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THE
GIFTS
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*including
new tools to
make the
work your
own*

BY BRENÉ BROWN

ATLAS OF THE HEART

DARE TO LEAD

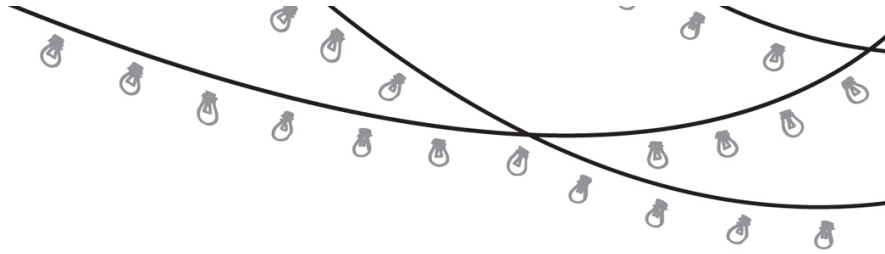
BRAVING THE WILDERNESS

RISING STRONG

DARING GREATLY

THE GIFTS OF IMPERFECTION

I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST ME



Brené Brown

PhD, MSW

10th Anniversary Edition

THE GIFTS OF

IMPERFECTION



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Editor's note:

This is a work of nonfiction. Nonetheless, some of the names and personal characteristics of the individuals involved have been changed in order to disguise their identities. Any resulting resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and unintentional. This publication is not intended as a substitute for the advice of health care professionals.

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*To Steve, Ellen, and Charlie.
I love you with my whole heart.*

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10TH ANNIVERSARY NOTE FROM BRENÉ

It's been thirteen years since my 2007 ~~Breakdown~~ Spiritual Awakening and a full decade since I wrote *The Gifts*.

~~Life has been good. I mean it's been so easy and just about perfect since I started cultivating all of the great practices on the wholehearted list and letting go of all of the fear-based behaviors from the "shit list" that I write about in this book. It's like once you work your way through these ten guideposts, everything just falls in place. No more shame. No more anxiety. No more self-loathing. No more crushing busyness. No more "never enough."~~

Sigh.

In the past thirteen years, I have loved, lost, fallen down too many times to count, mercifully gotten back up that same incalculable number of times, broken my toes, broken my own heart, and had a couple of other people break it for me. I dropped my daughter off at college then stayed in bed crying for a week, fell back in love with Steve, questioned how Steve and I are ever going to stay married and how we should split the albums during the divorce, wrote four more books, lost track of a million great ideas and found ten good ones, buried people I love including parents, watched Charlie turn into an amazing teenager, lost my first pet, bought reading glasses, white-knuckled my sobriety, discovered that sobriety is my superpower, planned interventions, wondered if I needed an intervention, fought for social justice, continued to uncover more blind spots and areas of unacknowledged privilege, moved houses, started businesses, shut down businesses, swam in several pools of low-grade depression, splashed around in my magic Lake Travis with the people I love the most, practiced gratitude for every single

gift in my life, and pissed and moaned for so long about the smallest irritations that I actually got sick of hearing myself complain.

It's been a full, amazing, hard-as-shit, beautiful thirteen years. Most days, I'd describe it as a wonderful life with really painful patches. However, not gonna lie—there are seasons when it feels like the painful patches will swallow us whole and I'm not sure how to scratch my way back to a balanced life, much less a "wonderful life." In fact, as I'm writing this, I'm quarantined with my family in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I'm getting ready for a podcast interview with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi on antiracism. It's June 3, 2020, and I want to believe so badly we're going to get through this pandemic and things will *not* return to normal. That we will become a country ready to own our history and do what it takes to put an end to the policies and practices that not only dehumanize the Black community but all of the communities that have suffered under white supremacy.

When I look back on the past decade and think about the work, research, and words that make up the original *Gifts of Imperfection* book, there are two things that are gratifyingly and painfully clear to me:

1. Transforming the ten guideposts of wholehearted living into daily, lifelong practices is more work than I ever imagined.
2. Transforming the ten guideposts of wholehearted living into daily, lifelong practices is more valuable than I ever imagined.

It's not hyperbole to say that writing *The Gifts* changed my life and continues to do so. The adventure of wholehearted living launched my work, continues to inform my relationship with Steve, helps me find the courage to be the parent I want to be and the grace to try again when I'm not, and, most of all, this work continues to lead me back to myself. All of myself—the parts I love and the parts I've orphaned and keep bringing back home so I can wipe their noses, bandage their skinned knees, and be whole.

I wrote *The Gifts* in my early forties. Ellen was eleven years old when it came out, and Charlie was only five. Now Ellen is a senior in college, and Charlie is about to start high school. I haven't changed the stories or much of the text. The lessons are the same even though the kids are older, Steve and I have more wrinkles and gray hair, and some of the concepts have become the foundation of entire books.

INTEGRATION

When we talked to readers about the 10th Anniversary Edition, people were very clear that the text shouldn't change. This book has become a reference guide and touchstone for many people, and we want to honor this. We did, however, add a new Integration Index so that you, as a reader, can start to embed the work in your life.

