

If you dare to put yourself first, you're labelled "selfish," but what about the idea of being self-full? Taking time and care to pamper your spirit in order to share a healthy sense of self?

There's a well-known apothegm that gets bandied around: "There's no 'i' in 'team.'" It gets drummed into most of our heads from childhood that in no circumstances must we be selfish; that putting others' needs first and taking a back seat is morally correct. If we analyse this notion, it means the good of the whole is way more important than that of the self, so personal ego must bow down before collective needs. Society values our constant contribution – to be giving more than receiving and doing good – in order to receive our "cool karma" ticket next time around, or a one-way, first-class Virgin ticket to heaven!

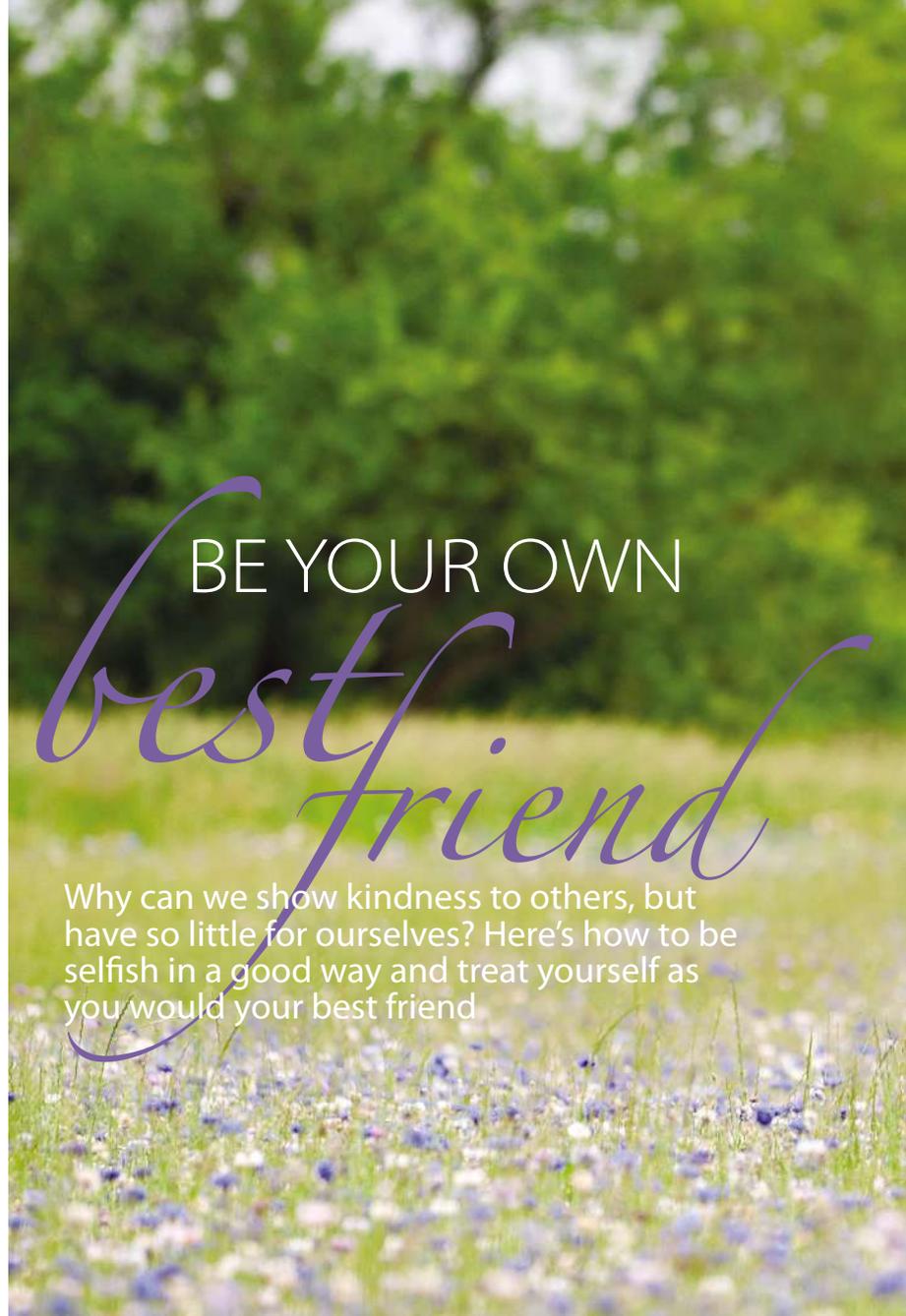
Yet there's a flipside to this: how can we add

