

Lighten Up: Seven Ways to Kick the Suffering Habit

Deborah Duda

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Fear-induced habits—self-doubt, resistance to change, judgment of others—keep people from living carefree lives, says Deborah Duda in her engaging second book, *Lighten Up: Seven Ways to Kick the Suffering Habit*.

Duda lived a free-spirited and nomadic existence in early adulthood that included sailing the Mediterranean, working for the United States Foreign Service in Chile, and living in an isolated Nepalese village. She shed tears of empathy for the world's poor and starving but struggled to make sense of her own roller coaster life and intense insecurity. Sick, afraid, and broke, she sought out Mother Teresa, who told her to return home to help her own people. Deeper exploration of spirit led Duda to a more balanced life that relieved her own suffering habit. This new sense of direction further led her to counsel prisoners and support terminally ill patients and their families.

Quotations from literary and spiritual notables, as well as bulleted lists and sidebars, reinforce Duda's message. The book concludes with the seven practices promised in the subtitle, with corresponding exercises designed to alleviate negative thoughts and behaviors that keep people from living "lightly." The cover photograph effectively conveys the carefree abandon of a young boy diving into a pile of autumn leaves.

The author believes that everyone is entitled to enjoy the fundamental human needs of love and freedom. She says that people often experience repeated episodes of failure as their lives progress, leading them to give up all hope of realizing more fulfilled lives. But instead of enduring compromised existences, Duda asserts, they can insist on bringing both love and freedom into their lives: "Whatever we'll settle for is what we'll get."

Human fears, often based on cultural and religious beliefs, are perpetuated from one generation to another, Duda explains. People feel alone and powerless against the hostile forces of the world and seek the protection of churches or groups that impose beliefs that reinforce restrictive, fear-based behaviors. Duda states, "I believe that fear is simply forgetfulness. We forget our divinity."

Duda writes in a relaxed, comfortable style and underscores her message to lighten up and embrace life by revealing her own struggles to overcome fear. Her personal story shows readers that the path toward understanding the self requires courage, patience, and introspection. Written in first person with little dialogue other than her internal thoughts, Duda's natural exuberance for life and humanity sufficiently enlivens the narrative flow. However, there are some typographical errors, and deviations from the overall chronological order of events cause gaps in an otherwise well-organized text.

Lighten Up merits the attention of individuals seeking to improve the quality of their lives. Professional counselors and therapists might well consider using this book as reference material when treating patients.

MARGARET CULLISON (July 22, 2013)

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