

“Everyone should read this treasure trove of essential inner knowledge.
This book is a magnificent accomplishment.”
—Caroline Myss, author of *Anatomy of the Spirit* and *The Power of Prayer*

The Alchemy *of* Inner Work

*A Guide for Turning Illness & Suffering
into True Health & Well-Being*

LORIE EVE DECHAR *with* BENJAMIN FOX

A New Story of Healing

As the world around us careens toward increasing states of environmental, financial, and cultural chaos, and the time and resources available for poetry, dreaming, self-reflection, imagination, and creativity shrink, does personal healing at a soul level still matter?

How can a young boy's recovery from the trauma of an unexpected chronic illness, a feisty psychotherapist's struggle to find herself without leaving her marriage, a coyote-spirited singer searching for the courage to sing, an advertising executive's development of an inner life, a mother's annihilating experience of her son's death, how can the courageous, creative inner work of these brief individual lives matter in the face of climate change, species extinction, monster storms, disappearing rain forests, endless numbers of homeless and incarcerated people, rampant racism, crumbling democracies, destroyed cultures, and genocides?

After more than three decades spent with patients in the treatment room and two decades spent developing my work with Alchemical Healing, I feel the painful relevance of this question rock through every cell in my body. And yet, the answer that comes from the depth of my heart is, yes, the soul still matters because it is the essence of our humanity.

And yes, one person's resolute audacity to heal, to find meaning and purpose, and to evolve at a soul level does matter because in the integral reality that is struggling to emerge, one person's inner work touches us all. In this new consciousness, our personal growth will inevitably result in some positive, albeit unpredictable, change in the outer world. Indeed, as I learned during the weekend I spent with Joanna Macy, inner work and the consciousness shifts it engenders are prerequisites for healing the planet.

In the latest research on the theory of evolution, the accepted Darwinian idea of natural selection and the survival of the fittest is being re-examined. Ornithologist and evolutionary biologist Richard O. Prum, in his book *The Evolution of Beauty*, proposes that "evolution is frequently far quirkier, stranger, more historically contingent, individualized, and less predictable and generalizable than adaptation can explain." In fact, according to Prum, evolution is guided not only by rational, measurable, predictable survival strategies but also by a mysterious subjectivity and by individual aesthetic experiences of beauty and desire.

In his book *Climate: A New Story*, Charles Eisenstein asks, "What induces a shift to the consciousness of interbeing?" And with an indirect nod to Prum's view of evolution, Eisenstein answers his own question "It is through a confrontation with beauty, suffering, and mortality. It is through a confrontation with what is real."

The innate entelechy of life to grow in the direction of truth, beauty, and wholeness that underlies all of alchemy as well as Prum's thesis and Eisenstein's reply also forms the basis of Alchemical Healing. For me, it also explains why the soul, with its miraculous capacity to reverse entropy and reinvigorate the life force with courage, hope, connection, compassion, and inspiration still matters, perhaps more now than ever before.

And yet, the caveat is that the zeitgeist of our time requires that Alchemical Healing extend beyond our individual soul's experience of healing and growth if it is to provide a relevant and useful new story of health and healing. Although I am convinced that fulfilling the mandate of our unique Tao is still a crucial aspect of a fully realized life, there is more. We also need to move beyond the myth of the Hero's Journey, the successful fulfillment of individual destiny, which is the central theme of mental consciousness and the Western project. We must discover a life path that includes and goes beyond Jung's individuation process.

We need to find a way to heal and fulfill our destinies as individuals within a tribe and an integrated circle of life, where one person's well-being does not detract from the well-being of the

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community or come at the expense of harm to other beings or the environment. In her book *Emergent Strategy*, social justice activist and healer Adrienne Maree Brown writes, “Right now, it’s clear to me that something is wrong if it hurts the planet.” She adds, “We all have the capacity to heal each other—healer is a possibility in each of us.” And she asks, “How can we, future ancestors, align ourselves with the most resilient practices of emergence as a species?”

Clearly, a view of healing that takes into account the well-being and destiny of the individual as well as the well-being and destiny of the human community and the planet is the new possibility. And just as clearly, none of us know how to do it yet. We are living in a group learning project, a vast human laboratory experiment with a completely uncertain outcome. In the depths of our being, we feel something attempting to arise, something buried like a seed within us, something that knows and yet, requires a sacrifice of knowing. This not yet manifest but implicit possibility requires us to come out of numbness and denial, to feel our fear, anger, love, generosity, and grief in the face of illness, impasse, crisis, and death. It demands that we revise our view of the body from a problematic mechanical system to a sacred source of wisdom, and that we care for the world as we would for our own body. This new possibility invites us to surrender familiar but no longer efficient ways of organizing our reality in order to give birth to a radically new way of being a healthy human.

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