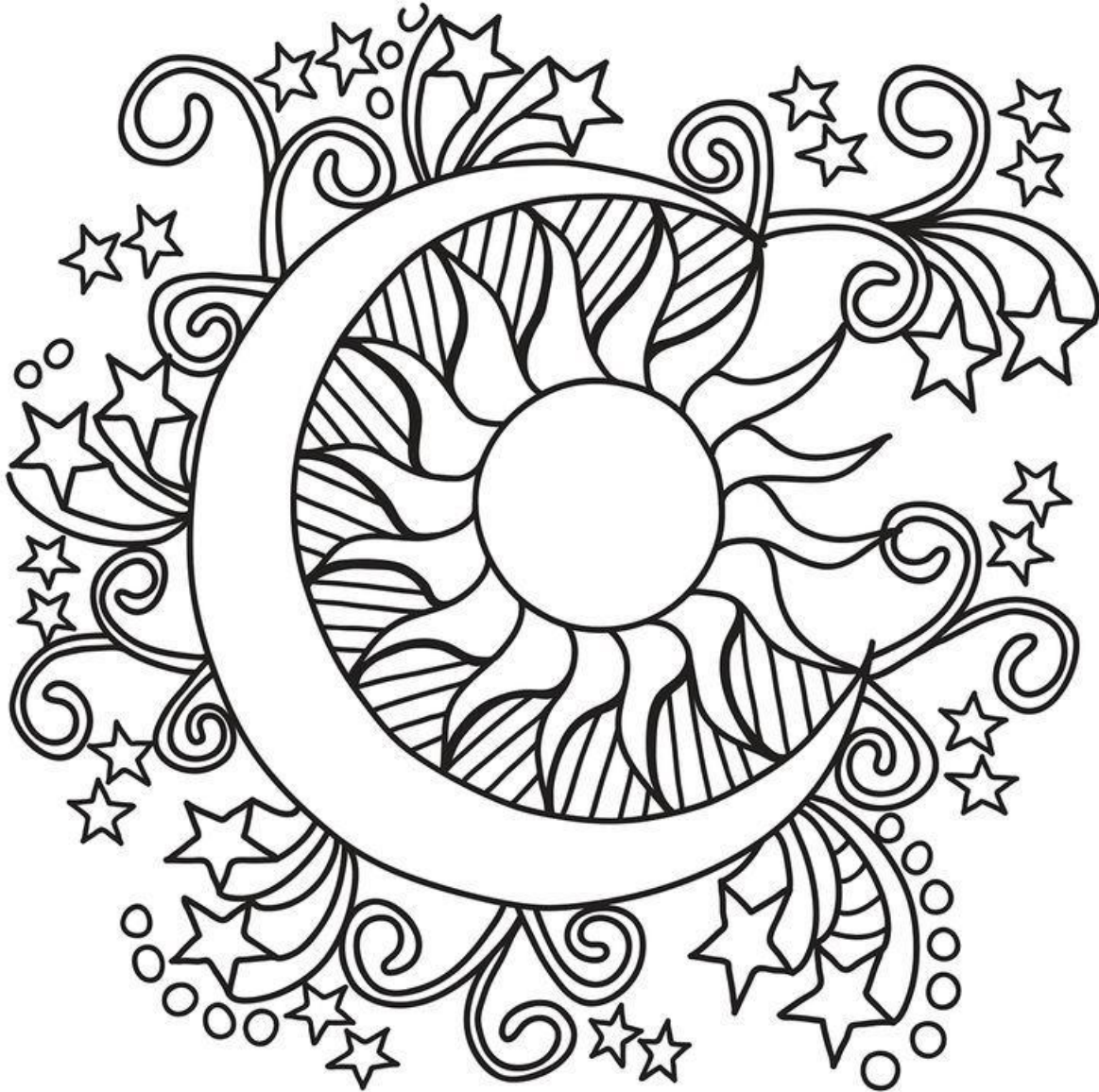


Kids Lit From Within™

Molly Barker



(Have some fun and color this in!)



Chapter 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Let's get one thing straight, right off the bat.

You are amazing!

Okay...that may seem a little weird. I know what you're thinking. "She doesn't even know me!"

And you're right on one level. We've never met in person. But I also know that if you are a kid, you are vibrant, fun, and honest. You say what's on your mind. You are active. You are REAL!

I'm happy to share, that I am often described in the same way.

Why? Because I'm just a kid like you, all grown up! In 1996, I started an organization called *Girls on the Run*. You've probably heard about it. Maybe you've even done it, or your sister did it. The program is in over 225 cities and over 2 million girls have participated in it.

I started the program in 1996 for many reasons, but one of the most important reasons was this: Sometimes we need to be reminded of just how truly amazing we really are! I mean seriously! "Kids" like us are usually open-minded and accepting. We have genuine friends who love and support us. We know that when we are having a rough day, one of our friends will listen and love us.

Now don't get me wrong. I know life isn't always, happy, joyful and free. It can also be tough, nowadays, being a kid.

Sometimes we can be mean.

Sometimes we can really hurt each other's feelings.

Sometimes we feel ugly. Trying to feel beautiful or handsome is a challenge when so much of what we see on social media and in magazines are pictures of people who have been altered to look that way.

Sometimes we compare ourselves to those pictures and feel like we don't measure up.

Sometimes we don't feel smart. Not every kid in the world can make straight A's and when we don't, it's hard to find the "smarts" inside of us.

Sometimes we feel unpopular. We might feel like we don't fit in or have the right clothes. We might look in the mirror and wish that we could live the life of someone else.

I know you feel these things sometimes, because you know what? I do too. I'm just an older kid inside an older body. But even MY friends and I struggle with some of the same kind of feelings.

When I started Girls on the Run, I had been living the life of a kid who never felt like she quite fit in. I never felt pretty enough, smart enough, fashionable enough...I never felt like being myself was good enough.

And so, when I was in sixth grade, I went into the "Trying to Fit In Box." The "Trying to Fit In Box" (or let's call it the TTFIB for short) is this imaginary place where some kids go around middle school. In the TTFIB, we say farewell to the really cool kid that we are, and we begin to try to be the kid we think will make us popular.

Trying to fit in showed up for me in lots of different ways. I started acting silly and flirtatious. I started wearing clothes I didn't feel comfortable in. I started behaving in ways I thought would make me popular, instead of just behaving in a way that was me!

About four years later, when I was fifteen years old, I started running with my mom. My mom was one of the coolest women around. My mother and I were very close. The two of us would go running at 6:00 in the morning, before school. I can close my eyes now and feel the cool morning air, feel the sweat as it would roll down the sides of my face, hear our breathing and the scuffle of our footsteps as they would hit the sidewalk, step for step.

I loved to run. Running for me was the one time during my day when I felt like I was my old self again. I didn't worry about what I looked like or what people thought about me. My mind would empty itself of all my TTFIB thoughts and I could rediscover the fun, energetic and genuine kid I really was!

When I ran, I was myself again.

It's kind of weird, but it was also about that same time, that I started doing some things that were really bad for me so I could "fit in." I had my first cigarette, started going to parties and generally began acting in ways that weren't good for my health; and while I might've looked like I was happy and popular, I was actually really sad. Even when I looked like I had it all together, I never really *felt* like I did.

Fast forward, ten years. I am 25 years old and I've graduated from college. At that time, I was teaching high school chemistry and competing in a very tough endurance sport called the triathlon.

A triathlon is where you swim, bike, and run very long distances...and all in one day!!!

