

EXCERPTS FROM

Five Keys to Unlocking the Gift in the Wound

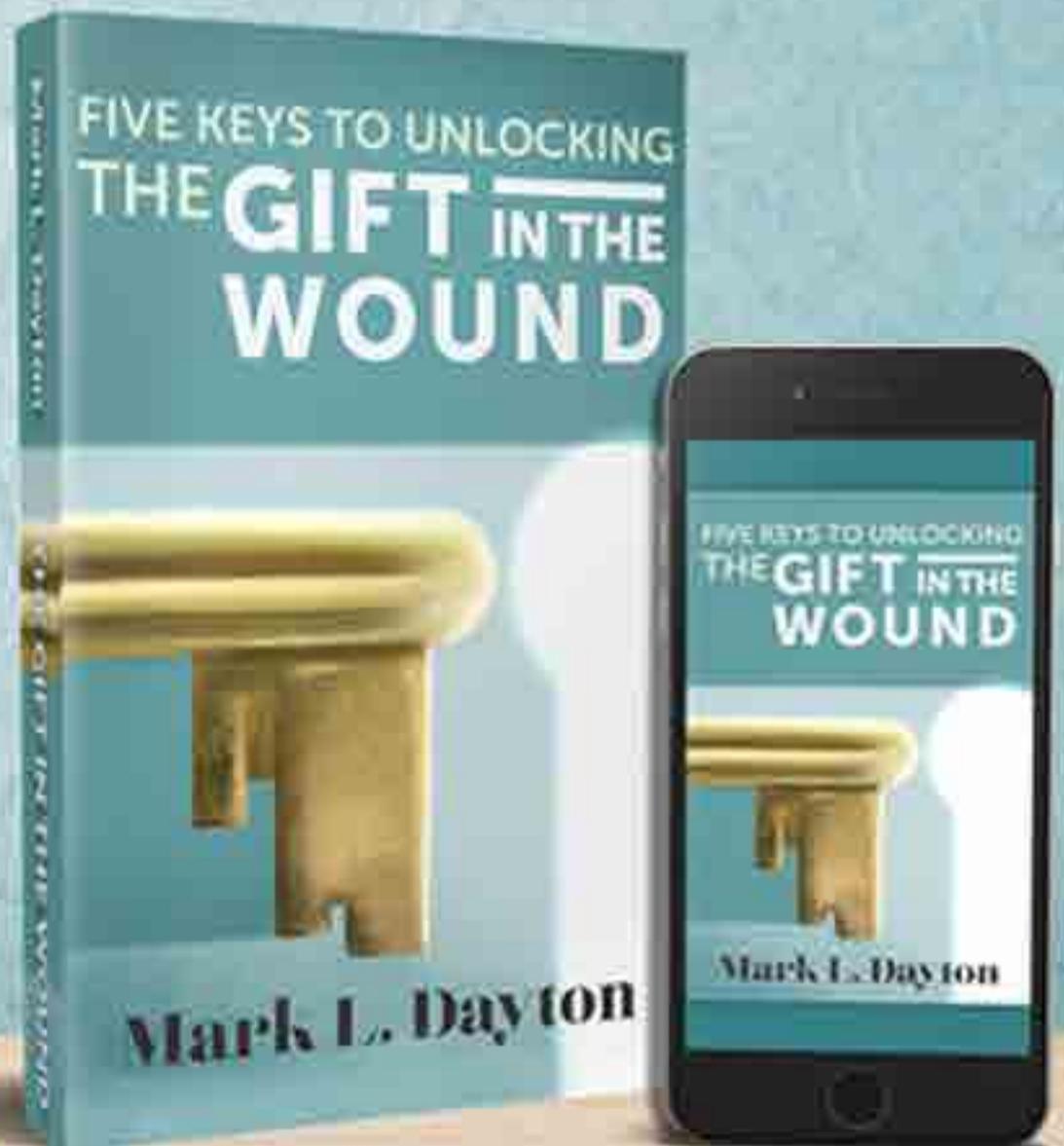
“Great insights that opened my eyes to new options for personal growth. Engaging style, and memorable, real-life examples.”

