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AWAKEN YOUR POWER WITHIN



Let Go of Fear
Discover Your Infinite Potential
Become Your True Self

GERRY HUSSEY



Awaken Your Power Within

Gerry Hussey is a performance psychologist who has been working in the fields of health and performance for almost twenty years.

Through his programmes, keynote speaking engagements and events, Gerry helps clients strip away learned behaviours and thinking patterns to unclutter, clarify and overcome both internal and external obstacles and challenges, and ignite the best version of themselves from a mind, body and spirit perspective.

At the forefront of building high-performance teams and individuals, Gerry leads teams for success at high-profile competitions such as the Olympic Games, Heineken Cups, World Cups, and World and European championships. He also works with corporate organisations along with one-on-one sessions for individuals.

Gerry brings an unrivalled wealth of honesty, experience and infectious passion to everything he does. He has the ability to awaken, unlock and connect people and teams in a truly powerful manner.

Find Gerry at www.soulspace.ie or on Instagram @gerry_hussey or @soulspace_the_experience

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For Miriam, Elijah, Dad and Mum

This book includes meditations, exercises and prompts for journalling. A pen and notebook might be useful to have nearby to record thoughts and revelations that come to you while reading.

The advice in this book is intended as a guide. If you have a medical condition or are in mental distress then you should ensure that you seek professional guidance and advice from your doctor or mental-health practitioner.

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Trying to fill the inner void

Meet my eleven-year-old self

The alarm sounds and it feels much too early. The sun trickles through the curtain but I struggle to convince my eyes to accept the morning light. I struggle to gather the energy or the will to get out of bed and get dressed. Masses of thoughts and criticisms run through my mind. Like water released from the constraints of a dam, thoughts and emotions flood my system with incredible force, and I feel like I am drowning in them. Not only can I not see the bottom or the safe land, I can't even see the sea in which I'm drowning.

In automatic mode, my body makes its way to the bathroom and I freshen up, presenting an external picture that is very different to the one felt inside. It's even hard to feel the hot water of the shower on my skin against the avalanche of icy emotions inside.

Still in some type of automatic mode, my body makes its way into the kitchen, where I acknowledge my family with a mumble. At the breakfast table, I eat porridge but what I am really consuming is anger, anger at everyone at this table, anger at my own family – that I could be here, in so much pain, so

much distress, drowning before their eyes, and for them not even to notice, not even acknowledge my distress.

My cycle to school is my first chance to bring some type of order to these inner thoughts. It's my first chance where I have just enough energy to try to deal with them, my first chance to take on the army of demons that have been screaming for attention since the moment the alarm rang and gave them permission to attack.

I begin to create plans to support these thoughts. I began to make decisions about not speaking up in class because I knew it would reveal how stupid I was. Planning how I can avoid certain situations that may reveal the fact I have no friends, the excuses I would use when I'm not picked for the football team. I create plans to support all of these thoughts and beliefs. I have to – they control my life, and I believe, of course, that they are correct and are to be obeyed.

In the evening, I am back in bed. The countryside has become a vacuum of stillness, but my mind is still a torrent of noise. A distant howling dog expresses the need I have to scream, but I stay silent, fighting back tears. I want to scream at the sun not to go down, to stay up and keep me away from the terrors of the dark. The clock ticks and time moves on, but I stay the same, locked in a never-ending, frozen present of anger and fear. I imagine all the happy people going to bed, resting and closing their eyes, surrendering into a gentle sleep of happy dreams while I lie awake fighting demons.

If only I knew why my mind is like this, if only I knew why my brain is doing this and what is wrong with me. If only I knew how to stop it, but I don't.

I feel helpless.

There is nowhere I can run or hide from my own mind. It is this feeling of helplessness, this feeling of weakness that is the most painful. In an external world where there is nothing to be afraid of, I am terrified. In an external world where there is so much happiness, I am in a vacuum of relentless sadness.

Whatever is causing this, sleep is not the answer. I am too afraid to sleep, too afraid of what my mind might become and where it will go if I don't keep fighting it, trying to get it to stop. Staying awake isn't the answer either as I am exhausted.

What are the options?

Where else is there to go?

There is to be no peace or joy in either sleeping or waking. I can't carry this pain any longer, I can't bear this relentless cascade of fears and emotions. I can't carry this crushing feeling of being a failure any more – but where else is there to go? Where is it that pain and this crippling cascade of consciousness will ease? Where is it that this little boy can go because he simply can't take this pain any longer?

These are not easy questions to have to answer when you are eleven.

My name is Gerry. I was that little boy, lost and alone and contemplating suicide. This is where my story begins.

The destructive art of self-sabotage

Since as far back as I can remember, I had developed a way to live that enabled me to get through life, to survive. My life was

about getting through each day and getting through each week. I was simply trying to hang in there and keep my head above the water, and yet I didn't even know what the water I was trying to keep above was.

I was living within the constraints and behaviours of my own self-limiting ways so I would not be exposed. I was avoiding all the things I dearly wanted to be part of for fear of being rejected. I was terrified that someone would see my inner fears – my anxious mind, my dark thoughts – and would think I was crazy or defective, so I hid them and avoided any situation where they might come to light.

I was so afraid of what people would think if they really knew what was going on in my mind. I was afraid that they would think I was weak for thinking like this. I was terrified of being exposed as the failure that I was.

I felt I had little choice but to live within the limits of my own fears and the limits of my own beliefs.

Back then, I didn't realise that both my fears and my beliefs could be changed. So, instead of changing my fears and my beliefs to suit the life I craved, I changed and constructed my life to fit within the limits of those fears and self-limiting beliefs.

All through my teenage years, I pushed everyone away, especially those who showed any interest in me or who wanted to be my friend and to get to know the real me. I kept everyone at a distance. I did this as an act of self-sabotage. As we will find out, self-sabotage is actually self-protection but,

'Back then, I didn't realise that both my fears and my beliefs could be changed.'

at this point, I knew little about it. At this point, I felt so much pain inside that I believed anyone who shared my life would be infected with the same pain. I believed that I would infect others with the same life-crushing negativity that pulsed through my heart and veins, and that waves of darkness would engulf those who came close to me – so I stayed away from everyone to protect them, to protect them from me.

