Praise for *This Monk Wears Heels*

"My friend Kodo is so talented, brave, and graceful. They say to really know someone you must walk a mile in their shoes. Reading his story felt like I had popped on a pair of heels, and it was fabulous!"
Carson Kressley, Emmy award-winning TV personality, style expert, fashion designer, and New York Times *bestselling author*

"Due to the societal diktats, unconscious biaises, and stereotypes, the quest for our own identity is a long journey. Kodo-san's book is a generous, sincere, and moving testimonial that shows you the way to be in line with your own values and to find your inner diamond so that you dare to be who you are and who you want to be. *This Monk Wears Heels* is a warm invitation to live in harmony, love, and peace with oneself."
Sandrine Jolly, Brand President Worldwide, Shu Uemura

"Reading *This Monk Wears Heels* makes you feel like you are in Kodo's makeup chair. He heals your heart, and helps your beauty to shine with pride."
Riyo Mori, Miss Universe 2007

"Kodo's generosity and kindness shimmer across each delightful page of *This Monk Wears Heels*. His story will encourage every heart that longs for deeper, more meaningful connection. Kodo invites readers into the

wisdom of Buddhism with such gentleness and skill—a world-class example of offering traditional wisdom in fresh and gorgeously relevant new ways. Religious leaders who are trying to figure out how to invite emerging generations into new conversations take careful note—this book belongs at the very top of your reading list."
Sue Phillips, co-founder of Sacred Design Lab, Unitarian Universalist minister, and an Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School

"Kodo's inspiring and heartfelt book shines just as brightly as he does if you ever see him in person. Kodo takes us on his journey towards self-acceptance, healing, and transformation, demonstrating that sexuality, body-affirmation, and even difficult emotions like anger can all be integrated into a Buddhist path to finding true freedom. His story exudes warmth and honesty, giving us the confidence to look deeply at our own stories, to shine openly in our own rainbow palette of colors, especially when others do not want us to shine. Thank you Kodo for your beautiful offering to the world."
Elaine Lai, PhD Candidate in Religious Studies at Stanford University, co-president of the Buddhist Community at Stanford (BCAS)

"... a jewel of self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-transformation that speaks to a universal spiritual journey. *This Monk Wears Heels* is a must-read for articulating how Buddhism can be reconceptualized for our time."
Hwansoo Kim, Religious Studies, Yale University

THIS MONK WEARS HEELS

BE WHO YOU ARE

Kodo Nishimura



WATKINS
Sharing Wisdom Since 1893

This Monk Wears Heels
Kodo Nishimura

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For anyone who has ever
struggled to be honest
with their heart.

Introduction

I am Kodo Nishimura, a Buddhist monk, makeup artist, and member of the LGBTQ+ community. I read sutras—sacred scriptures—as a monk, do makeup, put on heels, and wear sparkly earrings. From the age of 26, I have been proud to own my sexuality, but while I was growing up, I hid my true self from the people around me and lived my life thinking I was something to be ashamed of. I was afraid of being judged and humiliated. I felt guilty about being "abnormal" and concealed my true emotions.

When I was young, gay people were mostly shown in the Japanese media as being comical or perverted in some way. Many of the representations on TV were

of men dressed up as women, being nasty divas and villains. There was nothing respectful or sophisticated about them. The portrayal of LGBTQ+ people as a whole was terrible. Fortunately, this image has been changing in Japan—many people have started talking about LGBTQ+ rights, and, since 2015, in many cities there have been growing numbers of same-sex partnerships.

All the same, because of the Japanese media, the culture, and the society I grew up with, I used to think that my sexuality was something to be ashamed of. However, when I traveled outside Japan, I met people who had overcome this sort of discrimination and who were living confidently. I learned that homosexuality has existed since long, long ago, and was recorded in ancient Roman and Greek times. I also learned the history of LGBTQ+ people, and that there was much homosexuality in ancient Japanese society too. I came to understand that there was nothing wrong with being LGBTQ+.

Nobody can say that it is wrong to be who you are.

My childhood home was the Tokyo temple where my father was a priest. My father was born into a farmer's family. He was the second son, so he was not going

to inherit the farm business. When he was five years old, he was taken to Tokyo to a distant relative's temple to be adopted by a couple who did not have children. Even though he was not allowed to choose his area of study, he graduated from university with a PhD in Buddhist studies and is now an emeritus professor.

Ever since I was young, people around me expected me to inherit the running of that temple one day. My friends and other people would really annoy me by asking if I was practicing reading sutras already, and if I would be shaving my head soon. I hated it.

Despite those expectations, my parents never suggested I should take over running the temple. Moreover, as they raised me, they accepted that I enjoyed princess role-play and drawing pictures. When I was little, I loved doing those things. There's a comment from my teacher in the yearbook they made when we left kindergarten. It says that I often taught my classmates how to pretend to be Cinderella. At home, according to my mother, I'd put on her miniskirt and twirl around and around. "Look, I'm a girl!" I'd say. My favorite thing was to dance to the song "Bonjour" from the *Beauty and the Beast* movie.

One day, when I was older and cleaning the house, I accidentally came across an old cassette tape of me singing when I was younger. I was improvising random songs and imitating different languages. Hearing that

little me on the tape was a surprise. I was making jokes and I could just tell that I had lots of self-confidence. I had loved myself much more back then. When I was around five years old, I would look at myself in the mirror and sigh, "I am so perfect; how can anybody be prettier than me?" and I completely believed it. Where had that little me gone? The little me that expressed themselves so freely, with absolute confidence?

Thinking back, something inside me changed when I went to elementary school. There, the boys were expected to act as boys and girls were to be girls. People made fun of me for being "girly" and the next thing I knew I'd shut that real me up inside. At school, I was a completely different person to who I was at home.

My elementary and middle schools were OK, because I was able to make friends regardless of gender. I would find friends to play with Pokémon or dolls. During middle school, I had good friends who I would get excited with about Harry Potter.

When I entered high school, the gender contrast was much more obvious. I went to a private school where I did not know anybody, and the culture there was foreign to me. The focus was solely on getting into great universities. I completely closed up my heart. Especially when a classmate called me a "faggot" and I felt so ashamed and offended.

During my high-school years, I was barely able to survive. I was constantly depressed and lost. I was not good at academic subjects, and I was not able to make any friends. Boys got excited about baseball or comedy shows. Girls gossiped and talked about boys. I loved Disney princesses and the idea of studying abroad. Nobody seemed to have similar interests to me. I never found a friend or teacher who truly knew me. I spent those years at high school desperately trying to hide my loneliness—and I said to myself every day: *I'm not a bad person. Why do I have to be so lonely?*

The humiliation and misery really fueled my desire to study English and get away. I found refuge in American culture. I would listen to Mariah Carey, Destiny's Child, and Michael Jackson. I would watch movies like *Charlie's Angels*, *The Princess Diaries*, and *Sister Act*. The characters were authentic, unafraid to show who they were, and taught me to follow my heart.

