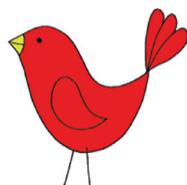


The Tao *of* Turning Fifty

What Every Woman in Her Forties
Needs to Know

Jennifer Boire



Little Red Bird Press

Published by LITTLE RED BIRD PRESS
Beaconsfield, Quebec

Copyright © 2011 by Jennifer Boire
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1466378115
ISBN-13: 9781466378117

*No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted
or stored, in any form by any means for whatever reasons,
without permission in writing from the publisher.*

Legal deposit/Dépôt légal,
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
and the Library and Archives of Canada,
Cataloguing in 2011

Boire, Jennifer, 1954

*Cover art: Monique Légaré
Author photograph Supa Studios*

Printed by CreateSpace, an Amazon.com company

The woman's journey
is to realize
her power
is within her.
As a woman.

– Joseph Campbell

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction: A Workbook for Women at Mid-Life	vii
What is the Tao and Valuing the Feminine	xi
SECTION I	1
I Have a Self? Self-Care for the Challenged	3
Why You Should Practice Self-Care: Preventing Burn-out	7
I am Enough! Learning How to Say No	11
I Need to Get Away: The Need for Time Alone	15
I Am So Tired: Why Rest is Radical	19
The Power of Doing Nothing: Getting in Touch with Your Cycle	25
Feeling like I'm Going Crazy!	29
I Feel like Crying One Minute, Laughing the Next	33
Why Am I So Angry? Listen to the Inner Bitch Goddess	37
Finding My Voice: Speaking My Truth	41
Where Did My Libido Go? Feeling Sexy When I <i>Feel</i> Like It	45
Do Be Do Be Do: For Women Who Do Too Much	51
Tango at Mid-Life: Stories of Creative Transformation	55

Simplicity: Going Squirrelly, Packrats and Empty Nesters	61
Going Down and In: Courage to Face the Dark	63
Inanna's Descent	67
I Am Not the Overarching Boss of Everything: Let Go of Control	75
Inner Guidance: How to Cultivate Your Own IGS System	81
SECTION II Menopausal Mindset	83
Is This Menopause? Menopause is Not a Disease	85
Why We Need Menopausal Wise Women	93
The Joy of Menopause: 10 Best Things	95
Fifty is Feisty	99
Self-Care: Mothering Ourselves	101
APPENDIX: Helpful Tips for Self-care	103
Journaling: 30 days to Change Your Neural Pathways	105
Kicking the Adrenaline Habit	107
7 Tools for Essential Body Wisdom	109
Creating a Mini-Retreat	111
Eating for Optimum Health and Herbal Remedies	113
Women's Circles (Finding Allies)	115
Celebrate the Change: Poetry about Turning Fifty and Menopause	121
Books & Resource List	125

Introduction:

A Workbook for Women in Mid-life

I have enjoyed greatly the second blooming...suddenly you find – at the age of fifty, say – that a whole new life has opened before you. – Agatha Christie

On the path of a woman's life, it's easier to see where you've been than where you are going. It is not a straight path or a highway from point A to point B. It is more of a spiral or labyrinth, an unfolding. The journey through mid-life is no different. It is not always clear what lies ahead. There are thick forests and clear spaces and twisty windy paths through deep woods.

What I've learned from interviewing many women in their forties and fifties is that a lot of us get sideswiped not just by hormones but by the yearnings and questions – we thought we were all grown up and over that confusion – but it starts to feel like a second adolescence – a new search for self, a need for freedom, a deep need to be alone with the questions: what do I love, what do I want to be? Who am I (again)?

This book points to some of the most burning questions, and helps you find your own answers through journal exercises, as well as pointing you to helpful resources and books. The key thing is to listen deeply to what your body and heart are telling you.

The Tao of Turning Fifty also addresses women at mid-life who may fear that they're going crazy, and those who want a road map for what is coming ahead, the 'whole new life' they'll experience at fifty. Okay, maybe there isn't a map, but this book offers a few guidelines for what to expect.

Maybe you're not fifty yet, not even thinking about it, but already in your forties you notice something is afoot: changes in your mood, changes in desire, changes in hormone, jobs, partners, perhaps kids leaving home, or parents needing health care. It's all about The Change, isn't it? But how are we supposed to enjoy the second half of our lives – including

the famous post-menopausal zest Margaret Mead crowed about – when we can't even find our glasses or remember why we walked into a room? And what about the sleepless nights, rage, anxiety and angst, vertigo and low libido?

