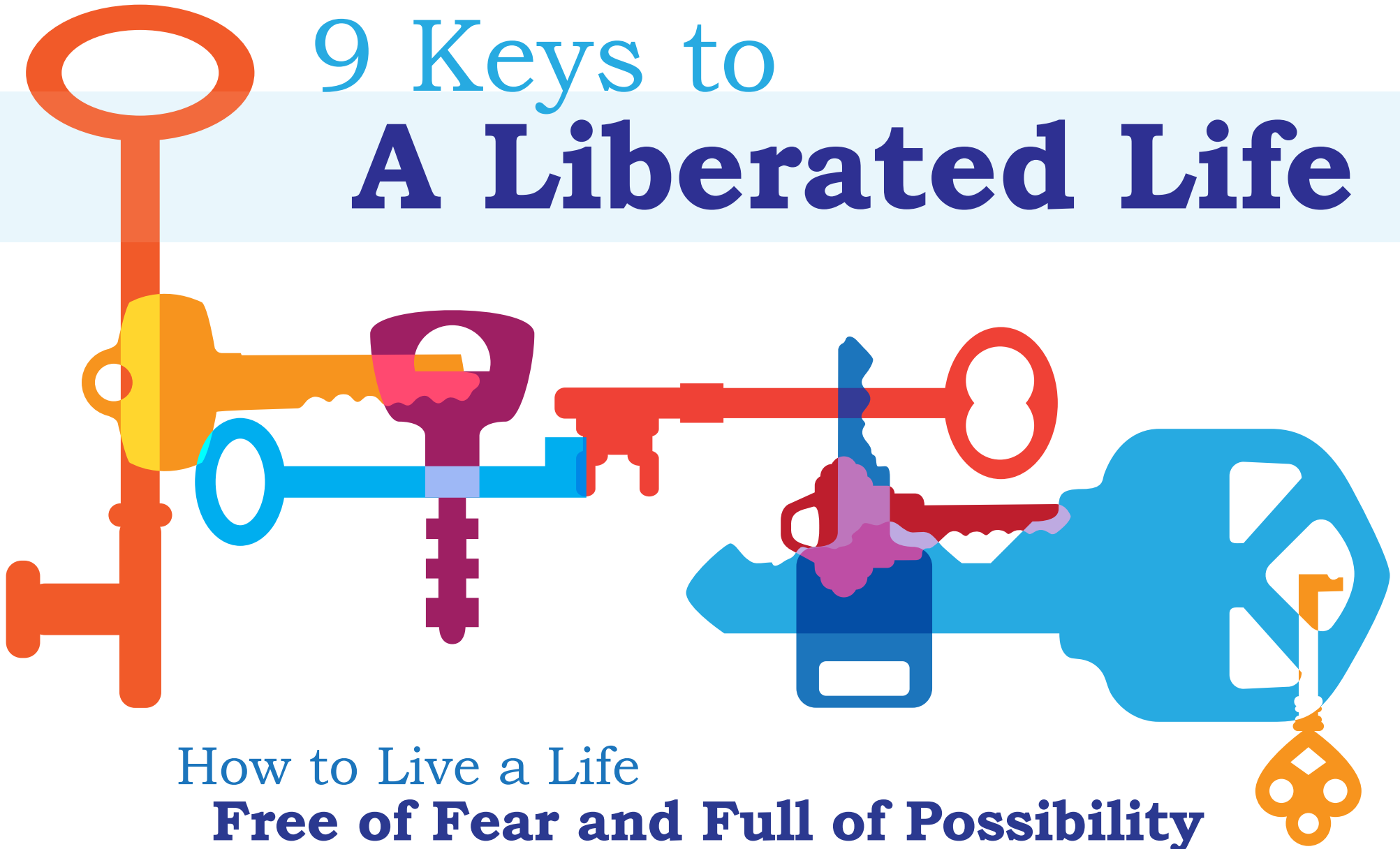


9 Keys to

A Liberated Life



How to Live a Life

Free of Fear and Full of Possibility

Created, with love, by Maia Duerr

This e-book is free (of course!)