After graduating from high school, I went to study in the US. Finally, a place where people would accept my unique being. However, now I was faced with feeling inferior because of my ethnicity. My complex about my appearance grew. I began to loathe my eyes, my height, and my quiet personality.

But then something happened that changed my life. When I was 20, I graduated from a language school and college in Boston, and entered Parsons

School of Design in New York. There, the students and teachers around me expressed themselves with pride. Little by little, the old ideas of "normal" that had tormented me were replaced by something much more liberating. This was also when I started to work as an assistant makeup artist.

Up until 2019 I worked as a makeup artist in the US and had the chance to work with many models and celebrities. But even though my life was expanding, I still felt like I was in a cage. Why? Because I hadn't been able to come out to my parents. Ever since I was little, there was an invisible spiderweb hanging over my head. I wanted to lift my head up, but I couldn't. I lived with a nervous fear that if I ever relaxed I'd snag my head on something horrible.

When I was 24 years old and had returned to Japan to start training to be a monk, I made the huge decision to come out to my parents. When I revealed the true me, the spiderweb over my head was suddenly swept away. I could look up and see the stars! It was like jumping—SPLASH!—into a pool of peach soda. My world turned pink and fragrant. My life shot upwards like a fizzy soda bubble.

Since returning to Japan, I've had opportunities to appear on TV and in newspapers, magazines, and other media. I've even been given the chance to speak about my experiences and ideas at renowned universities

and global companies, for TEDx Talks, and also at the United Nations.

Right now, I can proudly say I'm happy to have been born the person I am. Yet I spent more than half my life at the bottom of a colorless pit. Perhaps there's someone reading this book who's thinking (like I did once), *I can't even imagine revealing who I truly am. That's only for the few, but not for me. There's no way I'll ever say or do what my heart desires.*

I want to say this to you from my own experience: Yes, I know it is very difficult, but it's your own thinking that limits your life, and that is what I want to help you with in this book.

We are all bound in many ways. We can hide our real selves and camouflage ourselves to look like others.

It may seem like the easier choice, but hiding your true emotions and pretending to be somebody you are not because of the expectations of other people is harder.

Gaining information, meeting people, and traveling freed me to be OK about showing the world who I really am. Now I have friends and family who understand

what I am thinking and doing, and who support me all the way. I feel like I have defeated the villain in the movie of my life. Of course, I still get confused and depressed sometimes, but in the process of coming out and finding myself, and getting support from people around me, I have learned various lessons that I hope will inspire you throughout this book. I will also be sharing insights from ancient Buddhist teachings, the spiritual tradition that helps me find my way today.

A passage from the Amida Sutra, a sacred Buddhist text, explains the scenery of the pristine Pure Land. It says that in the pond of lotus flowers, "The blue lotus flower shines in blue; the yellow lotus flower shines yellow; the red lotus flower shines red; and the white lotus flower shines white." This means that each flower shines with its own color and is uniquely beautiful. I believe that each person should also shine in their own unique colors.

Everyone is unique, and that diversity is beautiful.

But, in reality, it can be hard to accept and celebrate each other's differences. So in this book I want to explain how you can share your feelings with others, how you can protect yourself from others, and

“No matter in which direction I searched, I could not find anything more precious than myself. Thus for us all, our own existence is the most precious thing. Therefore we shall never offend others for our benefit.”

Udānavarga 5:18

ultimately how you can shine in your own colors and be celebrated for yourself.

And here is a secret: the ways of makeup and Buddhism may be different, but the goal is the same. My role is to bring out and protect each person's special colors and help them truly shine!

Today, I'm proud to be unique. I know how tough it is to sacrifice the real you just to live. That's why I'm on your side. I want you to love yourself and live with pride.

To start this self-love, you have to accept yourself and believe in yourself. Because believing in yourself is the first step toward others believing in you. Still, you must find firm reasons to believe in yourself. If you are looking for those reasons, I pray that my experiences and thoughts may be of some use to you now.

My goal in life is to help people to be who they are unapologetically and with conviction. That conviction can come from studying who you are, and

also from gaining information: researching history and facts, meeting people, traveling, and expanding your horizons. I want to act as a bridge to help you experience all you need to experience, because that is how I freed myself.

I want to show you how living authentically is feasible and honorable. To those who are like that skirt-wearing child all those years ago—and everyone else—may you all look up to the sky and live your best life!

Never be afraid to be who you are. It's time to be true to you.

1

It's Time to Be True to You



1

It's Time to Be True to You

You are free to live your life however you decide to. The first step is self-acceptance and self-belief.

I don't think of myself as either a man or a woman. I am both. But during my childhood in Japan, whether I liked it or not, I was treated as a boy. Even now I am an adult, most people consider me to be a man. While my body is male, what is inside does not have a gender.

I don't believe people should be defined as a man or a woman. Their body can be identified as such, but our emotions are ever-changing. The body can be either a car or a ship, but the controller may be whoever! The vehicle

does not define the person inside, nor can it define where they should go. If I may say more, even if the body is young or mature, it does not define the maturity of the spirit, and the same can be said of skin color and any other physical differences. We never know what kind of controller there is inside the bodies of others.

Hold on to the steering wheel of your life; don't let anybody else control it for you.

I was born with a male body and it says "male" on my family register, the equivalent of a birth certificate in the West. But I don't identify as male. "So, are you female?" you might ask. Well, I'm not that either. Since I was little I've role-played as Disney princesses, but I've never wanted to change to a female body via sex-reassignment surgery.

When someone asks, "Are you gay, transgender, or queer?" I'm a bit stuck for an answer. In fact, until my mid-20s I considered myself gay. But it seems that "gay" refers to people who identify as male and are attracted to men. I don't feel I fit into that category.

I am not transgender either, because I don't consider myself a woman. The "Q" of LGBTQ+ stands for queer

and questioning. I don't feel comfortable being called queer, and I am not really questioning or exploring, so for me that feels a bit weird too, to be honest.

I am a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, but when I try to precisely express where I fit, I find that I don't belong to any one LGBTQ+ category. I doubt I'm the only person who feels frustrated about that. For example, there was a girl with whom I went to the NYC Pride March who had a girlfriend, and who married a man a few years later. Some people feel comfortable being defined by the term LGBTQ+; however, some people cannot be defined by just one term.

