



LISA BRONNER

# SOAP & SOUL READER'S GUIDE

Whether you read *Soap & Soul* by yourself or with a group, whether you read all the stories or jumped straight to the recipes, whether you listened or e-read or held the hardcover, this Reader's Guide is for you. Even if you haven't yet read the book at all, this Guide will help you take the next step forward in your green journey. Grab something to write with and on, find a comfy spot, and dive right in.

-Lisa

## WELCOME

*You've picked up this book perhaps because you want to learn about healthier personal and home care, perhaps because someone gave you a bottle of Dr. Bronner's Pure-Castile Magic Soap and you want to know what to do with it, or perhaps because you've seen some of my tips online and want to have them all compiled in one place. You're in the right place.*

~ page 13, The Introduction

Why did you pick up this book or why are you interested in this topic? How did the book meet or miss your expectations? What were your three biggest learnings or takeaways from the book? Did anything you read surprise you?

*As you step inside [my house] perhaps you'll say, "This house is so . . ." And I hope the next word is something like "comfortable," "welcoming," or "homey." I'd be disappointed if the adjective you chose was "clean." I don't want you to notice clean. I want you to notice that life is ready to happen here.*

~page 28, The Introduction

This is how I hope others describe my house. How do you want others to describe your home and do you think it achieves that? If not, what's in the way? Think of a house you've been in that feels the way you want yours to feel. What contributed to that impression when you entered? How can you bring that feeling to your home?



## HABITS

*I finally landed on four tasks that are the linchpins to get my day moving. I call these my First Four. They need doing every morning, so there's no decision. The answer is yes. They are:*

- *Dress ready for the day.*
- *Make my bed.*
- *Empty the kitchen sink.*
- *Start a load of laundry.*

*And even if the rest of the day spirals off course, I can look at the Four and say, "I did that."*

~ page 31, The Bath and Bedroom

Identify your "First Four" (or three or five) tasks that jumpstart the productivity in your day. These are tasks that need doing every day with no decisions. What is it about these specific tasks that get your day moving or started off right? Have they always been the same or how have they changed over the years?

*Tah-Dah lists are far superior [to To-Do lists]. In them I record everything I accomplished in that day, big and small, whether I had intended to or not. This is how to incorporate, and even justify, all that unplanned stuff that derailed the to-do list. It transforms the unexpected into an accomplishment...And here's the magic: unlike on a To-Do list, everything on a Tah-Dah list is already done.*

~ page 32, The Bath and Bedroom

Write yourself a Tah-Dah list for yesterday, or if you're at the end of today, then for today. What did you do, both planned and unplanned, big accomplishments and little? Write one for the past week, for the past year. Do this at the end of the day for a sense of accomplishment or as an antidote whenever you're stuck feeling unaccomplished and as though nothing got done. If you're struggling to see what you've accomplished, ask some trusted friends or family.



Healthy skin and body care begins with lifestyle. If you can't read [Soap & Soul] any further than this point right here, you'll still have gained the most essential takeaway: health and beauty don't come primarily from a bottle.

~ page 34, The Bath and Bedroom

The five life habits I've identified as most impacting health and beauty are: eating nutritious whole foods, drinking plenty of water, getting 7-9 hours of sleep each night, exercising regularly, and relaxing. Which of these are you doing well? Pause right here and congratulate yourself for that. Which area could you do better? What is one step you can take towards improvement in that area? Is there anything you would add to this list?



## GOING GREEN

When you hear of the idea of chemical exposure, perhaps you think of billowing smokestacks or industrial sewage discharging into rivers. While those are real, the chronic daily chemical exposure most of us face is in the products we put on our bodies. Between our cleansers, moisturizers, skin treatments, powders, deodorants, perfumes, colognes, and makeup, we apply, on average, 13 products daily to our bodies, with 169 unique ingredients.

~ page 35, The Bath and Bedroom

It's time for a Bathroom Cabinet Inventory. Make a list of all the products that you regularly apply to your body. How many are on your list? Circle the top three products that contact your skin the most each day. (These will be leave-on products you wear daily. Hint: your deodorant is likely one of them.) Look up these three on the Environmental Working Group's (EWG's) Skin Deep Database, [ewg.org/skindeep](http://ewg.org/skindeep). If its hazard rating is higher than 3, see EWG's suggestions for better options. Find one you like, then move on to analyze the next product on your list.