Contact me: maia@liberatedlifeproject.com

Please share this book with anyone you think will benefit from it –
it's licensed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

©2012 Maia Duerr

Design by Anoki Casey

Contents



I. <u>Dedication... and a Warning!</u>	<u>1</u>
II. <u>What is a “Liberated Life”?</u>	<u>3</u>
III. <u>The 5 Dimensions of Liberation</u>	<u>6</u>
IV. <u>The 9 Keys to Liberation: How You Can Live a Liberated Life</u>	<u>15</u>
V. <u>Where to Go From Here?</u>	<u>25</u>

I. Dedication

...and a Warning!



The Liberated Life Project is dedicated to Liberation in all its forms.

May this book help you to find freedom in your life, and may you in turn be inspired to work for freedom for all beings.

Warning!

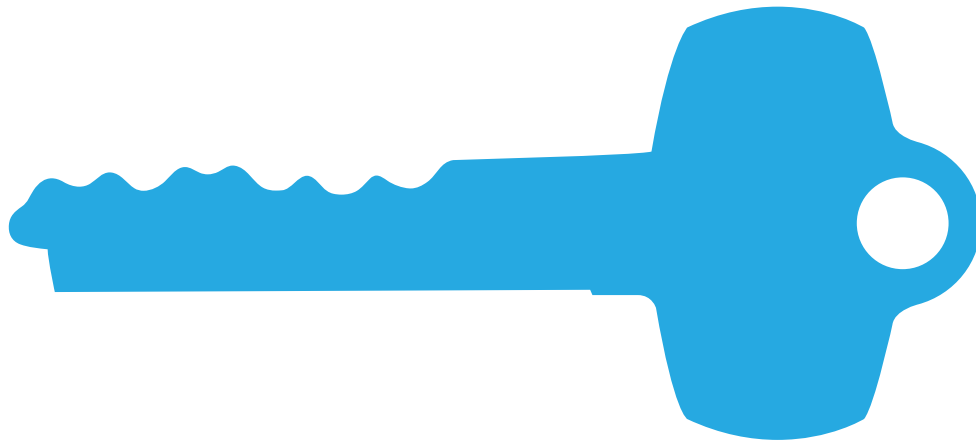
This book is not for everyone. Some people don't want to change anything about their lives or question their beliefs. However... the very nature of liberation implies that you need to be ready to let something go in order to discover a deeper level of truth.

- If you have the courage to look more deeply at your beliefs and to make some changes in your life...
- If you're ready to make your declaration of independence, or better yet interdependence...
- If you know it's time to commit to your own **integrity and freedom**, the kind of freedom that releases you from fear and opens you to possibility....

Then let's dive into these **9 keys** together!



II. What Is A Liberated Life?



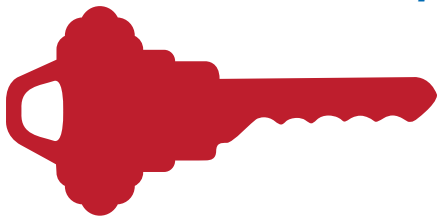
When I first started the Liberated Life Project in 2010, I asked readers for their definition of “a liberated life.”

They had some great ideas, including:

- *“**Not having to worry about finances**, being able to do what you want to do when you want to do it, and many tropical vacations.”*
- *“To me, a ‘Liberated Life’ is the moments I breathe with **mindfulness & compassion**... an instantaneous uplink to the universe.”*
- *“A life lived in **equanimity**, composed of **joy** and **compassion**, filled with **loving kindness**.”*
- *“A liberated life is one that is constantly looking for options and considering new avenues of exploration with an **open mind**.”*

This was one of my favorite definitions:

- *“**Mindful of death, overflowing with compassion, feeling the joy of others, expressing creativity, and unmoved by fear.**”*



I love this last definition because it centers on **awareness** – holding a steady awareness through all the conditions of our life. When we can do this, I truly believe that we will discover a boundless source of compassion, joy, and creativity. And I believe that’s the essence of a Liberated Life.