The way I see it, my body is a container that happens to have a gender, but the soul it contains does not have a gender, so I don't think it's accurate to categorize anybody.

Currently, I like to consider myself "gender gifted," because I am able to think and live beyond the expectations based on gender, and provide new or alternative perspectives. "Gender gifted" is a term that I heard somewhere many years ago, and it gave me the power to be who I am. It is all about perceiving yourself with an optimistic viewpoint.

Each person is unique, and each person has their own changing preferences, so I promise myself that when I meet anyone I see them not as male, female, or even LGBTQ+, but just as a single human being right there.

I'm part of the LGBTQ+ community, but I don't really feel a fit for any of the letters. I would like to identify myself as "gender gifted."

People might see you differently because of your physical attributes and conditions. However, we should know that our own awareness of being is what makes us *us*. After all, there is no inferiority or superiority in our awareness. We can only perceive our own awareness, so we can never really compare and rank ourselves to others. That is easier said than done, and I still struggle with this sometimes, but I always come back to the principle of self-awareness. This is the core message of the following chapters, because this understanding can never be shaken—as long as you are aware of it.

And now I want to tell you a little more about the Buddhist path that I have chosen to follow, which sometimes surprises people.

What is a Buddhist monk?

Many people expect monks to be quiet, disciplined, and free of desire, chanting in temples and living minimally. So when I began appearing in the media, I saw comments on social media criticizing me, such as: "Someone who wears makeup and dresses up isn't a real monk." Yet I am a monk. I have trained as a monk, passed all the exams, and am officially licensed. I wear a monk's robes and have learned to chant prayers, and I am now entitled to call myself a Buddhist monk. That is just a fact. A monk is somebody who has been received into the order and who has been given precepts to follow.

What does it mean to be a Buddhist monk? What is the fundamental purpose of being a monk? I consider a Buddhist monk to be somebody who tries to share the Buddhist teachings with others. Just as school teachers are not always perfect when it comes to all the subjects on the school curriculum, Buddhist monks are not perfect either. We can never know if somebody is a perfect monk or not.

I feel that the understanding of what it means to be a monk is often limited. To me, a monk is somebody who seeks to live in a balanced manner and who tries to make the world harmonious. With that in mind, I would like to show how the history and branches of Buddhism support diversity.

Whatever our beliefs, let's improve our understanding and celebrate diversity.

Buddha means "Awakened One"—it is an adjective rather than a specific person. Many versions of Buddha only exist in stories in the sutras, the ancient scriptures. However, a real person called Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism in the 4th–5th century BCE.

Siddhartha was born into an aristocratic family in ancient India, but gave up his privileged life to seek enlightenment. After many years, he achieved this and started to take trainees and formed a group of followers. After the passing of Siddhartha, his trainees created books of his teachings using a story-telling format. There are also stories about mistakes the trainees made, which later became a list of precepts. Over time, many other sutras were written in the spirit of Siddhartha, and some were later written in China. The evolution of Buddhism has been dramatic over the centuries. Currently, there are many sutras, and each school of Buddhism reads and believes in different sutras and precepts.

The Buddhist school I studied is Pure Land (Jodo Shu) Buddhism, which was founded by Hōnen in 12th-century Japan. At first only the wealthy benefitted from Buddhist

teachings, and the ordinary folk were forsaken. By letting people know that we can all be liberated, the teachings of this school became widely appreciated and the school has flourished, where the original teachings were mostly focused on anecdotes demonstrating the wisdom required to live a harmonious life free of suffering. The Buddhist practices have since shifted their focal point, but what I love about the Pure Land school is that it is rooted in original Buddhism that is accepting and inclusive.

What Buddhism means to me

To me, Buddhism is not something you believe, but something you do. It is not really a religion, but a lifestyle. It consists of a series of life lessons and a way to balance our hearts.

One of the many reasons I admire Buddhism is that it is an old teaching, and yet it says yes to diversity and living your true self. So, why not use these teachings to validate our lives and be happy today?

I am spiritual rather than religious, and I value logical teachings that make sense to me more than blindly following the old Buddhist anecdotes. I prefer to study Buddhism to seek its intention, rather than focusing on detailed examples that are meant to explain core values.

Some people even consider it "science" that measures the universal laws of nature. Since Buddhism is a series of life lessons, instead of only doing what is told, I want to do something that the founder of my school did—to propose an approach that is relevant and necessary in the current era, but whose purpose remains the same: to help people. In this book, I am not promoting Buddhism, but introducing it, especially in relation to how it has shaped my own existence. So if you want to study this path in depth, I would suggest you read other books about the history and teachings of Buddhism.

I also feel that being religious and being spiritual are two different things. You can be non-religious and very spiritual. You can believe or have faith in your own way of thinking, and that is enough for some people. I cannot criticize nor compare any religions, because religion is something that you live with, and I would never want to deny what other people believe in. I don't intend to convert anyone to Buddhism. Even if you follow other religions, I believe that we can all find insights from Buddhist teachings to broaden our views. Buddhism was created to help people, and I want it not to limit me, but to help me go beyond my limits.

I am happy to walk my own path and share the joy with you.

What matters to you?

What matters in life is not what someone else thinks; it is who you believe is the real you. Confidently recognizing what kind of person you are is the fundamental first step toward taking proper control of your life and living as your true self. If you don't dig deep into yourself, you will never quite master yourself. It is about learning how you think, how your body acts. It is about creating your own "how to live effectively" manual, instead of letting others define your life. If we have any complexes or weaknesses, I feel that we should face these to understand why it is so, as acknowledging them will only make us stronger.

As a person who is attracted to men, from my earliest childhood I saw myself as someone who'd suffer discrimination and be made fun of by society. I know that rocky road to the safe place where you can say, "It's OK to live as the real me." I have gone from living a timid life in colorless alleyways to walking true and proud in a ever-expanding Technicolor world!

"Everyone else" doesn't really exist

Because I like men, I thought there was something shameful about me. For a long time I was convinced of

it and wouldn't let the real me come out. Being untrue to yourself is like living with constant guilt and never feeling welcomed by anyone. It was extremely hard.

I wish that, as a child, I'd met someone living proudly as LGBTQ+ and saw that there is nothing wrong with being my true self. Then I wouldn't have experienced so much pain. That's the sad thing about not knowing.

