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Search for yourself.

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Search for Yourself

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Foreword.

Search for Yourself

It deeply moves me to discuss in this book topics that can hold value for many who are unfamiliar with the diverse themes addressed here. The cover design carries a powerful message: a mirror, a symbolic window to the outside world. In that mirror, a person appears trapped, held captive by a reflection that does not represent their true essence but rather a projection of expectations, norms, and values imposed by others.

The mirror symbolizes how the world outside often reflects a distorted image of ourselves. This image, though inaccurate, is unconsciously accepted by many as the truth. But what if that image is merely an illusion? A reflection of what others want us to be, rather than who we truly are?

This distortion can cause a deep sense of entrapment and alienation. It may lead you to question your authenticity, filling your world with a sense of falseness and discomfort. Yet, the mirror also offers an opportunity. It confronts us with these illusions and invites us to look beyond – to reach past the surface reflection toward our core, our truth.

With this book, I hope to offer guidance to anyone who feels trapped in a mirror image that does not align with their inner reality. It is an invitation to peel away the layers of imposed expectations and learn to see yourself as you truly are, free from the distortions of the outside world. Only when you have the courage to look into that mirror and acknowledge what you see – both the real and the illusory – can you find the freedom to truly be yourself.

In psychiatry and psychology, the term trauma is used to describe what happens when a person remains stuck in overwhelming emotions like fear, anger, or loneliness following a shocking or painful event. Trauma often arises from experiences so extreme, unexpected, or impactful that the individual cannot fully process them or find meaning in them. As a result, one's inner self becomes stagnant, as if part of the psyche remains frozen in the moment of the event.

This process often leads to a sense of disconnection from the inner world, a core space essential for self-discovery and personal growth. When someone loses this connection, the inner world feels like a dark, unexplored terrain – a labyrinth devoid of light and understanding. In this state, life can feel like a sequence of external stimuli, lacking the deeper meaning and connection that the inner world provides.

However, within this darkness lies hidden potential. The inner world, though unexplored, patiently waits for the moment when the person finds the strength and courage to illuminate the darkness. The path to recovery is often not easy and requires confronting pain and vulnerability. Yet, in that confrontation lies the opportunity to restore the broken connection, bring light to the shadows, and reconnect with one's true self.

This imagery deeply resonates with me, evoking a personal memory of a recurring nightmare that seemed to mirror the same struggle. In that dream, which was both suffocating and haunting, I felt the battle to step out of the shadow of external expectations and discover my own core. It was as if I were trapped in a mirror image that did not reflect the real me, but a distorted projection of what others expected of me.

Perhaps that nightmare symbolized the inner journey we all must undertake at some point: a process of bringing light into our darkness. It is a path that can be both confronting and liberating. Confronting, because it forces us to face the shadows – the fears, doubts, and limitations we have accepted as part of ourselves. But also liberating, because it gives us the opportunity to release those shadows and make space for our truth.

This journey requires a shift in how we view the mirror. What once seemed like a prison can transform into an

invitation—a gateway to self-discovery. By looking beyond the surface, past the illusions that hold us captive, we find the courage to embrace our authentic selves. The process is not simple and requires patience, but the path that unfolds leads to a deeper connection with ourselves. Ultimately, we discover that darkness is not the end but a place where transformation begins.

In my young adulthood, I was haunted for years by the same recurring nightmare, an elusive echo that seemed to dig deep into my unconscious. The dream always began the same way: I stood before a large, mysterious house on a dark, desolate hill. The house held something irresistible, as if it both invited and repelled me. Some rooms were lit with a serene, almost deceptively calm light, but beyond them lay dark secrets—a shadowy attic and an even more ominous basement.



The house had a labyrinthine structure, with secret doors and hidden stairs leading to unknown places. I knew that these hidden spaces held something important, something that had to be revealed, but the fear of facing the unknown held me back. From the shadows came terrifying sounds – whispers that swelled into screams,

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the sound of footsteps chasing me, and a threat I could never see but always felt.

Every time I tried to escape, it seemed the house tightened its grip on me. The farther I ran, the deeper I was pulled into the chaos of the unknown. It was as if the house was a reflection of my own psyche, with rooms that represented parts of myself I dared not enter. The lit rooms were the parts of my life I accepted and recognized, but the attic and basement were something else – an untamed darkness symbolizing everything I didn't want to see or acknowledge.