“Mark’s candor and willingness to make himself vulnerable allows the reader to relate, understand, and finally embrace the concept.”

“These timeless keys are presented in a clear, relatable way that accelerates progress and change.”

PLUS: INSIGHTS AND AN OFFER TO HELP YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY

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On the knife's edge.

My world was spiraling out of control. For years I had been on a knife's edge between success and failure, and finally, I fell. Because of changes in the investor climate and obscure clauses in business contracts, my high-flying start-up failed, and with it went every single penny I had spent 20 years of a very successful business career saving up. I was bankrupt. I went from visions of cocktail parties and Fortune covers to nightmares of even being able to buy an issue of Fortune. Never did I expect to be facing total financial ruin. The one person my financial mismanagement had affected most was my wife, and I wished that I could somehow even hide from her.



BEYOND WILLPOWER

Surely change was just around the corner...

Soon enough, I found myself spiraling into uncontrollable depression. I tried everything I could think of to combat this feeling. I read countless books and diligently tried to implement their suggestions. I would get on a new program, get excited about setting a new direction, then charge off on another quest. With each one I was sure change was just around the corner.

After a few weeks of pushing through, I was hanging on by sheer willpower and still not feeling the underlying shift in my attitude or outlook. Then, invariably, something would come along that would push me backward: a job interview that didn't go well, a friend or family member who had something great come into their life, unexpected bills

or expenses that squeezed us even tighter, or goals and schedules that never seemed to be within reach. Bit by bit the light would fade, and I'd find myself back in the same dark world.

My religious advisor suggested a counselor who might be able to help me work through some of my issues and find answers. I set up an appointment and began twice-weekly sessions. At first our discussions were helpful, and our visits gave me something positive to look forward to. We began exploring various issues and options, and I worked on the homework he suggested. But over time, I began to have that "stuck" feeling again. It was like I had gotten off to a good start, got my hopes up that I was making real progress, only to find myself bogging down again in fear, frustration and hopelessness.

To top it off, my marriage was falling apart. My cherished wife of nearly than 25 years, Cynthia, had reached the end of her rope in trying to hold together a relationship increasingly devoid of caring, understanding, and partnership. I had become bitter and hopeless, and it increasingly fell to my wife to hold the family together. She did everything she could while I slipped further and further into my lonely, dark hole.

Well-meaning people told me, "There's a lesson in there somewhere for you. Just hang on." But I couldn't imagine there was real meaning in all this. Why me? Why had my dreams and expectations evaporated?

Why not for others? I was sure there was more to life than merely going through it. I could see others around me who seemed genuinely happy and fulfilled. The happy “hang in there” comments just weren’t cutting it anymore.

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On good days, as I was driving to my odd-job consulting appointments I would see a school crossing guard or lawn trimmer at work and think, “I could do that. That wouldn’t be so bad.”

On bad days, it didn’t even seem worth it to keep slogging through. What was the point? What I did wasn’t making a difference anyway. I saw little to hope for, and even began to wonder what purpose I had on the planet.

Finally, one day I found myself standing at a busy intersection waiting to cross the street and thought, “It would be super easy to just step out in front of that car or bus, and then this would all be over. It would probably be better for everyone anyway. I’m causing so many people so much pain. The world would be better off without me.” All that stood between me and taking that step was the fleeting flicker of my family’s apparent desire to still have me around.

Finally, one day Cynthia drew the line in the sand. “I’ve been talking to a friend about our situation, and she’s been working with a counselor for a number of years who she says is fantastic for helping people like us. But it has to be us – you and me. There’s no solo option in this. I’ve set up an appointment for next week for the two of us. If you’re not in, I’m out.”

I got the message. I didn’t expect that this counselor would be any different than the last, but for the sake of saving our marriage I agreed to give it a shot.

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I’ve set up an appointment for next
week for the two of us.
If you’re not in, I’m out.”**



REASON TO HOPE

First Impressions

The next week we went to the office and were ushered in to meet Brad. He greeted us warmly and directed us to a couch facing his chair. The first things that struck me were his kindly face, the slight twinkle in his eye, and a wry smile that suggested meaningful conversation mixed with playful humor.