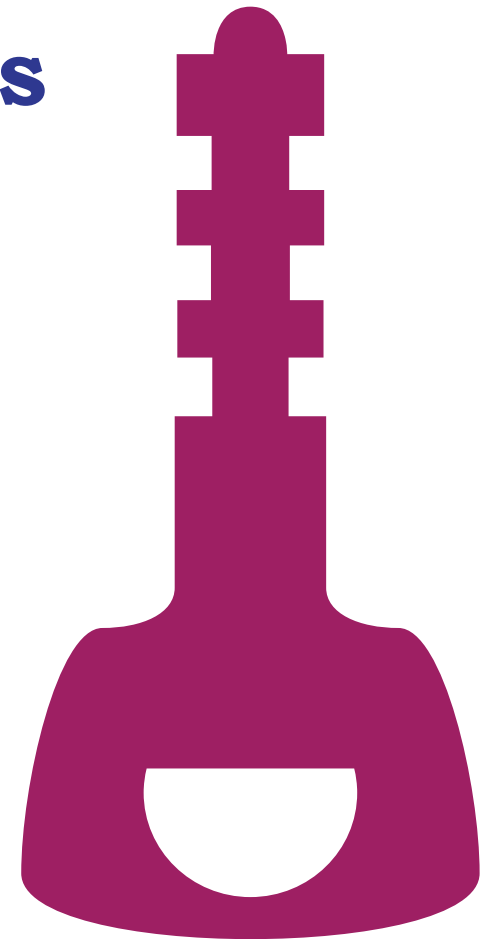
So here’s my working definition:

A life free from fear and limitations
+
**Full of joy, meaning, and contributing to
our collective well being**
=
A Liberated Life

Is that something you’d like? Yeah, me too. So let’s see how to make this happen....

Before we get into the 9 keys, I want to share a bit about the **5 dimensions of liberation** that I focus on in the Liberated Life Project. And I’ll tell you some of my story as well.

III. The 5 Dimensions of Liberation



Spirit

The whole Liberated Life Project is built on the assumption that **freedom comes from the inside**. No matter what the external circumstances of our life, we can work with our mind to find liberation... and that in turn affects what's going on in our life circumstances.

This is why Spirit is the fundamental zone of liberation.

Some of the most profound examples of liberated lives come, in fact, from people who have been incarcerated. Take **Nelson Mandela**, for example, who was imprisoned for 27 years following arrest for his involvement with an anti-apartheid militant resistance group in South Africa. During that time, his friend Desmond Tutu said,

“Nelson Mandela evolved from an angry young man into someone who grew in magnanimity and in his understanding of the point of view of the other.”



Mandela was able to break out of the prison of his own anger to step into a much greater version of himself. In the process, he helped to dissolve apartheid and create a new South Africa.

We have a lot to learn from these people. But we also have a lot to learn from ourselves. Remember the beginning of Star Trek – “Space, the final frontier!” Well, Gene Roddenberry didn’t get that quite right.

The final frontier is actually our own minds and hearts. We are capable of so much more than we think.

I’ve been blessed to have lots of opportunities to study and practice Zen Buddhism over the past 20 years. This has given me a kind of strength, stability, and flexibility that was lacking in my life. In 2012, I was ordained as a Buddhist chaplain after two years of training at Upaya Zen Center. I’ve also found a deep well of spirituality in many other experiences such as international travel and nonprofit work. I love bringing all these perspectives into the Liberated Life Project.

Spirit links all the other diverse categories of the Liberated Life Project together – Creativity, Relationships, Livelihood/Financial Liberation, and The World We Live In. I hope that the insights and practices shared will be nourishment for your spirit as you live your own liberated life.

