me. I truly felt like the proverbial caterpillar being turned inside out and upside down in a chrysalis, to finally reemerge, transformed, stronger, and more whole than before.

Although I'd experienced inner peace before, this time was different. Instead of occasional moments of it, I discovered a pathway to an endless ocean of peace. It stretched into infinity and could be visited at any time.

Within you also lies such an ocean. No matter what you are struggling with, your life has a stillness and silence beneath the chaotic surface. No matter how hectic your world, this ocean of peace is always there to refresh, revive, and nourish you – if you take the time to discover it. Sometimes it begins as a small trickle of water in the desert, but if you are persistent, take your time, and practice – you, too, will discover it. It's truly as natural as breathing, and breath is the river we travel down to merge once again with that endless ocean of peace.

THE PEACE WITHIN PROCESS

What do I mean by *Peace Within*? Although it refers to what most people think of as inner peace, there is a difference. For many, inner peace involves getting *away from life*: going on a retreat, escaping to a mountain getaway, or an ashram, monastery, or yoga class. Although all of these can help us become acquainted with a taste of peace, what I'm referring to by *Peace Within* is finding peace wherever you are: *Peace Within life*, within relationships, within the workplace, within illness, within struggle, and even *Peace Within death*. This is the vision that grew in me and has become my practice with each breath.

In my 30's, I'd guided wilderness-based vision fasts, retreating into the wilderness in order to escape the noise and clutter of the outside world, and guiding others there as well. These journeys were valuable, important and some of the most powerful work I've ever done. However, after going through my transformation and awakening, I found I could discover the same peace everywhere I turned. There is no need for me to hike miles into the wilderness or to fast; this peace is available everywhere once you tune your mind, heart, and soul to its current.

Peace Within is an inner state that is not dependent upon external circumstances. Because life is always changing and moving like a river, *peace within* is actually a dynamic process that requires

improvisation and skillful maneuvering through the rapids of life.

This comprehensive, integrative process addresses mind, body, heart, and soul. Unlike many other approaches it merges Eastern and Western practices.

Each module of the book deals with a different dimension of being human and finding *Peace Within*:

The Peace Within Process

Peace Within Your Self

Peace Within Your Day

Peace Within Your Soul

Peace Within Your Body

Peace Within Your Relationship

Peace Within Your Mind

Peace Within Life

Peace Within Your Heart

Peace Within Death

As you read the text and practice the exercises, remember that *Peace Within* refers to a dynamic, living, integrative peace that grows from the inside out. In time, your inner peace will become less and less dependent upon external circumstances; rather, it will grow from the inside-out emerging from the great ocean of peace that is always available to all of us, if you know how to access it.

My journey from despair to awakening and living in deeper alignment with the ocean of peace that informs my life, day in and day out, has been nothing short of amazing! In the following pages, I have refined the essential elements of what I discovered on my journey into a format that I hope will resonate with you and help you find your *Peace Within*.