When I was a child, people treated me as inferior and I accepted that. I had no choice but to accept a situation where people were called "faggot" or "homo" and bullied. Automatically, I ended up being convinced, telling myself, *Everyone thinks that, so it must be true.*

But actually, deep inside, I didn't accept it. I'd criticize myself, wondering, *I'm not a bad person at all, so why is this happening?* And then I'd give up wondering about that, thinking, *They wouldn't understand anyway.*

The truth is that we each decide how to live our own lives.

I didn't want to give up on living as the real me. Partway through my life, I chose the path of living with pride: to believe that being LGBTQ+ is not shameful and that we are not inferior.

I'm so glad I could do that. Letting "what everyone thinks" decide how you live is not promising. Because,

if my life hadn't worked out, would this "everyone" have helped me? Or would anything have happened by complaining to this anonymous "everyone"?

I know I have to be careful about using the words "everyone," "normal," and "conventional." I don't use them without thinking. This "everyone" that people talk about doesn't actually exist. The words "normal" and "conventional" are merely the measurement of how broad the speaker's horizon is. You realize that there is really no one type of "normal" nor "conventional" if you have traveled around the world and met many people.

Nobody knows about everything or everybody; nor can we ever fully understand what other people are thinking. This life might just be an illusion. What I know for sure are my feelings. So why not use them as a compass to guide your life, given their certainty?

Don't listen to what others say; listen to what your heart says

When I was training to be a monk, someone asked me, "How can you convince someone to believe in Buddha if you don't believe in yourself?"

You're right! I thought. When someone truly believes something in their soul, it shows through their words

and expression. Words that come from a conviction have the power to move hearts.

Unless you have full conviction, people will not believe you. If there is a tiny dot of anxiety or doubt, people will spot the black dot on the white paper, and start pointing it out.

It was Ángela Ponce, the Spanish representative in the 2018 Miss Universe pageant, who taught me the power of proclaiming: "This is who I am." She was the first transgender woman ever to take part since the pageant began in 1952.

Ángela made world-wide news yet also faced criticism. People said things like, "She'll harm the traditions of Miss Universe," or "She should take part in a transgender beauty competition." Ángela always had the same simple and powerful reply: "*Soy una mujer*." "I am a woman."

I was at the pageant as a makeup artist and spoke to Ángela in Spanish. "I have always dreamed of Miss Universe, and I once wished that I could compete as a delegate, but I gave up because of my gender," I said.

"So seeing you here competing makes me as happy as if my own dreams had come true!"

She smiled and said, "I have always been a woman. My body has adapted to my soul, and I am a woman. The word 'woman' doesn't just apply to one shape. There are all sorts of women: different races, body shapes, levels of health, and backgrounds. I happen to be a transgender woman. The problem is not that I am a transgender woman, but that society is not educated about diversity."

I felt that we don't need approval from others to be who we are, especially from people who don't know us.

Ángela taught me this: "When the person themselves says it with conviction, criticism from others loses its power." To announce to the world, "This is who I am," a person needs to think carefully to make sure they are ready, and it can be scary to stand out by making that declaration. I want us all to have the strength to speak our truth, and for everyone to respect that truth.

As a transgender woman, Ángela Ponce made history in the Miss Universe pageant. She didn't reach the top 16, but at the end of the competition she had a special walk down the runway with her message being played in a recording of her speaking. I saw her walk so full of confidence and was deeply moved. My eyes overflowed with tears as I saw myself in her.

What made me happiest of all was how the Miss Universe organization had decided she should appear.

I realized that many of the organization's leaders, from many different parts of the world, believed in equality and truth, and it gave me courage.

Yet even though Ángela had won the Spanish competition and been chosen to represent her country, she was criticized by others. It's so sad. I think about where that aggression comes from, and I'm sure that, deep down, it's from the "faceless values" of tradition and custom.

Mostly, when people attack a specific person with criticism and blame, it is based on insubstantial things like historical, cultural, and traditional values, and so-called convention. But don't you think it's sad to be scared into keeping up "appearances" and worrying about conventional values; things you'll discover are completely different in other cultures? Don't you think it's sad not to live as the real you?

Ask that question and I'm sure that many people would say, "You're right!" Still, I understand how some people might not act on that knowledge, even when they understand it logically in their heads, because for a long time I was one of those people. I was afraid of what people would say and how they'd react. I couldn't tell them I was homosexual. Without the experience of meeting people who encouraged me and said, "It's OK. It really is," I'd still be hiding the real me and living in fear. To be honest, there are still times when I'm afraid.

But these days, when I get scared, I encourage myself by saying, "It's OK. It really is!"

If you want to take hold of the wheel, steer your own life, and set out in self-love for a place you love, you must discover the true nature of what traps you and release yourself. Is someone else taking hold of the steering wheel in your life? How do you take back control?

Free yourself from the past

I tried remembering the roots of my trauma, and how I came to be ashamed of myself and my sexuality. The instant I discovered its real cause, the trauma disappeared.

I was not able to come out to my parents until the age of 24. My parents studied in Germany and can understand English and German. They often meet people from abroad and they are not the type to have prejudices. As I've mentioned, my father also has a deep knowledge of Buddhist history and he taught sutras in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Pali at university; he also taught me when I studied Buddhism too. But even with parents like that, I felt I couldn't tell them I was homosexual.

Memories from childhood held me back. When I was four or five years old, one of my second cousins, a girl older than me, bought me some glittery rainbow

nail polish. I put it on and admired my sparkly nails. I was so happy. But my mom said, "I don't want you to become an adult who does 'that' kind of thing." It wasn't the reaction I'd hoped for. My little mind thought, "Mom doesn't like it when I do girly things."

Then, one time when I was walking with my father in the Asakusa area of Tokyo, we came across someone who was transgender (or "transvestite" as people said back then). My father whispered in my ear: "That person is a man." It felt like he was telling me a secret and I interpreted it as him saying: "It's wrong for men to dress up like women."

Later, he also said, "In order to run a temple, it is essential to have a wife to help take care of many things." I remember thinking: *Does he expect me to get married? That ain't ever happening.*

I think we all have childhood experiences of being hurt by some casual comment, and we don't want our parents to dislike us. That psychological pressure convinced me that I couldn't say, "Look, I'm a girl!" in front of anyone. Instead, I thought, *I like boys and I'm probably going to be discriminated against.*

Much later, I learned I'd misinterpreted my mother's and father's words. But who knows when something might happen that makes you lock your real self away?

Perhaps the same thing happened for you. It's natural when you can't be who you are, and traumatic

events don't disappear from our memories easily. I decided that I wanted to resolve this difficulty properly between my parents and me. So, a few years after coming out to them, about which I'll be sharing more later, I asked why they had said what they did.