He was dressed in a crisp, starched shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots. I started to get this picture of a juxtaposition between country ruggedness and cultural refinement. Although he was a little informal and at times brusque, I immediately felt comfortable and safe around him.

He spoke with some feeling about what he referred to as “the cancer group.” Although he had never dealt with cancer, some 20 years earlier Brad had started this group as an attempt to help a person or two dealing with terminal cancer diagnoses find meaning and closure in life. Before long it evolved into a larger group of ardent cancer copers and survivors, many of whom had defied terminal diagnoses and lived well beyond any medical expectations. Brad hinted at the strong connection between our minds and bodies, and the ultimate power we have to choose.

“Before we jump in, I have a couple of questions for you,” I said.

Okay, shoot.

“I’ve worked with a number of different professionals, and I’ve gotten some background on you for comparison. From what I’ve learned so far, your approach seems quite different.”

Well, like many of my good colleagues, I was trained in classical, linear psychology. I received a PhD in social psychology and for 25 years I worked with patients from that framework. My job was to assess, diagnose and treat. And after 25 years I found I wasn’t helping nearly as much as I’d like, and yet people were still coming to me and paying me money for therapy. I became convinced there had to be a better way.

As I thought it through, I decided I had the model backwards. That approach always starts with a diagnosis. It basically says, “You have this problem, we’re going to label it xyz, and then we’ll fix it.” That model works pretty well in the world of physical ailments, but in my world of psychology this starting premise is all wrong.

When we diagnose and label someone with a psychological or emotional challenge, we’re saying, “You’re broken. You’re defective as a human being. And I know how to fix you.”

“Perfect?” I queried. You don’t really mean perfect, do you?”

For the vast majority of human beings, I don’t believe that assessment to be true. I believe we are all perfect individuals with imperfect awareness or understanding.

“Perfect?” I queried. You don’t really mean perfect, do you?”

The majority of us traversing life on this planet spend a good part of that existence believing we are somehow defective, separate, that we are lacking and broken, and that we have lost something. It’s true that we have flaws. All creatures do.

I discovered that it’s this imperfect understanding of ourselves that gets in the way of the healing journey. So my challenge from the beginning

is to help people believe that they aren't broken, or defective, but that they are perfect, with perfect flaws that need to be viewed from a different level of understanding.

So, I consider myself more of a coach than a therapist. Rather than diagnose and treat, which would be the curing approach, I coach you through the transformation of self-discovery that is at the core of healing.

With that as a starting point, we can then work together to discover the truth within. It's a discovery, or return to who you really are, not fixing something that was broken – which in reality wasn't really broken in the first place.

Those words echoed to the depths of my soul. Not broken? Don't need to be fixed or cured, or figured out? These ideas seemed at the same time both foreign and deeply encouraging.

For the first time in years I felt I had found a reason to hope.

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IT'S MY STORY

Stuck in the Story

I was looking forward to our next meeting, as I hoped we would be able to dive into my issues and really get down to the business of fixing my problems.

As Brad greeted me, I was struck again at the odd juxtaposition of his crisp, businesslike demeanor and his warm, natural manner. After some friendly chatter, he invited me to start by telling him more details about my situation. With relish, I dove into all the awful things that had happened to me over the past several years: Brutus-like business partners, bankruptcy, toxic relationships, humiliation, depression, and a horde of other terrible events.

I paused momentarily, expecting maybe some empathic affirmations or reflective feedback before I continued. Brad stopped for a minute, leaned forward and said, So, how's that working for you?

I came within an inch of jumping up off the couch and punching him in the face. I'm not a violent man, but I had never wanted to hit someone so badly. I was furious. I thought, "Are you kidding? I just spilled my guts to you about how awful things are in my life, and you have the gall to ask how it's working for me? Isn't that fairly obvious?"

You have the gall to ask how it's working for me?

Through a tightly clenched jaw I sarcastically blurted out, "It's not working at all, obviously."

Sensing my level of agitation, Brad offered, "You just shared with me your story about how you've been wounded by different people and circumstances in your life. We all have stories we hold onto that define us and our reality. They are usually rooted in pain and fear, and a lot of misperceptions, but we use them to define who and why we are. In essence, it's being 'stuck in the story.'"