I was one of the best triathletes in the country. When I was training for and competing in triathlons, I felt free of the "Trying to Fit In" Box. When I ran, I felt strong and free-spirited like the Molly I had been in fourth grade. I was happy, joyful and confident.

The rest of the time, however, I wasn't much fun to be around. I was a difficult person. I was angry. I didn't keep promises I made. I didn't like the way I looked. I was very irresponsible and unreliable.

My family was beginning to worry about me.

Fast forward again, about seven years, to 1993. I had just completed an Ironman Triathlon. (That's a triathlon where you swim 2.4 miles in the ocean, bike 112 miles across very hot black lava fields in Hawaii and run 26.2 miles through rolling hills.) If you had looked at me back then, you would have seen one of the fittest *looking* people around.

Yet, if you were to see inside my body AND spirit...you would have seen that I was actually very *unhealthy*. Behaviors I'd exhibited over the course of my "Trying to Fit In" lifetime, up until then, were causing problems for my health. My stomach was upset. My blood pressure was occasionally too high from unhealthy foods and stress and my lifestyle included very risky behaviors.

I had become "Lightless." This means that the little Light that shone inside of my soul had dimmed. I felt so much shame about the person I had become...that I just quit allowing myself to feel anything. I was dull, sad and felt all alone.

I was depressed.

On July 6, 1993, I called my big sister. I didn't know who else to call. (Aren't big sisters great?) I asked her to help me feel again. I asked her what I should do so I didn't feel so bad about myself all the time. I asked her to help get the painful "Trying to Fit In Box" out of my life.

She lived far, far away so she couldn't hold me while I cried. But what she did was help me calm my tears. She talked to me in a soothing voice. She told me she loved me and that someday I would know why all of this was happening. Right before she hung up, she told me to curl up on the couch...right in the spot where I was...and go to sleep. "Things always look better in the morning, with a new sunrise and a fresh start. This too shall pass," she said. Little did either of us know how right she was.

The next day was July 7, 1993. The day was hot. The day was sticky. The day was the day my life changed.

That afternoon around 4:00, I went for my daily run. There was a thunderstorm "brewing" off in the distance. Big black clouds were on the horizon and the wind was beginning to whip the leaves up off the pavement. The sun would peek through the clouds occasionally, and random drops of rain would escape from the sky.

I rounded a corner and began the last mile of my run, down a long and congested street. Cars were whizzing by and the wind was really picking up.

When something very mysterious and beautiful began to happen.

I began to run *very* fast. The sounds of the traffic disappeared. I could hear my heart beating in my chest like the pounding of a loud drum. I could feel the soles of my running shoes lightly

tapping the cement. I smelled the hot summer pavement, fresh with wet rain. I felt the sweat from my effort, roll down the sides of my face, down my chest and down my back.

And then It happened.

The "Trying to Fit In Box" lifted right off my shoulders. I had this sensation like I had left my body and was looking down at myself running. And who I saw, was the most **ALIVE** person in the world. She was vibrant. She was fun. She was real.

And she was ME!

I felt, for that moment, what you and I and everyone in the world are capable of feeling...the most intense joy possible, because I was free of the suffocating "Trying to Fit In Box." I rediscovered the person I had left behind in sixth grade. For the first time since sixth grade, I felt comfortable and contented in my own skin.

I cried, right there on that busy street, and realized that I was crying tears of joy...something I had never done. I realized that to be a content person, I needed to get out of the TTFIB and do everything I could do to help kids either get out of the box, or better yet NEVER GO IN!

So, three years later, I started Girls on the Run. In 1996, I wrote the first set of lessons, tried them out with a group of girls at Charlotte Country Day School and the rest is history.

That's why this book is for you. I started a national kid's running program to help people like you feel like you never have to go into the "TTFIB." But what I've learned over the course of the last 25 years, since I started that program is this: I think YOU know more about how to stay out of the "Trying to Fit In Box" than I do, because you aren't in it yet!

And here is where I'd like to introduce the word *perspective*. One of the things I love about being older is my ability to have perspective. Perspective means I can look backwards at the path my life has taken and put the different experiences I've had, into some kind of meaningful sequence.

So, I thought it might be cool, if we made a deal. Since you and so many kids your age have taught me so much about how to stay out of the "TTFIB" over the last two decades, I thought my gift back to you...would be to add perspective to it. This means I will put it all together in some kind of sensible sequence so you can look at what you've taught me, from a longer point of view. This way you will have a greater awareness about the things you are doing NOW, that keep you out of the "TTFIB" and will keep you from ever going in!

This book has a total of nine chapters: this one and eight more. Chapters 2 through 8 are the seven insights you have given me...small tasks that if performed daily will keep you out of the "TTFIB" for the rest of your life. I learned these by watching you and learning what you do to stay true to the very cool person you are, right now!

The ninth chapter is a summary chapter and puts chapters 1-8 into perspective. (I'll be using that word a lot. 😊)

So, friend! Are you ready?

Alright then. Fasten that seat belt and let's get this party started!



(If you want to, go ahead and color this in.)

Chapter 2: You Are Lit From Within

To kick off this chapter, I've got a great story for you. Quite a few years ago, I was flying to Chicago, Illinois, to lead a Girls on the Run training. That's when we teach the adults in a city all about how to get Girls on the Run up and running in their area. I was wandering my way through the Chicago O'Hare airport—which is huge, by the way—and couldn't find the woman who was there to pick me up. I had never met her or even seen a picture of her. I was making my way through the very busy terminal and was going up an escalator, with all my baggage, when I saw a woman on the opposite side going down. She was smiling, full of life, confident and strong. She was healthy, vibrant and radiant! She was, as the expression goes, "lit from within." The Light

that was right there in the middle of her heart seemed to be shining from her body. I knew she was Kris, the woman who was picking me up. I knew this because most people connected to Girls on the Run have that same look. They are "lit from within."

I took a chance and hollered across the terminal. "Kris? Kris Anderson?"

The woman turned toward me, smiled and waved. We had found each other!

Now I know we can't always feel "lit from within." Sometimes it's hard to be enthusiastic about life. We ALL have tough days.

But here is one thing I DO know. On the days when I'm feeling sad or down or "unlit" I love hanging out with kids your age, because you are usually "lit from within." There is this special spark about you.

Remember that very special day in my life, while out on a run when the "Trying to Fit In Box" just lifted right off my life? What I realize now, with some of that perspective I'm talking a lot about, is that during that run, I unplugged from the negative messages of the "Trying to Fit In Box" and let the real me shine out!

Unplugging from all that outside energy and just being our own Light, is what makes us "lit from within."

After that run, I started doing this cool visualization. (That's where you create a picture of something you want to happen, with your imagination.) Every time I start to feel afraid that I won't be good enough at something or when I begin to feel myself listening to the negative messages of the "TTFIB", I do this visualization. It helps me find that spark inside myself, so I stay "lit from within."

Here is what I do:

I picture that I have an electrical socket in the top of my brain.

You know, like the one where you might plug in a lamp or a toaster. I then picture that I have a cord plugged into it. Like an electrical cord, except this cord is special because I can see into it and I can see what the stuff going through this cord looks like. The substance in it is very slow-moving. It is yucky and gooey and has the texture of peanut butter. If it made a sound, the sound would be a thick “glub, glub, glub” sound. This yucky stuff that goes down into my brain through this “Trying to Fit In” cord goes down into my body and begins to dim the spark—the bright Light—that is right where my heart is. That beautiful spark begins to fizzle and sizzle and slowly begins to dim. The message of this globby, gooey stuff coming in through the “TTFIB” cord says things like “You aren’t smart enough,” or “You aren’t strong enough,” or “You aren’t popular enough.” Basically, the message of this cord is “You aren’t good enough.”