My deepest inner belief was that I was weak. I was someone who couldn't even control his own mind. Someone who had failed to do this over and over, so I was a failure. I believed there was something intrinsically wrong with me. I thought that because I was so attached to so much sadness and anger, I might even be evil. Therefore, before anyone could find this out about me, I would push them away. I had perfected the art of self-sabotage, even if I couldn't label it as such.

At times, we all experience self-sabotage. We keep ourselves from meeting the perfect partner, we stop ourselves from going to our dream job, we inhibit ourselves from taking that leap of faith that would set our souls free. We all experience self-sabotage to some degree and I will explore why and how we can overcome this later in this book. But right then, and all through my teenage years, self-sabotage was my greatest friend, my ever-present coping mechanism, and I used it every single chance I got.

My fortress of isolation

My self-imposed, rejection-free cocoon was a fortress designed to protect me but, in fact, that fortress was actually the thing

that kept me in isolation and loneliness, away from the people and things I loved and craved.

It was hard to see that at the time as I knew nothing about the power of the human mind. It was hard to understand that our thoughts are not reality and that our beliefs can be changed. It was far easier to stay in a world of self-perpetuating sadness, loneliness and pain, and just hope that it would go away – and even easier to stay in it and believe that it was all there was. I was living in a self-created bubble and it was like I was underwater all the time, unable to hear or see clearly, and all the time I was alone and gasping for air.

The truth about personality

Emotional and psychological pain can be like a thorn. However small, it can become infected if it is not removed. It becomes the locus of pain that will consume your attention, your thoughts and your emotions.

When combined, our attention, thoughts and emotions become our state of being – and if we stay in the same state of being for a sustained period, it becomes our personality. It becomes the state by which we come to know and recognise ourselves, the state we feel familiar with – and, in being familiar enough with it, we become familiar and comfortable with our own discomfort and we can actually become addicted to that state of being, that personality.

When we begin to believe that this is simply our personality – who we are – we believe that we have little choice about it, and so we must live within its limits as it is the way we are built

or the way we are somehow prewired and that is set in stone forever.

To support and affirm this, we tell ourselves dysfunctional stories like: 'This is just the way I am' or 'That's my personality type' or 'I am a type A personality so that's just the way I think and act' or 'This is the way I have always been' – eventually, the worst of all dysfunctional stories, 'Sure it's too late to change now'. Very often what we describe as our personality is simply our emotional safe zone, a way of thinking, feeling and acting that has become so familiar, we feel safe and secure in it – our thinking, actions and behaviours become predictable to ourselves.

As we will find out in this book, the subconscious mind and the ego simply want the familiar, so we begin to believe in a personality box and we allow ourselves to get into this box and stay within it.

When we believe in a hardwired personality-type construct, we can spend our entire lives putting our energy into feeding and maintaining this constructed version of ourselves, stopping ourselves from being what we might become if we were willing to step out of the emotional safety zone we call a personality type and step into a whole new way of thinking, feeling and behaving. Sometimes we simply live within the limits of a personality type that we have actually created ourselves but were not born with. This doesn't mean that we don't have innate and natural tendencies and ways of being – of course we have, but we can expand, evolve and grow these any time we are willing to do the work required to create inner change.

'I didn't know back then that my personality was not set in stone and that I could actually change it.'

I didn't know back then that my personality was not set in stone and that I could actually change it. So, I told myself that I just didn't have a very high intelligence, that I was very shy, that I was naturally a fearful person, that I wasn't a natural leader and that I was born with very low confidence. I told myself things that I would later prove were not true at all and I gave myself labels that I would go on to remove and prove incorrect.

At that time, I had a completely inaccurate belief about who I was and the abilities I had, but that is not surprising because, back then, I was buying into self-created labels and didn't know how to strip them away to reveal and become my true and authentic self. At that time in my life I had fallen into the it's-just-my-personality trap.

Putting up with the thorn became easier than removing it

We each carry different thorns. The feeling of not being seen or valued by a parent, of being rejected by friends, of being rejected by someone we gave our heart to. The fear of loving again, of spending our entire lives trying either to live up to or squeeze into the expectations of others, spending our lives trying to be what others want us to be.

Although the thorns can be different, the outcome is always the same – our lives are spent motivated by fear and not love. We chase other people's affirmation and never get our own. We live

a life of playing small, suffocating our dreams and denying our brilliance in order to suit everyone else.

Eventually, the thorn you carry becomes so painful that you can no longer feel all the other parts of your body that are not infected, all you can feel is consuming pain. Psychological pain is the same. It becomes so much that all you can feel and focus on is the part of you – the part of your life – that is in pain, you feel nothing else and you lose sight of all your beautiful parts. All the good dissolves and disappears from your experience and your awareness of yourself, and you are left with a picture that contains only your failings and your pain.

We disguise our pain with maladaptive behaviours and socially acceptable addictions

The sad part of this is that so many of us can carry emotional or psychological pain for so long. We hide it, suppress it and distract ourselves from it, hoping it will go away, but really knowing it won't. We construct our whole lives, our behaviours and our dreams, to hide our thorns and hide our pains. This is maladaptive behaviour.

Sometimes, the loudest person in the room is the one trying to drown out their own inner pain. Sometimes, the person with the seven-day smile is the one trying to deflect you from their tears. Sometimes, the very motivated, very driven person is the one who is running away and afraid to sit still. Sometimes, the person who is addicted to adventure and

'Sometimes, the loudest person in the room is the one trying to drown out their own inner pain.'

extreme pursuits is the one looking to self-harm or self-punish. Very often, the people who drink too much and tell you they don't care about it are actually telling you they don't care about themselves.

Sport and business are two socially acceptable ways we can hide and disguise our pain. Obsession and self-harm can be described as 'drive' and 'fearlessness' – the inability to be happy with who you are right now drives you to want more medals and more promotions. Avoiding a dysfunctional family life drives you to spend far too long at the training ground or in the office, and an unhealthy need to be seen, to be loved, will drive you relentlessly to be the centre of attention and the person everyone is talking about.

We will use any behaviour or emotion we can to keep ourselves as the centre of attention, even if, at times, the behaviours and emotions we use are destructive to others or ourselves.

