

## Do Self Help Books Help?

Contributed by Steve Gillman  
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{bot\_wrgoogle}But then there are the books that are meant to help you become a "better" person in general. These are the ones about self esteem, motivation, attitude and self image. Do these make your life better? Some are useful, but there is one glaring flaw in many of them.

The problem I am referring to is the excessive focus on the "ego" self, as though helping that grow stronger or "better" is somehow an improvement. Some books recommend affirmations, for example, which you use to convince yourself that you are strong, wealthy, or healthy, without reference to reality. But what a fragile sort of confidence you gain when it is based on this sort of posturing.

Wouldn't it be better to have the capacity to be happy and at peace even if you are weak, poor, and ill? There is certainly nothing wrong with pursuing strength, wealth and health, but being attached to these outcomes as an important part of who you are creates a lot of unnecessary stress and suffering. Yet this is what many "self help books" encourage you to do.

Do we really want to encourage our ego self? This is the self that creates an image of who we "should" be, and reminds us (painfully) when we don't live up to that image. This is the self which tells us we need to impress others, to be "great" and to rush to achieve as much as we can to prove how "important" we are. It is forever comparing us to an ideal it invents and then making us suffer for not living up to it.

Following the advice of this false self is a recipe for anxiety and mental pain. Why, then, would we want self help books which encourage us to build it up, and to embrace it even more strongly, when letting it go is what we really need? We don't need such books.

This touches on areas that are commonly called spiritual, but the label isn't necessary. Simple honest observation can show us that whatever our true self consists of, there are also parts of us that encourage chasing false values based on what this ego self insists is important. Peace of mind is certainly more valuable than any of the temporary emotional highs we can get through that sort of "self help."

When choosing and using self help books then, avoid those which plainly encourage the ego self. These include any which suggest that success is about making lots of money, being better than others, impressing people, improving your "self image" through pretenses, or in any way building up a "self" that can be torn down. Look for those which help you let go of the nonsense associated with this "created" identity, and help you act from a deeper purpose and sense of who you are.

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