At this point in my visualization, I take a minute and think about how I feel. I become aware of how being plugged into this kind of cord isn’t good for me. It makes me sad, angry, depressed and closed in on myself. It doesn’t allow the bright Light of who I really am to shine out. This cord suffocates my Light instead of helping it to shine brighter.

I then reach up with my left hand and unplug that cord, right out of the top of my head. I really do this. Seriously! If you were watching me, you would see me **really** reach my left hand up to the top of my head, grab hold of an imaginary cord and pull it out. I then take that cord and toss it (with enthusiasm) behind me! (Okay, I’ll admit, it might look funny, but I do this anyway! Hey, I’m unplugging from the negative “TTFIB” and don’t care anymore if I look a little bit funny!)

I then bring my arms down by my side, plant my feet solidly on the floor or ground beneath me, gently shut my eyes and begin to feel the Light inside of me. I give it all my attention. Sometimes that Light is in my feet. Sometimes that Light is in my head. Sometimes it’s even right above my head. But most of the time, it’s resting right where my heart is, in the center of my chest. And then something almost magical happens. That Light begins to feel and become brighter and brighter. I imagine the sounds it makes as it pops and fizzes like a sparkler. Eventually that Light grows to take up space in every part of me! The Light right there, the Light of my being begins to send out so much Light that I now have Light coming out of my eyes, my ears, my fingertips and my voice. When I walk, Light is bouncing off my footsteps and hair and even leaves a trail of Light behind me.

At this point in my visualization, I just see how that feels. I automatically feel stronger, more confident and more comfortable in my skin. I feel my body stand up a bit taller, my shoulders are back, and my head is held high. I become “lit from within.”

I can then walk into just about any situation and feel strong. I don’t compare myself to other people, but I also don’t put other people down. I am just me, **content** with who I am.

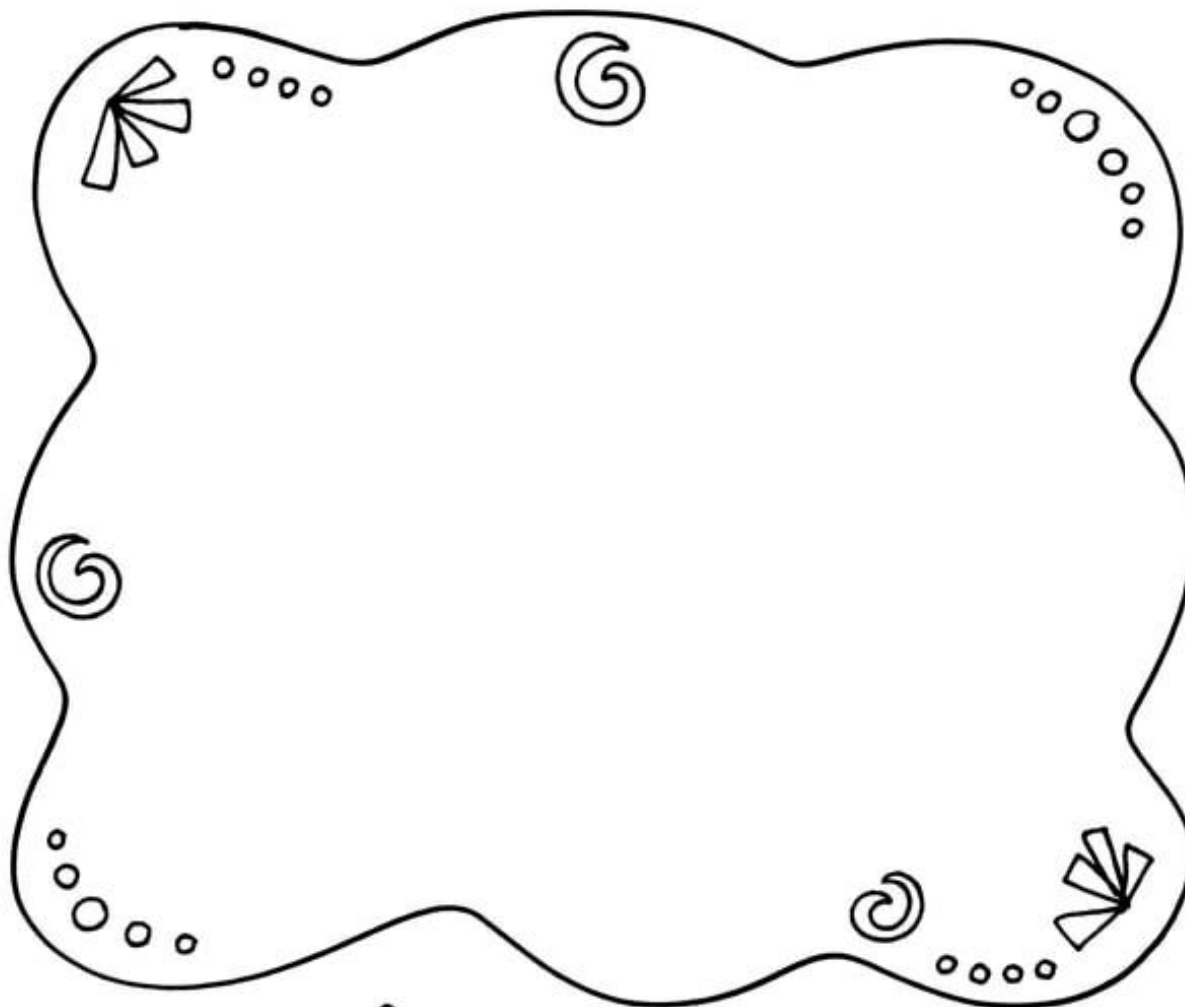
So now you and I have finished Chapter 2! We’ve learned one little tip we can use anytime we begin to feel the “Trying to Fit In Box” come down over the spark of our spirit.

Will you promise me that you will use this visualization anytime you need it? I will! This will be our pact, between two people, you and me—a pact which will keep me from going back in the “TTFIB” and you from ever going in. Okay?

Alright, superstar...on to Chapter 3!

(If you feel like it, try drawing a picture of what you feel like when you are contented and “lit from within” in the illustration on the next page.)

Draw a picture of what you feel like when you are contented and "lit from within"!



Doodle Art Alley ©

Chapter 3: Gratitude is an Attitude

Sometimes when that “TTFIB” cord is making its way back into my brain, I find myself complaining a lot. I’m not happy with the way I look. I might not like the clothes I own. My job is too tiring. I wish I had more free time. I wish I had something that I don’t have.

This ungrateful attitude is an obvious sign that I’m headed right back into the “TTFIB.” In the “Trying to Fit In Box,” instead of being grateful for what I have, I get caught up in the mindset of wishing I had more. For example, I might wish I was smarter or more popular or had more friends.

But when I watch you and kids like you, I see how you celebrate every day with built-in gratitude! Kids your age, are grateful for what they are able to do. Without even trying, you have an attitude of gratitude. Every little thing you get or every new thing you experience is exciting and fun. You see things with wonder and curiosity. You don’t judge. You don’t compare yourselves to other kids, like adults do. I had forgotten what real gratitude was like until I started hanging out with kids your age and had the opportunity to feel REAL gratitude all over again!

To make sure I keep an attitude of gratitude, here is another easy task I perform *everyday*: I made a gratitude list.