When pain turns to anger, we declare war on ourselves

When you carry this inner pain for long enough, it can simply become too much. Sadness, loneliness and despair give way, and all that is left is anger. Intense anger.

Even when I was a young boy, I became angry at my family, my teachers, my friends. Eventually, having been angry at everyone and anything external, I turned my anger inwards and declared war on myself. Anger turned to hate. Ferocious, sustained self-hate.

I hated myself for my mistakes.

I hated myself for the sad and lonely person I was.

I hated myself for all the things I wasn't achieving.

'I created a mask, a suit of armour, to hide my inner child and my inner weakness.'

I hated myself because I wasn't the strong, confident person I wanted to be.

I hated myself because, in my own eyes and through my own inner stories, I believed I was a failure.

I was none of the things I thought I should be.

I was none of the things I thought my parents wanted me to be.

I believed I was a failure and I had failed all those who loved me. I had betrayed them, something that could not go unpunished.

I needed to prove myself to everybody and anyone. I needed to prove my strength – I couldn't let the world see my delicate and hurting side. The only way to heal was to get angry and push through, to suppress and deny. I told myself to harden up, toughen up, get on with it. There was no place for weakness or silly sadness. Toughen up, bottle up, that's the only way to get through this. I marched on, wounded and sore, alone and drowning. I created a mask, a suit of armour, to hide my inner hurts, to keep my demons locked in and the outer world locked out.

We create masks to hide behind

Throughout my teenage years, I contemplated ending my life a number of times. I thought it was the only option. I had even thought in detail about how, when and where I could do it. It is a really bizarre situation to be in, and anyone who has experienced it will know that it is shocking how clear your mind can be in the midst of such thoughts. It's not that death is what

you want – I don't know if anyone wants that – it's more that you're trying to ease the relentless pain, the non-stop thoughts and the ever-present feeling of being alone. It's almost like looking at life and the world from inside a soundless void, a vacuum, with a feeling that all of life and everything you wish for is on the other side of a glass wall but you can't get at it, you can't feel, sense or experience it.

I didn't want to die but I simply couldn't keep living, not this type of life.

In those dark days, I didn't know that I could change my life, that I could change my world simply by changing me. Therefore, I thought I was trapped into living this same reality, and that was something I couldn't bear to face.

Finding that one piece of me that was loveable

On one occasion, at the age of fifteen, as I prepared to end my life, I started to think about my mum. My incredible mum, who I love with all my heart. My incredible mum who I knew loved me even if I couldn't understand why. I love my mum dearly and I started to imagine what it would do to her if I went ahead and ended my life. This shook something inside me.

It was the first moment in my life where I actually allowed myself to look at evidence and realise that there was, in fact, someone who loved me.

Deep down, I knew, despite all my disguises, that my mum knew me, knew every part of me. If my mum was willing to love me, then, at some level, a piece of me must be loveable. For the briefest but most powerful of moments, I felt loved

and I felt love. I began to realise that, as powerful as fear is – and it is powerful – there was something that was more powerful, more powerful than anxiety, more powerful than anger and more powerful than self-sabotage – and that is love. In that moment, I experienced love. As I allowed that feeling of love to flow through me without resisting it, I realised that I felt differently, mentally and physically. As I embraced the feeling of being loved and being loveable, everything in my being felt different, not just in my mind but in my body and, for that brief moment, I realised the true power of love and that how I feel emotionally has a massive impact on what I think and how I feel in my body.

'I began to realise that, as powerful as fear is – and it is powerful – there was something more powerful, more powerful than anxiety, more powerful than anger and more powerful than self-sabotage – and that is love.'

For the first time that I could remember, it was like something clicked in my heart – a wave, a volt of electricity – and, when it did, for that split second, there was a whole new feeling. There was a curiosity over how my thoughts and physical sensations changed so fast in that moment of feeling loved and there was hope, hope that if my mind and body could change even for a brief moment, then maybe they could change forever.

I now started to wonder: *What if I could find and experience that piece of me? What if, even for a second, I could allow myself to see myself through my mum's eyes?* I became aware that I had something to fight for, and that maybe love was the starting

point, maybe love was the medicine I needed, maybe love was the answer.

I decided I would give life another go and see if I could find and experience the part of me that my mum found loveable. The part of me in which love still existed and was still alive.

There was now something in me that wasn't quite ready to go, something that was still willing to believe that a different life was possible. There was still a part of me that was driven to stay, to live and to finally be able to experience the life, the freedom, the ease I had so desperately craved and had just experienced for the briefest of moments.

Chasing stuff

I was beginning the right journey but what I didn't know was that I was taking the wrong path.

The path I decided to take was to try to become the person who deserved my mother's love because, at that time, I wrongly believed that love was something we have to earn. I didn't realise that real love is choosing to love someone for who they are and not for what they do. So I set off to push, force and strive my way to becoming someone that was good enough, someone that deserved love.

I began to set goals around sport and school. I committed to doing everything I could to become somebody – somebody valuable, somebody people would like, someone my mother could be proud of. I wrote down all the things that I thought would make me a good son, all the things I needed to achieve to be considered valuable. I fell into the goal-and-target trap.

I began to believe that my self-worth was in the things I did, the things I won, the trophies, the titles, the exams, and not in the person I was.

I started chasing stuff.

For the next few years, I threw myself into the relentless and self-punishing pursuit of excellence, where I set higher and higher personal standards and goals that I desperately needed to live up to – all in a fraught desire to convince myself that I was different to my inner thoughts of worthlessness. This obsession with targets and winning became a non-stop need to win, where each win became a short-lived shift away from the belief that I was a lonely, terrified loser. But shortly after each win, the belief and the emotion of not being enough would reappear and the win would dissolve.

In competitive environments, obsession and desperation can easily be masked as focus, desire and determination. Self-punishment and self-harm can be masked as a willingness to break down and push through pain barriers. In highly competitive environments, I could hide my inability to accept who I was and replace it with a relentless desire to be someone else, chasing someone else's goals.

Winning was a temporary reprieve from the chaos of my mind, which was determined to rip itself apart. Each win in sport or school gave me a momentary feeling of happiness, while losing would further compound the feelings of uselessness and emptiness. I was changing my activities, and these new activities could temporarily change my emotion but, as soon as the pursuit stopped and the emotion dissolved, I realised that I was back

to the same old belief. I didn't know then that unless I actually changed my innermost, deepest self-beliefs, I would always arrive back at the same place.

