

THE AWAKENED PATH

From Chaos to Significance

A Memoir of Multiple Sclerosis, Identity,
and the Journey from Survival to an Awakened Life

NATASHA PINTO

**You Are Not Trapped by Circumstance.
You Are Limited by Unconscious Design.
And Design Can Be Rebuilt, Consciously.**



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Disclaimer

This book is not a substitute for therapy, medical care, or professional support. It is intended as a companion for reflection and growth, and I encourage you to seek qualified support where needed.

This book is an honest account of lived experience. It includes references to physical illness, emotional trauma, sexual experiences, and sexual assault.

Some sections are intense and may be distressing. Reader discretion is advised. Please engage with this book at your own pace with self-compassion.

Dedication

To the unseen strength within us, the quiet force that never leaves, even when we forget it is there.

To the storms that reshaped me and revealed who I truly am.

And to every soul ready to move from chaos to significance.

May you remember your power. May you walk your path with courage. May you become who you were always meant to be.

Epigraph

Make yourselves nests of pleasant thoughts. None of us knows what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thought, proof against all adversity. Bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, faithful sayings, treasure houses of precious and restful thoughts, which care cannot disturb, nor pain make gloomy, nor poverty take away from us.

- John Ruskin

Acknowledgements

This book began as a whisper, a quiet insistence from somewhere deep within that, my story, and the frameworks I had been living and refining through years of personal reckoning, were meant to be shared. What followed was not a straight path. It was, fittingly, an awakened one.

To the Creator, angels and souls who guide me, thank you for the storms that built the spine of this book and the blessings that filled its pages. For the breaking, the rebuilding, and the becoming.

To my readers, you are the reason these pages left my private journals and entered the world.

To those who kept asking, when is the book coming? Your persistence became my accountability.

To my mother, who told everyone her daughter was bold and beautiful, I hope this book proves you right. To my father, who said it is better to wear out than rust out, I finally understood. To my family, thank you for loving me as I am, not as the world expected me to be.

To my dear husband, Daniel Pledger, whom I lovingly call Aussie Cakes, insider joke between us, or My Pledger (yes, I am territorial but not possessive about that 5 ft 9-inch human who insists he is taller, haha), thank you for walking beside me through reinvention, resistance, and revelation.

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To those who stayed, you know who you are. Thank you. To those who left, thank you as well. Some chapters are meant to close so new ones can begin.

To the sceptics who thought I was just doing things, thank you for the bamboo years. While nothing appeared to be happening above ground, the roots were growing deep and wide.

To the critics, I hold no resentment. You played your role in my evolution. I wish you growth, clarity, and peace.

To the souls who have departed but shaped me, your love echoes through every page.

To Gaia, the trees, wind, sky, oceans, and stillness, thank you for holding me.

To nature's daily tease, mind-blowing sunsets, clouds shaping hearts, you reminded me beauty never waits for permission.

To strangers who shared wisdom, kindness, and light, you changed me in ways you may never know.

To the animals who crossed my path, you softened hard days.

To those I may have hurt, knowingly or unknowingly, I see it, I own it, and I wish you healing.

To my Past, thank you for the lessons, even the brutal ones. My Present, thank you for the breath, the clarity, the love I get to live now. To my Future, I am curious about you. Be kind, but stretch me. I am ready.

This book is not just mine.

It is the result of every collision, every connection, every collapse, and every calling.

Every chapter of my life built this one.

To every soul living with an invisible disability, you are seen. Not by the world that keeps asking you to explain yourself, but by these pages, which were written knowing you exist. Your story matters. Your fight matters. Your refusal to be defined by what cannot be seen is one of the bravest things a human being can do.

To the MS warriors specifically, this book carries you in every chapter. You are not your worst day. You are the stubbornness that keeps showing up anyway.

To the outliers, the rebels, the ones who never quite fit the mould and stopped apologising for it, you are my people. This book was written for the ones who colour outside the lines and then realise the lines were never theirs to follow.

To the bikers, Night riders, the adventure junkies, the ones who jump off cliffs and out of planes and up mountains not because life is easy but because it is precious, thank you for reminding the rest of us what it looks like to be fully, unapologetically alive.