At nighttime I take several minutes and write down in a notebook (My journal actually, but I’ll get to that in Chapter 4), at least 10 things for which I am grateful.

Here, I’ll share one of my lists with you:

My Gratitude List for March 19, 2021

I am grateful for:

1. My children, Hank and Helen;
2. My best friend, Ricky.
3. My health;
4. My sweet dogs, Pixie and TJ;
5. My kind heart;
6. My sisters, Helen and Emily;
7. The town I live in;
8. The relationship I had with my Mom;
9. My neighbors who look out for each other;
10. My friend who drops off cookies every once in a while.

And here’s the absolute **best** part about writing a gratitude list. I feel better. Instead of seeing the world through eyeglasses that have me wanting more...I suddenly see the world through eyeglasses that allow me to see my life as full.

There is an expression that says, "You can either see the glass as half full or as half empty." The messages from the "TTFIB" see the glass as half empty. Living life *outside* of the "TTFIB" gives me the "glass is full" perspective.

So now, we know how to do task number two. Every night, write out a gratitude list with the top ten things in your life that bring you gratitude. Put the list next to your bed and in the morning, before you roll out of bed, re-read the list. You can then hop up and out of that bed for a day filled with an attitude of gratitude.

While the task is easy, you still have to do it to make it happen. I promise to write out a gratitude list every night, if you will! Alright then, let's shake on it. Now, on to Chapter 4!

(If you're up for it, check out the image on the next page. You can practice writing a gratitude list by writing down ten things that bring you gratitude. You can also color in the picture above it!)



Practice writing a gratitude list by writing down ten things that bring you gratitude. You can also color in the picture above it!

Chapter 4: Journal

When I was in third grade my big sister, Helen, gave me a diary. The green diary had a plastic shiny cover on it with the words "MY DIARY" written in cursive across the front of it. A tiny key opened and closed a very small lock allowing me to lock in everything that I wrote on those pages. At the top of each page was the date, and I would always write in it, each evening...like I was talking to a friend. I even named my diary. His name was "Frederick." Every night I would share with "Frederick" what I had done during that day. I also wrote down my feelings about what I had done.

The next Christmas, I got another diary from my sister. Getting a diary from her every Christmas became a tradition. I always looked forward to what it would look like, the size of it, the texture of the pages.

When I was in middle school, my sister realized that a small diary wouldn't work anymore, because in middle school I had many more thoughts, fears and "things" I needed to write about. So, she gave me a journal.

Every night I would take a good 25 to 30 minutes to write in my journal. Each page had lines on it so that I could guide my pen across the white pages, leaving my fears, thoughts, hopes and comments there for me to review later.

So, suggestion number three to staying out of the "Trying to Fit In Box" is to keep a very private journal. You don't have to spend any money on a journal. As a matter of fact, you can take extra pieces of paper and attach them to the back of *this* book or create a separate book just for journaling.

When you take time each morning or evening, to write in your journal, remember to just let your thoughts flow. A journal can only work its magic, if you don't worry about what you are writing and just write. Start with one certain idea...like friendship or something that happened during the day...and then just start writing. One thought will lead to another and before you know it, in 10 minutes you will have several pages of what has been inside your mind, now down on paper. Before you finish your journal time, go back and read what you've written. Think about what you have written and then see if you can come up with one sentence that summarizes or explains what you have written down.

The most important part about keeping a journal, is to keep your journal well-hidden and for your eyes only. Don't leave it out for your little brother to find or even your parents to discover. If you are worried other people might find your journal, you are very likely to not write down what your **real** thoughts are and will end up writing what you think others may want to read. This will completely defeat the purpose of the journal.

My mom once wrote in the cover of one of the journals she gave me for my birthday. "The truth will set you free." I didn't understand what she meant at the time, but now that I'm older I

do. My journal was a safe place for me to tell the truth about all the things I was feeling. My journal was a place for me to process my thoughts and be a good friend to myself, by listening to what I had to say. Keeping a journal helped me become a very **self-aware** person. I was able to listen to and observe my thoughts. Being self-aware is a character trait that, as I've grown older, I've come to truly value. Whenever I'm confronted by something and I'm not sure how to handle it, I can journal about it and read what I've been thinking. Next, I can observe what I've been thinking and then consider what the next steps are. Writing in a journal provides a brave and safe space for me to determine how I want to act and behave in certain situations.

Let's both promise to keep a journal, okay? Will you make yours or buy one? I like the idea of making my own...decorating it with my style and hiding it in a safe place in my room. For me, I think I'll hide in the back of my closet underneath some boxes. How about you? Where will you hide yours?

(On the next page is a sample of a journal page. You can print off as many of these as you want to make your own journal. And while we're at it, why don't you practice writing in it today on the following page! What comes up for you? What theme shows up? Have fun!)



Today's Date: _____

Today's Theme: _____

Chapter 5: Meditate

Alright, what I'm going to talk about in this chapter may be something you've never heard of, but the truth is, I learned all about it by watching kids just like you!

Before I started Girls on the Run, I was a teacher. School can be a very busy place, right? There is lots of talking, movement, laughter, and activity. Over time, I began to notice that when some of my students were having a rough day, they would slow themselves down to cope with whatever was bothering them.

Even with all the people and activity around them, their energy was quiet. They would naturally go through the motions of the lesson, but they were somehow "inside themselves." They seemed to be looking inward instead of being actively engaged with those around them. They were, even in the presence of all the hustle and bustle of the school day, taking some "quiet" time for themselves.

Because kids are not yet in the TTFIB, they don't worry about what their friends will think if they need to take this special quiet time for themselves. They just take it. They take it if they are in a group or if they are at home. They seem to understand how important it is to just shut out all the noise of the world around them and connect back to what's real.

I respect their courage to take care of themselves and have learned that taking quiet time is one of the most important activities I can do to stay out of the TTFIB.

I remember one student in particular. His parents were getting a divorce. One day before class, he asked if we could talk for a few minutes.

"Ms. Barker, I need to share something with you. My parents are getting a divorce. I've known about it for a while, but I have to be honest. It's really getting to me and I'm struggling today. Would you mind if I took a time out? I will be in the classroom, but just need to tune out. I need to just not be engaged right now."

I appreciated his honesty and his need for a time out and responded with "Why yes, of course. I am so glad you shared this with me. Please know you can continue to speak up with me on this subject or any others."

QUIET TIME. Think about it! Everywhere we go, there is noise. We are always doing something. We wake up, eat breakfast, get dressed, go to school, spend time with others, leave school, go to afterschool activities, come home, eat dinner, do homework, and then go to bed.

WHEW. I just got tired writing out all the activities!

As we get older, the many tasks we perform get more complicated and often involve more people. I'm a single mother with two kids, a job, a house to manage and a life to live. I'm

driving here, there and everywhere and half the time, by the end of the day, I haven't stopped long enough to consider what I'm thinking, feeling or doing.

Quiet time is not a natural part of American culture. I often feel pulled in so many directions that I don't take time to pull inwards, as kids like you do, when you are tired or stressed.

So, guess what I do? I MAKE quiet time. Instead of waiting for it to magically appear in my day, I sit quietly on a big yellow couch in my living room and meditate. I meditate every morning and sometimes even in the evening!

My mom used to meditate every morning. I would wake up, tiptoe down the hall and find her listening to calming music (or in absolute silence) and sitting on a chair with her hands crossed in her lap. I knew this was sacred time for her...so I would tiptoe back to my room or quietly make my way to the kitchen.