This is what my mother said: "I don't like nail polish because I feel like the nails can't breathe; I thought that nail polish would be bad for your health. Didn't I give you my skirt when you were at kindergarten? I never told you it was bad to dress up in skirts."

When she said that, I thought, *She's right! One of the photos from when I was little shows me wearing my mother's skirt with a fuchsia* furoshiki*—a wrapping cloth—on my head as long hair. It's right there.*

I learned that when my father said, "That person is a man," he didn't mean anything else by it. He was just commenting on the fact that the person was transgender. However, transgender women were not depicted with any positivity in Japanese society, so I might have extinguished any willingness of my own to live as a transgender woman. If society were completely understanding, things might have been different. Transphobia is something that still makes me afraid to be who I am. I don't want other people to react negatively to me or to be a victim of violence. As of now, I am comfortable with my body, but I would be happy to wake up tomorrow with a female body too.

Anyway, the misunderstandings with my parents evaporated. That's what they were: misunderstandings. But I certainly saw things differently at the time.

When I was growing up in Japan, and later in the US, I was terrified that my parents would hear from someone else that I wasn't heterosexual. I was frightened they'd abandon me if they discovered I was homosexual and scared they'd find out in some indirect way. I made sure not to confide even in close friends. I did not trust anybody.

But not being able to talk about the very core of your identity means you can't be your true self. Isn't it so unfair when you can't accept yourself just because you're different from others? In the end, I believe that the only way to free your heart is to find somebody who you can be yourself with, and tell your stories. Revealing your true self to another person will help to set you free.

Of course, it's not possible for everyone to tell those around them who they truly are. But I believe that telling someone you think will understand can make things easier. There's no rule saying who to tell or when. But if you are ready and decide to tell someone, I support your bravery. And remember that even if the people around you now do not understand you, you can choose your soul family and friends.

The change you seek will come the moment you make up your mind to be your true self.

**People don't easily change.
But if you run away or give up,
nothing will ever change.**

Separate other people's emotions from your own

After I told my parents I was homosexual, things really did get easier, although I think my father was a little worried at first about how the temple community might react. During that time I appeared on national TV in Japan, where I taught makeup skills to people battling with illness and transitioning as transgender women. I also came out nationally during the program, saying that I had struggled with my own sexuality. One person wrote a letter that said they'd been moved after seeing me on TV. Later, I was also asked to give presentations to other Pure Land school monks and the response was still positive. So it seems my father was reassured in the end.

Online, however, I would read critical comments like, "You're not a real monk. Look at the Thai monks!" Some comments were so off the mark that I instinctively wanted to reply, "What do you know about Buddhism?"

But that's when I had to carefully think, *Why would this person say something like that?* They were only speaking based on what they knew, and that does not mean they were right.

We cannot control the way other people think, but we can try to understand them.

Here's something romantic: during my training as a monk, I had met another trainee who told me that he used to love a man. I was like, *Wow, he might be bisexual!* We got along very well and I started to really like him. I told him that I had feelings for him, but he said he saw me only as a friend. Yet he still asked me to go to Vietnam and Thailand with him. He said he was not sure how he would feel, but wanted us to continue to hang out together.

He had a dream of becoming a film director, but was told by his parents that they wanted him to inherit the family temple and the acupuncture clinic next to it, which his monk father also managed. I think my friend wanted me to persuade his parents to support his dream to be a film director. I did everything I could to support him, from bringing carefully selected gifts for them

on my arrival, sweeping the temple, picking up fallen leaves in the garden, and washing all the dishes, to doing ceremonies together, to prove that I could be a good monk doing what I love and being who I am.

I figured that his parents would not know about his sexuality either. When I mentioned that my friend wanted to study in the US, his parents raised an eyebrow. They asked me, "Your parents are also Buddhist priests, right? They said you can do whatever you want in your future? How did they raise you?" Two words—"No way!"—were written on their faces. I wanted to prove that I could study in the US, be free, and still be happy and successful. I wanted his parents to know that a person can fulfill their dreams and still be a brilliant monk as well, so they would support his dream.

At first, his parents welcomed me so much. I was taken to all the good restaurants, hot springs, and local festivals. I was introduced to all their family and friends. I became very close to the entire community. I helped with their household chores and Buddhist ceremonies and events during the day, and we all watched movies together at night.

Because I was still living mostly in the US back then, I would only see my friend during the summer when I went back to Japan. The following year, I was invited to visit again by my friend. I became close to a neighbour of his mother as well. She seemed to be a cheerleader for

my friend, somebody who supported him in what he wanted to do.

One day, the neighbour told his mother that I must be a homosexual. It gives me chills to remember this, but all of a sudden she freaked out. It was like a movie. She began to give me the death stare and criticize me for the smallest things, such as not putting my chopsticks on the chopstick rest (which had never happened before). "*Why* are there chopstick rests on the table?" she asked me. I could see her fear and fury that her son might be attracted to men too, which is the last thing she wanted to see happening. She had raised her son to be a monk, and to take care of her later in life. She could not let him be with a guy, nor let him live in a different country. Never!

An emergency red alarm started ringing in my head. Usually I would watch movies with the family, but that night she told me to go to bed right away because they needed to talk about something as a family. I was so frightened. I didn't know if I would wake up alive the next morning. Staying in another family's temple, with somebody giving me that glare, the night seemed even darker than usual. I was unable to talk to my friend, who was going to be sleeping upstairs, so I texted him: "Please do whatever you think is the best for you. I am ready to leave tomorrow so don't worry about me."

"There never was, nor will be, nor is there now, anyone who is wholly blamed or wholly praised."

Dhammapada, 228

The next morning, my friend did not get up until the afternoon. It was so awkward waking up alone and having to see his mother. She told me, "My son is getting married in this temple and having a family. So give up. You have been nice and hard-working, but are you acting this way to convince us that homosexuality is acceptable? Homosexuality is unnatural. It is due to food additives and colorings that your hormones were corrupted. You should read a book about macrobiotics!" She added, "Your mother must have consumed food additives so that you ended up being born homosexual."

I was so shocked I didn't even feel anger then. I struggled to understand how this person could say such things to me. Later, my friend came downstairs and I asked him what they had talked about the night before. He said his mother had learned that I was homosexual, and that it was against the law of nature. He had tried to defend me by saying that she was wrong, but he wasn't able to explain it to her or convince her. He seemed totally lost and helpless.

Finally, he said, "I only see you as a friend, so thank you for the past two years that we hung out."

I thought that if I got emotional and argued back, his mother would have won by making me angry and looking like I really was corrupted in some way. So I just said, "Thanks for all you have taught me."

