LIBRIS | We know books

THE ONE WHO BROKE YOU CAN'T HEAL YOU

LET GO OF TOXIC BONDS AND BUILD HEALTHY ONES

NAJWA ZEBIAN

yellow kite

LIBRIS | We know books

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ix

PART I: CLOSE THE DOOR ON THE PAST 1

CHAPTER 1 Closure Is a Myth: Stop Trying to Make Sense of Them 3

CHAPTER 2 Shed Your Old Beliefs 7

CHAPTER 3 The Seven Bonds 47

PART II: OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE PRESENT 79

CHAPTER 4 How to Fix What They Broke 81

CHAPTER 5 Mending the Bond with Yourself 123

CHAPTER 6 Let Go of Toxic Bonds 139

CHAPTER 7 The Foundations of a Home with Another Person 160

PART III: LOOK FORWARD TO MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS 183

CHAPTER 8 How to Build Relationships That Build You Up 185

CHAPTER 9 Planting the Seeds for Meaningful Connections 196

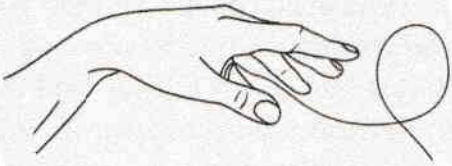
CHAPTER 10 How to Always Be the One Who Fixes You 206

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 219

LIBRIS | We know books

PART I

CLOSE THE DOOR ON THE PAST



LIBRIS | We know books

CHAPTER 1

CLOSURE IS A MYTH: STOP TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF THEM

Do you really need the person who hurt you to say "I hurt you"? And "I'm sorry"? And "I feel awful that I did it"? It's beautiful to get an apology like this, but do you *need* it? Do you not know how painful the pain was when you experienced it? Do you need them to tell you how painful it was and give you permission? You don't *need* it. You might *want* it because you believe relief will come when the one who wronged you acknowledges what they put you through. But even if they do admit it and apologize, do you think that will take the pain away?

It won't. Because you still have to heal from the pain. Acknowledgment and apology are not like a magic switch that all of a sudden heals you. You're still going to wonder why. You're still going to hold on to the same stories you told yourself in the past, because you haven't actually released the pain, the anger, or the resentment. You're putting all the power of your healing in another person's hands.

The one who broke you cannot heal you. *You* have to heal you. You can't expect the person who broke you into pieces to pick up those pieces and say, "I'm going to put you back together." You can't do that. Well, you *can*, but why would you choose to do that? Someone who has the power to destroy you

LIBRIS We know books

and uses that power . . . why would you trust them with rebuilding you?

You can't have authentic relationships without being vulnerable. When you are vulnerable, you are open to injury. You are open to pain. That means you go into a relationship knowing that someone has the power to destroy you, but you trust that they won't. You gave someone that power. They used that power. Why would you now say, "I'm going to give you that power *again* so that you can fix what you broke"? Stop doing that to yourself. It is a type of self-abandonment—you're waiting for someone to come save you. You're waiting for the one who left you behind to come take you back from the place where they abandoned you. You're telling someone, "Do whatever. Treat me however. Just welcome me into your life. See me as worthy of your apology, your regret."



Healing Thread

Since there is power in bringing the invisible into our conscious awareness, find a string, thread, or yarn. Make sure it's a few inches long. Hold the string at both ends with each of your fists. One fist represents you, and the other represents the person, place, job, environment, or whatever else you are bonded to that has broken you in some way. Take a few moments to feel what it's like to want that person at the other end to validate you or apologize to you. Now say out loud, "The one who broke me can't heal me. I have to heal me." Then release your end of the string. Feel the liberty and peace that brings you.

Practice physically letting go of your end of the string as many times as you need. It's a good idea to keep the string in your pocket wherever you go and do this exercise whenever you feel stuck on wanting their involvement in your healing.

LIBRIS | We know books

Closure comes when you recognize that you have the power to close the door on the past. You have the power to let go of your grip at your end of the bond. You have the power to stop waiting for those who broke you—friends, family, colleagues, romantic partners—to come to you and give you permission to start healing. You can stop waiting for them to believe how bad it was for you to go through the pain they caused. You stop waiting for them to believe that you have the right to feel the wounds of what they did to you. And when you choose closure, you are choosing to close the door on the past, the relationship, the hurt, and the questions. You are choosing to bolt that door shut with multiple locks and throwing all the keys away. There is no going back to the rooms that broke you. There is only walking away from them.



Healing Thread

In moments of doubt, repeat to yourself:

It did happen.
It was that bad.
I didn't deserve it.
I have the right to be hurt.

And when they make you feel like you're the villain for drawing a boundary or severing the bond with them, repeat to yourself: *Don't blame me for the line I had to draw with the blood your knife left on my back.*

LIBRIS | We know books

Weave your own healing thread. It's time for you to write down a healing strategy, reminder, or reflection that works for you.

LIBRIS | We know books

CHAPTER 2

SHED YOUR OLD BELIEFS

MAYBE SOMETHING *IS* WRONG WITH YOU

I found myself one day in my doctor's office seeking some form of clarity on my sleepless nights, very dysregulated nervous system, and what felt like complete imbalance. Like I couldn't be myself in every relationship in my life. With men. With my friends. With my family. I kept my true self, my needs, and my desires to myself because I didn't want to disappoint, burden, or stress other people. I felt like I was holding space for each and every one of them, but no one seemed to hold space for me. I felt like I was carrying everyone's being and burdens, but I couldn't lay the weight of my being or struggles on anyone. I had to carry myself.