I've studied meditation over the years and there are many different "ways" to meditate, but here are some pointers that will help make your meditation time more effective:

Try to meditate in the morning, before you are dressed for the day and even before you've eaten breakfast. The quiet time first thing in the day really helps kick the day off with feeling peaceful, **centered**, and bright.

Try to always meditate in the same spot. Pick a favorite place...maybe on the floor of your room, maybe in a chair in your room. Most people avoid meditating on their beds because guess what happens? They end up falling back asleep and you definitely don't want to do that!

Sit comfortably with your legs relaxed and your hands resting in your lap or on your knees. Try to pick a position that you can hold for at least ten minutes. I usually sit with my legs in a crisscross position and my hands are gently folded in my lap or resting on my knees. My head is upright and slightly down.

Close your eyes.

Take some deep breaths. A fun breathing exercise to do looks like this:

Count to four (inside your mind) while you breathe in; Count to four while you hold your breath; Count to four while you let the breath out; Count to four while you hold your breath again. Do this about five times.

Next you might want to repeat a mantra. A mantra is a word that you repeat over and over inside your mind. Meditation experts say that if you repeat a mantra you can really clear your mind of all of those negative TTFIB messages and open your mind to the Light that is you. The mantra I repeat, is "Om Nama Shivaya," which is a mantra one of my meditation teachers gave me to say. That hasn't always been the mantra I use. When I first started meditation, I said, "Love" and then I went through a period of time, where my mantra was "Bring Healing." You can pick your own mantra!

Eventually and without even trying, I stop saying the mantra and I move into a very peaceful state. I'm breathing very easily. I almost lose track of where my hands, arms, legs, and feet are resting on the chair. If at any point, I start to get distracted by my thoughts, I go back to repeating my mantra again, over and over. And slowly I return to a feeling of peace inside myself. I become aware of something within me that is experiencing all that happens in my life.

After a few minutes (usually at least twenty), I open my eyes and look around the room.

Remember, the point of meditation is not to psych you up for the day, but rather to center you for the day. **Centering** yourself means surrounding yourself with energy that keeps you focused on the Light of the world around you and within you.

When I take time to meditate in the morning, here's what I gain throughout the day:

I feel lit from within.

I am open-minded and less judgmental of myself and others.

I gain insight. If a problem in my life has been really bugging me, I gain insight on how to handle the problem.

I feel compassion for others without becoming drained.

Go ahead and try meditating, for at least three weeks. You can "report" in your journal how meditation makes you feel and what happens when you meditate. You can keep track of the difference in how your days go when you meditate, and when you don't.

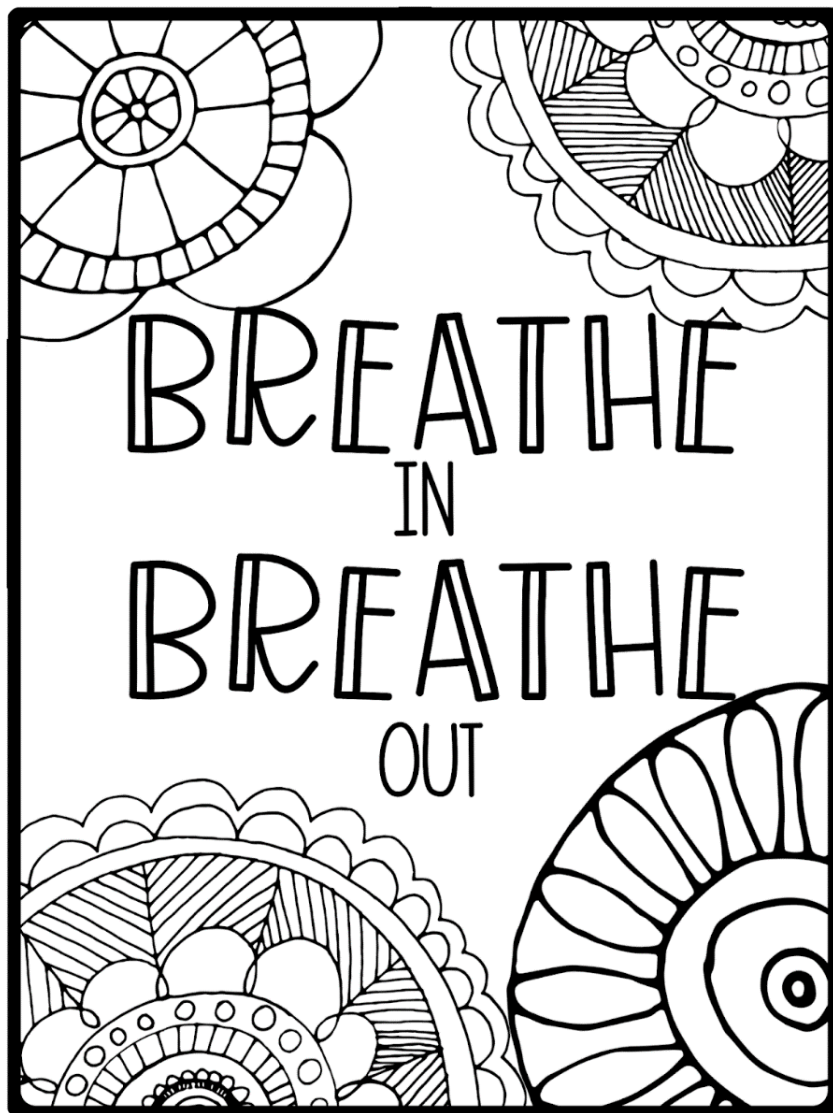
I think you will notice a tremendous difference. Meditation will help you see the world (and yourself) through open eyes and an open heart!

So we've done it. We've made it through Chapter 5! Now on to Chapter 6 and one of the most challenging insights yet!

(If you feel like it, fill out your meditation checklist on the following page. Gather up the items and get ready to feel centered!)

My Meditation Checklist:

- ✓ I set my alarm for _____, so I'm sure I will wake up with enough time to meditate.
- ✓ The spot where I will meditate is _____.
- ✓ The mantra I will repeat over and over to keep me focused while I meditate is _____.
- ✓ My journal is ready and waiting for me to document what happened while I meditated.



THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IS IN

Chapter 6: Make Amends

One of the hardest things to do is admit when we are wrong. Kids in the “Trying to Fit In Box” have an even more difficult time admitting they are wrong.

Think about it. The message of the “TTFIB” is “you should be perfect.” Therefore, kids trapped in that dreadful box can’t admit when they are wrong, because to do so would be admitting they really aren’t perfect.

But here’s something I’ve noticed! Whenever someone has done something wrong and they apologize for it, I actually feel closer to that person. I admire them for having the courage to admit they are wrong and even more so for apologizing for it.

Something I try to do everyday is make amends to those whom I may have harmed. Making amends is like an apology with one more step. In addition to apologizing to the person, I make sure any future actions I take show that I have learned from my mistake. I stop hurting the person or doing the same hurtful action to others. When I make amends, I go to sleep with my energy not tangled up in the negative energy around my hurting other people.

Let’s face it. You aren’t perfect and neither am I and you know what? That’s okay! Part of being human beings and living life, includes doing things that are wrong every once in a while.

I will admit that there have been times when I have hurt someone by lying or gossiping. I’m not proud of these actions. As I’ve grown older, I’ve come to understand some of the reasons I did those things, and it was *usually* because I was trying to fit in. (See? Even adults struggle with that darn “TTFIB.”)

