

HOW SELF-HELP SAVED MY LIFE

Journalist-turned-self-development-advocate Toni Jones shares her story and the books that shaped her journey to self-love

‘SHE LOVES HERSELF.’ A statement most people see as an insult. Inferring that the subject is totally self-assured, possibly overly confident, expects the best and is definitely not into caring about – or comparing herself to – what anyone else does, says or thinks. Um, like those are bad things?! I do love myself, BTW. I’ve spent almost ten years working on getting to this point, and so I don’t mind saying it in a glossy magazine that all the people I know (and lots I don’t, yet) will read. I’ve also said it on Instagram, in workshops, on public transport and even on stage. It wasn’t always like this. The first time I tried to say “I love you” in the mirror I cried. For hours. The next couple of times I couldn’t make eye contact. ►

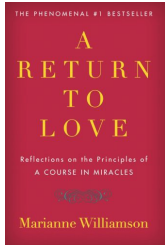


But that was before I had made it my project. No, my *mission* to use self-help to change my life, and now, yeah, I LOVE MYSELF! But that doesn’t mean that my mission is over. Because now my mission is to help you love yourself, too.

Which is why, just over two years ago, having left a high-flying job in journalism, I started a self-help book club, the Shelf Help Club, as a passion project. I had a simple objective: to help people like themselves more by introducing them to books and ideas that would change the way they thought about and talked to themselves. I wanted to help people fall back in love with themselves, because, from my own experience and also from everything I was learning from the experts and authors and support groups and healers and therapists that I sought out, I knew that improving the relationship we have with ourselves changes *everything*.

From a local little book club in West London, The Shelf Help Club has now grown into a global community – and business for me – connecting thousands of people from Los Angeles to Liverpool to Dubai and Dublin, with people sharing their experiences and supporting each other through the themes of the books we read online via Instagram or our empowering Facebook community, and offline at face-to-face meet-ups and author events and workshops. We also recently launched The Clubhouse, a self-help subscription service for like-minded readers and seekers wanting more support with their personal development.

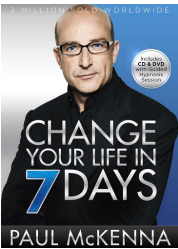
Shelf Help’s objective remains the same – self-love for all – but as our ability to empower more and more people to take charge of their own mental wellbeing has grown, so have I. Over the last eight years I have gone from being a chronically stressed, scared and sad self-medicator to someone living a happy and exciting life full of love, purpose and adventure. I am absolutely not exaggerating when I say “self-help saved my life” and, in case you’re interested in starting your own self-love story (and I hope you are), these are the books, and lessons, that helped me along the way...



A RETURN TO LOVE BY MARIANNE WILLIAMSON (HARPERCOLLINS)
This wasn’t the first self-help book I read (I actually read this book quite far into my self-love journey, on a retreat in South Africa in 2018) but it is probably the most important,

because it contains the first quote from a book that ever took my breath away: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us,” says Marianne in a now-quite-famous passage. Until I read this – aged 30ish – I had spent my whole life feeling inadequate, and busting a gut not to let anyone else in on the secret. I just knew that I was stupid and uninteresting and somehow ‘less’ than everyone else, and “who do you think you are?” was one of my favourite internal put-downs. As a kid, my dad used to tell me – loudly and often – that I didn’t have a clue about how the world worked, shouting me down if I dared disagree with him on anything (which was pretty regularly, even as a five-year-old). So I’d always known that I was crushingly inadequate (thanks, Dad), and a couple of decades in had learned to handle it. Ish. But now here was this woman telling me that I was, in fact, “powerful beyond measure”, that we are all “gorgeous and talented and fabulous” and that we are *all* “meant to shine”. How stupid. How ridiculous. How... *interesting*. A couple of years later I finally attended my first ever self-help event to see Marianne speak. Feeling super self-conscious and totally out of my depth, I tried to laugh it off as a fluffy meet-up full of weirdos with no real friends, *but* I was also hungry to know more. So much more. Something had clicked, and my return to (self-) love had started...