"When you get to a place where you understand that love and belonging – your worthiness – is a birthright and not something you have to earn, anything's possible."

anything of real honesty and integrity if we don't possess a healthy sense of self? It means that the whole benefits to our own detriment and is only experiencing some of our real magnificence. We're bringing something less than whole to supposedly support and expand that whole. It doesn't make sense.

This is largely fuelled by the polarity in which we live – an exclusive world of "either/or." We battle at every turn to consider the other option – that of "and," of being inclusive and satisfying both sides simultaneously. What if we seek a harmony that ebbs and flows, rather than the austerity of black or white, you or me? Must they be mutually exclusive?

It all boils down to self-belief and the idea



that you can have what you choose in the way you want it. Most of us have been brought up to make choices and to accept that these have consequences. Yet if you have a courageous conversation with yourself and others about what's really important to you, you might just find a way forward that incorporates both, or several.

It's a mindset of how you view the world and what you think you deserve. If you're able to be kind to everyone else – treat them with compassion and gentleness, and support and hold them – then what stops you from putting yourself on that same list? We need to look at our inner conviction that others are better and more deserving than we are, and that we have to be there for them at any cost.

Dr Brené Brown, a researcher on vulnerability and shame, says: "When you get to a place where you understand that love and belonging – your worthiness – is a birthright and not something you have to earn, anything's possible. Keep worthiness off the table. Your increase can be



on the table, your promotion can be on the table, your title can be on the table and your grades can be on the table. But keep your worthiness for love and belonging off the table. And then – ironically – everything else just takes care of itself.”

The moment we question our right to exist and feel worthy, we question our right to be joyful, happy and self-actualised.

It’s being demanded of our spirits to find the way back to self-acceptance, self-love, self-appreciation – in short, self-esteem.

Nathaniel Branden shared the following at the first International Conference on Self-Esteem in 1990 in Asker/Oslo, Norway: “Self-esteem is the experience that we’re appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self-esteem is (a) confidence in our ability to think and cope with the challenges of life; and (b) confidence in our right to be happy – the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to respect our own needs and wants, and to enjoy the fruits of our efforts.”

Your job is to expand your notion of self, to feed your self-esteem so that you can show up in the world in all your magnificence.

When you’re willing to explore the depths of who you are and what you need, understanding that you’re as important as the next person and that your presence affects the whole, then you can start being authentically yourself. Start by thinking about your boundaries: when you say “yes” and when you say “no”. Often the former is spat out of your mouth by default, agreeing and committing without even running it through your filters and deciding whether you’re truly willing to do whatever’s being asked of you.

Stop worrying about others’ opinions: what other people think of you is none of your business. Yet how often is everything you do, think or feel based on whether others will approve of you? Every time you put another’s needs ahead of your own for the wrong reasons, effectively scratching yourself off your own priority list, you’re denying your own needs.

As you shine your light, others are inspired by you. Playing small serves no-one.

“To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don’t need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself,” said Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Buddhist leader and founder of the Order of Interbeing.

5 STEPS TO BECOMING “SELF-FULL”

- Ask yourself: would you expect your best friend to always put your needs before theirs? Wouldn’t that make them feel insignificant? Why should you do the same?
- Put yourself in your equation every day – something specifically to feed your soul.
- Let go of the need to make excuses when you want to refuse a request.
- Be aware whether you’re putting others first out of guilt or obligation – it’s a warning signal.
- Allow for both yourself and others, with the same kindness and consideration. 