There is more to mid-life than hormonal changes. What I really want to talk about in this book is how to find and maintain sanity and balance in the middle of mid-life turbulence. For some, the mid-life years are like a second adolescence without the zits! It's more than a change; it's an opportunity for transformation. This turbulence is what *The Tao of Turning Fifty* addresses – the emotional yoyo of mid-life changes – the feeling of going crazy, the fatigue, and the urge to run away and reinvent yourself.

Let me assure you that this transition period is really a blessing in disguise. It can be seen as a rite of passage to your woman's wisdom. Part of that wisdom involves slowing down and listening to your body, paying attention to your intuition. You are getting signals you need to listen to. You may have worked at a career all your life, or worked at home raising kids and had little time to wonder who you are or what you want, but now in mid-life, there can be no more sweeping what's bugging you under the rug. Some lucky women breeze through their late forties and fifties and never peek under the proverbial rug or feel a hot flash, but that's not *you* or you wouldn't be considering reading this book!

So, browse these chapters, open a page that calls to you. Whether you are in the middle of a mid-life transition or just curious about what's ahead, my hope is that in these pages you'll find some useful information and the tools to help you figure things out. By the end of this book, you'll be more in touch with your inner needs, maybe even feel a little more Zen. At the very least, you will take some baby steps toward giving yourself permission for rest and self-care – a great beginning, and my aim while writing this book.

I know from experience that it's the hardest thing a woman ever does – to find time for herself, and not feel selfish taking it. It's difficult to even put yourself on the to-do list (somewhere after cleaning out the cat litter, writing that overdue report and putting in a third load of laundry). However, it's important to know that the greatest good you can do in this world is to be balanced and grounded. When you feel solid, not stretched, you are better able to deal with stress in your family or at work. Women do an awful lot of the caring and loving and relationship building that goes on so it's important that you fight the fear of being selfish when it's time to take care of you. Your family and friends will then get the benefit of a wholehearted, happy you.

This workbook affords you a unique opportunity to learn about yourself and identify some of your needs. I hope to inspire you to look inward to find your own wisdom.

*I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures. – Tao Te Ching*

NB: you can write directly in this book or buy yourself a special notebook to journal in for the exercises at the end of each chapter.

What is the Tao?

Tao (pronounced Dow) is an ancient Chinese word meaning way or path, or sometimes doctrine or principle. It can also be described as the primordial essence or fundamental nature of the universe that cannot be named because it contains paradox, such as including both being and nothingness. Following the Tao implies the ultimate goal of harmony or being at one with the flow of the universe. ¹

For the purposes of this book, I use the Tao to mean a way, a path – to represent the circuitous path of a woman’s journey through mid-life.

Valuing the Feminine

Tao Te Ching #78

*Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.*

*The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice.*

*Therefore the Master remains
serene in the midst of sorrow.
Evil cannot enter his heart.
Because he has given up helping,
he is people’s greatest help.*

True words seem paradoxical.
Lao Tzu (translator Steven Mitchell)

¹ Wikipedia, The Tao.

Water is soft and yielding, yet strong. The Feminine has that quality, too. Wherever I use the word Feminine in this workbook, I mean the quality that is in both men and women, and that is particularly ignored or devalued in our western society.

Let's put a woman's mid-life struggle for self-care into context. In the Western world, we live in a culture that highly values productivity, assertiveness, aggression, drive, forward motion, which we like to consider as progress and have traditionally aligned with the world of work and the Masculine. We spend our lives with the on button pressed all the time, *work work work*. Being productive is good. However, we've created imbalance by banishing the day off, the Sabbath or rest day. The softer, inner values of rest, reflection and cultivating the artistic, inner soul qualities have become secondary. But that is exactly what we need as an antidote to being overly busy and exhausted. Getting in touch with the Feminine is an important survival tool for our planet right now, especially at mid-life, when so many workers are burning out, especially those in the caring professions. Taking a little down time to rest should not make us feel guilty, but somehow it does.

How do you get in touch with and strengthen your connection with the Feminine? On the most basic level, you acknowledge it whenever you take care of your body through conscious eating, exercise, bathing, resting, healing and lovemaking. You also nurture your connection to the Feminine by listening to your emotions and feelings. Especially at mid-life, the Feminine cries out for our attention, entreating us to find balance.