***Even in the midst of devastation,
something in us always points
the way to freedom.***

- Sharon Salzberg

Livelihood / Finances

It's only been recently that I've been able to find some sense of liberation in the domain of work and money. If you had asked me about this ten years ago, I wouldn't have seen any connection between work, money, and freedom. Like many people, I was conditioned to believe that work was often frustrating and confining, that money was scarce, and that abundance was out of my reach.

Everything I pour into the Liberated Life Project comes out of my own hard-learned and hard-earned life lessons. One of the most difficult was finding my way out of \$32,000 of credit card debt.

I accumulated that debt over four years; it took me twice that long to pay off. Numerous times I thought of taking the easy route and declaring bankruptcy, but I realized that I'd very likely repeat the same patterns and choices that got me into that mess in the first place.

I came to learn that liberating myself from debt was a path into a whole new way of living, one in which I was much more empowered. The surprising thing was that the empowerment extended into every other area of my life, though how I related to money was the starting point.

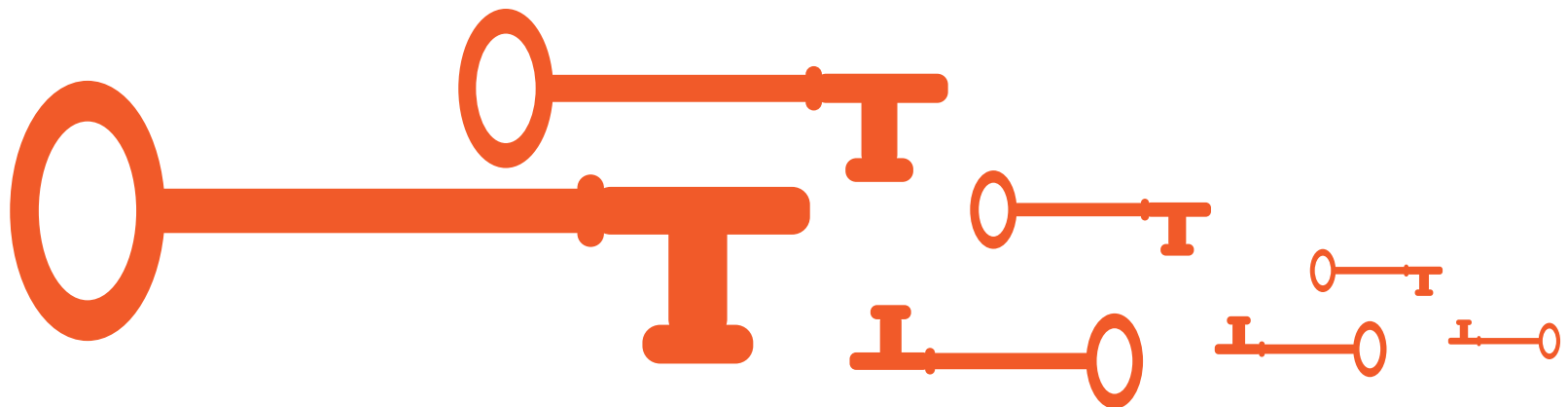
***There are people who have money
and people who are rich.***

- Coco Chanel

Learning how to work skillfully with my livelihood and finances has become a way for me to break all kinds of old patterns and to live a more full life. I may not have bucketloads of money but I have a sense of sufficiency—and that is even more important.

We often peg our hopes and dreams onto our work and our financial situation, and then blame the fact that we can't fulfill those dreams on not having enough. "If only I had this job..." "If only I had more money..."

One of my goals with the Liberated Life Project is to share lots of practical tools and ideas around finances and livelihood. But most importantly, the goal is to free ourselves from the delusions that often crop up around money and work, and to explore what it means to truly be rich, irregardless of the amount of money in your checking account.



Creativity

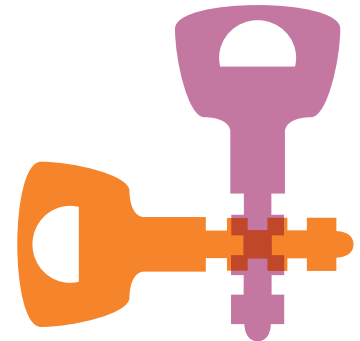
Creativity is the lifeblood of liberation.