I remember one time in particular many years ago. I took a bracelet out of my daughter’s room without asking for it. I wore it. Sometime during the day, I took it off and put it in the console between the two front car seats. When I picked my daughter up at school, she asked if the bracelet in the console belonged to her. I stumbled through some mumbling response about how I didn’t know how it got there and well...I’m not sure if it was hers or not. Of course, she knew it was hers and so did I. The problem was I had taken it from her room without asking and I felt bad about it. I didn’t want to own my actions; and to make it even worse, I lied to her about it!

Two hours later, I worked up the nerve to call Helen (she was at her Dad’s house) and apologize for not being honest. I also apologized for taking the bracelet from her room without asking.

Apologizing wasn’t all I needed to do. The next step was to make amends, which means I had to really make “the situation right.” I went to a little jewelry store, bought a gift certificate, and gave it to her. I also made a living amends, which meant from there on out, anytime I wanted to borrow something of Helen’s, I would always ask first. I needed to show her that I was trustworthy.

So, take a minute, right now, and shut your eyes. Think about any friend or family members whom you've harmed in the past. How do you feel on the inside when you think about what you did to hurt them? I know that when I have done something that has really hurt someone else OR when I've told a lie, I feel it in the pit of my stomach. The wrong that I did doesn't just disappear. I feel it inside and it won't go away until I somehow release it. That's why apologizing (and being really sincere about it) can be so powerful! Saying you are sorry is one indirect way to pull the negative trying-to-fit-in-cord out of the top of your head. Apologizing lets you be human and to admit that you aren't perfect!

People who admit when they have done something wrong and apologize genuinely apologize for it are expressing a very important character trait called **humility**. Humility is showing those around you that you aren't perfect. Humility is having the ability to acknowledge that you are who you are because of all the people and lessons you've learned in your life. A humble person shows humility.

It's never too late to apologize or to make amends. Tonight, when you are writing in your journal, why don't you make a list of those people whom you have harmed and over the course of the next several weeks try to apologize to them. Be careful though! Sometimes our apologies may hurt someone more than help them. In that case, you will just have to skip the apology and try to forgive yourself for what you did. You can also make a living amends instead of offering an apology and choose to live your life in a way that reflects what you learned about the mistake that you made. You can do things differently.

However, if you can apologize and your apology won't hurt the person, go ahead and do it! You will be amazed at how good you feel. You'll be able to look at others and yourself, directly in the eye. You will feel like your step is a lot lighter. You won't be carrying around the burden of your lie or your harmful behavior.

You will feel like the bright Light that you really are!

Before I close out this chapter, I thought I might share with you a concept called "paying it forward." "Paying it forward" is the notion that when we do something good, even when no one is watching us, the good we did circulates throughout our lives.

Here is a very simple example of how this principle might work. Let's pretend I'm walking from the parking lot at the local gym to the building itself. On the way in, I see a squashed soda can sitting in the parking lot. Instead of just walking over it, I pick it up and place it in the trash can on the way into the building.

I have no idea how my simple act of picking up the soda can may have helped someone else. Perhaps a car was going to roll over the rough edges of the can and get a flat tire. Or maybe a little kid was going to try to kick the can and may have cut her foot on it. The parking lot is part of my life and my surroundings and it is my responsibility to keep it clean.

Simple and kind acts like this, build up over a lifetime. They create a positive energy that swirls all around us. Performing kind acts such as picking up trash or apologizing when I've done something wrong are ways I stand in my Light and share my Light with others.

What's really cool at this point (you've probably noticed), is how all of the insights we've already discussed are beginning to rely on each other! You need to unplug from the TTFIB-cord in order to stand in your Light, but sometimes we do stuff that puts us back in the "Trying to Fit In Box", so we have to journal and meditate to figure out what to do to get out of the box. After journaling and meditating, we may realize that we owe someone an apology. All of these positive behaviors create a "pay it forward" kind of life that surrounds us with positive energy, which then attracts positive people who honor the Light that is us because they love us just the way we are!

Whew I'm always amazed how everything is connected. How I live my life is actually creating the life that I am living!

Okay, onto the next insight...one that is full of fun and playfulness. Onward! Chapter 7 awaits!

(Check out the words on the next page. "I can do hard things." Sometimes it's hard to admit we owe someone an apology and need to make amends. If you're up for it, color in the page and remind yourself daily that you can, in fact, "do hard things.")



Sometimes it's hard to admit we owe someone an apology and need to make amends. If you're up for it, color in this page and remind yourself daily that you can, in fact, "do hard things."

Chapter 7: Dance

If there is one thing that kids do...especially very little ones...more often than anything else, it's DANCE. Just watch them. What amazes me, is the way their bodies move when they dance. They are totally uninhibited, playful and downright goofy sometimes!

When my kids were little, we used to put music on and dance in the house, the car, while out on runs, while skateboarding, while swimming...pretty much anywhere we were and no matter what we were doing. We danced everywhere! We took "dance breaks" when homework got tough or when our moods got sour. My daughter would shout, "Time for a DANCE BREAK!" and we would stop whatever we were doing and DANCE!

Dancing is actually very freeing! Dancing is one of the easiest ways I have found, to share the Light that is me, with the people around me! If I can let go of all my "Trying to Fit In Box" fears and DANCE, then I become totally comfortable in my skin!

If you aren't accustomed to dancing, don't panic. You can grow into it. Start small. Maybe a good place to begin is while you are in the car and your mom is driving. First tap your foot on the floor. Then do the "foot tap" a little bit bigger. Next you might add a snap, clap or some fun movement with your head! If you are really bold, just go for it!

I dare you to dance right now. Get up...NOW!!!! Put this book down and dance, wherever you are, RIGHT THIS MINUTE!

Don't come back to this book for at least one minute. Dance for the whole minute!

I'll be waiting...

(I'm waiting.)

(Still waiting.)

(A few more seconds.)

Okay, tell me how do you feel? Good, right?

See? You just can't stay in the TTFIB if you are dancing. **JOY** is what dancing is all about. Dancing is the expression of JOY: JOY for who you are; JOY for the life you are creating; JOY for living your life outside the "Trying to Fit In Box."