Stuck in the story, I mused as my blood pressure came back closer to normal. Easy to say. But, how do I get unstuck, especially when all that awful stuff really happened to me?



PAIN IS MY FRIEND

Healing Pain with Pain

In order to heal from pain, you must see the purpose of pain. If you see pain as something you just want to get rid of and has no purpose, it creates another set of problems. Pain without meaning is exquisite suffering.

At a biological and egotistical level, pain – including the ‘dark’ emotions – is offensive, so we do everything we can to avoid it. We want to get rid of it, to eliminate it. So, we resist it. That’s the natural human inclination. But pain resisted only intensifies.

The key to healing is, ironically, a willingness to submit to the pain, to embrace it, to understand its message. Pain is the process that is telling us that there is something wrong. Pain is literally the messenger. This

kind of pain is absolutely necessary because it calls us back to start examining ourselves.

It's counter-intuitive – why would I do that?

It's counter-intuitive – why would I do that? It doesn't make any sense. And the ethics of the medical model reinforce that thinking: get rid of it, medicate it, or fix it, but certainly don't embrace it. So we treat the symptom – the grief or the depression – but it is still there. It's just masked. It simply melts back into the unconscious from which it came. It's never healed, because the pain or dark emotion is only the messenger, pointing us to the root issue that needs to be healed.

If we merely rid ourselves of pain or dark emotions, we don't learn the message that each messenger is bringing. Our natural tendency is to kill the messenger before we hear the message.

Recently I was talking to a young woman who has been in the traditional medical psychotherapy model of healing for years.

'What's your diagnosis?' I asked.

'They've diagnosed me as bi-polar, borderline personality disorder, and a couple of other things,' she replied.

‘How are they treating these “disorders”?’

‘With meds.’

‘How many medications are you on?’ I asked.

‘Currently, about seven different meds,’ she said.

I asked, ‘Your doctors think that’s the best plan?’

‘Yes, they tell me I can’t come off of them,’ she replied

‘And do you think that is the best plan for you?’ I asked. ‘Do they make the quality of your life better?’

‘NO!’ she answered emphatically.

I asked, ‘You’ve been in this misery, this psychological suffering for how many years?’

‘As long as I can remember,’ she replied.

I gently probed further. ‘Has anyone asked you the source of your pain? Was it an event? A process of invalidation? Was the pain physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual? Has anyone ever addressed the purpose of your pain?’

**Has anyone ever addressed the
purpose of your pain?**

'I don't remember anyone ever asking me those questions,' she responded.

So I asked her, 'Has anyone ever asked you to see the purpose of your pain? Has anyone ever asked you to make friends with it, and to see what it is trying to tell you about your level of consciousness, about yourself, and the way you see the world?'

'That's stupid, why would I want this pain?'

'It's not that you want the pain, it's that your pain is there for a purpose, and you need to understand that purpose. It's telling you something about the nature of your life,' I suggested. 'It may be telling you that you that you really are worth something.'

'That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard,' she retorted.

Needless to say, we didn't make much headway in understanding and beginning to heal her pain.

 This young lady had been holding a great deal of toxic shame from childhood experiences. She was living in a toxic marriage, had no self-esteem, and in fact held herself in contempt. In her mind she deserved no better. She was unwilling to see that these deep spiritual and emotional wounds were the source of her pain, and that medication was treating the symptoms, not the root of the problems.

I attempted to get her to see that the story she had adopted over the years might not have been entirely accurate and that choosing a new perception may serve her better. However, she was very reluctant to see pain as anything except pain, and the sole strategy in dealing with it was to make it 'go away' by medicating it.

The cognitive level is aware of the pain, but it also has a whole set of beliefs about pain. For example, if you have the pain, and you have a belief about the pain – that it's bad, it's going to kill me, I don't want it – and you still have the pain, then you have moved into resistance. And resistance makes the pain worse.

On the other hand, if you have the same pain and you say, 'Wow, that pain is telling me something. I'd better pay attention to it,' you move into it. And you embrace it. Then you have no resistance, so you don't add suffering to the pain. In that process, the body naturally heals the pain - without effort, without forcing it.