Creativity is what helps us to see something that does not yet exist and then to bring it into existence; and to see what is already there but in a completely new way.

Can you imagine a new life for yourself? A new future for our planet? Having a creative vision, not bound by fears, is the most important step on the path to transformation.

Creativity comes in endless forms... art, music, dance, yes... but it also might manifest in that beautiful lasagna you've been cooking, or in how you work through a complex mathematical equation, or in the moment that you tuck a flower into your daughter's lunchbox before she takes off for school.

More than anything, creativity is a state of mind that is wide open to all possibilities and ready to dish itself out to the world in giant heaps with a big side of love.



Creativity is actually a practice, a muscle that you can strengthen by exercising it every day in a multitude of ways. I invite you to draw inspiration from these folks and begin working out those muscles:

Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.

—Twyla Tharp

There is a vitality, a life-force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost.

—Martha Graham

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.

—Michelangelo



Relationships

I've not had an easy time with relationships and by no means do I feel like I'm an expert in this area. In fact, my life has been one long journey to learn what intimacy really means. An image of a scene from the movie *Dr. Zhivago* comes to mind, where the good doctor is crawling across the plains of Russia in the midst of a huge blizzard... yes, that's what it's felt like at times!

But I'm going to dive into this topic anyway, because part of leading a liberated life is facing our own fears.

**What does it mean to be “liberated” when it comes to relationships?
I believe it includes:**

- Coming to know ourselves well enough so we don't project our 'stuff' onto our loved one
- Understanding the beliefs that we've inherited about what relationships are supposed to be like – and letting them go so that we can be present for what our relationship is truly like
- Realizing that the most important relationship is the one with ourselves
- Knowing that we are in relationship with the whole world

“Relationship” is defined broadly here – it may be with a lover, partner, wife, husband. But it can also be with our kids, our parents, our best friend, our co-workers, the homeless young man down the street, that beautiful gnarled oak tree in the park. Remember, everything in a liberated life is bigger than it seems.

This is really about interconnection, that mysterious quality of life in which we are connected to everyone and everything, and at the same time we walk our path alone.

The World We Live In

I used to think that I couldn't get very involved in the problems of the world until I had mine all sorted out. While there is some truth to that – we can all too easily cause harm and destruction when we act out of our own suffering – I now believe it's equally true that becoming more deeply engaged with the world around us can accelerate our own path of liberation.

Or maybe more accurately, it's a step-by-step process. The inner and the outer work move along in tandem, sometimes one takes precedence over the other but always in a dance of relationship.

I'm inviting you to consider that your life is bigger than the boundaries around your skin, or around your own home or family.

Inspired by stories of amazing people who have broken through their own fears and insecurities to take compassionate action, my hope is that all of us on Team Liberation can contribute something of goodness to the world and help to soften suffering.



IV. The 9 Keys to Liberation:

How You Can Live **a Liberated Life**





1. Practice Radical Self-Acceptance

The basic assumption of the Liberated Life Project is that the only way to move along the path toward living a free life is to come to complete acceptance of who you are.

Are you ready to get to know yourself, to look into the corners of yourself that you'd rather avoid, and to become your own best friend? **It all starts there.**

An Invitation:

- Find a time when you can be in silence for about 10 minutes.
- Get a piece of paper and a pen.
- Light a candle, and take some time to sit with these questions: What about myself most bothers me right now? What is something that I really wish I could change about myself?
- Write down whatever comes to you in response to those questions.
- Now here comes the radical part: **Do nothing.** Don't try to come up with a plan to change this thing about yourself. If feelings of shame or humiliation arise, just notice them but don't let your mind run with them. Simply take this piece of paper, put it in a special place, and release it with love and perhaps even gratitude. Know there is absolutely nothing you have to do about this right now. Or perhaps ever. You might even want to consider that whatever you've written about yourself may be a gift in disguise. Wouldn't that be something?