LESSON LEARNED: To stop playing small, because it doesn’t serve you or the world, and that the only way to change anything is to rediscover and then step into the most awesome version of you.

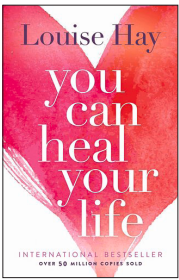


CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN 7 DAYS BY PAUL MCKENNA (STERLING)
AKA the one that changed *everything* for me. Around seven years ago it took me over a year to read this book about changing your life in seven days (ha!) because the

concepts in it – that we are not our thoughts, that we can let go of limiting beliefs, that we can learn self-confidence, that what we put out energetically comes back to us – were so new to me. But this book is filled with positive psychology and NLP techniques that can work for everyone. The first question the book asks is: “What would it be like if you woke up one morning and a miracle had happened – your life had become exactly what you wanted it to be?” Back then I had no clue what this might look like, but last year I got to interview Paul online about this very book, Skyping him in London from my holiday in Miami, which was a *huge* pinch-me moment for me as I realised that life



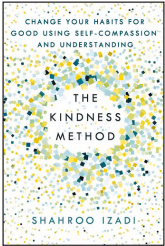
had become pretty much exactly what I wanted it to be.
LESSON LEARNED: How we talk to ourselves *really* matters.



YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE BY LOUISE HAY (HAY HOUSE)
Before she died aged 90 in 2017, Louise Hay was considered the grandmother of self-help (a multiple best-selling author who also founded the self-help publishing empire Hay House)

and her first title is basically a hug in book form. While Paul McKenna’s book helped me to look at how I thought and behaved and start asking, ‘Why?’, Louise’s book invited me to start to get to know myself and then, very gently, using journaling and mirror and inner-child work, gave me permission to start to like and be nice to myself. Sounds simple, right? But for anyone who has spent most of their life ignoring themselves by filling their days – and nights – with work and parties and people and being busy at all times, this kind of calm and quiet healing work is transformational.

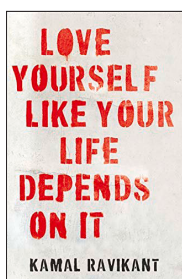
LESSON LEARNED: All healing starts with self-care. *This is the Shelf Help BOTM (Book of the Moment) for Feb/March 2020 and you can read along with us on Instagram or by joining the Shelf Help Facebook group. And for those wishing to dive a little deeper, we have created a Self-Care Toolkit featuring our favourite authors and experts and available exclusively at shelfhelp.club/clubhouse*



THE KINDNESS METHOD BY SHAHROO IZADI (PAN MACMILLAN)
Another game-changing manual on the power of kindness and self-compassion. Shahroo is a psychologist who focuses on habit change, using techniques

she learned working in addiction in the NHS to help people change any kind of habit that is holding them back. Shahroo has also used The Kindness Method (TKM) on herself after a lifetime battling food issues. This is the first book I recommend to people new to self-help and looking to boost their self-esteem, and in 2018 TKM helped me to make some much-needed lifestyle changes.

LESSON LEARNED: All habits served us at one time, even the awful ones, and uncovering how and why is the key to changing them. And that being kind to ourselves is not just self-help fluff, it’s proven to be the fastest way to make change happen. ►

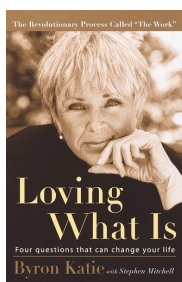


LOVE YOURSELF LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT BY KAMAL RAVIKANT

A self-published book from a Silicon Valley whizz kid who almost lost it all. This is a very modern take on the ancient power of affirmation and the power in its simplicity: say

'I love myself' as often as possible. And repeat.

LESSON LEARNED: Any and every type of person can hate themselves, but these feelings will pass. There is always light on the other side and life won't feel this dark forever.

