

Your AUTHENTIC self

HOW TO LIVE YOUR PERSONAL TRUTHS FOR A MORE FULFILLING LIFE

Women play many roles during the course of their lives – child, partner, parent, colleague, friend, boss, mentor – and often change to suit others and their needs. How often do you find yourself agreeing with something that’s not your own view just to avoid conflict or to appear more affable? Throw in social media and the increasing pressure to have the perfect life, and it becomes easier to hide your true self behind an array of masks. But who are you? Where is your inner, authentic self? Living authentically is a phrase that has been thrown around by life coaches and

spiritual gurus for years, but what does it actually mean, and how do you go about finding your authentic self?

To live authentically is to align your actions and words with your inner beliefs and values. It involves mindfulness and grounding yourself in the current moment. It means taking the road to self-discovery, often a daily journey, to uncover what beliefs reflect you as an individual; analysing your upbringing, the values that shaped you, the value systems society believes you should hold, and deciding whether they’re truly for you. Do the values you currently hold give your life fulfilment and purpose, and make you happy?

Kerstin Jatho, a life coach and positive psychologist at 4seeds.co.za, takes it one step further: ‘Living an authentic life, in which your values, life purpose and strengths align, enables you to realise your full potential,’ she explains. ‘In positive psychology, authenticity would be classified as a meaningful life, where you strive to live according to your values, and where you strive to use your strengths for something much greater than yourself. We want to do “good” for the greater benefit of society and humankind. By focusing on something bigger than ourselves, we derive deeper meaning and purpose, which results in you feeling fulfilled, happy and content.’

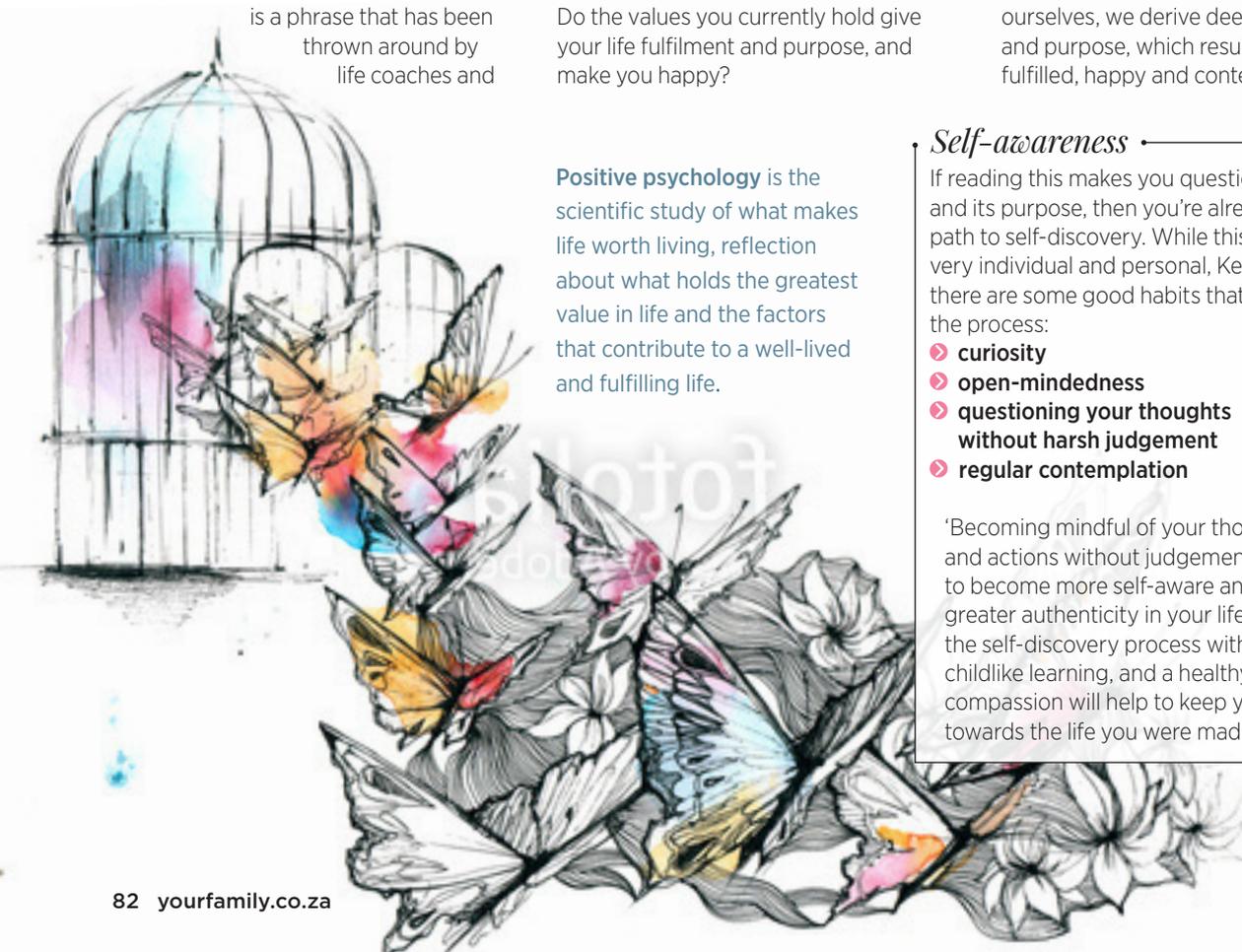
Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living, reflection about what holds the greatest value in life and the factors that contribute to a well-lived and fulfilling life.