His father handed me 30,000 yen, which is around $300, saying that it was from the temple for my cleaning work and participating in the Buddhist ceremonies. I said, "No, I don't need it."

He said, "Well, it's for your airplane."

I just said, "Thank you," and I left alone.

On my way to the station, I called my mom crying, and she immediately booked a flight back from Kyushu to Tokyo for me.

I was furious like never before. I had never experienced that much hate toward me because of my sexuality, and it was my friend who had asked me to come over two years in a row, even after I had told him that I liked him. What did I do wrong to deserve to be treated this way, to be told that I was going against both nature and my family?

Afterward, I read the book about macrobiotics that my friend's mother had talked about. It describes homosexuality as abnormal, and claims that when the balance of the body's yin and yang has gone wrong, a person turns to desiring animals and people of the same sex.

For many months, I wondered, *Why does she resent me so much? Why did that person say those things?* Anger took over me, my eczema exploded, and I hated myself even more. I was deeply depressed, and my heart never smiled. I thought about retaliating in the worst ways, but these thoughts only made me suffer even more. I began writing my thoughts in notebooks to help myself analyze what had happened.

> **"In mountain clefts and chasms the streamlets gush loudly, but great rivers flow silently. Empty things make a noise while the full are always quiet."**
>
> Sutta Nipāta, 720

I came to understand that my friend's mother probably felt trapped in the temple, and was expected to act a certain way. His mother had projected her suffering onto me. When her son had been born, apparently she hadn't wanted him to be a monk, but due to the pressure from his grandparents, she had brainwashed herself into believing he would be, and devoted her life to raising an heir for the temple. She was taught to sew robes for

the monks and told to stay in the temple to serve the guests. She was not allowed to travel or even participate in activities outside the temple precinct. I remembered that she had only recently been allowed to join local volunteers that helped children with sports, dance, and to play in nature. She was literally trapped in the temple; she must have been lonely and frustrated. I finally understood that it was she who was sad and angry, so how could she allow somebody else to come and go, and be free and happy?

I was eventually able to let go of my anger. I know that I am aware, I am talented, I am loved, and I am free.

I stopped being angry at people who are not happy, because I am not living their lives. When you experience negative emotions from others, your own emotions can be negative too. But I realized that you don't have to accept others' emotions. You can feel pity for them and, if possible, you can try to help them. Because these people are often hiding their vulnerable emotions as well.

What you do have to do is look at the origins of your own emotions.

Sometimes getting angry can make changes, so anger is not all bad. However, constant anger is not healthy. I would use anger as a motivation for improvement, and refuse to stew in it for too long.

“As the dust settles with the rain, so suffering can be settled with wisdom.”

Udānavarga, 12:2

> **"Conquer anger by not getting angry. Do good and defeat evil. Conquer meanness with generosity. Conquer dishonesty with truth."**
>
> Dhammapada, 223

Why do you feel the way you do?

If somebody else makes you angry, it is because you care. If it wasn't important, you wouldn't get angry.

I have agonized about my sexuality and I have learned to treasure it. My parents are also hugely important to me. They have told me to do what I love and live wherever I want to live. I get angry when things that are important to me are unjustly offended.

I believe that anger originates within us. Buddhism teaches that anger begins with the idea that "I am right," and the three poisons of ignorance, anger, and greed are the root cause of human suffering. We can aim to surpass these by living in harmony with the Noble Eightfold Path (see page 105).

It's so difficult to love and help somebody when we are angry, yet as human beings, we may never be completely free of these three poisons. On the other hand, they can motivate us to do better. Anger and hatred can encourage us to better control our emotions by imagining alternative ways. Ignorance and delusion can inspire us to further study what we don't know.

We are sometimes angry because we are not being entirely honest with ourselves. And the truth is that we are not always right. For example, the other day I got irritated and thought, *This person talks for so long.* When I considered why I was irritated (and I don't always think about this person that way), I realized I was just fidgety because I wanted to go to the toilet! I blamed the other person as I did not want to acknowledge I was angry just because I was waiting to go to the bathroom.

When you endure or suffer, you aren't fully listening to yourself, and can't say why you do it either, so it's easy for anger to arise. After all, it's easier to put the blame on others. Like somebody who was unable to free themselves from suffering and reflected that anger toward me.

Some people are completely bound by the rules of their family or community. Others are forced to study as if there is no other choice. It's understandable that when people with lives of endurance see me—a monk who wears high heels and does makeup—they get angry and say, "That's not a monk!" Because if those

people accepted who I am, they would probably start to think, *What are my own values really?* It's natural for people to react with unease to unfamiliar things. For example, when I was younger, my father told me not to wear red pants because they're too loud. Another time, he told me not to wear sunglasses because I could be associated with the Yakuza (Japanese mafia). I thought "Oh, come on! What's the big deal?" but he is right to an extent. When Japan lost WWII, most of the Japanese people were poor. In order to rebuild solidarity, people refrained from showing off wealth and going on vacations. However, today this value can oppress people from attaining opportunities or demonstrating uniqueness.

The Japanese word for endurance— 我慢 (*gáman*) —is actually a Buddhist term. These days it tends to mean enduring things, but the word's literal meaning is "egoistic pride." Buddhist teachings warn against feeling important, getting puffed up, and looking down on others. And endurance truly is a form of arrogance. I've been in a situation where I used up my own time, pushed aside my feelings, and put up with things—all for a particular person. I thought that if I endured, they would understand my value. It really was arrogance because I assumed that person figured "I was right". As a result, nothing changed in them. I started resenting that person, my eczema got worse, and I suffered.

You can't really change anybody else; the only person you can change is you.

I'm sure there will be other times when I end up enduring or suffering. But when it happens, I intend to ask myself, *Are you enduring something you shouldn't?*

Learn to listen to yourself

The world still tends to speak of endurance and self-sacrifice as beautiful virtues. How boring for your one and only life to be with little pleasure and full of endurance! (I'm not saying we should be drowned in pleasure either.)

Personally, I don't think it's wrong to avoid pointless suffering so that you can look after yourself. It's OK not to endure, it's OK not to hide your true feelings, and it's OK to show your weaknesses. And it's also OK to do the things you want, express your opinions, and enjoy your life. You should never be ashamed to say what you love. Nobody has a right to deny what your heart is attracted to.

Someone might say, "Isn't it just life not to be free?" Never forget this: you're here and now is what you have chosen. It's not what your parents, your boss, or your friends told you to do. If you just do what someone else tells you to do, you are entrusting your life to others.

Self-destructive thinking—thinking that sees arrogance and self-sacrifice as good—can often steer you away from being true to yourself. I approve of working hard for yourself, but you'd be surprised how often self-destructive thinking lurks behind ideas like, "If only I endure," or "I can't quit while everyone else is working hard."