In our healing journey, pain is mandatory. Suffering is optional.

**Pain is mandatory.
Suffering is optional.**



PAIN IS MY FRIEND

The Gift IS in the Wound. Really.

Brad's office wasn't far from my house, so on a particularly warm, sunny morning I decided to walk rather than drive the car over to visit my friend. As I turned down the tree-lined lane along the route, a flood of memories and impressions filled my mind.

I realized this was the very spot where a few years earlier my wife Cynthia had given me the "If you're not in, I'm out," talk that had changed the course of my life. That day I was a walking time bomb, filled with fear that I would lose my marriage, my livelihood, my home, my family – everything that was important to me. I could see no way forward and no way out other than to keep slogging through.

Those first few meetings with Brad were so strange and painful to me. He was asking me about things that were so far out of my frame of reference they seemed to be a foreign language. Choice, paradox, domestication, victim. Such alien concepts and experiences. And yet, at some level they resonated deeply. It was like walking through a fog and recognizing shadowy outlines that somehow drew me in and beckoned me to move on despite the confusion.

I reflected on the overwhelming relief and hope that swept over me as I first sensed his sincere belief that I wasn't broken and needing to be fixed, but that I was a perfect human being with imperfect consciousness and understanding. I thought of when, early on, Brad looked me in the eye and said, You know, this is the perfect experience for you. What a ridiculous idea!

Like most everything else we discussed, his assertion proved to be right. The depth of my wound brought me to the teacher, and to the point of willingness to listen and learn. It was the perfect motivator to set up the perfect healing journey.

I glanced down at the notebook I carried under my arm. That trusty tome chronicled my visits with Brad, and my journey of becoming more fully awake. Each time we met, I had eagerly jotted down new insights, concepts and understanding that seemed to pop out of our conversation and find their way onto the page. Impressions and images

became pictures and maps that illustrated a lively story of discovery.

Each new concept opened a world of understanding and hope, and cracked the door for small steps of progress toward finding meaning in my often-meaningless world. In the process, I confronted searing pain that tested my resolve to discover the insight each carried, and abandon the easy way out of adding each to my already swollen library of victim bla-bla-bla stories.

Instead, I had re-written my life, chapter by pain-filled chapter.

I had wrestled with the demons of my own multi-generational domestication and recognized the judgment I was putting on them in defining my life.

I had escaped a number of deeply embedded victim stories and sparked my way into militant faith, gratitude, and forgiveness.

I had even become the teacher in sharing my insights, pictures, and maps of the healing journey.

**I had found myself full-circle,
back to wholeness.**

And I had found myself full-circle, back to wholeness. Back to genuine me. Back to something I thought I had lost, but didn't have eyes for.

As I continued my walk down the lane, it struck me how really, nothing had changed. The people, places, circumstances around me were all still the same. And yet, everything had changed. Far from cursing life for my circumstances, I saw each new day as a gift, and each new wound as an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to change. I saw the world with new eyes of understanding, gratitude, forgiveness, and joy.

My wounding had led me to the teacher, and the teacher had led me back to me. To whole me. To conscious, more fully awake me. To joyful me.

As Brad always said, life is pain. But therein lies the secret to self-discovery, wisdom, and joy.

To those who are willing to embrace it, discover it, and sense it, the gift is in the wound.

You are not alone in this journey!

Experts estimate that on any given day, more than half of the people you pass on the street are dealing with a major trauma, pain or upset in their lives. We're all very good at hiding it, but the majority of us walk this path at one point or another wondering why such-and-such happened, when it will end, and how to fix it, figure it out or make it go away. And many of us give up hope that it will get better any time soon.