I felt like I always had to hide parts of who I was to avoid disappointment or abandonment. So I opted for camouflaging myself into the environment around me. I became what their eyes wanted to see. What their ears wanted to hear. I was being dishonest with them, but above all, I was being dishonest with myself. I wasn't fooling anyone, honestly. I was only fooling myself. I was terrified of being alone while actually feeling lonelier than ever.

I sat in my doctor's office crying the saddest tears I'd probably ever cried in my life, because I couldn't name my pain.

LIBRIS We know books

All I could do was feel it, and see it every time I looked in the mirror. No amount of makeup could hide it or spark light into my eyes. No amount of skin care or speaking gently to my younger self could get rid of the dark cloud that rained over me wherever I went, even on sunny days.

The doctor prescribed me sleeping pills and gave me tips on how to increase my appetite. Then, as I was about to leave, I blurted out, "Maybe something is really wrong with me."

I helplessly sank in my chair. My doctor turned to me with quite a bit of resolution in his eyes. He had known me for years. He said, "I read your words, and you know so much. You just don't follow your own advice. And sometimes I think you seek external validation . . ." He went quiet for a little bit, then finished his thought: ". . . when you really, truly, don't need it." And he left the room.

He left the room, but his words stayed with me. This was my biggest fear—that I would be a fraud. I had always prided myself on being reflective, being introspective, and knowing the right thing to do. I'd found ways to inspire other people to show up authentically and truly love themselves. And all of that was real. It came from a very true, knowledgeable, and wise place from within me. So why wasn't I following any of it?

I started hearing voices that said, *How would the people who read your work react if they knew you were accepting this kind of treatment from the people in your life?* I felt so ashamed when I heard that question. I felt as if I was living a life full of inner conflict where I knew exactly what I needed to do, but at the same time I had handcuffs around my wrists, a rope around my neck, and an anchor holding the rest of me in place.

My mom's words came back to me then—her most repeated words:

You are like a candle. You light up the way for everyone while burning yourself.

LIBRIS We know books

When I left the doctor's office, I called my mom as I cried. She said something new this time: "You are just like your dad."

That sentence brought up so much for me. I love my dad so much, and I looked up to him growing up. I wanted to be just like him. He was admired and respected everywhere he went. He was the person you went to when you needed something done with integrity. I believe that I got my strong moral compass and need for things in life to be fair from him. But he also taught me to put everyone else ahead of myself.

The patterns we fall into in our adult years are heavily shaped by our early experiences with our parents, by what we witnessed them do or not do, and by the ways we learned to cope. My way of coping was to disappear into the environment I was in. It wasn't out of weakness but out of the need to survive. I thought I couldn't survive without the acceptance of those around me. People's opinions were so important to me from a very young age.

I became the friend that my friends needed me to be. If they needed someone to listen to them, I was the listener. If they needed someone to go places with them, I was the one who went. If they needed someone to get them all the gifts they couldn't afford, I was the one who bought those gifts. If they needed someone to teach them a language that I knew, I was the one who taught them that language. I learned from a young age to be of service. It was my way of proving that I deserved to be their friend.

I learned that my relationships were one-way streets, and maybe you have, too. That's why it was so hard for me to depend on anyone or to pick up the phone and call someone and say, "I'm really struggling." I was the one who people came to. If I went to people, I thought my own image of myself would somehow crumble. I was the one who understood people's pain, the one who was able to help them navigate it and make the right choices for themselves. I should have been able to do that for myself, too. But for some reason, I couldn't.

LIBRIS | We know books



Healing Thread

In moments when you feel weighed down by the feeling that you're obligated to do too much for everyone at the expense of your own well-being, ask yourself: *What about me?*

Instead of echoing the criticizing voices around you that tell you you're selfish to be thinking of yourself, raise the voice of the inner advocate you have for yourself.

That's the loop I went on for most of my life. Until I hit that point where I was sitting in my doctor's office saying the words that I never thought I would say: "Maybe something is really wrong with me."

I decided to sit down with my pen and paper and write a letter to myself, which started this way: "Maybe something *is* wrong with me." Do this exercise with me.



Healing Thread

Write the sentence or sentences that come to you when you are going through your darkest times. Write a letter to yourself that gives compassion to the you that feels those words to be true.

"Maybe something is wrong with me."

I hear you say these words, and I know you think they're true. Maybe something *is* wrong with you. But maybe something is actually *right* with you.

Maybe something is wrong with the environment you're in.

LIBRIS | We know books

And all the right parts of you are fighting against the injustice in that environment.

Maybe something is wrong with what you learned was the real meaning of love and being a good person.

And all the right parts of you are aching for you to see the love you actually deserve and that you are capable of giving yourself.

Maybe something is wrong with the way you learned to survive.

And all the right parts of you are fighting for you to stop just getting by and start seeing the magic you have within you.

Maybe something is wrong with your understanding of the way you deserve to be spoken to.

And all the right parts of you are fighting for the gentleness and love you actually deserve to have falling on your ears and your soul.

In my book *Welcome Home*, I shared the story of how I developed the belief that I didn't deserve to be included in people's love. I was eight or nine years old, and it was the night before a big celebration. My aunt came into the room where my cousins and I were playing, and she asked them to all go downstairs for family time. She told me specifically to stay in the playroom, because this time was for family.

I lived with them. Until then, I had thought that I *was* part of their family. What I experienced in that moment heavily influenced the way I saw my significance in the world. It was then that my belief that I needed to fight for my place in people's lives, that I needed to do more to prove to them that I deserved a place, materialized. I understood that just being at my aunt and uncle's house was not a good enough reason to be worthy in their eyes. I didn't receive love the same way that I saw everyone around me receive it, so I internalized the belief that something