If you want to dig deeper:

"The Chance of a Lifetime is to Be Yourself"



2. Know Yourself

The core of every liberated life is a keen sense of **self-awareness**. Self-awareness means holding an intention to stay awake to the truth of what's going on inside ourselves and in relation to our world. It means having an unwavering commitment to non-harm, both to ourselves and others. And it means taking full responsibility for our lives.

Every day, have some practice that re-connects you with your mind, heart, and body. These practices will help you to stay awake, to catch yourself when you start to fall into trances and patterns. It's that very catching of ourselves that is self-awareness. As meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg says, "The moment you realize you've been distracted is the magic moment." That's our chance to wake up.

An Invitation:

- Start journaling on a regular basis
- Begin a meditation practice or deepen the practice you already have
- Begin a yoga practice or deepen the practice you already have
- Ask your best friend to tell you what they see about you that you cannot see in yourself

If you want to dig deeper:

"Self Awareness: How to Avoid the Hole in the Sidewalk"



3. Focus On Freedom “To” – Not Freedom “From”

Freedom from something may seem liberating. But be careful.

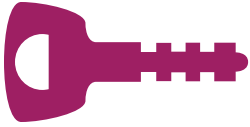
Everything you try to run away from owns you in some way.

The kind of freedom that moves toward something requires deep commitment and discipline. But it’s also the most genuine and most lasting. **Find ways to move toward what you love, rather than away from what you fear.**

As I worked to get out of \$32,000 of credit card debt, I got bogged down when all I focused on was finding an easy way out of it. I hated the feeling of being in debt so much that I didn’t want to even think about it. When I replaced that aversion with more positive motivators—such as realizing how much more money I’d be able to devote to people I love, and imagining how much lighter my spirit and body would feel when I finished paying off that debt—I had something to move toward rather than to fight against. It made all the difference in giving me the endurance I needed to meet that goal.

An Invitation:

Think of a dream or goal that’s important to you. What’s motivating you to fulfill that dream or goal? Make a list of all the reasons you are aware of, both positive and negative. Once you’ve finished this list, make a commitment to stay focused on the positive motivators and release the negative ones.



4. Language Matters

Language is powerful, and the words and phrases we use shape our beliefs.

If you want to see where you are trapped, listen very closely to the way that you talk about things. Do you find yourself using phrases like, “I’ll try, but I’m not sure...” “I’d like to do this, but...” “Nobody asked me...” “If that’s what you want me to do...” “If only he/she would...”

Yipes. Can you feel the cage starting to slip down? Language can oppress, and language can liberate.

An Invitation:

Here are a few things to start playing with in relationship to the words that you use:

- Verbs are way more liberating than nouns. See what happens when you say, “I [verb]” or “I am [verb]-ing” instead of “I am a [noun].”
- Instead of using the word “but” say “and.” How does this change your perspective?
- Under no circumstances let the words, “I’ll try...” slip from your mouth! Ask yourself what’s getting in the way of committing to doing something—and then choose whether you really want to do that thing or not. As Yoda says, “There is no try, only do.”
- Anytime you start a sentence with “You,” stop yourself and re-frame it from an “I” point of view. Rather than wanting someone else to do or be something different, what action can you take that will change the situation?



5. No One Can Do It For You. And Yet You Don't Have to Do It Alone.

Cultivate self-reliance. Have confidence in your own abilities. At the same time, don't be afraid to ask for help. Realize **interdependence**; that is, the truth that we are each walking our own path in life and yet we are all completely dependent on each other's existence.

Sit with this quote from the late Irish poet John O'Donohue and see what it says to you:

*“It takes great courage to meet the full force of your aloneness...
When you face your aloneness, something begins to happen. Gradually,
the sense of bleakness changes into a sense of true belonging. This is
a slow and open-ended transition but it is utterly vital in order to come
into rhythm with your own individuality.”*

An Invitation:

Every once in a while—maybe at the beginning of each new season—give yourself the gift of a solo retreat. Make a list of activities that are nourishing for you, like walking along the beach, writing, yoga, and create an informal schedule for yourself to follow during this time. Find the joy that rests at the heart of solitude.