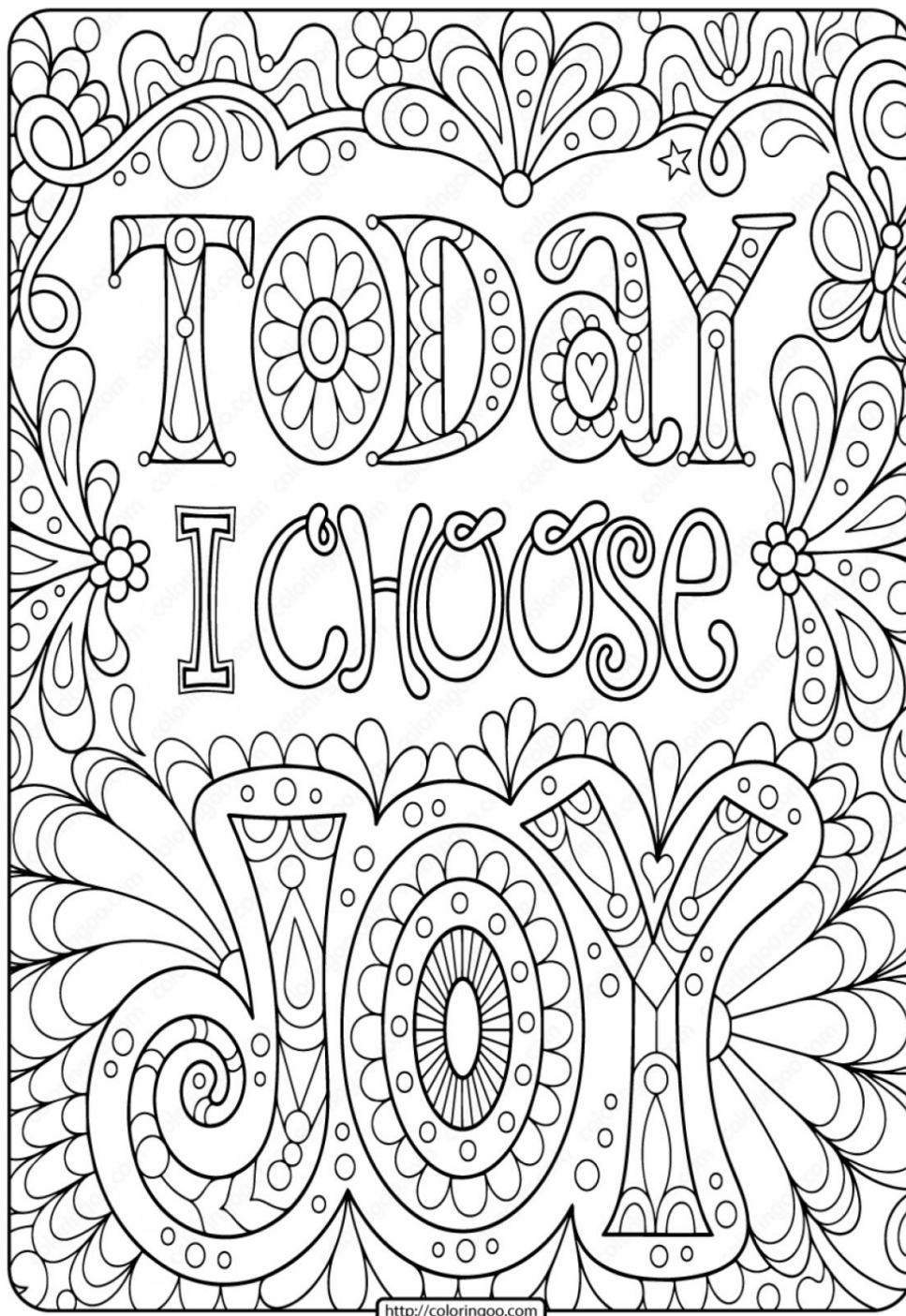
Thanks to the time I have spent with kids, I now have another tool to use when I find that I'm going back into the darn "Trying to Fit in Box." I dance with so much energy and so much joy that I become free of the box, right there on the spot!

We all need to dance. No matter how old we are, no matter the size of our bodies, no matter where we live or how much money we have. We need to unite as people and DANCE like there is no tomorrow!

So, get on with your Light-Filled Self and DANCE!

Whew. Now take a beath or two, because we have one final insight before we wrap it all up!
Ready? Let's do it!

(If you feel like it, color in the image on the next page, cut it out and post it somewhere, where you will see it often! And for more FUN, when you see it, dance for ten seconds.)



If you feel like it, color this image, cut it out, and post it somewhere, where you will see it often! And for more FUN, when you see it, dance for ten seconds.

Chapter 8: Bringing Your Light to Tough Situations.

Here we are. Here is the final insight we can practice to make sure we live **Lightfully!**

Let me set the stage for this chapter by talking first about the word impulsive.

When a person is impulsive, they do something without thinking about WHY they are doing it.

Let me give you a real-life example. Remember back in Chapter 1 when I shared that I started doing some very unhealthy things when I turned 14...and that one of those things included trying cigarettes?

I remember the first time I tried one. I was at someone's house and there were a lot of girls there. Several of them were smoking cigarettes. One of the girls asked me if I would like one. Without even thinking, I said, "Yes." I was reacting and impulsive. I didn't think through my response. I wanted to fit in so badly that I didn't think it through.

A couple of decades ago, I learned a really helpful method to keep me from reacting impulsively to tough situations happening around me.

It's called the "SBLR" method. (I like to use funny expressions to remember things more easily.)

SBLR stands for "Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond."

Let me show you how it works. Let's pretend that some people I know, begin to say mean and untrue things about my friend Shannon.

The first thing I impulsively feel like doing is lashing out at the people who are saying the mean things, but I've learned that being mean because someone else is mean, isn't changing anything. So instead, I take a moment and use the SBLR method.

I Stop: I stop whatever I'm doing.

I Breathe: I take a few deep breaths. (Maybe 3 to 5).

I Listen: I listen to all the different responses I have running around inside my head and I pick the one that makes the Light inside of me (and my friend Shannon) shine the brightest!

I Respond: I respond with an action that is just right for me. "Hey. Shannon is my friend and I love her very much. I know her just about better than anyone, and I know that what you are saying about her isn't true. I'm not a fan of gossip."

Isn't that cool? Think of SBLR (Stop, Breathe, Listen and Respond) as a little machine you can use when you feel yourself having an impulsive reaction to a tough situation. Instead of immediately reacting to the situation, you put the details of the situation in at the front of the SBLR machine and at the other end you will know what to do!

Sometimes, I have to run through the SBLR process many times throughout an entire day!

Here's another example.

Let's pretend you're on the playground and a group of kids is bullying someone. Your immediate reaction may be to bully back. Or maybe your immediate reaction is to walk away. Here's a great time to use the SBLR method.

Stop.

Breathe. Take a few deep breaths.

Listen. Listen to all the different responses inside your mind and pick the ones that makes the Light inside of you (and the person being bullied) shine the brightest!

Respond. In this instance, you decide to walk over to the person being bullied and ask them if they'd like to go play on another part of the playground. Later that day, you respond by going to a teacher and telling them about it.

Here's one more scenario. Let's say you are walking home from school and a group of kids confronts you and asks YOU if you want to smoke a cigarette. Use the SBLR method and watch what happens!

Stop.

Breathe. Take two or three deep breaths.

Listen. Listen to all the possible responses in your mind and choose the one that makes the Light inside of you shine the brightest.

Respond. In this instance, you say, "No" and just keep walking.

Sometimes the SBLR method doesn't always give us an answer right away. Sometimes it takes days or even weeks. Sometimes, I don't always get it right, but whenever I use it, I slow down long enough to be **INTENTIONAL** about the decisions I make.

So give it a try the next time you are faced with a tough situation. Write out the letters S, B, L, R in your journal and see what comes up!

What's next? The final chapter that puts everything together! Let's gooooo!

(If you're up for it, color in the hearts on the next page to help you remember Stop, Breathe, Listen and Respond!. You can even cut out the smaller version at the bottom of the page to carry with you, so you remember to use the SBLR method when you need it!)



Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond.

Chapter 9: Love

All right, friend. We've made it to the last chapter, the one that pulls together the seven insights into some kind of perspective. (Are you tired of that word yet?)

Let's review:

The seven insights were:

YOU:

- Are lit from within.
- Possess an attitude of gratitude.
- Journal.
- Meditate.
- Make Amends.
- Dance.
- Bring Your Light to Tough Situations

Several weeks ago, while I was on a run, I started thinking about the insights and was struck immediately by the deeper trait that each of the seven insights brings:

Here they are:

YOU:

Are lit from within, therefore, you are **CONTENT**.

Possess an attitude of gratitude, therefore, you are **GRATEFUL**.

Meditate, therefore, you are **CENTERED**.

Journal, therefore, you are **SELF-AWARE**.