Productivity and keeping busy may improve our self-worth, but it can also lead to overwork, stress and exhaustion. We need down time to hang out and do nothing so we can allow a little joy and meaning into our lives, and find that spark of life we used to feel when we were younger.

I know for sure that when I take good care of myself, the world is also taken care of; it is of great benefit to everyone that I feel balanced and healthy.

The Tao is like the Great Mother:
Empty yet inexhaustible,
It gives birth to infinite worlds.

It is always present within you.
You can use it any way you want.

Tao Te Ching, #6, translator Stephen Mitchell

SECTION I

The Real Work

*It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,
And that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.*

– Wendell Berry

I Have a Self? Self-Care for the Challenged

We all must learn to believe that we are worthy and deserve time to pursue our own interests, to have our needs met and to enjoy lives that are rich, full and abundant in every way. Until we learn this soul lesson, we will always be in conflict as we continue to put others' needs ahead of our own. – Barbara Ganim, Susan Fox

I'm going to come right out and say it: cultivating a self is not selfish. If you are a woman, chances are you have been programmed to put others needs first – to take care of younger siblings, elderly parents, grandparents, husbands, children and co-workers before ever sitting down to relax. You may also be programmed to be a 'good girl' who thinks of others first; therefore booking yourself a massage, writing in your journal, getting a weekend away alone, eating lunch sitting down by a calm window instead of munching a banana on the run may feel too self-centered for you to even consider. But in this new work we are called to do in mid-life, it's time to take care of your Self. Believe it or not, you will be more helpful and useful to others if you are not running yourself into the ground.

Where do we begin to honour the Self? The place I start with is the one place I always have available to me: inside myself. I find a calm place to sit and breathe so I can calm the nervous flutter and mental noise. Sometimes in the middle of a hectic week, what I need is to trust the voice that is calling for rest. Sometimes I even take an afternoon nap. If you've never done this, it takes a little getting used to. The point is, how can you listen in to your own needs and be gentler with yourself?

It actually takes a great deal of courage and chutzpah to put your Self on the agenda. To push away all the items on your to-do list that over the years have made you feel worthy, useful, dutiful, or self-less and take time for *just you* – for your creativity, for your sanity, for your inner peace, for your sense of balance. The question is why do we feel selfish when we take time to care for ourselves or explore our creative passions? You are worthy and deserve to allow yourself to do what you love, to take time to enjoy the garden's lush flowers, the softly falling snow. You deserve a massage, an afternoon off to paint, a day of no

laundry or no housecleaning and less overtime! Can you love yourself as much as you love the important people in your life? Can you start to believe it?

Don't wait for a break-down, a broken leg, or a break-up to thrust you into self-care mode. Listen to the gentle urgings from your inner wisdom to treat your Self with tenderness and compassion instead of ignoring your needs for rest and running over your Self with steel-toed boots. Take a few minutes to breathe and reconnect with your intuition. Get in touch with the desire to be present; be your own best companion. And feel a sigh of relief as you do this. I invite you now to come home to your Self.

Here's how I do it: Once a week, I start the morning with a mini-retreat. I light a candle, put on some soothing music, do a centering breath exercise, then stretch and cradle my creaky hips on the floor. Sometimes I begin with some inspirational poetry. Mary Oliver is wonderful. Ah, this line from *Wild Geese* helps: "*You do not have to be good*", she says, "*you just have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.*" How I love to hear this line, which allows me to be good and love my Self at the same time. What does the soft animal of your body love?

Sometimes the restless-keeping-busy mode is really just resistance to being at home in my body. I am at home with myself today and it feels good.

Body Scan Exercise: Get in Touch With How You Feel

Begin with a centering breath. Sit comfortably and breathe in through your nose. Gently concentrate on the rise and fall of your belly with the in breath and out breath (rest your hands there if it helps). Breathe out gently through your relaxed open mouth; unclench the jaw. Now breathe into your head and neck. Then breathe into each area of your body, one at a time, from your shoulders down to your feet.

As you breathe, just notice if there is any tension, any discomfort in any part of your body. How are you feeling overall? Tired or sluggish, wide awake, joyful? When you're ready, open your eyes and write in your journal.

Note: The Body Scan Exercise is a good preliminary step to writing in your journal every day.

Journal this:

Is there anything that is bothering you at the moment?

If you could sum up what your body is trying to tell you today in one sentence, what would it be?