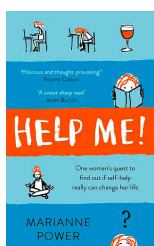


LOVING WHAT IS BY BYRON KATIE (THREE RIVERS PRESS)

An incredible book, and system, and woman! Byron's life had become a series of rock bottoms until, at her lowest point, with cockroaches crawling over her as she slept on the floor of a halfway house, she woke

up to the idea that all our suffering is created by thoughts. "It's not the problem that causes our suffering; it's our thinking about the problem," she observes. Byron went on to create The Work, a series of four questions starting with: "Is it true?" Once I started applying these questions to my life and rather extensive collection of limiting beliefs ("I'm dumb." "Nobody cares what I have to say." "I'm a total imposter.") I was able to unpick them and start to debunk them.

LESSON LEARNED: Get curious about everything you think, feel and do. Because once you shine the light of curiosity on something, things will start to shift.

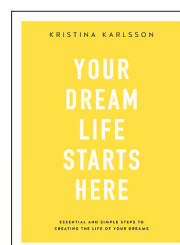


HELP ME! BY MARIANNE POWER (PAN MACMILLAN)

Marianne and I were journalists at the same (infamous) newspaper but never really met until her first book came out at around the time I started Shelf Help, and now we're on this crazy journey from serious(ish) journalists

to professional over-sharers together (one of our first events was reading to three people on hay bales in a tent in South Wales in 2018; now Marianne's doing TED Talks and I'm writing about self-help in *Grazia* – it's most definitely been a journey!). *Help Me!* is the (hilarious) story of what happened when Marianne took on a different self-help book every month for one year, so it's a brilliant introduction to the genre for anyone unsure where (or even whether) to start.

LESSON LEARNED: Self-help isn't about fixing ourselves because we're not broken, it's about realising that we are exactly where we need to be, and that the magic is in the journey.



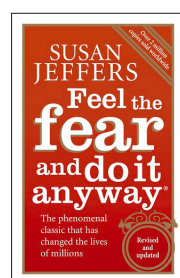
YOUR DREAM LIFE STARTS HERE BY KRISTINA KARLSSON

(HARDIE GRANT BOOKS)

A super stylish – of course – and inspirational guide to dreaming big from the kikki.K founder. Before

I started to trust and believe in myself I never really let myself have big goals or grand dreams because deep down I didn't think I deserved them, and this book and its author came into my life at exactly the right time, helping me start imagining greater things for myself and my little book club.

LESSON LEARNED: There is no dream too big.

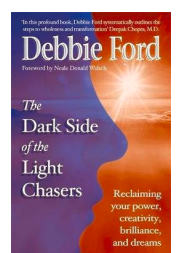


FEEL THE FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY BY SUSAN JEFFERS (EBURY PUBLISHING)

An '80s classic, and one of our members' favourites. I chose this as a BOTM in 2019 because it totally reframed so many things for me, including nerves and fear of

failure, and gave me the push I needed to turn Shelf Help from a fun hobby into a bone fide business.

LESSON LEARNED: Nothing will change if we don't change.



THE DARK SIDE OF THE LIGHT CHASERS BY DEBBIE FORD (HODDER & STOUGHTON)

This is the book I am reading right now, and it's one I've been putting off because it involves taking a look at our 'shadow' side (AKA those

parts of ourselves that we don't like, and don't think anyone else would like either, and so do everything we can to ignore/hide/close down) and that's not always loads of fun. BUT all this 'work' so far has taught me that true self-love comes down to believing in our worth, and believing on a deep level that we are deserving of the life/people/experiences/things we want, and for most of us that means reprogramming our subconscious – including making peace with our shadow self – in order to accept that.

LESSON LEARNED: That the path to self-love isn't always easy, but the more of this 'work' we do the more confidence we'll have that we can do the tough stuff. And the more we'll trust that it will always be worth it. 🧠

• *Shelf Help is looking for hosts in the Middle East! If you love reading and self-development and inspiring positive change in people then you can apply at shelfhelp.club. And/or you can join in the book club chat anytime on Instagram @shelfhelp.club or the Facebook group*