Yet, despite the suffocating feeling, I also sensed a deeper message in this dream. The house forced me to keep looking, not to run away from what it was trying to show me. Perhaps the house wasn't an enemy but a teacher – an invitation not only to confront the frightening shadows but also the hidden treasures buried within. A call to explore that dark unknown, not to escape from it.

Each time I woke up, drenched in sweat, still trapped in the suffocation, and fear the dream had invoked. Even while I dreamt, I often realized it was a dream. But that realization offered no relief; I couldn't free myself from the overwhelming sense of helplessness. It seemed as though my subconscious was desperately trying to make me understand something, something my conscious mind couldn't or wouldn't grasp.

It wasn't until much later that I read that a dream about a house is often seen as a symbol of oneself. The house

represents who you are, with all its rooms, hallways, and hidden corners. That thought made me reflect. Why was the house in my dream so dark? Why did I feel so much fear in going through those secret doors or descending those hidden stairs? Was I afraid of myself? Of what was inside me?

The dark attic and basement, the unknown spaces, and the sense of threat began to tell me something. Perhaps the dream wasn't about fear of the outside world, but a confrontation with my own inner shadows – parts of myself I had tucked away, perhaps out of shame, fear, or misunderstanding.

The fear of entering those spaces might have symbolized my resistance to looking inward, to facing parts of myself I'd rather keep hidden.

What was that darkness trying to show me? Was it merely a reflection of my own unresolved emotions, fears, and desires?

Or was there something more, an invitation to look beyond the fear? Perhaps that darkness wasn't just a threat, but also a potential – a place where insights, strength, and healing could be found, if only I gathered the courage to enter those hidden rooms.



Slowly, it began to dawn on me that these dark spaces didn't just inspire fear; they symbolized a deeper truth: I didn't truly know myself, no matter how much I thought I did. They were a reflection of my inner confusion, a quiet indictment of the image I had built of myself. It became painfully clear that my identity was not entirely my own. My life, my choices, my beliefs – so much of it was made

up of fragments from others: their opinions, norms, beliefs, and rules.

I had unknowingly adopted these influences as my own, as though they were self-evident. Never had I truly stopped testing them against my own truth. Had I chosen this myself? Or was I merely living according to a blueprint laid out by others?

The dream became a catalyst for reflection. It was as if my subconscious was inviting me to peel back the layers, to break down the walls I had built around myself, and to rediscover what was truly mine. Those dark rooms and hidden stairs didn't call for avoidance, but exploration. They were not places of fear, but spaces full of potential, waiting to be filled with my own authentic choices and beliefs.

I began to ask myself: who am I really, apart from all these influences? What would remain if I shook off everything imposed from the outside? Which parts of me would stand strong if I let the light of honesty shine on my inner world?

This journey inward was not an easy one. It required courage to look at the shadows, patience to learn what they were trying to tell me, and honesty to admit that not everything I believed was truly mine. But at the same time, it also brought a deep sense of liberation. The realization grew that wholeness doesn't mean you only

embrace your light, but rather that you learn to live with the dark – and in doing so, fully accept yourself.

I had been living all this time not from myself, but from an unconscious urge to belong. But to what, exactly? And why was that so important to me? These questions tapped into the core of a deep longing: not just to be accepted by others, but also to accept myself, a longing I had never truly recognized.

That dream brought a painful but necessary insight. It taught me that I had been surviving, rather than truly living. The large, mysterious house was a reflection of my inner world, and the dark rooms symbolized parts of me I had been avoiding. Sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of convenience. They were the invisible burdens of expectations and judgments – not just from others, but also those I had imposed on myself. It was as if I was afraid to truly meet myself, to get to the essence of who I was, free from the voices and expectations that had surrounded me for so long.

When I began to understand this, the dream slowly transformed. The house was no longer a place of darkness and threat. It became an invitation – an opportunity to open the closed doors and let in the light. The light wasn't just a symbol of clarity and understanding, but also of acceptance. It was asking me to get to know myself

without judgment, to embrace both the light and the shadow within me.

With each step I took, I discovered that the house was not an enemy, but an ally. It was a guide to my own truth, to what was authentically and unmistakably mine. The process was not easy; it took courage to face the confrontation and patience to explore the unknown. But with each door I opened, the house became less frightening and more like home.

That realization - that the house was a reflection of my own inner journey - felt like a new beginning. It wasn't an endpoint, but the starting gun of a journey that still continues. A journey in which I can keep rediscovering myself, and in which I learn that wholeness is not about perfection, but about accepting everything I am.