I came to fear losing, to the point where it was all I could think about. Of course, the more we fear something, the more energy we give it and the more we manifest it. I was so terrified of losing that I couldn't focus on anything else. I knew losing would bring about a tidal wave of self-fear and self-hate. It wasn't the actual losing, I feared the voice in my head that would be released if I lost, I feared the feeling in my heart, I feared being catapulted back into those moments when I first contemplated suicide as an eleven year old with no place to go, facing the abyss of nothingness.

It's who we are that matters, not what we do

Back then, I didn't realise that we should value ourselves for what we are, not for what we do or what we have. I didn't know that this focus on accepting the person we are – and coming to fully accept and love all parts of ourselves – is actually the first step in our transformation.

The biggest challenge most of us face is to accept ourselves fully as we are right now. To know that you are enough, that who you are right now is the perfect starting point from which you can create any future.

We spend far too long waiting for things before we start our transformation. We wait until our body shape changes ('When I lose a few pounds') or until we get the next promotion ('When I'll feel more successful') or we wait until we have more stuff,

thinking that happiness can be found in the stuff. We wait for some external thing so that we can begin to feel like we're enough.

We forget that, very often, the things on the outside don't actually change how we feel on the inside.

The more we wait to become someone we can love, the more we are not loving the person we are. It means that the person we are right now has been judged and is rejected. If we keep sending that message to ourselves, it quickly forms our belief and, when we repeat this belief over and over, it becomes so powerful that we cannot break from it.

Even when we change things on the outside, change how we look, we will still remain the same on the inside. If we don't change our inner view of ourselves, then it doesn't matter what we change on the outside, we still face the same negative self-talk.

To love and accept yourself fully, exactly as you are right now, and to transform fear, anger and self-judgement into self-love and self-acceptance is the only place from which you can create a new future of ease and happiness. Back then, I didn't know any of this, so I set out to change everything on the outside in the hope that that would change everything on the inside.

I didn't know that no amount of external achievement or

'To love and accept yourself fully, exactly as you are right now, and to transform fear, anger and self-judgement into self-love and self-acceptance is the only place from which you can create a new future of ease and happiness.'

possessions can fill an internal hole. I kept filling my internal psychological hole with external physical things. I was in fact like someone trying to fill a bottomless bucket.

During this time, I constantly needed a new goal, a new win to keep the bucket of self-esteem from emptying. It was exhausting. When we need external wins, external validation and external material things to fill our internal hole, we are on a never-ending path. Eventually, if we are lucky, we realise no amount of external affirmation, no number of external wins, can overcome and erase an internal limiting belief.

We can all, at times, over-consume material things to fill an internal hole. We can work too hard, eat too much, consume too much alcohol, too much social media and even be too obsessed with fitness. We can all find something that gives us a momentary reprieve from the pain of loss or absence of inner peace, a momentary feeling of nourishment, but these are short-term and fleeting before we are quickly met with our own inner malnourishment – and instead of finally nourishing ourselves at this deeper level, we go to the quicker and more immediate solution of work, food, wine, chocolate or a pill.

But it's hard to know this when you are fifteen, so I pushed on. I bottled up and suppressed everything that was in my mind and in my heart in the hope that a medal in my hand would suddenly, somehow, bring the ease and peace I was so desperately craving. I was now on a relentless mission where I pushed myself constantly, further and further.

The revelation about dis-ease

Of course, when you push so hard there comes a time when you simply can't take any more. When you live with an inner lack of ease, it will eventually become a physical dis-ease. The revelation about the root cause of so much of our disease is right in front of us in the name – dis-ease simply means a lack of ease.

If you live with a high level of unease in your mind, it will eventually transfer chemically and physically into your body. I have come to realise that so much of our physical disease begins as a lack of ease in the mind or spirit, which I will explain in greater detail in Chapter 10 regarding the disease of distraction and the mind–body connection, but I didn't know any of this as a teenager, this was a revelation that I was about to get a sudden awakening to.

My internal dis-ease begins to appear in my physical body

Throughout my teenage years, I experienced physical symptoms, pains and headaches. I seemed to have a headache more often than not. I would get shooting pains that would run up and down my neck and I began to experience periods where my heart would race. At times, I thought I was having a heart attack.

Of course, at that time, I didn't know that the mind and body are actually connected, and that often the body is the blueprint or the physical

'I didn't know that, very often, the body is the tongue of the subconscious mind.'

manifestation of the mind. I didn't know that, very often, the body is the tongue of the subconscious mind. I didn't know that I started to get physical symptoms because of an emotional lack of ease.

I had certain physical symptoms, but we can all experience a range of symptoms or sensations and, if we listen to them in the right way, we may realise that they are actually messages and information about what is going on in our psychological and emotional world. They may not be pains at all – they may be more sensations or feelings of unease, dissatisfaction and worry, which can turn into anxiety.

If we ignore our psychological or emotional world long enough, then our incredible intelligent systems will switch the signal and the symptoms to the physical. If you ignore your mind long enough, it will eventually speak through your body and make sure you listen.

My parents took me to our GP, who said I was healthy, but I continued to get worse. More headaches, more racing heart, more physical signals, so they brought me to a consultant. This gave me so much hope, maybe I would finally get some answers about why I had always felt the way I did. Maybe this consultant, a professional who knows everything about health, would help me fix this pain and brokenness that I had lived with for so long.

I remember that day when, full of hope, we went to the consultant's office. I prayed he would see how much pain I was in and have the medicine to help me. He examined every part of my physical self. I sat in his office feeling like I couldn't breathe;

my heart was pumping so quickly that I, again, thought I was having a heart attack and I had a headache that felt like someone was shoving knives into my skull. Sitting there, in this turmoil, I watched as the doctor walked back into the room with a smile and said, 'Good news, all clear. He is a perfectly healthy young man.'

My heart sank. How could he say that? How could I be perfectly healthy and feel this terrible? What could explain the pounding in my head and in my heart? It made me feel so guilty about wasting my parents' time and money, and made me believe even more that I was weak.