You know, the thought that "everyone has to be the same" can limit your life and make you suffer. To truly live as yourself, you must draw a line to protect yourself. I tell myself that *There's no need to do what is expected* each time these situations arise and then I pluck up the courage to be true to myself.

You have to decide the course of your own life.

Don't make yourself suffer by using self-destructive thinking to endure things you don't want to do! Loving yourself means protecting yourself. So don't try so hard that you ignore your own heart.

Put aside harmful thoughts

In my school of Pure Land Buddhism, we worship Amida Buddha, who came into being after the physical death of Siddhartha Gautama. Amida Buddha is introduced in the Mahayana sutras, where he says that if we chant his name then he will guide us to the Pure Land, which is like heaven. There we can train to be Buddhas ourselves, and eventually reach enlightenment and break free of reincarnation—the cycle of rebirth, where we keep coming back after death to live as animals, humans, or even starving ghosts or celestial beings. But there will always be suffering whenever we lose mental peace. We will always be caught up in the three poisons of anger, greed, and ignorance. Therefore we chant and pray that we do not have to come back to the cycle of life and suffer more.

To meditate by chanting, my fellow monks and I repeat: *Nam Amida Butsu*. ("I devote myself to Amida Buddha.") We are taught that we can all be liberated as long as we chant faithfully even if we are mere humans who constantly make mistakes. Which is non-discriminatory and forgiving. I do not expect you to chant the name of Buddha, because I know everybody has their own values. So let me introduce my favorite way to listen to your heart that I think can be utilized regardless of a person's faith.



Meditate to listen to your heart

When I'm anxious or don't understand something, I ask myself a question: "What is my heart thinking?" And I never close my ears to the answer. To listen to your own heart, write down your thoughts as they come on a sheet of paper. Write whatever comes to your mind, as if your heart is speaking. Once you are able to visualize your thoughts, you will start to see what is preventing you from being free, or what is making you suffer.

1. Sit at a desk or table where you will not be disturbed—if you need to lock the door, do so!
2. Pick a pen that lets you write smoothly, and a blank sheet of paper.
3. As your thoughts bubble up, write them all down For example: *I've started this note but I don't know what to write. Oh well, my family is asking me to go*

on a trip, but I really need to finish my book, so I don't know if I should join them. It might be nice, but this is crunch time, so no mercy, but you know what? Maybe I can still work in the hotel room ...
Just like this; whatever comes into your mind!

4 Stop once you feel like you have written enough.

5 Read what you have written through quietly, and use it to analyze what is currently happening in your life, and what is bothering you. By doing this, you will be able to see your situation from a distant perspective.

6 Repeat this exercise as often as you want. There is no such thing as too little or too much.

RuPaul once said that meditation is what enables you to get off a river, where your emotions are constantly flowing, and climb up a mountain and see the river from a distance. Then you can observe the situation from a different perspective and see clearly. This is what I did to overcome my anger at the discrimination I received over my sexuality. And you know what? You don't even need to write anything down; if you prefer to say your thoughts out loud or tell your friends how you are feeling, that is OK too! I do all of this! It's all about saying what's on your mind without filters. After the clutter is cleared away, honesty peeks out.

Find self-acceptance

What is needed to live with self-love? For me, it is to find reasons to love yourself and to be confident. The process of building confidence is essential, yet most people incorrectly think that confidence is the same as being good at things. Confidence means believing in yourself. But what's necessary so that you can believe in yourself?

Personally, I think it's about knowing what kind of person you are, understanding what you can and can't do, and believing in that fact. In Japanese, confidence is written as self-belief, 自信 (ji-shin), so it does not mean that you have to be good at something, but that you know who you are as a person.

Of course, it's wonderful to be confident about being good at languages or looking beautiful, but the instant someone better than you appears, that belief tends to wobble. Belief in abilities or looks won't support you when you feel down or have problems, will it? So I don't consider those things to be true self-belief. Rather, I think being able to believe in who we are as people, in our personality and way of thinking, is powerful because these will not change no matter who else comes into the room. For example, I know that I enjoy art and music; I know that I can be a good listener; I know I think creatively. These are sources of confidence that do not require any particular skill or ability. Perhaps you

don't believe in yourself because you think you're less capable than others? But, you see, confidence isn't just about being better at things.

Even in a tough situation where you think, *I'm no good at anything. I'm mentally exhausted. I don't have the courage to attempt anything*, I'd like to tell you this: Actually, you have the unshakeable awareness that comes from fully understanding your situation right now. Nobody is perfect. It's a wonderful thing to be able to recognize your situation, understand it, and accept yourself as you are.

When you know who you are and can accept that with positivity, you realize that it's pointless to compare yourself to others.

That's an unshakeable source of confidence in any situation. And I'm sure it will make living life easier!

Be honest with yourself

Be realistic about what you're good and not good at. That's the first step. You need a "cannot-do" confidence, as well as a "can-do" confidence.

I think that belief in what you're good at, or not good at, is a kind of confidence. For example, my "can-do" confidence is related to languages and art. I'm still having fun studying English and Spanish. When I talk in those languages people tend to be surprised and praise me, so I guess I have more ability than most. I make use of that "can-do" confidence by memorizing greetings in many other different languages to say hello to people from those countries. People are happy when I talk to them in their own language and there's an instant rapport.

On the other hand, there are lots of things I am confident I "cannot do," like sports and some academic subjects. I'm not good at history, for example, but I realized that if I know something about someone's country and its history, I can better understand what is happening in the world today. So now when I'm training at the gym I listen to a fun podcast series about the history of the world and religion. I've read manga about history in the past and didn't remember that at all. But with this podcast I can have fun finding out about the history and cultures of the world and enjoy it just like I'm

“Deep wisdom, acquired skills, learning to be disciplined, brilliantly used words—these are happiness.”

Sutta Nipāta, 720

listening to the radio. My vague knowledge soon started to come into focus, while my feelings of unease and inferiority gradually faded away. I was really reminded how important knowledge is.

Once you accept what you're not good at, you can look for other ways to get them done. That's why I think it's important to admit a "cannot-do" confidence.

Don't think you can do it all yourself. Everyone has different abilities, so accept what you can't do and ask for help.

It's crucial to understand what you can and can't do, and to acknowledge your capabilities without deluding yourself. Society expects us to know things and to be able to do things to a certain degree, so unless you accept the fact that you cannot do some things, you'll start hiding and denying your weaknesses. At the other extreme, when you are praised all the time, you can become needlessly proud and vain. And that conceit and vanity will only hold you back from living your truth too.