Now let's look at the Cleaning Cabinet. Make a list of all the products in your cleaning cabinet. Circle the three that you use the most. Look them up on the EWG's Guide to Healthy Cleaning, [ewg.org/cleaners](http://ewg.org/cleaners). If it ranks worse than a "B", try out one of the recipes in Soap & Soul instead, or look for another store-bought product on the EWG site that ranks better. One by one, research each of the products you use and swap them out, if necessary. Dispose of products you do not use—bear in mind that some need to go to a hazardous waste drop-off site.

The two GIY (Green-It-Yourself) recipes I wrote that everyone should try first with Dr. Bronner's products are the Foaming Hand Soap (page 45) made with the Castile Magic Soap and the All-Purpose Cleaning Spray (page 91) made with either the Magic Soap or the Sal Suds Cleaner. Have you tried them yet? If not, go do so right now. What scent do you most like for the foaming soap? Did you customize your dilutions with any essential oils? What have you washed besides hands with the foaming soap? What have you used the All-Purpose Spray on? Which other GIY recipes were you or are you most eager to try out from the book? If you've tried them, what did you think?



## IDENTITY

What a blessed gift that we can release our intangible frustrations, sorrows, and confusion through physical effort. We can walk them off, run them off, crochet them off, knead them off, dig them into the garden soil. A clearing, a cleaning, a weeding, a sorting, a de-wrinkling of what is before us and what is within us. ~ page 119 The Laundry Room

I talk about the therapeutic value of busy little somethings—small physical tasks that help us calm our spirits, create momentum, gain perspective, and build resolve to tackle bigger, more difficult intangible tasks. For me these are cooking, crocheting, gardening, and walking. What smaller physical or organizational activities help you prepare for and manage difficult big tasks? How can you incorporate this strategy to navigate the turmoil and tangles in your days?





Storytelling played a powerful role in my growing up, and part of my journey has been untangling the facts from the embellishments. What stories, silly anecdotes, or tall tales have been passed down through your family and been retold at family gatherings? When were they told and who told them? Were there particular traits that were valued or censured in them? Were there details that you learned later were exaggerated or completely fabricated?

*When a crowd of voices populates the white spaces of my life, they drown out the ones I most want—and need—to hear: the voices of loved ones, the voices of inspiration, the voices of my own reason and imagination. These surplus voices need to go.*

~ page 221, Afterword

Conduct a “voice audit” in your life. List out all the voices you encounter in your day: the in-person voices, as well as the voices you read or hear in-print, TV, radio, podcasts, streaming, news, blogs, comments, chat threads. Lastly, add in the voices from social media. How many voices did you list? Circle the voices that are the highest priority to you. Put a box around the voices that are the least important. How can you amplify the most important and minimize the least important? Find three ways to turn off, unsubscribe, log off, and reduce access for those less important voices.

*All these various identities were cluttering up my drawers and closets with unused equipment, weighing down my house, and getting in the way of accessing what I needed for today. These old identities needed to go! This idea of naming identities, and relegating them to the past, gave me a strong framework to apply to the objects in my house. “Is this item part of who I am today, or will it be part of my certain future?” If not, out it went.*

~ page 33, The Bath and Bedroom

Conduct an “identity inventory.” Write out the identities you have right now at this moment in your life. Include relationship roles, professions, hobbies, and responsibilities. What identities have you had in the past that you no longer have today? What identities did you think you might have in the future but they never materialized? Then open an overstuffed closet, cabinet, or drawer, and pull out all the items that are unrelated to your current or near future identities. Donate, rehome, or dispose of these items. Then move on to the next closet, cabinet, or drawer until you have pared down all the surplus items.



## INSPIRATION

*In Celtic tradition, there are places in this world and moments in our lives where the separation between heaven and earth is just a whisper’s width. They call these “thin places.” In such places or at such times, the heart swells and the spirit enlivens and every breath takes in more than air. The temporal and the eternal brush shoulders. While it is impossible to remain in the thin places, it is possible to carry the memory of them, place cues to remind us of their occurrence.*

~ pg. 224, Afterword

Share about your experience with a thin place. Was it a place, a time, an event? Do you have more than one? What cue can you bring into your daily life to remind you of these thin place experiences? Perhaps a picture, a memento, or another token that takes you back to that moment and sensation. What else in your days lifts you above the tasks and to-dos and connects you with a bigger picture? Where could you use more of that?

What next steps will take on your green journey, to simplify and lighten the burdens and bring more joy?



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