Maybe that's how it was. Maybe I had been trying to come up with the idea of what "normal" was, as the world defined it. But what does normal even mean if it requires you to deny yourself? What remains of your true self when you adapt to a standard that takes away your inner freedom?

It is unnecessary to say that the journey to my own identity was long and intense. It was not a path of comfort, but of discovery and transformation. As I got to know myself better, the house in my dreams began to change. Where fear and darkness once reigned, now

openness and light appeared. The rooms that once felt cold and uninviting became warm and welcoming.

The attic, which had initially seemed so confusing and oppressive to me, changed. Where the chaos of my thoughts had once seemed to reign, I found clarity and overview. With every beam of light that filled the space, I felt how my mind opened, as if the attic wasn't just a place in the house, but also a reflection of my own mind.

And then the basement – the place that had always inspired the most fear in me. It was there that I had hidden parts of myself that I was too afraid to embrace, the emotions and experiences I found too difficult to face. But as the light reached those dark corners, something remarkable happened. I discovered that those hidden pieces were not my enemies, but parts of my soul waiting to be acknowledged and accepted.

By lighting up this basement, I felt how I became free. Free to reconnect with those forgotten and suppressed aspects of myself. Free to no longer see them as sources of shame, but as building blocks of my wholeness. The light I allowed into the house of my dreams became a symbol of the freedom to fully be who I am – not perfect, but authentic.

This journey of self-discovery taught me that being "normal," as the world sees it, means nothing if it comes at the cost of your own truth. It was only when I allowed my

unique light to shine that I began to understand what it truly means to live.

Occasionally, the dream still returns, but now the house has a different appearance. Where once there was suffocation and fear, now there is light, space, and calm. Everything is clear, even the rooms that were once dark. What was once a source of fear and confusion is now a place of curiosity and adventure. Instead of feeling trapped, I now see the secrets of the house as challenges, invitations to explore further and learn more about myself. The secret doors and hidden stairs are now a game, a way to explore and grow, a way to push my own boundaries. What once felt like a prison is now a space full of possibilities.

A large part of my journey, I share with you here, not because I claim to know what is right or wrong. I don't believe my path is a universal model that works for everyone. I prefer to leave the judgment of what someone else should do to others. My path is unique, just as your path is. Still, I hope that my story might touch something in you, help you on your way, or provide insight that can take you further.

Discovering yourself is a continuous journey. It's not a destination that can ever be fully reached, but an adventure without an end. It is a process of constant exploration, in which you learn more and more about who

you truly are. It takes courage to embrace both the darkness and the light within you, to allow both pain and joy, and in both, discover that together they form the richness of your existence. What I have learned is that there is no right or wrong way to discover yourself. It's about accepting the journey and embracing the adventure, with all its unpredictable twists.

I wish you much joy and courage in exploring your own inner world, your personal house. For what you find there could be the key to a life that is more aligned with who you truly are. It is an adventure that requires courage and openness, but also a loving gaze towards yourself. What you discover along the way can help you break free from the expectations of others and bring you closer to your own truth. The path to yourself is unique, but it always brings you closer to the freedom and authenticity that lie within you.

Best wishes,

Attie

Finding Yourself.

Finding yourself is a journey, a journey that doesn't lead to distant places, but inward. It's a path that requires courage, patience, and honesty. It's not always easy to look inward; sometimes it's even painful. When you dig deeper, you may discover parts of yourself you would rather not have seen.

You encounter your shadow side – the parts of you that lie hidden beneath layers of pride, fear, or shame. And in that moment, you realize that you may not have always been as kind, strong, or good as you thought. It can be confronting to face your own imperfections, to acknowledge that you too have made mistakes, and that not all choices came from pure intentions.

But it's precisely in that confrontation that growth lies. Acknowledging your shadow side is not a sign of weakness; it's an act of strength. It gives you the opportunity to embrace yourself in all your fullness – with your light *and* your dark. It helps you learn from your mistakes, become gentler with yourself, and ultimately become a more authentic version of yourself.

The journey inward is not a final destination. It's an ongoing process of discovery, letting go, and starting over. It's an invitation to become whole, to learn to live from who you truly are, without masks and without judgment. But it's worth it. It may sometimes be difficult, it may challenge you in ways you didn't expect, but every step