6. Practice the Art of Asking Powerful Questions

Questions are a wonderful way to break old patterns and to find our way toward more freedom. In fact, the quality of your life depends to a great degree on the kind of questions that you ask of yourself. Ask a limiting question and you'll get a limiting answer; ask an expansive question and you open up all kinds of new possibilities for yourself and the world.

“A paradigm shift occurs when a question is asked inside the current paradigm that can only be answered from outside it.”

- Marilee Goldberg

An Invitation:

Some powerful questions to practice with in your own life:

- Am I making this choice from love or from fear?
- What am I waiting for?
- Who would I be without that thought? (Thanks to Byron Katie for that one)
- What would my life look like if I were liberated from fear?
- What is the best possible outcome of this situation?
- What is there for me to learn from this situation?

If you want to dig deeper:

“The Art of Asking Liberating Questions”



7. You Are More Than Your Psychology...

Know the Forces that Shape Your Life So You Can Re-Shape It

I've always remembered something that one of my college sociology professors said: **"What is the world but an agreement?"** In other words, we eat with a fork and knife only because when we were growing up, that's what we saw everyone around us doing. We stop for red lights only because of a collective agreement. There is nothing inherent in forks and knives or red lights that require us to see them as we do. But we have been so thoroughly conditioned in those actions that it seems like the only rational response.

Recognizing that the world shapes who we are—whether we know it or not—is a crucial step toward freedom. **By uncovering the hidden scripts that we grew up with, we give ourselves many more choices in how to respond to situations.**

An Invitation:

Here are some questions to work with as you free yourself from the limiting beliefs you may have inherited from your family and culture:

- What agreements have you signed on to that may not be in alignment with who you really are?
- What tools help you to wake up to those agreements and consider other possibilities?
- What is one agreement that you are now choosing to question?
- How can you create a new response to this, one that is based on what is true for you now in your life?



8. There is No Individual Salvation or Enlightenment

This is my gentle way of saying, “Get over yourself!”

We are genuinely happy and free only to the extent that other members of our human family are happy and free. Once you really get the truth of **interdependence**, you begin to understand this.

The very best way to guarantee your own peace of mind and happiness is to move away from self-centeredness and work toward the wellbeing of others. So many people have said this more eloquently than me. Like Mother Teresa:

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

We hold the key to each other’s liberation. Let’s help each other unlock that door.

An Invitation:

- **Volunteer** in the community soup kitchen one afternoon.
- **Send a letter** to someone in your family whom everyone else forgets (a real letter, not an email!).
- **Learn about someone who is struggling to survive** and then send a small donation to help. Give from your heart and make a difference in someone’s life.

If you want to dig deeper:

“How to Be Bigger Than Your Suffering”



9. Love is Everything!

Self-explanatory.

Sometimes music is the most powerful vehicle for learning this one.

Dip into one or more of the following, and let your heart open...

that is the source of true freedom.

[Ode to Joy \(Beethoven\)](#)

[Om Namo Bhagavate \(Deva Premal\)](#)

[Hey Hey Hey \(Michael Franti\)](#)

[All You Need is Love \(Beatles\)](#)

[The Book of Love \(Peter Gabriel\)](#)

V. Where to Go

From Here?





Remember Key #5? You don't have to do this alone...

...there are plenty of resources to support you. I would love for [The Liberated Life Project website](#) to be a place where you can draw inspiration from others who have faced their fears and moved beyond them to be of benefit to the world. In addition, here are some resources that I've found useful in my own life:

Spirit

[The Shift Network](#) - No matter where you live on the planet, you can access the wisdom collected on The Shift Network. Tele-courses (many of them free) like "The Sacred Awakening" series feature teachers such as Marianne Williamson, Robert Thurman, and the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers.