'A perfectly healthy young man', was his expert opinion, so that is what we were to believe and accept. Nothing needs to change, everything is perfect. But, of course, I knew he had missed something, maybe he had missed everything.

He had never once asked me anything about my inner world – about the sleeplessness, the inner fear and anger, the loneliness and the self-hate. He simply ignored the terrified, lost boy sitting right in front of him and simply examined the physical. He missed everything that was right in front of him.

Exhausted and scared, I left his office and I had no idea what to do now or where to go; all I knew was that I was exhausted and unable to keep fighting, keep living the life I had been living. But I didn't know what else to do only push on, bottle up, toughen up, and stop wasting people's time.

The doctor's words kept coming back to me. I was 'perfectly healthy', there was nothing wrong with me, so I told myself

to stop complaining and get on with it. Eat healthily, exercise regularly, take care of the physical and all will be well – that's all it takes to be healthy, right? I had never even heard of a psychologist, no one had ever suggested I see one and no one had ever explained to me the mind–body connection. So, I focused only on the physical.

Our physical symptoms are simply a reflection of an emotional or psychological problem

The physical symptoms continued throughout my teenage years. At the age of twenty-three, things came to a head in what would prove to be a powerful catalyst and a period of incredible learning.

One day, after a training session, I started to feel very unwell. I was rushed to hospital and quickly admitted and treated for suspected pericarditis, which is an inflammation of the pericardium, the thin layers of a sac-like tissue that surround your heart and hold it in place. My heart was inflamed, enraged and constricted – which was also a perfect description of how my mind felt at that time.

The body gives us physical messages that tell us what is going on in the mind.

I thought, once again, that there was something wrong with me physically, because I had still not learned about the incredible mind–body connection. I had not learned that, often, our physical symptoms are simply a reflection of an emotional or psychological problem. So, I continued to try to fix the symptom and ignore the actual root cause.

I was hospitalised for a few weeks because the doctors were trying to get to the bottom of my condition. I was placed in a room where, over time, I would watch a number of my fellow patients pass away. For a period, I even believed I was next. I was so sick at that point, that I really thought I was nearing the end of my life.

The bizarre thing is that I had contemplated ending my life and now I thought the decision would be taken out of my hands. I didn't fear death – in fact, it seemed like a welcome reprieve – but during my time in hospital, I was forced to examine my life in a whole new way that would change everything.

Death is never the tragedy, realising at the end that you never actually lived your life is the tragedy

Slowly, my body began to recover. The pains began to ease and I stopped resisting and denying my situation. I stopped saying that someone had got it wrong, that I was too young and too healthy to be in this room, this room of old, sick people. Slowly, my anger towards my situation and towards everyone in the room turned to acceptance and then to curiosity. I finally had nowhere to go, nowhere to be, nothing to chase, no mask to hide behind and nothing to cling to. I was stripped bare, in nothing but a free pair of pyjamas from the hospital.

I began to get to know the five other men who I shared my hospital room with. We were different ages, with different backgrounds and different life stories. The room became our world. It was where we watched television together, listened to the radio and, at times, listened to each other as we shared our

stories. As the days passed and we began to get to know each other more, we listened to the TV and radio less, and started to listen to each other more.

The freeing power of vulnerability

We were all trying our best to process and contemplate what was unfolding for each of us. As we gained each other's trust, we shared a little more about what was unfolding in each of our hearts.

During the day, we would sit and chat and joke about life and football. We would slag each other about where we were from and how the culchies were so lucky to be allowed to live in Dublin with the Jackeens. Even in the most distressing of environments, we found things to laugh about, temporarily anyway.

At night-time, we would lay in our beds, contemplating something a little deeper – the regrets for the things not pursued, how much time we had wasted on things that didn't matter, the meaning of life and the mystery of death that was clearly not far away from some of us. I never quite knew what each of the men was thinking as we lay silently in our beds at night-time, but the density of the silence was filled with a million questions, a million worries, fears and regrets, and a million images of people we loved and memories we clung to.

The silence was the most remarkable thing; at times none of us would speak a word, but the way we would catch each other's eye, the nod to a question not asked out loud, let me know that, in that silence, there was a powerful communication taking place.

As the time passed, we became closer. The stories we shared became deeper and more honest. As we were separated only by tiny, almost see-through, curtains, there was nowhere to hide physically, and I was beginning to realise there was nowhere to hide mentally or emotionally either.

As some of my room-mates got closer to the end of their lives, we began to see each other stripped bare, not just physically but mentally and emotionally. We began to see each other not by our age or accent or where we were from, but as terrified, remorseful, unsettled and lonely souls who were beginning to realise that, for some of us, there was no going back, no second chances, no more next years.

As our conversations deepened, I learned about the wives some of them had lost and how life seemed to have had such little meaning since their losses. I heard about the pain of having no relationship with a son and about the pain at having spent so many years separated from loved ones and maybe never getting the chance to change the vacuum that existed. In that little room, where six human beings were forced together, where six hearts were hurting physically and emotionally, and six souls were either worried about or preparing for death, I was receiving my greatest education.

It is amazing how well you can get to know somebody when you allow your outer mask to fall, when you are no longer afraid to bare your soul and speak your truth to each other. It is amazing how well you get to know somebody – and yourself – when you allow yourself to be vulnerable.

In that room, all six of us were forced to show our

vulnerabilities, our weaknesses and our fears, and, in doing so, we connected with each other on a level at which I had never connected with anyone up to that point. It forced me to drop the pretence, to drop my fear and my ego, and it allowed me to bare my soul completely – and I realised the freeing power of vulnerability.

In this short period, these men became my friends. They knew more about me than anyone else in the entire world, and their honesty and lack of bullshit enabled me to see myself in a whole new way. They became friends who listened to my inner, deepest fears and regrets, the people I could, for the first time in my life, be my true vulnerable self with and not be afraid of comparison or being judged. These men had no time or need for these things. It felt incredibly freeing to have this type of relationship in my life.

But, of course, we were all in that room for a reason. We were all sick in some way and some were dying. Over the course of my time there, I watched two of these new friends pass away. In the small room, with the almost see-through curtains, there wasn't much confidentiality. As each man passed away and said goodbye to his family, as each family experienced the fear and heartache of losing a loved one, I was there. I witnessed every tear and conversation and registered every regret.