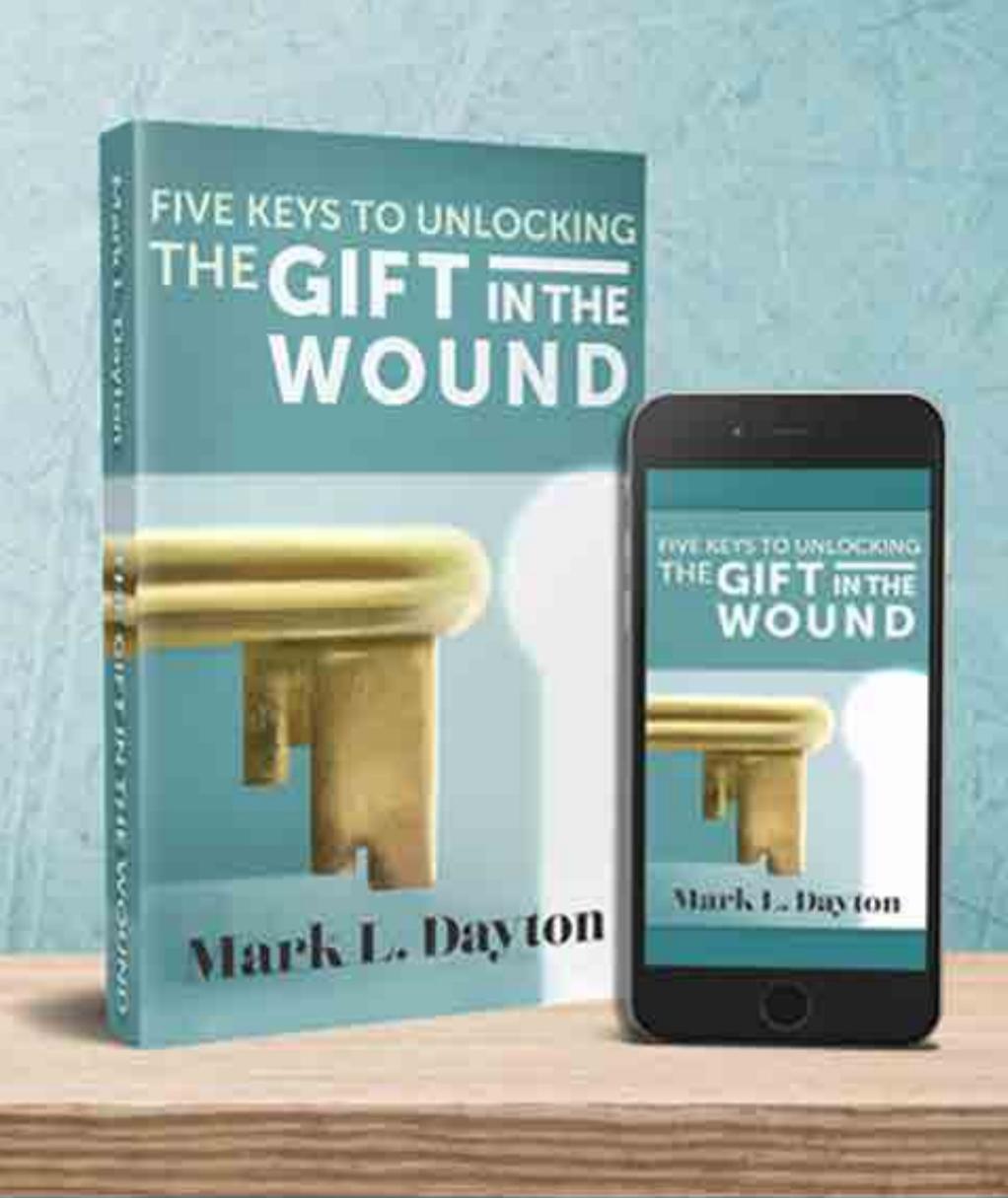
You're not alone. There is hope. You really can make it better – much better! You can't make it go away, but there is a healing path to peace, joy, enthusiasm, optimism and tranquility in life. I know. I've walked it. That's why I wrote this book – in the hope that it may guide a few of my fellow travelers to some insights and answers.

In these pages you'll share in my frustrations, my struggles, my eye rolls, my wrestling and whining. But you'll also share in the enlightenment, the healing and most importantly, the belief I discovered that life can be different.

I believe it can for you, too... That's why from all my experience I distilled five simple keys that unlock the gift in the wound: Choice; Victory Over Victim; The Pain Portal; I Love Me; Effortless Acceptance.

These five keys can unlock your greatest life-gifts as well. I'm confident of that.

Come take the journey with me!



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