There are still plenty of things I'm not good at. I'm not good at understanding manuals for computer software such as excel and photoshop. All I need to do

is contact someone who seems good at that stuff and ask. Then there's rarely a problem.

Different people are good and bad at different things, so why should you take on everything yourself? When you have "cannot-do" confidence and rely on the help of others, the things you can't do turn into things you can!

I now like tidying, but when I returned to Japan in 2019, my old room was a jumble of stuff: manga from when I was at school, letters from classmates, broken items, notebooks from old classes. I asked myself a question: *Could someone who can't even tidy their own house feel beautiful and successful?* Of course, the answer was no. *I need to do something about this*, I thought. So I took three tidying-up lessons from someone I decided would be the perfect teacher for me. That person was a top apprentice of Marie Kondo, the author of *Spark Joy*.

Now all my things are carefully sorted out and I can even say that I live surrounded by things that spark joy. Success! Even as I write this, more than a year after I took lessons, my closets and drawers are beautifully organized. I keep my room tidy enough for anyone to come over and take a photo anytime!

I'm not embarrassed by things I can't do and I don't hide them. I listen carefully to advice from experts and then, after they teach and help me, I can do it too.

But I think the results depend on the teacher. That's why I take great care over finding someone who can

teach me well. My way is to spend less time worrying and more time looking for a good teacher. If the teacher does not make you feel that you are actually improving, I would move on to the next teacher. There are many people who call themselves professionals but are not really qualified to be considered as such. (Sorry, but I'm just being honest!)

Flip your weaknesses into strengths

I've said that knowing what you can and cannot do gives you confidence. But I believe working on everything with positivity—your strengths and weaknesses—is the key to finding the true you. When you get better at the things you're good at, it's an obvious improvement. Meanwhile, even those things you thought were weaknesses can become attractive features when looked at differently.

I used to dislike the way I speak. People would tell me that it made them feel sleepy! For a long time I thought I had to correct it. But, instead of making some futile attempt to make my voice snappier, I changed my thinking. I decided to make my voice more "relaxing," and that became an aspect of who I am. Soon my friends told me things like, "Nobody can soothe people with their voice like you," or "It's

calming; you should read bedtime stories." I began to think of my voice in a positive way—as a strength rather than a weakness.

I also used to have a complex about my almond-shaped eyes, but I've given up on applying glue to make a double eyelid so my eyes seem bigger. Instead, I use my own eyes' distinctiveness by extending my eyeliner sideways and making my eyes look even sharper. My eyes have become something I can use to say, "This is me!"

Instead of chasing some far-off ideal, accepting what looks good on me has made me confident. Not Barbie, but Asian beauty!

In the same way that some Asian people long for a big-eyed biracial look, some people in Europe and North America admire the sharp, mysterious look of long and almond-shaped Asian eyes. When I was hanging out with my Spanish friends, one of them even said, "I want to get facial surgery so that my eyes are narrower, and my nose is lower." At the time, I was completely shocked that somebody wanted to have surgery to look more like me.

I had one specific idea of what beauty looked like, but there are so many types. The decision to appreciate it is



The compliment battle

Struggling to love yourself? I'd like to share a fun game that helped to build my self-esteem. It's what I call the "compliment battle." I was unable to find anything that I liked about myself, so I asked my friends, but in return, I would name good things about them too, which was much easier than identifying things I liked about myself.

1. Find a trusted friend or partner who won't say anything to traumatize you.
2. Think of ten things that are good about each other. This might include some physical attributes, their sense of fashion, their voice, their scent, or positive aspects of their personality.
3. Take it in turns to share your compliments! For example, you might say: "I like your humor," "I like when you write nice emails," "I love your earrings today," "I love when you wear red lipstick."

You may find that it's quite challenging to identify ten positive things about yourself, but that's what's good about this exercise. The other person will be looking hard at you, and you at them, and you will both find good things about each other that you wouldn't have found for yourself.

If you play the compliment battle with five or so friends, there will be things about each of you that multiple people praise. With some of those, you'll think, *Of course they're saying that, because I work hard at it.* But you'll be surprised at some of the other compliments and think, *I had no idea people thought that about me!* Either way, when people tell you objectively about your good points, it's a gigantic boost.

For example, my friends all told me, "Kodo, your head is such a beautiful shape," and, "The way you move is so elegant." When I was doing my monk's training, even a teacher who was a nun had said, "The way you carry yourself is so gentle and graceful, Kodo." Yet when I was at school, I was put down for the way I moved. "You run like a girl," they'd said, so I tried to hide my graceful movements. Now it made me so happy to be praised for something that came naturally to me.

You may assume, "This is just how I am," but perhaps there's a positive aspect hidden somewhere? How about trying something like the "compliment game" to see if you can uncover those good points?

up to me. I don't want to restrict my idea of beauty, when I could change my prejudice in a way to love myself. I want to adopt a broad-minded sense that being unique is also beautiful, and apply it to myself too. When I started thinking like that, I was able to change.

Of course, I didn't suddenly start loving my eyes. I practiced doing makeup again and again, noticed things, and kept experimenting. Once I'd perfected eye makeup that let me love my eyes, I started to love my eyes without makeup too.

> **"The one who protects oneself protects others as well, so protect yourself. These people will not be harmed, and are wise."**
>
> Anguttara Nikāya

It's not the ideal I had in mind at first, but once I accepted a way of being that was natural for me, I realized that it suited me. It feels very comfortable to be the real you, and when you feel comfortable, you love yourself. Being able to love myself makes me happier than anything. I did not have to keep trying to be somebody else anymore; I was already complete!

There was once a time when I couldn't love myself, maybe because I was pessimistic about my sexuality. I had low self-esteem and complexes about my looks. I got depressed when I looked at mirrors or photos. After trying lots of things, now I can truly say I love myself!

It's not a sin to enjoy your life. If you don't live in each moment, you'll end up missing your chance to have a fun life. We can only live in this moment, so please don't postpone the things you enjoy. If you wait to be happy, you will never be happy. So celebrate today! I try to live knowing that everything can be lost one day. I can be sad thinking about it, but that is the best way to prepare for the future and enjoy the moment.

We must work hard for the sake of our future lives; I don't deny that. It's the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. But what a waste not to enjoy our present lives. "One life" has become my favorite quote, especially since studying Buddhism and reincarnation. Ironic, right? I ask myself: *Is there anything that I am postponing that I actually want to do? Should I go skydiving tomorrow?* The answer may be no, but it is good to ask myself so that I have no regrets later.