In this little room, there was no getting away from the reality that was unfolding in front of me, there was no getting away from the reality of life. My running away from my fears was over and, for the first time, I had no distraction to run to, no mask to hide behind and no tomorrow to wait for; everything

of importance in life was unfolding right there and it was both mind- and heart-blowing.

Slowly the room of six became a room of four. Then two others were transferred to another part of the hospital; I never saw them again and I don't know whatever happened to them.

That left two of us in the room. The conversations between us became quieter. As we waited for new arrivals to fill the empty beds, we tried to make sense of all that we had experienced, listened to and been part of in such a short period of time. Quickly, the empty beds began to fill with new people, new stories, new fears, new regrets and new unfolding vulnerability. But, this time, I didn't have the same interest in getting to know my room-mates. Perhaps it was because I was tired, or perhaps afraid that if I got to know them again, and hear their stories and form friendships, I would lose them too. There is only so much bereavement we can take in a short time and, at that moment, I'd had more than enough.

I still had my friend from the original six and we stuck together. We were now a two-man team and that was enough. We remembered the others for their jokes, their laughter and their stories, and, as best we could, we tried to keep their memories alive and fill the glaring emptiness as we waited for our own destinies to unfold.

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One morning, as I was having my breakfast, my friend's wife was visiting. As they chatted, a team of doctors walked into

the room and pulled back the curtain around my friend's bed. I saw something on the doctors' faces as they walked in, I saw something in their eyes, and I knew the news was not good. As one doctor began to speak, I tried not to listen, but there was nowhere to go, nowhere to not witness what was being said.

Over the next few minutes, I heard one of the frankest, to-the-point and most factual conversations I had ever witnessed. The doctors had come to tell my friend that all of his test results were back, all the retests had been done and that, on data and evidence, their best advice was that he should go home to spend the little time he had left with his children.

I will never forget that conversation. It brought home to me how sacred and special time is, how valuable our health is and how we can simply never take anything or anyone for granted.

I remember him and his wife pleading with the doctors for some answer, some tiny shred of evidence that might suggest that this was not the truth, but every question they asked was met with the same answer, 'Spend as much time as you can with your family.'

We can put off so many things, we can be happy to wait, thinking – assuming, even – that we have more time than we actually have. The truth is that none of us knows exactly how much time we have or when that time will end.

The time to do anything of importance – to love, to hug, to kiss, to chase your dreams – is absolutely not in the future, it is now. That tiny room with the see-through curtains had become the place of my greatest education and I was finally beginning to hear the lessons.

Later that day, after he had packed his bags and was about to leave, he walked over to my bed to say goodbye. The tears were rolling down his face, yet he still found the kindness to wish me well and he said he would pray for me.

We went to shake each other's hand but instantly knew that that wasn't enough. We embraced each other in a hug that I will never forget. It was the first time in my life I had hugged a man. Until then, I thought that grown men didn't hug but there, in that moment, I knew that real men hug because love, kindness, compassion and support is neither a male nor female thing, these things are universal human traits and to be most human is to embrace all of them. It was the first time that I realised something else, too – I had never hugged my dad.

As we hugged, he said something really important to me. He told me to be sure to live life in the present, to take nothing or nobody for granted, to spend as much time with the people I love and to tell them every day that I love them. He told me to have fun and to remember that most of the things we worry about are never actually worth the worry.

I told him I would pray for him. I told him I hoped that everything would work out and that he would find peace. As his tears flowed, he slowly turned around and put his arms around his inconsolable wife, and together they walked out the door knowing they were about to face the greatest challenge of their lives.

I was overcome with anger, with fear and with sadness. I didn't know what to do, I just knew I wanted to cry, but I couldn't – for the first time in my life, I realised I had somehow lost, suppressed or buried my ability to cry. In this little room with see-through

curtains, I was starting to understand myself with a clarity I had never experienced before.

For the next few days, I retreated into my own mind, into my own space, trying to contemplate and make sense of all that I was witnessing and experiencing. Over those days, I was so engaged in my own thoughts and emotions that even though I was aware that doctors were coming and going and sticking things into me and doing things to my body, I wasn't even interested. At that point, the most important thing for me to heal was my mind and my emotions.

I had realised that, very often, our pain and the source of our greatest sickness is actually in the non-physical part of our being, something that was an incredible awakening for me.



When we are faced with death, it's amazing what becomes instantly unimportant. These are usually the things we have spent so much of our lives, time and energy worrying about – the job we worked in, the boss we didn't like, the overtime we did that kept us away from loved ones, the holidays we said we couldn't afford, the exam we failed, the kitchen we didn't clean. All these things, and any importance we gave to them, evaporate instantly and we are left with an empty space, asking, 'What the hell was my life actually about? Why did I give so much time to those things?'

Coming this close to what I thought was the end and witnessing others go through the same made me ask some

important questions, questions that I now believe we can all benefit from asking ourselves.

- What was my life about?
- Was there enough fun in my life?
- Was there enough laughter in my life?
- Did I spend enough time with the people I love?
- Did I tell them and show them I loved them?
- Was I open to being loved?
- Was I open to being loved as I was?
- Was I a good person who lived his values?
- What were my values?
- Was I kind to myself?
- Did I believe in myself?

In my case, there were a few more big questions that I needed to explore.

- Why did I never feel healthy?
- Why did I always feel that there was something wrong with me?
- What was I missing?
- What was everyone missing?
- If the answer wasn't in my physical body or my physical brain, then where was it?

These were important questions for me, and I would happily spend the rest of my life trying to answer them. That's the decision

I made as I fell asleep that night in the hospital all those years ago. *If I wake in the morning*, I thought, *if I survive this, I am committing to a life well lived*.

For the first time in my life, I had been stripped bare, my life and my beliefs about life were all exposed. At least I was beginning to get to the root of who I was and what my life was going to be about. I just needed a few more weeks of thinking and reflecting and reading to process all that had happened.