Inspiring websites:

- [Always Well Within](#)
- [Open Heart Project](#)
- [Tiny Buddha](#)
- [Facets of Joy](#)

Great books for your spirit:

- [Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha](#) by Tara Brach
- [Fully Present: The Science, Art, and Practice of Mindfulness](#) by Susan Smalley and Diana Winston
- [Mindfulness in Plain English](#) by Bhante Gunaratana
- [Gift from the Sea](#) by Ann Morrow Lindbergh
- [Woman's Retreat Book](#) by Jennifer Loudon



Creativity and Juiciness

Creativity-inducing websites:

- [LifeUnity](#)
- [Threads of Awakening](#)
- [Danielle LaPorte](#)
- [Moodstream](#)
- [99U](#)

Great creativity books:

- [The Art of Possibility](#) by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander
- [The Artist's Way](#) by Julia Cameron
- [Juicy Pens, Thirsty Paper](#) by Sark
- [The Creative Habit](#) by Twyla Tharp

Livelihood/Financial Liberation

I offer "[Fall in Love with Your Work](#)," an e-course that supports you to create right livelihood, based on the Liberated Life Project's core principle: freedom is an inside job. It's gotten rave reviews from participants. I encourage you to check it out if this is a part of your life you want to nurture.

If you're looking to make the break from working for someone else and get started in setting up your own business, Chris Guillebeau's [Unconventional Guides](#) are great. I've used the [Unconventional Guide to Working for Yourself](#) and the [Empire Building Kit](#) and highly recommend both of them. I got the inspiration and practical tools for creating The Liberated Life Project while going through Chris's year-long Empire Building Kit.

More great websites for livelihood and finance:

- [The Art of Nonconformity](#)
- [Escape from Cubicle Nation](#)
- [The Soul of Money](#)
- [Smarty Pig](#)

Relationships

Great books:

- [The Wisdom of a Broken Heart](#) by Susan Piver
- [Undefended Love](#) by Jett Psaris and Marlena Lyons



The World We Live In

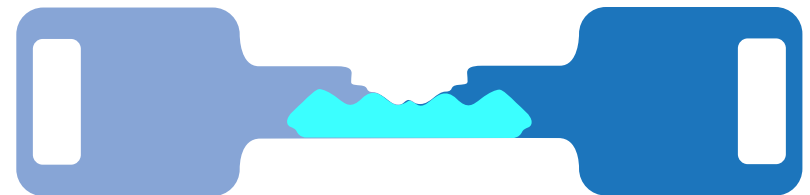
YES! magazine and website does a great job of sharing positive stories of social change and actionable ideas during this time when we get so little of that in the mainstream media. Themes of recent issues have included, “The New Economy;” “Food for Everyone;” and “Sustainable Happiness.”

More engaging websites:

- **The Buddhist Peace Fellowship**
- **Starhawk’s Tangled Web**
- **Sacred Economics**
- **stone circles**

Great books:

- **Active Hope** by Joanna Macy
- **Soul of a Citizen** by Paul Loeb
- **The Spiritual Activist** by Claudia Horwitz



What Now?



I'm very happy to give you this e-book as a gift, and I hope it makes a positive difference in your life.

I'd love it if you would pass it on to others who are yearning for a more liberated life.

Here's how you can do this:

- **Email it to a friend**
- **Post it on Facebook** (link to: <http://liberatedlifeproject.com/9-keys-to-liberation/>)
- **Tweet it**
- **Post it on your website**

Please send people to this webpage: <http://liberatedlifeproject.com/9-keys-to-liberation/>



About the Author

Maia Duerr lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She's been a writer, editor, Buddhist chaplain, anthropologist, mental health worker, nonprofit executive director, book-seller, and even an alfalfa sprout packer. Maia's mission in life is to open hearts and minds through her writing and presence.

You can reach her at maia@liberatedlifeproject.com