

# RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY



HOW TO MOVE  
BEYOND BLAME,  
FEARLESSLY LIVE  
YOUR HIGHEST  
PURPOSE, AND  
BECOME AN  
UNSTOPPABLE  
FORCE FOR GOOD

A Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence Guide for Personal Evolution,  
Self-Actualization, and Social Transformation

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 **sounds true**  
BOULDER, COLORADO

# CONTENTS

List of Figures xi

Foreword by Daniel J. Siegel, MD xiii

Acknowledgments xvii

Introduction 1

## **PART I The Beginning—Innate Goodness and Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence**

**CHAPTER 1** There's Nothing Wrong with You 9

🔊 *Opening Exercise: Part 1* 10

🔊 *Opening Exercise: Part 2* 11

*Exercise: Opening Meditation* 14

**CHAPTER 2** The Power of Presence 17

*Exercise: Monkey Mind* 19

🔊 *Exercise: Coming Home* 22

**CHAPTER 3** The Power of Empathic Awareness 29

## **PART II The Challenge—How We Ended Up Where We Are**

**CHAPTER 4** The Human Condition—  
a Fragile Beginning 47

*Exercise: Defining Moments, Part 1* 49

*Exercise: Defining Moments, Part 2* 55

🔊 *Exercise: Listening to Your Self-Talk  
to Discover Limiting Core Beliefs* 57

🔊 *Audio versions of the exercises marked with this icon can be streamed or downloaded at [SoundsTrue.com/store/practices](https://SoundsTrue.com/store/practices)*

<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>Stuck on the Drama Triangle Again</b>	<b>59</b>
	<i>Exercise: Familiar Dramas</i>	63
	<i>Exercise: My Victim Stories</i>	65
	<i>Exercise: My Persecutor Stories</i>	66
	<i>Exercise: My Rescuer Stories</i>	70

**PART III    Taking Charge—Becoming the Captain  
of Your Own Ship**

<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>Getting Off the Drama Triangle</b>	<b>77</b>
	<i>Exercise: Drama Warnings</i>	79
	<i>Exercise: The Vow</i>	80
	<i>Exercise: Counting to Ten</i>	81
	<i>Exercise: Own Your Feelings</i>	83
	<i>Exercise: Your List of Universal Needs</i>	84
	<i>Exercise: Boundaries (Good and Poor)</i>	88

<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<b>Taking Charge of Your Destiny— Brain Science 101</b>	<b>91</b>
	<i>Exercise: Emotional Triggers</i>	95
	🔊 <i>Exercise: Belly Breathing</i>	104
	🔊 <i>Exercise: Straw Breathing</i>	105

<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>Ruts and Grooves— Rewiring the Brain for Success</b>	<b>107</b>
	<i>Exercise: Breaking a Habit</i>	108
	<i>Exercise: Healthy and Unhealthy Habits</i>	109
	<i>Exercise: Habit Transformation</i>	120

**PART IV    Embracing the Path of  
Radical Responsibility**

<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	<b>Transforming the Victim Mindset</b>	<b>127</b>
	🔊 <i>Exercise: Victim Story</i>	129
	🔊 <i>Exercise: Taking Accountability</i>	134

<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	<b>The Nature of Circumstances</b>	<b>139</b>
	<i>Exercise: Circumstances Are Neutral</i>	143
	<i>Exercise: Patterns of Blame Shifting</i>	146
	<i>Exercise: Emptying Your Resentment Knapsack</i>	148