My experience in that hospital was that mental and emotional healing get very little or no time in general medical practice. While I was still in the middle of all of this experience – with my mind spinning, my emotions fluctuating, not knowing who I was anymore or where I was going or how I was going to make sense of everything – a doctor I had never met stood at the end of my bed. He read the charts for a couple of seconds and said, 'Mr Hussey, we are happy with your results. You are free to leave.'

I was released that afternoon having, again, been given a clean bill of health. While physically I was better and my symptoms had disappeared, I had no real explanation about why I had felt the way I had or what I could do to stop those feelings coming back. In some ways, I left the hospital no wiser than I went in – but maybe I left it a lot wiser and having learned everything I needed to learn.

You may think that being able to go home would have been amazing news. You would think that I would have been delighted to be told I was being released from hospital. After the fright of thinking I was dying, you would think that I would be delighted to be told I could leave, but I wasn't. I was terrified.

Terrified because I didn't know where to go or who I could speak to to help me process everything I had experienced or to help me find the answers I now needed. I was terrified of going back into my old life, I was terrified of falling back into the abyss of loneliness and emptiness that I had experienced before I went into hospital. Maybe I wasn't dying, but what I'd had up to that point hadn't felt like life, not a life I wanted to return to anyway.

The most incredible thing happened on the morning I was released. It was amazing how much I wanted to leave the hospital and, at the same time, how much I wanted to stay. I wasn't ready to go back to my old life. I wasn't ready to go back to the noise and distraction of the outside world. I wanted more time to try to process and understand, and I needed more time to heal mentally and emotionally. But, of course, I couldn't stay. Everyone expects you to be happy to be leaving the hospital, so I bottled up my emotions as I prepared to leave – packing away my fears along with my clothes into a small bag.

With a signature and the stroke of a pen, I was released. I walked out of the hospital and onto the busy city street, back into the hustle and bustle of everyday life, full of people rushing and racing. But something was different, something was very different – I was very different.

I now looked at the busy and distracted world through very different eyes. In my heart, I didn't want to go home to my parents' house because I didn't have the energy or know-how to share my stories, my feelings and my emotions with them. The truth is that I didn't know where to go. My old life wasn't

home any more, the old me wasn't home any more. In the most fundamental way, I felt homeless.

I saw a little coffee shop on the other side of the street. I decided to go inside to collect myself and think about what to do next. I ordered a pot of tea but what I was buying was time. I needed to sit and think. As I sat there, my eyes and my heart began to well up, to the point where I could no longer hold back my tears, and I started to cry uncontrollably.

I didn't have the energy to worry about what other people thought of me, I didn't have the energy to get up and leave, so I sat there in the middle of a busy coffee shop, crying my eyes and my soul out. Noticing me, the waiter came over and left a number of napkins on my table. I could see by his face that he didn't know what to say. He obviously knew something was wrong. I realised how hard we can find it to say something when we see someone upset. I may have left the hospital, but I was still learning fast.

I used some of the napkins to wipe away my tears. As I sat and waited, the tears slowly began to subside; I began to catch my breath and regained a sense of calm. In that space of momentary calm, something flashed across my mind, a simple but powerful realisation that I would not be going back to my old life. I would no longer spend my life running away from myself, nor would I chase the things that other people wanted me to have or the things I thought I needed to have for other people to like me.

I realised that the time of running and racing was over, the time of constantly craving external distraction and external affirmation was over. My days of looking for and waiting for

someone external to heal my pain was over. I realised that if I was going to have any life, any life of freedom and peace, I was going to have to first start living my own life, in my own way, where peace, love and happiness became the most important things.

I made the decision that I was no longer going to waste any of my precious time on things that didn't actually matter.

T.S. Eliot wrote a poem entitled 'Four Quartets'. In it, he has a powerful sentence that implies that, at the end of all our journeys, we will arrive back at the place of our beginning, but that we would know that place as if for the first time. I had read this poem thousands of times, but I had never really known what he was talking about. Now, for the first time in my life, it made perfect sense.

We are born naked and alone and we own nothing. We are born only with our personality, our inner dreams, our kindness, our compassion, and our ability to bring peace and love to ourselves and to others. At the end of our lives, we will again find ourselves in that place where we are naked and alone, where we have nothing but ourselves. The only thing that will matter on your final day is what you have found out about yourself and whether you are proud of the person you became – the things and people you prioritised, the love you shared, the dreams you pursued and the peace and presence you found in your life that enabled you to see and experience the magic of the universe.

On that day, depending on how you spent your life, the dreams you chased or buried and the love you embraced or hid from, you will be filled either with great pride or deep regret.

Now that I had experienced what a final day of life might feel like, I decided I would use that experience to live my life in a far more meaningful way, where I would get to experience and express myself more fully and understand everything that I was and everything that I could be.

There was no more waiting. The time to live was now.

I asked the waiter for a pen and, using the napkins that were left, I wrote down some simple but powerful things – promises to myself that have changed the course of my life. I promised myself that:

- I would stop running and I would value time more precisely.
- I would never take love for granted.
- I would be kinder to myself.
- I would stop worrying about what other people thought of me.
- I would value each and every day as a beautiful opportunity for me to understand and discover a little more about myself.

It sounds so simple, but the sentences I wrote on that little napkin have been the things that have enabled me to change the course of my life and manifest the things that I had dreamed about for years but which I never believed I deserved, let alone could achieve.

As I left that coffee shop, I was clear on one thing: my life was going to be about learning to love myself, to stop apologising for who I was and to stop comparing myself to others. I committed

to using the precious time I had left to find a new, more loving relationship with myself, my family and my friends. I made myself a promise that when I came back to hospital for my last day, at whatever time or stage of my life that was, I would have no regrets.

I now realise that the old me, the old Gerry, did actually die that day. As I walked out of the coffee shop, I knew there was something new about me and my life, and I knew things would never be the same again.

I was now awakening my mind and spirit, and learning fast about their power and the internal power we all have to manifest and realise our dreams.

I followed my heart and took the brave decision that I would go to university to study psychology and philosophy. Not knowing if I was clever enough for it or not, I decided that I had to follow my heart as the subjects were ones that would enable me to explore and awaken to the questions I had burning inside.

It was also a brave decision because everyone told me that these were crazy subjects to pursue, and that it would be very hard to get a job with them. They told me to choose something more practical – but I was done with practical, I was done with trying to be good at things I had no interest in and I was beginning to develop my greatest gift, my ability to listen to my heart.