Self-awareness

If reading this makes you question your life and its purpose, then you’re already on the path to self-discovery. While this process is very individual and personal, Kerstin believes there are some good habits that can assist with the process:

- ▶ **curiosity**
- ▶ **open-mindedness**
- ▶ **questioning your thoughts without harsh judgement**
- ▶ **regular contemplation**

‘Becoming mindful of your thoughts, feelings and actions without judgement is a sure way to become more self-aware and in turn ensure greater authenticity in your life. Embracing the self-discovery process with vigour, playful childlike learning, and a healthy dose of self-compassion will help to keep you on track towards the life you were made to live.’



Discovering the person you really are

The road to discovery is a constant journey. It requires patience, time and – above all – honesty with yourself. It involves discussions with those around you, and often difficult decisions as you choose to let go of beliefs that may have shaped who you are but no longer hold true for who you wish to become. 'A good starting point is to articulate what living authentically would look and feel like in all areas of your life,' suggests Kerstin. 'Spend time contemplating this and even visualising it. Bring in as many life areas as you can: work, family, friends, health, finances, hobbies, and self-care. Reflect on your current life, and establish how close you are to living an authentic life in each of these areas.'

The founder of positive psychology, Professor Martin Seligman, believed in five core steps to build wellbeing, happiness and authentic living, known as the PERMA model. 'This acronym, which stands for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement, is what we use to aid individuals in their discovery of the authentic self, helping them live a life full of meaning and purpose that is a true reflection of their self,' says Kerstin. 'These five steps are a great way to start living an authentic life as they bring you into greater connection with yourself, with others and with the life you want to live.'

Positive emotions

'In order to experience more happiness we need to become aware of our negative to positive emotions ratio,' says Kerstin. 'Ideally, for every negative emotion we want to feel three positive ones.' She suggests creating a mood journal where you write down your emotions as you get up and as you go to sleep, reflecting on the day and noticing what gave you joy and pleasure and what drained your energy. Daily meditations and focusing on life-affirming and positive self-reflection is also an excellent method to adopt.

“To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.”
— Oscar Wilde

Engagement

'This is where we use our strengths to experience performance and self-mastery,' says Kerstin, 'but the sad part is that many of us aren't sure what our strengths are.' Along with your mood journaling, jot down what you're naturally good at and what comes effortlessly to you. 'Alternatively, you can invite family and friends who know you well to tell you what they observe as your strengths. This can be a powerful and fun conversation where you can learn about how others perceive you. Once you've identified your strengths the next step is to begin using them more often, which leads to greater success in your daily life while being your most authentic self.'

Relationships

'When life becomes busy, often your relationships take a back seat. Start by making time for people you care about, like phoning a friend you haven't chatted to in a while,' suggests Kerstin. Are you grateful for certain individuals in your life? Make the time and effort to tell them. 'Becoming mindful to connect with the people you value and love most is a great way to feel part of the greater community,' says Kerstin, adding that listening attentively, actively expressing gratitude and even giving to others without expecting anything in return has a magical impact on our emotions and wellbeing while bringing joy and love to others. But remember to give of yourself within reason – the effect has to align with your values and should be driven from a place of purpose and not a need of affirmation.

Meaning

Find beauty and meaning in the everyday, create a ritual out of the mundane and turn it into something with value and purpose. 'We are meaning-making machines, and finding value in your work, tasks and activities is essential to living a happy life,' explains Kerstin. 'Go beyond the items that give you instant gratification and pleasure, and look deeper into things in your life that intrinsically motivate you. A simple but impactful method that stimulates meaning in your daily life is to change your routine. When you do this, you're taken out of automatic mindless processing.' Apply this to mundane work, such as washing dishes, as well as more complex work tasks. Becoming present in the moment – feeling, smelling, sensing and seeing – will add meaning and bring a sense of fulfilment to your everyday life.

Achievement

'Goal attainment and accomplishment is important to human beings' sense of purpose in the world.' As a life coach, Kerstin helps individuals set realistic attainable goals and assists them in the process of making them a reality. 'Set short-term (three-month), medium-term (12-month) and long-term (three-year) goals that challenge your skills and competencies but are still attainable,' she suggests. 'Write these goals down and then rate them on how much you value them (1-10) and how they would enhance your positive emotions, relationships, engagement and meaning.' Are the goals you set yourself true to what you want to achieve or are they dictated by a different source? Setting goals that are aligned with your core values and beliefs are easier to obtain than those that aren't because you have personal motivation driving you to reach them.

So what are you waiting for? Make 2018 the year of self-discovery, and start living the life you're meant to live.