To my gym, for being the place where I regularly blew my own mind. For starters, carrying 20-litre water cans regularly, doing that just for fun, just to see if I could, cheap thrills. You know what you did.

And to the things that held the space while the words arrived, to the cafes, Daily Bean, Theo Cafe, Blue Tokai, Third Wave Coffee Roasters, where I showed up normally on Wednesdays for the 'buy one get one free' deal and somehow always ended up with an iced tea and three more chapters. To the tables and chairs that bore the weight of this thinking, the roads that got me there, the meals that kept me going, the electricity that kept the screen lit, and the laptop that held every draft without complaint, you were part of this too. Everything that showed up, showed up for a reason.

And to the people who quietly held the everyday together while I was busy holding this book together, thank you. Some of the most important support in our lives is the support we barely have to notice.

To my editor, designer, publisher, and everyone behind the scenes who helped bring *The Awakened Path* to life, thank you for helping turn these words, stories, and ideas into something I can finally hold in my hands.

And to the version of me who started writing this book through diagnosis and darkness, through heartbreak and healing, through collapse and becoming, thank you for believing in your vision. This book is evidence that the path was worth walking.

The Awakened Path has been in the making since 2019. It is not simply a book. It is a life, documented.

With love, light and fierce gratitude,

Natasha Pinto

Voices Across the Path

Tasha's Awakened Path is more than a book—it's an experience that stays with you. What stands out is its raw honesty, drawn from lived experiences. It doesn't just talk about surviving the day; it pushes you to live each moment with awareness, intention, and a sense of fullness.

Her thoughts strongly echo the unspoken realities of many who navigate life within society's rigid definitions of disability. It gives voice to struggles that are often felt but rarely articulated.

This is not just a read—it's a perspective shift. A reminder to truly live each day, rather than simply exist until time passes.

A must-read for anyone seeking depth, courage, and a more mindful way of living—especially for the powerful idea of redesigning and consciously rebuilding one's life.

Dr. Asha Mathew

**Senior Manager Quality Systems and Assistant Professor,
Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research**

Everyone goes through pain in their own ways, the degree of suffering and outcomes vary based on individual capabilities; it shapes their life and perspective in a definitive way. I believe there are 2 kinds of people in this world.

One, that goes through it, battles hard & comes out triumphant and chooses to make other people's lives better, listening to them with intent, walking with them through their uncertain times, uplifting them, giving them direction in life to make better choices;

While the second, projects their suffering and afflicts others with the same agony

Natasha is the First kind... a woman of unbelievable strength and endurance. I met her when everything in life was crumbling, every day since has only been a blessing, learning gratitude with grace, breaking stereotypes, self love and understanding human nature closely.

This book is her odyssey, every word reflecting a sacred journey to finding her true self, her purpose, believing that the Spirit which has created the world, lives within us too. It encourages you to look beyond your limiting beliefs, challenge your inhibitions and trust the process. It imbibes that every setback is only going to catapult into you a bigger role, to finding your true purpose.

Heartfelt blessings to Natasha! May your book inspire wisdom, courage and consciousness to countless souls

Sangita Das
DGM buying

The Awakened Path felt like sitting with someone who finally put words to the chaos I couldn't explain. Natasha doesn't just share her story; she offers a brave, honest mirror that never glamorises struggle, but honours it and gently shows you what's possible beyond it.

What stood out to me most was how unapologetically real this work is. She doesn't hide the messy, uncomfortable parts of her story, and that's exactly what makes The Awakened Path so impactful. The honesty and strength don't just inspire; they shed light on things you may not have been able to name yourself.

The way Natasha has walked through that chaos, found language for it, and now uses it to support others as a life coach is deeply moving. Her experiences have forged her into someone who can hold space for others in their darkest seasons. She hasn't just inspired a community; she's clearly had to become her own source of strength first. She has met herself in that level of pain and still built a meaningful life, taking her lived experience and holding up a lamp for those lost in their own chaos. She has chosen to become a steady light for others. She is one of those rare people whose way of moving through pain makes this earth feel more compassionate and

awake, a quiet proof that one person's courage can make the world a softer, more hopeful place.