In my first philosophy lecture, our lecturer Dr Ann Power gave us an assignment for homework. I will never forget the title: 'What, in the last analysis, is everything?' How could she possibly expect me to know that?

At the end of the lecture, I plucked up the courage to ask her

what the title meant, and she simply asked me what I thought it meant.

I said, 'I think you are asking us to tell you what life is about and what the universe is about.'

'That is exactly what I am asking you,' she replied.

Daunted by the size of the challenge and before I could filter my words, I asked, 'How am I meant to know that?'

In her incredible way, she simply replied, 'Well, tell me what your life is about and what the meaning of your universe is.'

In that split second, everything changed again. Philosophy is a subject where they say the question is often as important as the answer, and here, on my very first day, I had a question that I would spend the rest of my life answering.

What is my life about and what is the meaning of my universe?

For the first time, an educator was not firing external truths at me to remember, she was awakening my inner truths. I knew at that second that I was in the right place and that I had made the right decision about my subjects. This was far more important than getting a job, this was about getting meaning, getting an answer to who I was.

I would spend the next six years immersed in exploring new areas of study but always coming back to the same question: Who am I and what is the meaning of my universe?

It was a strange and unfamiliar path and, at times, I wondered if I was crazy. For those six years, I followed the same routine. During the day, I was busy in college studying psychology and philosophy and, in the evenings and weekends, I was reading,

exploring and attending conferences in quantum physics, nutrition, and integrative health and wellness.

There were times when I was completely out of my depth and the easy thing would have been to walk away and leave it to the experts. But however limited my understanding of these subjects was – and is – they were opening up a whole new way of looking at and understanding myself. The first step to any breakthrough is getting yourself into the right space. Each discipline had a whole new language that I didn't speak or understand, but the truths and insights they gave me were worth the effort.

But there was a new ravenous curiosity in me, and even the little pieces from each field I could absorb were beginning to make perfect sense. It was like I was discovering an incredible jigsaw and each discipline had important pieces and I was beginning to put them together.

On finishing college, I couldn't wait to share my learnings and discoveries with the world or with anyone who would listen. I was beginning to realise what made me come alive: it was exploring the power of the human mind, the connection between the mind and the body, and the principle that we are 3D printers of energy and we have the ability to consciously create our own futures.

On leaving college, I knew I wanted to mix my two passions – sport and psychology – so creating a role as a sports psychologist was the next obvious step. To many people I knew, I was crazy to pursue such a profession, they thought my passion was a wasteful pursuit and that I would never make money or build a career. However, at this stage, I had spent long enough worrying

about what other people thought, and living in the shadows of being afraid to pursue my own passions and dreams.

I was setting off on a whole new horizon, a whole new journey. I had the wind in my sails and passion in my soul.

I was a self-employed performance psychologist with little previous experience working with Olympic athletes, and yet the leaders of the Irish boxing team saw something in me and in my message that fascinated them, something they believed would help them transform their Olympic team. They took a risk on me.

I was assigned the role of the team mental-skills coach. Trusted to help high-performing athletes waken the power of their mind and to manifest their incredible dreams. Over a twelve-year period, I was fortunate to help guide that team through three Olympic Games, and European and world championships, winning multiple medals – in fact we won international gold medals at every weight category, at every level and at every age, to become the most successful team in the history of Irish sport.

These were transformative years and I learned so much about myself, my profession and the real power of human potential.

After years of living in the shadows of fear, I was finally stepping into the light of self-expression and I was awakening like never before.

Armed with an intense passion and my years of learning, I was on a mission to share my techniques with these high-performing boxers and quickly other Olympic sports came calling – track cycling, athletics, sailing, professional rugby. As a kid that grew

up sports crazy, this was like a dream come true and I was now consciously awake and helping to awaken others who were passionate about exploring the power of the human mind and manifesting their dreams.

While many sports psychologists were speaking about arousal zones and goal setting, I was speaking about human spirit, spirituality, forgiveness, the power of love and finding pure consciousness. I was like a ship that had spent years tied and tangled up in the harbour and I had now finally rebuilt my vessel and hit the open seas with a hunger to learn, a relentless curiosity and a fearlessness that felt incredible.

Between 2008 and 2012, momentum grew. I started getting calls from some of the world's largest corporate brands asking if I would help them waken the minds of their employees and leaders, and help them ignite their inner potential.

By the age of thirty-two, I was the very proud owner of my own little business; I was my own boss with the freedom to follow my passion and I had a list of clients that included some of the most famous and most successful names in world sport and business. Twenty-one years after the first time I thought about taking my own life, I was helping others to save and change their own lives and to transform their dreams into reality.

Most importantly, I had left behind all beliefs that I was stupid. I wasn't clever in the traditional sense but I had found and ignited my own style of genius and that was good enough for me. I was excited by the people and things outside of me and I was at peace on the inside.

In the ten years since then, I have transferred my learnings solely from the world of sport to workshops and seminars all

around the world. It's been a whole new departure where I left the safety of the sporting arena behind and backed myself to continue to follow my passion and pursue my dreams. Ships are safe in the harbour, but that is not what ships are built for.

Having spent years in inner darkness, there was finally a light that was burning bright inside me. It was a light that wasn't just my own, it was connected to a source outside of me that I still can't fully explain, but a source I believe and trust in with all my heart and soul. It was time for me to continue to ignite this inner light and, where possible, be a light for others that may have lost their own.

You might be surprised to think that that eleven-year-old boy could transform this much. There are times I am surprised too. There are times I have to catch myself and take a deep breath and take a moment to realise how far that eleven year old has come, how hard he has worked, and the courage he has had while on a journey that took him to and through the darkest places and also to places of incredible light and awakenings.

In what follows in this book, I will guide you through my real and honest journey with openness and insights and I will share with you powerful questions and facts about the nature of the human being and this universe, and then ask you questions that, if you are willing to answer, will liberate you to let go of fear and distraction and awaken your true self and manifest the life you dream about.

My name is Gerry. I am forty-two years old. I am a son, a brother, a husband, a dad – and I am at peace in a life beyond my dreams.

PART 1

The Power of Letting Go