	<i>Exercise: Justifications</i>	150
	<i>Exercise: Being Right</i>	150
<b>CHAPTER 11</b>	<b>Discovering Authentic Relationship</b>	<b>153</b>
	<i>Exercise: Feelings and Needs</i>	156
	<i>Exercise: Unenforceable Rules</i>	161
	<i>Exercise: Unhooked</i>	163
	<i>Exercise: Authentic Relationships</i>	166
<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	<b>The Empowerment Triangle and Radical Possibility</b>	<b>169</b>
	<i>Exercise: Discovering the Co-Creator</i>	172
	🔊 <i>Exercise: Safe, Resourced, and Connected</i>	176
	<i>Exercise: Discovering the Challenger</i>	180
	<i>Exercise: Actualizing the Coach</i>	183
<b>PART V</b>	<b>Realizing the Heart-Mind and the Way Forward</b>	
<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	<b>Discovering the Power of Compassion and Resilience</b>	<b>193</b>
	<i>Exercise: Loving-Kindness Practice</i>	203
	<i>Exercise: Compassion Contemplation Practice</i>	206
	<i>Exercise: Compassion Contemplations for Working with Enmity</i>	207
	<i>Exercise: Sympathetic Joy Practice</i>	209
	<i>Exercise: Equanimity Contemplative Practice</i>	210
<b>CHAPTER 14</b>	<b>Designing and Sustaining a Transformational Life</b>	<b>215</b>
	<i>Exercise: Life Purpose</i>	217
	<i>Exercise: Burn the Boats</i>	218
	<i>Exercise: Practice Record</i>	222
	<i>Exercise: Current Ceremony</i>	224
	<i>Exercise: New Transformative Life Ceremony</i>	224
	Notes	235
	Additional Resources for Your Path	241
	About the Author	245

In spite of all our problems and confusion, all our emotional and psychological ups and downs, there is something basically good about our existence as human beings. We have moments of basic non-aggression and freshness . . . we have an actual connection to reality that can wake us up and make us feel basically, fundamentally good. **CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE**

# 1

## THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU

**T**he foundational premise of Radical Responsibility is that there is absolutely nothing fundamentally wrong with you, or me, or anyone else for that matter. This radical message or truth is the good news of this book. Now the bad news: we have all been indoctrinated, to one degree or another—through parental, religious, educational, cultural, and media influences—with quite the opposite message, and this indoctrination, though based on misunderstandings and untruths, is not so easily undone. We can, however, release this negative stranglehold with gentle effort, self-compassion, and perseverance. That's the second piece of good news. We can even wake up to the truth of our innate, unconditional *basic goodness* in a flash of transformative insight. However, even after such an illumination, most of us still have work to do, which is why human and/or spiritual development is often described as a path or journey.

That journey is what this book is all about. It begins with cultivating sufficient confidence in unconditional, innate goodness—our own and that of others. By doing so, we can move beyond blame and other

fear-based coping strategies to embrace a radical level of ownership for each and every circumstance we encounter in life. Once we do that, we can fearlessly live our highest purpose and become an unstoppable force for good in the world.

 **OPENING EXERCISE Part 1**

Please read the following list aloud to yourself slowly, going over each line once or twice and then closing your eyes to reflect on what comes up for you before going on to the next one. Just do your best to notice whatever comes up and be with it. Remember—there are no right answers!

- There is nothing wrong with you.
- You are not broken.
- You don't need fixing.
- You are an innately and unconditionally good, whole, intelligent, and beautiful human being.
- You are basically good, whole, and okay just as you are.
- You are here for a reason.
- You are not an accident.
- The world needs you.
- You are lovable and loved.

Okay, so what came up for you? I've led this exercise in person countless times with all kinds of folks—young children,

teenagers, CEOs, business professionals, prisoners, correctional officers—and they all have different experiences, all completely valid. For some, hearing these statements aloud feels relieving or validating. Others experience distrust or suspicion—“What does this guy know about me?”—or they feel a wave of unworthiness or self-criticism—“If only that were true, but I’m definitely *not* basically good.” Maybe one of these responses matches your own, or maybe what came up for you was a mixed bag—some positive and some not-so-positive feelings. Whether you found these statements comforting, validating, challenging, irritating, threatening, heartbreaking, confusing, or all the above, I invite you to just honor your own experience and remember that all change, growth, and transformation happens outside our comfort zone.

### **OPENING EXERCISE Part 2**

Let’s try this again with a slight change in the wording of the statements. Just like before, read each statement aloud to yourself at least once, slowly, and then close your eyes to reflect. Or, if you prefer, read the complete list through once and then close your eyes to contemplate what comes up.

- There is nothing wrong with me.
- I am not broken.
- I don’t need fixing.
- I am an innately and unconditionally good, whole, intelligent, and beautiful human being.
- I am basically good, whole, and okay just as I am.
- I am here for a reason.

- I am not an accident.
- The world needs me.
- I am lovable and loved.

Was that different from the first time around? How did it feel for you? Whatever came up for you might not feel comfortable, but it's incredibly important to see and feel. We're uncovering some of the underlying beliefs you carry around that drive your attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and—ultimately—the direction of your life and destiny. Discovering your basic core beliefs and getting clear about which ones serve you and which ones don't is the beginning of taking charge of your destiny as a human being.

Before you read on, please take a few minutes to write something about your experience with this exercise in your Radical Responsibility journal.

## DISCOVERING BASIC GOODNESS

Meditation is about learning to recognize our basic goodness in the immediacy of the present moment, and then nurturing this recognition until it seeps into the very core of our being. **MINGYUR RINPOCHE**

This book—and the Radical Responsibility path itself—are grounded in the contemplative discipline of mindfulness and awareness meditation. For thousands of years, human beings in cultures all around the world have employed various meditative and introspective practices to explore the depths of our humanity, discovering again and again a dimension of being in which our innate goodness and wholeness are undeniable. By quieting the mind's chatter, mystics, contemplatives, yogis, shamans, and ordinary people have discovered a deeper dimension of being that is beyond fear and the dichotomy of good



and bad—a place of experiential wholeness, strength, and resilience where ineffable peace and bliss abound. Needless to say, whenever we can touch into this dimension of our being, we experience ourselves and the world in a significantly different way.

During my years in prison, despite my inclination to believe in the basic goodness of everyone, I sometimes wondered about a few of the correctional officers and some of my fellow prisoners. My skeptical disposition led me to contemplate if it were actually possible that perhaps not *all* human beings possessed innate basic goodness. I developed an informal research project of sorts. Every time I thought I had discovered a fellow prisoner or correctional officer absent this innate goodness, they would inevitably reveal their vulnerability and basic goodness in some way. I'll never forget the moment when a correctional officer I had previously experienced as being one of the most abusive guards in the prison asked me with genuine interest how my son was doing, having seen us together in the visiting room months earlier. After several years of similar experiences, I concluded my research project, more convinced than ever of the goodness in everyone.

**Trust in Allah but  
tether your camel.**

As we begin to trust more in this unconditional basic goodness, we recognize ourselves and others as belonging to an interconnected whole, inseparable from the beauty and sacredness of the world around us—as opposed to continually dividing our experience into friends and enemies, things to be desired or avoided, blessings to accumulate or threats to ward off. And in case you're thinking that this all sounds like some kind of naïve, pie-in-the-sky spiritual optimism that's bound to set you up for disappointment or worse, I'd like to share one of my favorite aphorisms from the Sufi tradition: Trust in Allah but tether your camel. In other words, trust in the goodness and wholeness of life *while at the same time* being responsible, maintaining healthy boundaries, taking care of business, preventing problems, and promoting positive outcomes. This blend of experiential confidence in innate goodness and practical, no-nonsense personal responsibility and accountability is at the very heart of Radical Responsibility.

The next chapter offers a deep dive into the practices of mindfulness meditation, but there's no time like the present to jump in, so let's try it out. You may want to read the guided meditation below slowly to yourself and then set the book down to do the exercise. You could also have someone read it to you aloud or record it yourself in order to play it back while you learn this practice.

**Radical Responsibility is not about fixing yourself.**

### **EXERCISE    Opening Meditation**

Please find a quiet moment and place where you can sit undisturbed for ten or fifteen minutes. Choose any place or seating arrangement that attracts you, whether it's a meditation cushion, your favorite chair, your living room sofa, or—weather permitting—a favorite bench in a nearby park. If you're sitting on a cushion or bench, you may want to sit up with a nicely erect, yet relaxed posture; and if you've chosen a big leather easy chair, feel free to sit back and enjoy feeling supported and relaxed, just the way these chairs are designed to enfold us in luxurious comfort.

Once settled in your spot, gently close your eyes or lower your gaze and bring your focus to your body and breathing, just noticing whatever arises for you physically in the moment. You may find yourself experiencing a range of sensations—some pleasant and comfortable, some relatively neutral, and some perhaps a bit uncomfortable and not so pleasant. Do your best to simply recognize each sensation as an experience of being alive in a human body—your body. As you focus on this dimension of sensate experience, notice and feel how your breathing and the sensations are connected. Relax into simply feeling and appreciating the flow of your breath moving in and out of your body, along with the continual flow of sensations arising and falling away, much like leaves floating in a stream or clouds passing by in the sky.

After a few minutes of appreciating this continual flow of sensate aliveness in your body and breath, gently open your eyes or raise your gaze and begin taking in the world around you. Notice whatever appears in your immediate surroundings—a favorite picture or photograph on the wall, the way light and shadow play on the objects in your immediate vicinity, or perhaps a flower, tree, or the sky above you. What are you feeling? Is there any shift in the way you are experiencing yourself and your connection to the world around you?

Please take a moment to jot down a few notes about your experience of this practice in your Radical Responsibility journal for later reflection.

I strongly recommend making a habit of taking time out for yourself in this way, setting aside quiet times for solitude, reflection, and *being-ness*. Our world is so focused on *doing* that we have lost track of the importance of *being*. We've forgotten to allow time for what children and mystics have known to do for millennia—to simply *be* and appreciate the wonder, magic, and aliveness of our immediate moment-to-moment experience.

## THE JOURNEY

In this book we will explore what it means to begin a journey of discovery, transformation, and personal evolution free from the goad or lash of self-criticism and blame. This is not a self-improvement book. Radical Responsibility is not about fixing yourself. Instead, I invite you to embark on this journey with the faith and confidence that underneath all your conditioning and even your most pernicious negative habits, you are already innately and unconditionally good, pure, wise, and completely whole—just as you are. In this way, Radical Responsibility begins by compassionately allowing the clouds of misinformation and misunderstanding to dissipate so that you clearly experience the ever-present sun of basic goodness

radiating forth from the depth of your being. This perspective makes all the difference.

On this very personal journey, you will establish a life context that transcends blame and any sense of being somehow inherently at fault or fundamentally mistaken. You will be free to explore, practice, struggle with, chew on, and digest the ideas, distinctions, and exercises presented here in your own way, at your own pace, with no concern whatsoever for doing it right—or wrong, for that matter. When we realize that who we are is originally good, pure, and without fault, then we are free to play and make mistakes, just as young children naturally learn best by falling down and getting up over and over again, spilling and knocking things over, and exploring their world freely, absent the threat of blame or criticism. In this way, our journey is beyond the conventional context of winning and losing, getting it right, or even achieving something. This is simply an open-hearted exploration of what it means to be human.

As we explore the notion of embracing Radical Responsibility in even the most challenging and vexing life circumstances, it is of paramount importance that we develop greater confidence in our own innate basic goodness and the basic goodness of humanity all together. It's that confidence that will foster the self-compassion, resilience, and wisdom we'll need moving forward. One of the most effective ways to build that confidence, in my opinion, is to work with tried-and-true contemplative practices from the world's wisdom traditions. These techniques have been honed for thousands of years, and they are designed to help us relax into being-ness and discover our own inherent goodness. In doing so, we come to accept and recognize the relative good, bad, and ugly of all our *stuff* as simply the beautiful and challenging legacy of our shared humanity—the human challenge that unites us all. As we relax into this natural state and empowering self-acceptance, it becomes increasingly difficult to entertain the notion that there's something fundamentally wrong with us. This pernicious untruth and misunderstanding about our human nature simply doesn't hold up any longer—thank *goodness*!