When we were doing the research for *Rising Strong*, we discovered more about how creativity is the engine that drives integration; it helps us transform knowledge into practice. Basically, we move what we're learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands.

The index in the back of the book is adapted from a system that I heard Maria Popova explain to Tim Ferriss during a podcast in 2014. Maria is a writer, poet, cultural critic, and the genius curator behind brainpickings.org, a newsletter and online publication that has been added to the Library of Congress's permanent digital archive of culturally valuable materials.

This was six years ago, and Maria may no longer use this approach; however, for those of us who spent many hours wondering how she tracked, connected, and wove together all of the source materials she shares on brainpickings.org, it was a brilliant illumination.

In the podcast, Maria explained that when you read a book, you walk away with certain takeaways that are thematically linked. In most books, these takeaways don't occur sequentially. An alternative index is based on ideas that are important to you—not just keywords—so a personalized index allows you to find and document the patterns that create personal meaning and understanding. I started

creating alternative indexes, and it's transformed the way I read, learn, research, and integrate work. For example, in Ibram Kendi's book *How to Be an Antiracist*, my index included the following:

Beautiful language (borrowed this one from Maria):

Don't understand—need to learn more:

FD (stands for family dinner—something I want to discuss as a family):

Had no idea:

More books to read:

Organizational culture change:

Quotes:

RHR (this stands for rabbit hole research—it's my way of saying I want to look at original source material):

Share with Steve:

SO HARD:

Next to these, I have a list of page numbers separated by commas (e.g., 13, 46, 167, 229). When I turn to those pages (which I mark with tiny Post-it tabs), I see the highlighted passages. I'm telling you—it's a miracle. When you're done, you have new information *and* a blueprint of how to integrate it into your life.

For this book, I'm giving you pages and a list of suggested index ideas based on how I've seen thousands of people integrate this work into daily practices. I think there's some poetry in the fact that the Latin root of the word *integrate* is *integrare*, which means "to make whole." *How do we use what we're learning about wholeheartedness to actually make ourselves more whole?*

There are two other integration tools that will help you own and embody this work. First, we've spent several years building, testing, and validating our Wholehearted Inventory, which consists of ten subscales that align with the guideposts. This free online instrument will allow you to assess your strengths and opportunities for growth around the main topics explored in the book. I recommend you take this assessment before you start reading. It's useful to engage with it after you've finished, but I think it's more useful to go into the book

knowing where you've already got skills and where you can build them.

You can find that at brenebrown.com/wholeheartedinventory.

Another integration tool that we're building for you is a free online workshop that will launch in the fall of 2020. We'll walk through the ten guideposts, I'll take questions (and ask questions), and we'll DIG deep together.

WITH OUR WHOLE HEARTS

Over the past ten years, I've had the great honor of teaching and facilitating my work on courage and vulnerability all over the world. Although I am a teacher and a researcher, these experiences always afford me the opportunity to learn far more than I teach. One thing that's become very clear to me is that the experience of sharing our vulnerability is not the same for all of us. Let me explain.

The greatest casualty of trauma—the thing that trauma often takes away from us—is the emotional, and sometimes even physical, safety that is necessary for us to be vulnerable. I've seen this in my work with the military, veterans, and survivors. And, in addition to the trauma of violence, neglect and poverty are trauma. Dehumanization—the core of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and all systemic forms of oppression and/or bias—is a form of daily trauma. You only have to witness someone who shares your identity suffering to experience real emotional and physical trauma.

Many of these systemic forms of trauma are so pervasive that asking people to embrace vulnerability and imperfections without taking into consideration their lived experience can be asking them to do something that is not emotionally or even physically safe in all environments.

So, what do we do? I believe that everyone deserves brave and safe spaces to be vulnerable. None of us can fully embrace the gifts of vulnerability, courage, and authenticity if any of us are denied those gifts because of who we are or what we've endured. Being imperfect, authentic, and vulnerable is a function of being human—

not a privilege afforded to those who can get away with it without being labeled, dismissed, and judged.

We are all responsible for creating these brave, safe spaces and dismantling the systems that perpetuate trauma. Living and loving with our whole hearts is not just about self-work. It's how we change the world. Without awareness, work, and actionable change, we will continue to live in a world where we perceive some people as brave and strong for sharing their vulnerabilities, while for others, their sharing of struggles and fears becomes confirmation of the conscious or unconscious biases we hold.

The experiences that bring the most meaning to our lives are born of vulnerability—and that includes freedom. And, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “No one is free until we are all free.” There is no wholeheartedness unless we do everything we can to dismantle the brokenheartedness of injustice.

I still use the definition of authenticity that I first wrote for this book as a personal prayer. So, holding these words in my heart and in my hand, here's my prayer for all of us and my daily commitment:

May we find the courage to let go of who we think we're supposed to be so that we can fully embrace our authentic selves—the imperfect, the creative, the vulnerable, the powerful, the broken, and the beautiful.

May we show ourselves and others the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made of strength and struggle.

May we create a just and equitable world where privilege isn't a prerequisite for self-expression and authenticity, where everyone feels invited and safe to express their power and their vulnerability.

And last, may we experience the strength of connection, the love of belonging, and the grace of pure joy.

Thank you for walking with me.