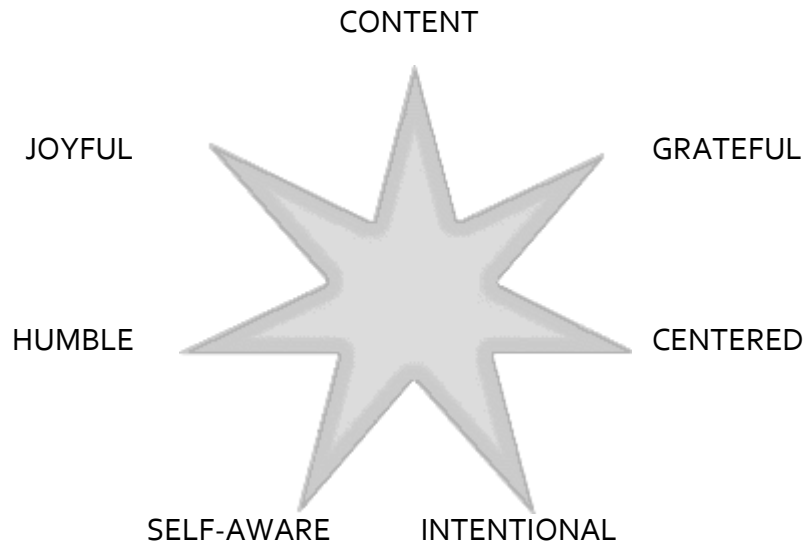
Make amends, therefore, you are **HUMBLE**.

Dance, therefore, you are **JOYFUL**.

Bring your Light to your life (using the SBOR method), therefore, you are **INTENTIONAL**.

Now here's the funny part. I couldn't stop there. I started thinking about how possessing each of these traits helps you and me stay out of the "Trying to Fit In Box" and helps keep our spirits "lit from within!"

And look what came next!



I can tell you right now, that any person who possesses these seven traits is going to be just fine in this lifetime. The Light from within them will shine so brightly that anyone who comes into contact with that Light will warmed by it.

This is called the “Power of Attraction.” I’m not talking about a romantic attraction. I’m talking about the kind of attraction that connects two people in a real and genuine way.

This kind of attraction can change the way a person feels about life. I sometimes like to imagine that if all the people in the world felt this kind of Light, warmth and safety with each other, there would be no wars. There would be no violence. There would be less suffering and pain.

Perspective, however, has taught me that we cannot truly celebrate the warmth of sunshine on a beautiful fall morning, unless we have felt the cold of dark clouds on a windy and bitter winter night.

If I could somehow teach you how to know the warmth of life without the “Trying to Fit In Box”, I would. But I know that part of growing up and sharing the wise and Light-filled essence of who you are means there will be times in your human life when you will feel the painful TTFIB darken the world as you see it.

But, my friend, what I also know, is that you have the tools to get outside of that box, anytime you choose to use them. I know this because you have used those tools (without even knowing) and I have written them (with the perspective I have as an older person) in this book! Kids, just like you, have reminded me of the wonder and beauty in the world! You have helped me rediscover the power of being content, grateful, centered, self-aware, humble, joyful, and intentional.

You and kids just like you have reminded me (and many other adults) the importance of letting our Light shine!

And as more and more people learn how to keep their Light shining, we help reveal a world where:

- People treat each other with respect, lift each other up and feel safe in each other's company.
- Political leaders seek peace instead of war.
- Company leaders create companies where everyone working there, is valued and seen.
- Elected leaders undo old policies and laws that harm people and create policies and laws where everyone, no matter their skin color, religion, financial situation, or gender, is seen, heard and valued.
- People in a community feel safe and brave enough to be their real and authentic Selves...safe and loved enough to let the LIGHT of who they are to shine brightly.
- People belong and feel loved.

Your Light, my Light, OUR Light together, is just that powerful.

I've had fun spending time with you. What's really cool is how we can have time together any time we want it by just opening up this book and reading it again, over and over. I figure that whenever I start to step into the "Trying to Fit in Box" I can always turn to these words and the insights of this book and automatically feel safe and strong.

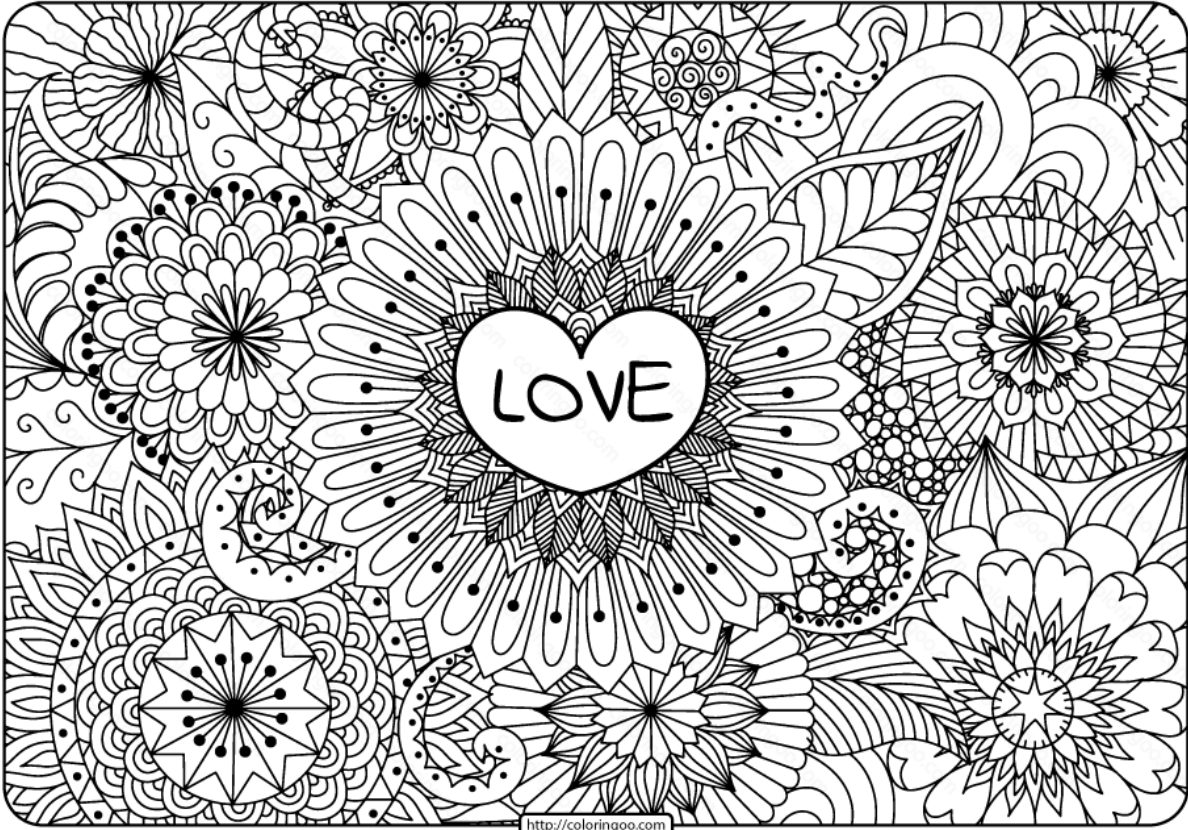
So, let's promise that we will revisit this book, whenever we feel like the TTFIB is trying to put out the spark of who we are. This way we will both always stay "lit from within."

You take care of yourself, okay?

I love you,

Molly B.

(On the following page write out what you have learned about yourself and your Light, underneath the LOVE coloring page! Share anything you want to say! If you feel like it, take a picture of it and email it to me at mollybarkerconnects@gmail.com. I would love to get connected.)



What I've learned about myself and my Light: