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now her books are pulling others up.”*

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Tapping
the Power
Within

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Tapping the Power Within

A PATH TO SELF-EMPOWERMENT
FOR WOMEN

Ryanla Vanzant



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This book is dedicated to

OrisaSami

Gemma Lynnette Vanzant

My Life, My Love, My Heart

Nisa Camille Vanzant

My Baby, My Buddy

Niamoja Adilah Afi

The best part of all that I am

Kimani Vanzant and Ashole Vanzant

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Introduction



It is hard to believe that 20 years have passed since I presented the first copy of the first edition of *Tapping the Power Within* to the world. I produced it on an electric typewriter and made copies at Kinko's. At that time, I was a single mom just finishing law school, ending a long-term relationship, and I had no clue about what to do next with my life. My dream at that time was: "Lord, let me have enough money on my credit card to make 20 copies of this book." Since that time, I have discovered that what we dream about is usually only a minuscule fragment of what is actually possible. That first edition of my first book was my initiation into a world and a life that I had never imagined to be possible.

When I wrote the first edition of *Tapping*, I was a recently initiated Yoruba priestess. When people asked me what that meant, I said simply: "I am a minister in an ancient African tradition." I was both excited about and eager to share what I had come to know about the ancient customs and traditions of my matriarchal lineage. Most of what I knew and shared was grounded in a linear and limited interpretation of my experiences and what I had been taught by my elders about the indigenous religion of the Yoruba culture.

Twenty years ago, I wore predominantly African garb. My hair, rich brown and finely braided, was usually draped over elaborate head wraps. Whenever I spoke, I began with a traditional Yoruba prayer, calling upon Olodumare, God, my ancestors and elders

for guidance and support. I was, in essence, a neophyte: someone “new” to what I knew. It was from that place of newness, excitement, and inexperience that I first wrote this book. I knew then, as I still believe today, that the spiritual philosophies and traditions of African culture must be at the table of knowledge and teaching if the world is to heal emotionally and evolve spiritually.

I am now a 25-year initiate of the Yoruba tradition, and I recognize myself as a cultural custodian. In my mind and heart, this means it is my personal life assignment to promote and maintain the cultural and spiritual tenets of the Yoruba culture, which include the spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people. The difference between my neophyte stage and today is that I now recognize that those tenets are not confined to the Yoruba tradition; they are universal principles viewed from a particular cultural perspective. Faith, trust, compassion, forgiveness, love, kindness, joy, and devotion to God are the same tenets of psycho-spiritual development and evolution that underpin the world’s major spiritual philosophies and most of the world’s religions. Today I realize that Yoruba is not what I wear or what I do to my hair. Yoruba is who I am. It is what I bring into the room; it is what I say when I open my mouth to speak; it is how I bless my children and grandchildren. It is the cultural foundation that manifests in particular spiritual beliefs and practices that, when practiced in faith, will facilitate and support the evolution of my individual consciousness and my purposeful functioning in the world.

Yoruba culture provides me with a framework for how I honor the Creator in all that I do; how I view myself in the world; how I view and treat other people; and even how I handle my financial matters. Today, I understand that Yoruba is not only a religion. It is a cultural framework that embraces a specific and particular spiritual and religious philosophy. By religion, I mean the sacred beliefs that create uniformity in practice and harmony among a community of people in their approach to God as the Supreme Being of life. And, along with that philosophy come certain practices that honor the cultural traditions through which the philosophy was born. Today, I am not wed to the practices as a demonstration of my faith; I am committed to living the tenets of the philosophy.

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Over the years, I have taken a lot of heat for my ability to bridge the philosophies of the modern and ancient worlds. The Yoruba community felt that I wasn't a strong enough advocate for the spiritual philosophy and practice of African culture, while the Christian community felt that I was inappropriately mixing two religions in a way that denigrated what they believe about Jesus being the only way. The Yorubas wanted to know if I had become a Christian. The Christians wanted to know if I practiced Voodoo. Some folks even believe me to be the anti-Christ, out to dupe others into moving away from Judeo-Christian beliefs and into some form of paganism.

Twenty years ago, other people's response to who I am and what I believe was a major concern for me. Now, not so much. Twenty years of experience has taught me that every living soul has a right to honor the validity of their experiences with God, and that there is considerable value in bringing the ancient traditions to the table of modern beliefs. What I know now is that you cannot separate the culture of a people from the spirit of a people. To do so is to dilute the power and presence of the Spirit of God that exists as a unique expression in every person, of every culture.

Rekindling the Flame

I grew up without my mother. There were many women in my life—strong, proud, beautiful women who did their best to usher me into womanhood. But they were not my mother. My mother's absence left a void in my identity that I was unable to name or speak in the face of the sincere, earnest efforts of the relatives who were doing their best to provide me with a home. My father's part-time presence and emotional unavailability only deepened the pain of being motherless. What I did have was a cousin, who was raised with me as my sister.

It was my sister's profound love and understanding of African culture that ultimately became my saving grace. It was through her that I discovered the richness of Yoruba culture and its spiritual

traditions. Yoruba not only gave meaning to my broad nose and round hips, it made the color of my skin beautiful. In the pantheon of the Yoruba spiritual beliefs and practices, I found an image of the Creator that looked like me—dark-hued and feminine. I was also introduced to the concept of “ancestors,” which reinforced my new understanding that my mother was not simply dead. Instead, she had been transformed. She was Spirit, eternal and ever present with me, as me, and around me. The cultural and spiritual philosophy of Yoruba opened my heart and mind to the meaning and presence of the spirit of God in all of Its forms and manifestations. It gave me an identity and filled the void in my soul in a way that human efforts and Sunday school had failed to do.

Yoruba, like other African and Native American spiritual traditions are technically defined as pagan religions because these traditions are not Christian, Jewish, or Islamic. What I know now is that language is a major challenge when attempting to explain the beliefs and practices of indigenous traditions. Quite often, there are no words in Western languages that can accurately translate the vastness and depth of indigenous cultures. Simultaneously, there is the challenge of interpreting spiritual phenomena from an intellectual perspective. Language can be limiting, and the intellect is programmed to discard or discount what it does not recognize and cannot rationally understand or explain.

How, then, are we to bridge the gap that exists between what the modern world defines as religion and spirituality, and what indigenous traditions offer? I believe that we must affirm the legitimacy of these ancient traditions by virtue of how we live. I have learned to do just that with much more grace, conviction, and elegance in the past 20 years. I have learned to be the demonstration of what I know and believe, without defense. I have learned to lean on and look to the place of commonality and oneness that touches all people and all beliefs. For me, that place is principle; the living, breathing tenets that are familiar to all leave little room for debate.

“There Is Only One Woman”

In presenting this revised edition to the world, I had to make some decisions. One of the decisions dealt with the subtitle: *A Path to Self-Empowerment for Black Women*. When my editor asked if I would consider changing the subtitle to *A Path of Self-Empowerment for Women*, I cringed. Over the years, this book has become a primer for many women of African descent seeking elementary knowledge about their cultural and spiritual identity. The information and the practices I originally offered—as I have been told many times—saved minds, hearts, and lives. Just like me, many black women embarked upon their spiritual journey feeling unworthy, unloved, and unfit to pray or practice spiritual rites.

Though times have changed, the experiences of many women of color remain the same. Many of us were raised in religious and spiritual communities that did not honor the contributions or the presence of women. Many of us have had emotional and spiritual experiences with religious leaders that were in total contradiction to what was being preached from the pulpit. Though many of us felt the call, the pull of our African-ness, we had no idea how to incorporate that into a spiritual philosophy or practice. We had, in fact, been taught it was wrong to do so.

Today, it is still common for women to feel unwelcome, invalidated, and inept when it comes to sharing our voice and addressing our needs in spiritual communities. It was this unique experience of women of color that I addressed in the first edition of *Tapping the Power Within*. So, “what to do?” was the issue I faced. How, 20 years later, shall I present what has been deepened and refined in my own consciousness? How do I honor all that I am within, and honor my sisters—all women—at the same time?

I have been blessed! Just as I always knew that my mother’s lineage was African, I learned that my father’s lineage was Native American. In the same way I was called to embrace my African heritage, I learned to embrace my Native side. My African, Native—and some Latin—heritage has afforded me the opportunity to grow in cultural sensitivity, diversity, respect, and knowledge. One of my dearest teachers, Wallace Black Elk always said:

*“There is only one man and his name is All men.
There is only one woman and her name is All women.
There is only one child and its name is All children.”*

I, therefore, am not my sister’s keeper. I *am* my sister. So I have changed the title of this book to: *Tapping the Power Within: A Path to Self-Empowerment for Women*, with the prayer that all women will find within these pages some one thing that supports her in a commitment to live a life guided by the Creator of life.

It is my vision that through the principles, practices, ceremonies, and rituals of their private spiritual practice, women will find both their internal and external balance; that they will find their own voice, song, and dance; that they will find value and worth. It matters not to me what a woman’s spiritual or religious affiliation may be. What matters to me is that each woman, all women, find that place of God within themselves and live from and through that place, whether that place is called Obàtálá, Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, or the Great Spirit.

In today’s world of haste, waste, anger, and violence, my mission is for women to know the love of God; live the love of God; and share the love of God in their homes and communities. I am wise enough to know, after 20 years of experience in dealing with the public, that not everyone is going to believe what I believe, nor embrace what I choose to embrace. I also know that no matter how much we fight and argue about it, we may never see eye to eye on the “right” way to approach our spirituality. My concern and purpose in presenting this work and living my life is to ensure that the traditional African and Native ways have a place at the universal table of spiritual knowledge. While each of us is free to utilize what is helpful and discard the rest, at the very least, we have a right to know these traditional ways exist.

Spiritual Evolution

The final challenge in re-presenting this work was how to integrate my learning, knowledge, and experience of the past 20

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years since *Tapping* was first published. You will find that the basic information contained in the original edition is in tact. The chapters— 15 in all—including “Spirit,” “Breathing,” “Meditation,” “Prayer,” “Forgiving and Releasing,” and “Spiritual Code of Conduct,” appear just as they were in the first edition with relevant revisions and amplifications. At the end of each chapter, I have written a new section called, *What I Know Now*, which shares new information gleaned from my most recent years of experience and learning. It is designed to enhance and enrich the original text. These additions explain how my original 30,000 word first edition grew into this 90,000 word anniversary edition.

When this work was first presented 20 years ago, the concept of spirituality was not as commonplace as it is today. In fact, many people were afraid to speak the word aloud, much less explore the concept or its practices. Today, spirituality is almost a fad. “*Ceremony*,” “*ritual*,” “*affirmation*,” and “*spirituality*” are now terms commonly used in newsrooms as well as sports arenas. People proudly boast, “I am spiritual, not religious.” At the same time, our children are ending up on death row or dead, our relationships are a mess, HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions, and our schools are failing miserably. Yet, the mega-churches are building overflow sections. How do such contradictions exist? Take heart! We are all walking contradictions. We all have those things we talk about and present publicly, and those things we deem private or secret about which we remain silent. With the growing popularity of spirituality come increased misconceptions about what it actually means to be spiritual.

What I know now is that the concepts and principles of living a Spirit-directed, Spirit-filled life have not changed since the beginning of time. The methods and practices have evolved, deepened, and been transformed. However the underlying principles that allow us to function from a spiritual perspective are still the same. We must discover and share the true meaning of love; we must learn to forgive all things and all people, including ourselves; we must find the source of our joy and share it with all people; we must walk harmlessly, peacefully on the earth; and, we must

faithfully acknowledge, embrace, and honor God, the Creator of all life.

The original text of this book, as well as the additional text added to this revised edition, is offered to assist you on your journey toward peace, love, success, and the freedom to be who you are—even with your personal contradictions. It is the first step in your journey back to the beginning—your journey in “spirit.” Written from the perspective of ancient Yoruba culture and universal knowledge, the information presented is based upon the premise that you are a divine expression of the Creator (Olodumare in the Yoruba language). As you pass from the world of spirit (the womb) into the physical world, God gave you the gift of life. That gift is *breath*.

You are, in essence, spirit, housed in a physical envelope, brought to life by the breath of God to fulfill a divine mission. Your mission, while different from that of all other living beings, is directed toward a common goal—harmonious interaction among all living creatures and service for the good of the universe. As spirit, you know your destiny. You were informed prior to your birth. You choose, as spirit, the time, place, location, and circumstances of your physical life. As spirit, you are fully aware of what you must do, learn, and overcome in order to fulfill your mission.

In the physical form, you were given hands, feet, intelligence, and the discretion to fend for yourself. To be able to clearly understand and accomplish your mission, it is necessary to align and integrate your spiritual essence and nature with your physical essence and nature. How do you achieve this spiritual/physical integration? How do you determine your spiritual mission? How do you find the correct path for your spiritual mission? How do you fulfill your divine destiny? You do this with your breath and with the quality of your thoughts. It is by breath and with breath that you can direct the course of your life.

Sounds simple, right? Well, believe it or not, life is simple! Life is the simple in-and-out flow of events, circumstances, and people. We make it difficult by cutting off, holding on, and otherwise trying to control the flow of our breathing and our loving. All we ever need to do is be conscious of the presence of God in all people and

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situations. We must breathe consciously and live consciously and love consciously. We must learn to let things flow just like breath, and life will do the rest.

Your spirit will guide you through the ebb and flow of events in life. As your link to the Creator, your spirit is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. Spirit is divine, and so are you! It is sometimes difficult to accept that people are so divine. It is particularly difficult for African Americans who have been oppressed, disenfranchised, mis-educated, culturally and spiritually raped. The key is to “believe” you are divine; to “accept” that you have spiritual rights and to “know” that your ancestors, the universe and the Creator are supporting you spiritually.

You should understand, whether or not you are of African descent, that spirit and spirituality are an essential and necessary aspect of your basic nature. You are not replacing or undermining God by developing your spirit—you are trying to make contact with the powerful force that is God within you. What you are seeking and searching for has always been with you. Spiritual growth, development, and empowerment is a conscious choice. Now is the time to explore, accept, and understand how to make the divinity within you work with you and for you.

The Principles of Understanding

The principle element of your spiritual growth and physical evolution is the understanding of your self and your experiences. Nothing in this world is new. It has all been done and said before. Africans, as the parent race, have established the principles of understanding and confronting life issues. The principles are what we call tradition and culture. It is through these mediums that our ancestors developed a standard of behavior, and a code of morality, ethics, and values, which should govern thoughts and actions for the fullest expression of life. Our ancestors determined five principles that, if applied to daily activities, will reap positive spiritual and physical results. They are: (1) Truth, (2) Order, (3) Love,

(4) Faith, and (5) Patience. These principles, when followed and utilized as the foundations of our actions, decisions, and interactions will put us in touch with the highest universal forces. When we act in contradiction to these principles, our lives become chaotic, disorderly, and stagnant. In our pain, misery, and confusion, we lay blame and seek solutions outside of ourselves. The key is to “begin within;” to survey, explore, and become intimately familiar with your internal landscape.

Anything and everything you have experienced has been purposeful; it has brought you to where you are now. If you are fat and happy, thin and sad, wealthy and miserable, poor and sick, you have a collection of experiences to use as steppingstones to take you where you want to go. Like cotton which grows as an ugly, thorny pod and is transformed into beautiful, colorful cloth, you can transform your experiences into beautiful lessons. How? By changing the way you think about them.

As you embark upon this journey, be gentle with yourself. Do not think this is a “quick fix” to the challenges you face, and do not set unrealistic goals for obtaining spiritual insights. You must eat the mountain one bite at a time! You must be willing to release worn-out thoughts, habits, and situations in order to receive and put to use the information Spirit will bring you. Be patient. Be open to know the truth about yourself. Above all, be open to receiving the guidance that will support your spiritual growth. Do not be afraid to look at your faults, for when you recognize them, you have the power to change them.

When you begin your quest for spiritual growth, keep your own counsel. Do not try to convince others that what you are doing is right for you or for them. Everyone will get what s/he needs, when s/he needs it. As you grow and develop, everything and everyone in your environment will respond accordingly. Very often, things and people will fall away from you. Do not hold on. Know that you cannot lose anything or anyone within the “divine” order of your life. You can pray for your beloved ones and others without seeking their approval of your spiritual growth. Remember, *you cannot want more for others than they want for themselves*. Your first

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responsibility is to yourself! Be good to yourself; be honest with yourself and others, understanding that we all, in our own way, are perfect expressions of the Creator's life force!

The energy of Olodumare is with you through spirit. Your mission is to tap into it! The time is now!

Toward Enlightenment,
Ryanla



LOOKING IN THE MIRROR OF SELF

There is an old saying: “What you draw to you is what you are.” For most of us, this is a difficult concept to accept or appreciate. We spend most of our time trying to fix what we see. We try to change people, conditions, and situations outside of ourselves because we don’t realize that what we are seeing is actually a reflection of who we are. Think of it this way: When you look in the mirror and decide to fix your hair, you don’t brush the reflection! You brush the hair on your head! In other words, we have to learn to fix ourselves, not what we see.

A very dear friend of mine taught me this lesson. Over a span of two years we worked together, confided in each other, and endeavored to bring our lives into order. At one point, our relationship changed, and I became her spiritual teacher. At first, it felt really great; we had what I thought was a good, honest foundation. However, as her teacher, my focus shifted. My priority became assisting this woman to grow spiritually. This often meant I had to tell her things that she was resistant to hearing. It also meant that I had to tell her things that I had not yet mastered myself.

A spiritual brother once told me, “We teach what we most need to learn.” Unfortunately, we do not realize we need to learn it, and our students have egos that make it difficult for them to accept the teacher’s weaknesses and flaws. This was the case with

my friend. I had revealed to her many of my shortcomings, my fears, and a past that was not strewn with lilies! She offered support, encouragement, and usually tremendous insight. I respected her and her opinion, because, as her teacher, I knew this woman had great potential. As her friend, I understood what her challenges and issues were. What I had not fully come to understand was that the people in our world reflect who we believe we are, even when we are unaware that the belief exists. The things I saw lacking in her were the very things I lacked myself.

In *A Course in Miracles*, we read: "When your brother (sister) acts insanely, it is an opportunity for you to bless him (her). You need the blessing you can offer. There is no way to have it except by giving it. Your brother is the mirror in which you see the image of yourself." As usual, I did not understand this statement when I read it. Like most of us, I allowed my ego to convince me that I had it all together. After all, I was a spiritual teacher and counselor. I had helped so many people come to grips with their issues that I was convinced I had mastered many of the challenges most people struggle to overcome. I had not yet realized that we never stop learning, and that a lesson will repeat itself over and over until we recognize it and make better or different choices. My friend taught me the lesson I needed to learn in a most unpleasant way.

One day, in a spiritual ceremony, my friend acted out. As her teacher, I was forced to take a position. I released her as my student. Her reaction to this was insane. She began writing a series of letters to me. She sent a copy of one letter to everyone whom she and I both knew. She sent the letter to all of my students, my former students, my supervisor at work, and the producer of a documentary I had been working on for two years. In the letter, she accused me of being a liar, a thief, and a con artist. She accused me of taking advantage of her, ruining her health, and destroying her home. Then, as justification for her attack on me, she wrote about everything I had ever told her in confidence as a friend. My first reaction was to ignore her. My lack of reaction infuriated her, so she started calling people and telling them the story. People then began to question me. I continued to ignore her, but somewhere inside of me, I knew she was showing me something.

Fears and Shadows

Almost everyone is afraid of something. This is the thing that we will go to great lengths to avoid. What we fear usually involves a perception of danger or harm and is usually associated with a particular incident or situation. Some people fear animals. Others fear heights or feathers. My fear was I would not be liked and that I was being talked about by other people. Like Job, my greatest fear had come upon me. People were talking about me, thinking bad things about me, questioning me about the validity of my friend's statements. Some people chose to ignore her. Others came to my support and defense. Others assumed it was true because she and I had been so close. I couldn't figure out what to do, so I did nothing. I was hurt. I was angry. I was scared to death! Yet something inside of me was very still. A quiet voice in the back of my mind said, "Just wait for the final outcome and watch who is here when the dust settles." I stopped reading the letters. I stopped answering the telephone. I just watched and waited. I knew the answer would come.

When the thing you fear comes upon you, it is like a sharp pain in the pit of your stomach. It causes you to double over. You can't move. And then it's over. When you don't face your fear, you have a constant ache. You don't know where it comes from or when it is going to stop. You just live with it. Perhaps I'm a masochist, but I will take the sharp pain. From one day to the next, my world as I knew it was falling apart. People doubted the validity of the work I was doing. They began to tell others about their own experiences with me. Most stories were embellished to fit the tale being told. Others told downright lies! I wondered what else people were saying about me. What were they thinking? How was I going to straighten this out? Were people going to like me? The hysteria continued for three weeks. I knew there was a lesson looming somewhere, but I couldn't see it. Finally, I decided to pray. I asked Spirit to show me what was going on. A passage from *A Course in Miracles* came to me: ". . . your brother is your mirror." It was too painful to look at myself, so I had looked at my friend.

My friend feared being abandoned, my own fear as a child. She did not want to take responsibility for herself, so she blamed others for everything that happened in her life. My friend had low self-esteem and a poor self-image. She resented criticism almost as much as I did. My friend was brilliant, intelligent, and beautiful, yet she behaved irrationally, self-destructively, and irresponsibly. She did things based on emotions and then, after thinking about what she had done, berated herself. My friend was lonely. She wanted love but was afraid of being hurt or abandoned. She had many painful issues surrounding her worth. She believed people were taking advantage of her. My friend would volunteer to do things for people. When they did not respond in a certain way or pay her what she thought her efforts were worth, she lashed out. My friend said yes when she meant no. She wanted to be liked, needed, and accepted. She was, however, convinced that there was something wrong with her. She thought that she wasn't good enough or smart enough, that she did not deserve good things. I knew these things about my friend, but I had not accepted them about myself. I was fixing the mirror. My friend cracked the mirror for me.

Spirit will always give you what you need when you need it. Unfortunately, we don't usually want what we need. We fight tooth and nail by blaming others and refusing to accept the truth about ourselves. We create our own experiences because we need to grow. It was time for me to grow. I had to move to a new level of awareness about myself and my work. It was time for me to let go of the thoughts, habits, attitudes, and people who were causing me harm. I had prayed for it. I had asked for it, and it came in the only way I was able to accept it at that time—painfully.

The things my friend wrote and said about me were things I had said to myself, about myself. I doubted myself! I questioned myself! I beat up on myself! I believed that my past, my family, and my mistakes made me unworthy. Yet I projected another image to the world. I spent my time fixing other people—people whom I thought did not have it together. I was fixing the mirror! This experience taught me that whatever we see in others is a reflection

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of ourselves. It was time for me to learn that just because we are defective does not mean we cannot see defects in another! Further, because we are defective does not mean we are not worthy! It simply means that we have to work a little harder to learn a little more. In order to be whole, complete, and beautiful beings, we have to put the lipstick on our lips, not on the mirror! My friend taught me this lesson in her first letter when she wrote: “. . . heal yourself and leave the rest of us alone!”

The Mirror of Self

The most important step toward the power of Spirit is knowing, accepting, and loving self. This is a vital process for women. We are the composite of past teachings, past experiences, life pressures, and external values. Consequently, it is often difficult to distinguish who we are from what we have been *told* we are, or what we have been *taught* to be. We are told that we are incapable of making our own decisions. We are taught to be dependent. We are socialized by generalizations. We are molded through external expectations that are primarily focused on the way we look, the environment from which we come, and the degree by which we attempt to appease the expectations. Since we are taught to respond to life's *external* stimuli, self is generally the last place we look to find answers, seek guidance, or resolve conflict.

Self—your true, authentic self—is the gentle, knowing, powerful essence of the Creator. Self is without judgment, without societal prejudice, without expectation. Self is the keeper of information and the promoter of revelations. Self is the witness and the judge. Self is the storehouse of guidance necessary to fulfill life's mission. Self is a student of life who has studied all that is required to pass life's tests and overcome life's obstacles successfully.

When we look in the Mirror of Self, we are asking to see all that we are, all that we have been, and all that we can be. It is a painful process, a loving step toward maximum growth, and the only way to develop self-acceptance. Looking in the Mirror of Self

opens our eyes to our self-destructive, counterproductive ideas, attitudes, and habits. It is the only way to accept responsibility for our actions and gain an understanding of our experiences. Because it crystallizes the quality of our intent, looking in the Mirror of Self opens the door to accepting our mistakes and weaknesses. When we can accept what we have done with an understanding of why we acted, we can no longer be persecuted. Looking in the Mirror of Self reveals the strengths we can rely on to guide us through challenges. When we know who we are, accept why we are, and understand what we are living to learn, self becomes a constant source of encouragement.

Mirror of Self Exercise

You will need the following:

- A four- to five-foot-long mirror
- Two white candles, preferably encased in glass
- A white sheet or towel
- A straight-backed chair or floor pillow

You may sit in the chair or in a lotus position on the floor pillow. Make sure you are comfortable because you will need to sit as still as possible for at least 20 minutes. The room should be completely dark, except for the candlelight.

- Place the mirror against the wall, so that it is straight.
- Position the chair or pillow three to four feet away from and directly opposite the mirror.
- Place one candle on either side of the chair or pillow so that the reflection of the candles can be seen in the mirror.



Looking in the Mirror of Self



- Sit with your back flat against the back of the chair or in the lotus position on the pillow with your back straight.
- Rest your hands on your knees, palms up.
- Focus your eyes on a place on the floor between you and the mirror.
- Take eight deep Cleansing Breaths.
- Sit quietly and listen to your breath for a minute or two.
- Silently affirm in your mind, “I am willing to see my true self.”
- When you can hear your heartbeat in your ears or feel throbbing throughout your body, slowly raise your eyes to the mirror.
- Continue repeating the affirmation until your head is lifted and you are focused directly on your eyes in the mirror.
- Take eight more deep Cleansing Breaths while gazing into the reflection of your eyes in the mirror.
- Silently affirm in your mind, “Show me my true self.” When you feel ready, stop the affirmation and concentrate on your breathing. Keep your eyes focused on your reflection until your eyelids feel heavy. When they do, allow them to close.

What You Can Expect:

- You may see nothing at all the first few times you do the exercise. Do not be alarmed. This is normal.
- You may see something or someone in the mirror that you do not recognize. If this happens, close your eyelids and take Cleansing Breaths. Refocus your eyes on the floor and raise them slowly again. If the same thing reappears, remain focused on it. Spirit will clarify what it means to you.
- You may begin to remember an incident or experience from the past. If this happens, close your eyelids and let it play out. Silently ask for understanding and clarity.
- You may cry for no apparent reason. Close your eyelids and give yourself permission to have the experience even if you don't know why you are crying. Listen carefully to your thoughts and silently ask any important questions.
- You may see nothing except the reflection of self. If so, silently ask, Who am I? and listen to your thoughts.
- You may see colors. Check the Color Reference Chart in Chapter 13 for clarification.
- If at any time you experience fear, lower your gaze to the floor and listen to your breath.
- When you feel ready to get up, take a few deep breaths, lower your eyes to the floor, stretch your body, and move slowly away from the mirror. Use a journal to write down what you have seen or experienced.

Looking in the Mirror of Self

- You can repeat this exercise once a week.
- Spend a minimum of 20 minutes, a maximum of 45 minutes for each session.
- This is also an excellent exercise to resolve and gain clarity when you have a conflict with another person. While looking in the mirror, ask Spirit for clarity and understanding about what the person is revealing to you about yourself.

Speaking in the Mirror of Self

Speaking in the Mirror of Self is an excellent process for developing positive thoughts, which will manifest as experiences in your life. When you are speaking to yourself in the mirror, you are opening your mind and spirit to different, more expansive, more self-honoring experiences. To speak in the mirror, stand directly in front of the mirror, look directly into your own eyes, and talk to yourself. By doing this you are sending commands to the essence of your being. Your spirit is ready and willing to follow your instructions and commands. The key is to surrender to the energy of Spirit as it guides you.

Speaking in the Mirror Exercise

Stand before the bathroom mirror in a relaxed posture. Look directly into the reflection of your eyes. Take three to five deep Cleansing Breaths. In a firm but loving voice, instruct your spirit. Be mindful not to yell at yourself. The following examples can be used. Feel comfortable to create your own statements.



To Create Wanted Conditions

Repeat each statement nine times.

- “I am open and willing to change.”
- “I am releasing all excess weight easily and effortlessly.”
- “I am attracting abundantly positive conditions and people into my life.”
- “I am creating positive conditions/relationships/situations in my life.”
- “I am all that God created me to be, and I am experiencing and expressing that truth moment by moment.”

To Create Self-Acceptance

Repeat each statement nine times.

- “I am beautiful/peaceful/confident/powerful.”
- “I am enough.”
- “I am worthy just the way I am.”
- “I am that I am.”
- “I am attuned to and aligned with the presence of God in my life.”

What I Know Now

Every person, situation, circumstances, and experience in your life is a reflection of some aspect of who you believe yourself to be.

All difficult, challenging, painful experiences and relationships provide us with an opportunity to heal some part of our consciousness. We focus on the weaknesses and shortcomings of others as a function of the shame, guilt, and fear buried in our own internal landscape.

No matter how painful an experience is at any moment, you must know that you will be okay.

Me, Myself, and the Other People

There comes a moment for each of us, a definitive moment, when we are compelled to assess where we are, and where we are going. In that moment, we must come clean with ourselves about what we say, what we do, and whether or not the two are aligned. Depending upon our internal response to this experience, we will either volunteer or be forced to take a long hard look at how we are showing up in the world. Looking at ourselves can be frightening at worst, and nerve-wracking at best. To see ourselves for all that we are or are not, to tell the absolute truth about what you see, is possibly one of the most challenging experiences we face as human beings. When done with humility and integrity, self-examination and self-reflection lead us to the brink of greatness. Once on the brink, we are called forth to jump, to make the necessary changes that will ultimately transform our state of being.

On the other hand, if you jump before you are ready, before you take a good look at yourself, you could fall face-first into self-brutalization and really hurt yourself. No one can beat up on you with the same intensity and severity that you use against yourself. No one can become more fixated on what's wrong with you with the same level of scrutiny as you use in the privacy of your own mind. It is what I often call "self-terrorization." We brutalize ourselves for feeling afraid, ashamed, or guilty about all that we

believe is wrong with us, and we invite others to participate. It is very, very painful. On the other hand, it is the way we learn our most empowering lessons.

I had just buckled my seat belt and turned the key in the ignition when the telephone rang. I can't say I was surprised. At the height of my career as a writer and speaker, I was emerging from seclusion at a four-day staff retreat. I knew that my message box was full and that there would be quite a few hysterical people trying to reach me. Losing most of your privacy is a part of living a public life that I find difficult to accept. To my surprise, the call was from my daughter, Gemmia. She wanted to give me a heads-up to lessen the likelihood that I would lose what little hair I had left after cutting off my 12-year-old locks. I was glad that she called, but dumbfounded by her news.

A major national magazine, one with which I had enjoyed what I thought was a good relationship, was running a cover story on me. So far, so good. They had lifted a candid photo of me in which I was making a mocking gesture. In context, I was probably talking to someone and trying to make a point. Taken out of context on the cover of the magazine, it appeared to reflect my genuine attitude. The headline was something about a wolf in sheep's clothing taking Christians off the path of righteousness.

Driving down a winding road in the hills of West Virginia, I did not dare slam on my brakes. Instead, I screamed, "What?!" which scared the bejesus out of the three passengers in my car. Gemmia informed me that it got worse. They had interviewed some of my neighbors who attended the church directly across the street from my facility. The neighbors indicated that they didn't know who I was or what I did, but if it had anything to do with Yoruba, it was against the Bible and against Christians. They interviewed prominent women speakers who had appeared with me on various panels. One recounted a story of my calling up ancestors at a luncheon that left women wailing and screaming. She went on to denounce me and ancestor worship, and particularly warned Christian women to be leery of me. I had absolutely no recollection of what luncheon she was talking about.

For three pages, the author of the article questioned, challenged, and twisted my work, my character, and my motives as she interviewed ministers, educators, and everyday people. The stated purpose of the story was to discover why my work had struck a chord with so many people. In essence, they wanted to know if I was successful because I was good, or if I was promoting something evil in order to make myself successful. And did unsuspecting people, particularly Christians, know the difference? The one saving grace in the article was an interview of a prominent minister from Chicago who stated simply: "They are jealous of who Iyanla is and what Iyanla stands for: the freedom of people's minds and hearts outside of the boundaries of the Judeo-Christian community."

I stopped at every 7-Eleven and newsstand I could find between Jefferson County, West Virginia; and Alexandria, Virginia. I found two copies of the magazine. I bought them both. I called Gemmia back and told her to go out and buy every copy of the magazine she could find. She told me she had started to do that, but realized she would probably run out of money before she got to the Delaware border.

"Breathe, Ma. Just breathe. Nobody is going to believe this crap. It is too disgusting and ridiculous."

"That's not the point," I told her. "I don't want anybody to see it."

"Well, it's too late for that. This is a national publication and people have already seen it. The telephone is ringing off the hook, and the e-mails are up to about 50 a day."

"Oh my Lord! Who's calling? What are they saying?"

"Breathe, Ma. People are outraged for you and with you, not *about* you. This is just another lesson."

I knew she was right, but it didn't stop my hands from shaking and my stomach from churning. Why? Why in the world would they do something like this? I had recently invited the editor of the magazine to my book-release party and he had come. He ate my food, talked to my guests, smiled in my face, and then *this*? It just didn't make any sense. What about my family, my husband,

my children, my grandchildren? Don't people know there are real people attached to an attack of this magnitude? Any attack, for that matter, is a form of violence. I couldn't figure out what I had done to warrant this from the publication that had dubbed me "one of the foremost African American speakers in the country" just a year earlier. I was hurt and angry and embarrassed; I was about to learn one of the most difficult lessons of my life.

What I know now is that looking in the Mirror of Self boils down to being responsible and accountable for the creation of our experiences. It also demands that we unlearn certain things in order to learn what really *is* required to live authentically in the world. Our lives mirror back to us what we need to know about our being that is *in* or *out* of alignment with our doing.

I am willing to acknowledge that I have joined a gym at least ten times and never attended a single class. I have bought dozens of cases of Slim Fast that I never drank. I have at least four books that I started and never completed. There have been those times when I believed that any disagreement or misunderstanding between myself and someone else was absolutely *the other person's* fault. I am better now! I acknowledge that as a human being, with weaknesses and foibles, it is so much easier to see *out there* than it is to acknowledge that I am the only one who gets to say what goes on in my life. I am creating my experiences moment by moment, thought by thought, word by word, action by action. For most of us humans, it is difficult to acknowledge that we have bad habits. We make promises that we fail to honor. We speak loosely, saying we will commit our time, energy, and resources to people and circumstances that we then conveniently *forget*. We forget because many of the things we commit ourselves to have no meaning to us. We forget because we have not been taught good *spiritual hygiene*.

Lights! Cameras! Healing!

Good spiritual hygiene requires a willingness to do what my brother-friend Rev. Dr. Michael Beckwith, calls "being in God's

darkroom.” It is when we are in the darkness that God impresses divine information into our hearts, minds, and souls—information that will become the picture of how we live. We don’t like the difficult times; we don’t like things we cannot control, or things we really don’t want others to know about us. We retreat from that place of not knowing, that place of being found out. It’s cold, and it’s frightening. In fact, as soon as the darkness of difficulty hits, most of us will run in the other direction. What Rev. Michael helped me to see was that being in difficult places in life offers an opportunity to be reproduced as a clearer vision of how God sees us and wants us to be. I find it very interesting that people are using disposable cameras. We don’t want to focus anymore. We don’t want to carry the heavy equipment or figure out the right distance, angle, or position required to get just the right shot of life. We want to point, shoot, and record the image instantly. *Life simply is not like that!* To get a really great picture, we must do the work. We must take the film into the darkroom. We must apply the chemicals to the negative. We must stand watch over the negatives, checking to ensure that they receive just the right amount of exposure to the chemicals and light. Finally, we must hang the prints up to dry.

Many great photographers still develop their own pictures. It takes time, energy, and patience to develop the image you desire. I don’t think God has embraced the concept of advanced technology in “photography.” What I know now is that God still does it the old-fashioned way. He takes us, the images of God’s divinity, into the dark places in life where He works in us, with us, and through us, until we become a mirror reflection of who God created us to be. We are God’s film. We can be redeveloped as many times as required to get a clear picture of ourselves and our focus in life. Sometimes we are hung up to dry. God will shut down everything and lock everyone out of our lives so that He can do the work required for us to live beyond the demands of instant gratification. When we emerge, we have a new idea about our identity and our purpose for living. We are a new image, with a new focus. *In the darkness, we become the vision, the I-am-ness God created us to be from the inside out.*

There was nothing, absolutely nothing, I could do to erase what had been written about me. I did not know how to respond to the people who wanted to know, Why? I did not have a response to the speculation about the veracity of the article. And I could not answer the questions I had within myself. I wept for days about what I thought was going on and why it was happening to me. I was being attacked for no reason. I was being maligned without provocation. I was being destroyed because of my desire to serve people. Then, as will happen when you are learning a lesson and wallowing in self-pity, the light came on and I asked myself, *What is it that they are actually saying about you?* The thought hit me like a bolt of lightning. Hey! Wait a minute! Why *am* I so hysterical about this?

I went back and read the article slowly, word by word, line by line. I made notes in the margins. In the process I remembered what one of my teachers had told me, “When God gives you something to do, you can’t just do the parts you like. You have to do the grunt work in order to get the glory.” I believed with all my heart that my work—the writing, speaking, teaching—is my purpose, the reason God placed me on the planet at this time. My intentions to support the evolution of human consciousness were clear. My desire to end human suffering was pure. Why, then, was I giving the publication all that power? The reason became as clear as the hysteria I was feeling: There was something going on that I was refusing to see about myself. *My goodness! Stick me in the eye with a fork!*

Hidden Core Beliefs

Reviewing the article revealed to me that there were elements of truth mixed with opinion and innuendo. People have a right to think what they think and do what they do, and we each get to choose how we respond. I was teaching people about Yoruba culture. I wanted to share with the world the beauty and power I had discovered in my heritage. I was also revealing the similarities

between Western spiritual culture and ancient African traditions. In a world that often dismissed and discounted both, the blending of the two had served me well. It had helped me to find my own beauty, voice, and power as a woman of African descent, raised with a Christian theology. I had discovered a way to embrace and honor both the ancient and modern traditions and cultures in a practical manner for those who had lost touch with either.

The article attempted to make my work about the right and wrong of religion. It was an age-old argument in which I could choose to participate or not. I was sharing my personal experiences about culture, Spirit, and spirituality in ways that many people had not heard before, and it resonated with those who were reading my books. The information wasn't new, but it was honest. It was empowering for some and threatening for others. I was writing about what many had wondered about. I was giving voice and validation to things that had been denounced as sinful, bad, and just plain old wrong. I was bringing African spirituality to the table with a universal flavor, and I had not gotten permission or approval from anyone, including myself.

With a closer read of the article, I could see how my core beliefs were coloring my perception of what was really going on. *I wasn't good enough* to have so much attention. *I was wrong* to stand up and speak out about anything, much less God. *I was bad* for doing the *wrong thing*, and now people were upset with me. It was the script of the six-year-old part of me playing things out in living color, and it was now time for me to rewrite that script. What I know now is that the article revealed publicly the secret and private thoughts and conversations I had with myself. There had been moments in my career when I wondered if I knew enough, if I had learned enough, if I was doing the right thing. At the time, I still battled with my own doubts and fears about simultaneously being Yoruba and Native American, and loving Christ as I did. The article said that my message wasn't clear. It was true! *I wasn't clear*. Life is about seeking, searching, and discovering. In order to grow we must question, challenge, and ultimately find solid ground in our spiritual quest. I had found what I thought was a

viable alternative for many. It had certainly worked in my own life, and I wanted to share it with others. That is my path. That is my purpose. *I am better now!*

Shortly after I was initiated as a Yoruba priestess, my godfather gave me an instruction that changed my life forever. He told me to read and study every sacred text I could find. That was a lot of information to take in, let alone process, but I did. I read the Torah and the Kabbalah. I studied the Qur'an and the Bhagavad Gita. I went back to *A Course in Miracles* and the Bible. Twenty-five years ago, before I had ever written a book or delivered a lecture, I discovered what I believe God wants us all to know: There are many paths that lead to one road, and that is the road of love and forgiveness as the foundation for and the outgrowth of an intimate relationship with God. The sacred text that I read only confirmed what some part of me already knew: The biggest obstacle we must overcome on the spiritual path is our own mind. The beliefs we hold, and the choices and decisions we make in response to our judgments and projections that are grounded in fear, are the blueprints we use to pave our spiritual path. Our interpretation of who God is and what God requires of us is a matter of faith and belief. No one can give you faith and no one can choose for you what you believe. What I know now is that our experiences become the blueprint we use to build our spiritual lives.

The next issue of that publication was its last issue. What I know now is that my photo on the cover and that lead story featuring me in the next-to-last issue was a desperate attempt by the magazine to stay afloat, to attract readers. I made it about me because my inner landscape needed tilling. Today I am grateful for the experience. It helped me to gain a clarity and strength that has served me well. What I know now is that when we resist or avoid looking at ourselves, the universe will hold up a mirror, making denial impossible.

Do you hear me calling you?
The voice of a mother and a father and a child.
Would you recognize the truth?

Looking in the Mirror of Self

Do you feel the love that's falling from my eyes?

Take just a minute.

Come and rest here by my side.

Let me tell you your own story,

Let me walk you through your lies.

— *One Hundred Thousand Angels* by Bliss

Begin Within!

The following exercise is designed to assist you in surveying your internal landscape, the core of your self, in order to identify the core beliefs that may limit or restrict your ability to create the life you desire. This exercise requires that you spend approximately 30 minutes a day for 7 consecutive days, responding to a set of inquiries. Remember, we are not rushing through a self-help exercise. We are creating a spiritually grounded and centered life, a life worthy of your time, energy, and attention. You are powerful and divine, and, as such, anything that interferes with your experience and expression of your authentic self must be addressed and eliminated. Looking in the Mirror of Self in this way is a self-honoring process that reveals a truth that you need to know if you are to experience life at a deeper level.

Your daily supplies for this exercise will be your journal or a sheet of paper and a pen. That's it! It's that simple. You will need a place to work where you will not be disturbed for the prescribed amount of time. If you take this as seriously as I pray you will, go ahead and create an environment that will help you relax. Music. Candles. Incense. No wine or other mind-altering substances! This is sacred work.

Before you begin, take several deep Cleansing Breaths. Allow your body to relax. Align yourself with the rhythm of your breath by focusing on your inhale and your exhale. Allow your eyelids to close for a moment as you focus your attention on your breath. Relax the base of your tongue in your mouth, and allow your shoulders to relax. Set an intention to know the truth. Remain in the stillness until you are ready to begin.



Core Beliefs Exercise

The following is a list of core belief phrases that have a strong and prevailing influence on our lives:

- God is:
- Life is:
- Men are:
- Women are:
- Money is:
- Work is:
- Time is:
- People are:
- Sex is:
- I am:
- Children are:

Complete each of the phrases listed with your most authentic response, *the first thought that comes to mind as soon as you read the phrase*. I encourage you to resist the temptation to write what you *think* you should feel. This is a healing opportunity to do your best to tell the absolute truth. If you have no response to a particular phrase, take a deep breath and respond to the next phrase. When you have responded to all phrases the first time, go back and fill in those that you skipped. If, on the second go-round, nothing comes to mind when you read a particular phrase, close your eyelids, focus on the rhythm of your breath, sit in stillness until you feel ready, and then address the phrase again. When you have completed each phrase, resist the temptation to reread or correct them. If you are not writing in a journal, place your responses in a safe place where they can be easily retrieved. Repeat this exercise for six days. Your responses may be the same each day, or they may differ each day. On the seventh day, the exercise will shift slightly.

Have your responses from the past six days available. At the top of a sheet of paper, write a brief description of the most pressing

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challenge or need currently present in your life. This description should be no more than 50 words. Under the description, write a brief statement of no more than 25 words that indicates why you believe this experience is present in your life. Beneath this statement provide a list of all people other than yourself who are involved. For example: husband, wife, son, daughter, mother, father, etc. If a person involved is not a family member (that is, mate, co-worker, friend), you must also indicate the individual's gender. For example: best friend—male.

Once you have completed your list, indicating the gender of those involved, match your list against your core belief sheets from the six previous days in order to identify the beliefs you see present. Undoubtedly you will discover that many of the beliefs you hold at the core of your being are present in the experience described. Pay close attention to the responses that came forward repeatedly during the six days of writing. These indicate your most deeply held beliefs, which are influencing your experiences. Most often we think that our experiences dictate our beliefs, when the truth is, our beliefs dictate our experience. When we are not aware that core beliefs exist, we become victims of what happens to us rather than being creators of what we desire. Once we become aware we are empowered to choose a new belief. This Looking in the Mirror of Self exercise will support you in identifying and eliminating beliefs you have inherited, adopted, and made up that have been playing out in your experiences.

Looking in the Mirror of Self is not a process to be taken lightly. You must be serious about healing, committed to growing, and willing to love yourself no matter what you see in your mirror. It is best to approach the process seeking your good, your strengths, and your power with an intention to eliminate anything that may be blocking or obstructing the expression of your authentic self. No good will come from the process if you are afraid that there is really something wrong with you or if you are searching for proof of how lowly or unworthy you may be. In her book *The Sacred Yes: Letters from the Infinite*, Rev. Deborah L. Johnson writes that we must all "Feel, deal, and heal!" This process is about feeling



the emotions you have deemed as unacceptable, dealing with the dark, ugly sides of your personality, and healing the unproductive images that have been impressed or implanted in your mind. If you hold in your heart a true desire for transformation rather than merely an end to your current problems, the Mirror of Self is a good place to begin.



About the Author



Iyanla Vanzant is the founder and executive director of Inner Visions International and the Inner Visions Institute for Spiritual Development. She is a Yoruba priestess and an ordained minister in Christian New Thought. The author of 13 titles—including five *New York Times* bestsellers, and the Inner Visions Series of Meditation CDs—she is the former host of the television series *Iyanla* and co-host on the NBC daytime reality show *Starting Over* as well. The proud grandmother of five, and avid scrapbook enthusiast, resides in Maryland.



Inner Visions Institute for Spiritual Development

Personal Development
Spiritual Life Coaching Certification
Ministerial Orientation

The curriculum of the Inner Visions Institute for Spiritual Development has its foundation in the exploration of universal spiritual laws and principles. The principles are the basis for:

- Identifying and clearing unconscious or non-productive thought and behavior patterns.
- Developing a spiritual consciousness and embracing a spiritual identity.
- Developing an understanding of how your unique identity has been impacted and enhanced by life experiences.
- Balancing the demands of external or physical life with the desires of the internal or spiritual life.

It is our intention to guide and support our students through the experiential process of remembering and embracing their Divine nature.

We believe that the Divine nature of every individual is supported and enhanced through knowledge and integration of universal laws and spiritual principles. What we teach is not new. However, we share with our students a new process and format for incorporating these ancient principles into daily living.

Our curriculum provides the student with a first-hand knowledge of how to utilize the power of their Divine and spiritual nature as a basis for all of life's experiences. With this understanding, students are empowered and prepared to make better choices resulting in a more fulfilling life. For more information, or to be placed on our mail list to be informed about upcoming events, we invite you to visit our Website: www.Innervisionworldwide.com

 *Titles of Related Interest* 

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YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE, the movie, starring Louise L. Hay & Friends
(available as a 1-DVD program and an expanded 2-DVD set)
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YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE, by Louise L. Hay

CARD DECKS

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TIPS FOR DAILY LIVING CARDS: A 50-Card Deck, by Iyanla Vanzant

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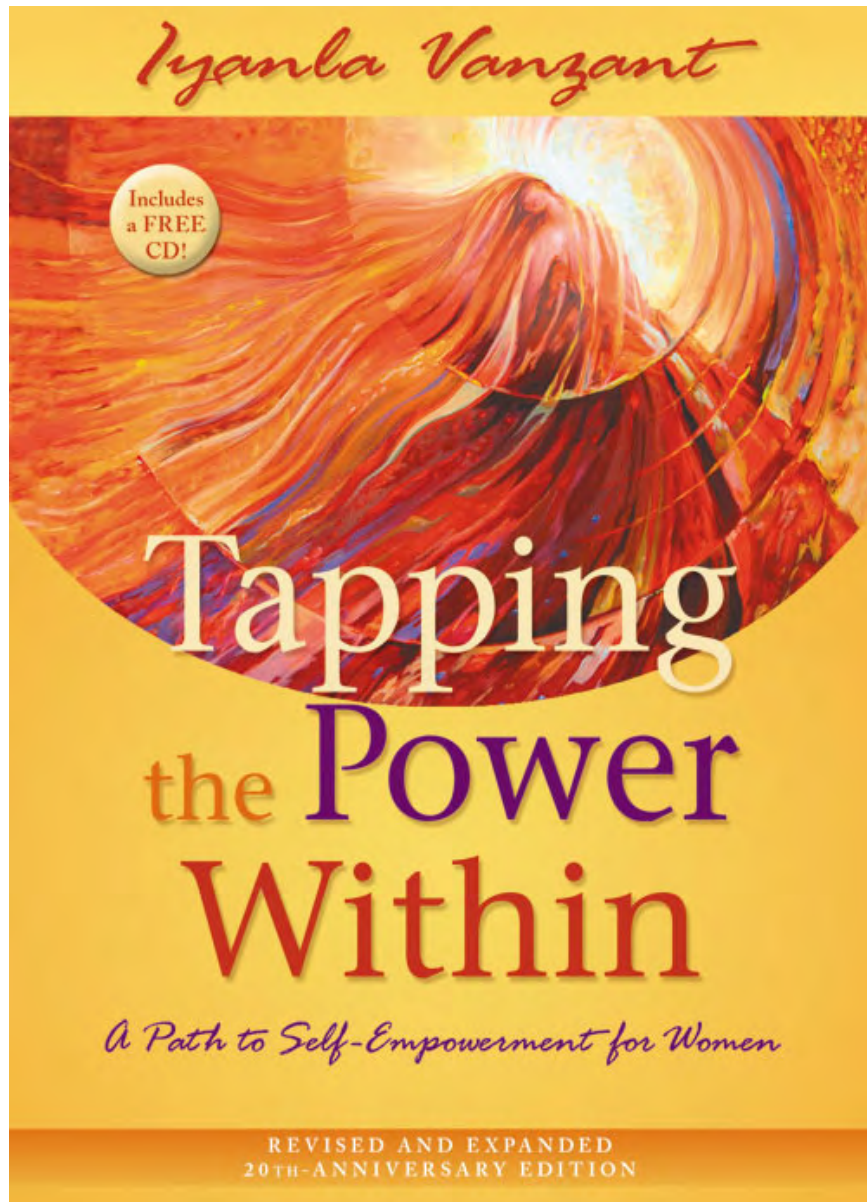
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