Vikash Sharma

An Awakened Explorer of Consciousness | Global Trade Compliance Professional

Natasha has created something really special here. This book feels deeply lived, not just written. The way she weaves her story with real insight into how our minds and patterns shape our lives is so powerful. The “hearts” and her explanation of the Reticular Activating System really stayed with me, it's such a beautiful reminder that what we focus on truly shapes what we experience. This is the kind of work that can genuinely change how someone sees themselves and their life.

Amanda Doggett

**Author | Founder, The Regulation Collective
Maternal Workforce Transformation Strategist**

This is one of those books that you'll come back to again, and again, and again. Natasha writes beautifully and openly about her own experiences, blending anecdotes with science and sharp insight to give you a series of practical steps that can help you change the direction of your life. It's an energising and inspiring read that I wholeheartedly recommend for anyone seeking deeper meaning and purpose in their life.

Jhanvi Gudka

Communications Director | Pilates Instructor

I've had the privilege of reading many powerful self-help books, drawing wisdom from Stoic philosophers and modern-day thought leaders alike. Yet never before have I had the privilege of witnessing an author rise and grow through personal hardships and losses that many would consider impossible to overcome.

This book, with its detailed research into the human psyche, can easily be considered a North Star for those navigating life's challenges. It transforms

misfortune into purpose, combining hard-earned experience with rigorous scientific research to guide readers through life's thick, thicker, and thin.

For the first time in a long while, a self-help book feels neither accusatory nor prescriptive. Instead, it is inviting—welcoming readers from all walks of life, each carrying their own unique struggles, and offering insight, understanding, and hope without judgment.

Gautam Kamat

Executive director in a hospitality company | Literary enthusiast | Mountaineer

Natasha Pinto writes from a place of lived experience, thoughtfully exploring how unconscious patterns quietly shape the way we see ourselves and the world.

These patterns play a critical role in leadership, decision-making, and identity. Through her writing, she invites the reader to slow down, notice, and reconnect with what sits beneath automatic reactions — opening space for more conscious choice and personal truth.

The Awakened Path is both a personal journey and a reflective exploration that brings together insight and practical application. It is also a gentle invitation: as she learns to see more clearly and act with intentional change, so can you.

Sarah Debusscher

**Executive & Systemic Leadership Coach, This Is My Table™
Former Director, London Stock Exchange Group**

What stayed with me most after reading The Awakened Path was not just the story itself, but the human being behind the words.

As someone who has had the privilege of knowing Natasha personally, I can say this book carries the same warmth, sincerity, quiet strength, and emotional honesty that define her as a person. In a world where people often hide behind perfection, Natasha has chosen something far more courageous — authenticity.

This book does not try to impress the reader; it gently reaches out and reminds them that they are not alone in their struggles, questions, fears, or moments of uncertainty. That is what makes it so deeply moving. It feels less like being spoken to, and more like being understood.

What I admire most is the humility with which Natasha shares her journey. There is no noise, no performance — just genuine truth, compassion, and a heartfelt desire to help others navigate life with greater awareness, courage, and grace. That kind of writing cannot be manufactured; it can only come from someone who has truly lived, reflected, evolved, and chosen empathy despite life's hardest moments.

I genuinely believe this book will touch many lives — not because it promises easy answers, but because it offers something far more meaningful: hope, perspective, and human connection.

Natasha, I am incredibly proud of you — not only for writing this book, but for having the courage to be seen so honestly through it. May The Awakened Path travel far and wide, finding the people who need it most, exactly when they need it.

Wishing you every success, every blessing, and a truly memorable book launch. The world needs more voices that heal quietly, inspire deeply, and remind people of their own strength — and yours is certainly one of them.

Commander Siddharth Kher (Ex Navy)

MBA (Strategy & HR), B.Tech (EEE & ICT) , Global SCM

Independent Director

DIN : 11522455

Foreword

I rarely come across a book that so precisely articulates what I have spent decades teaching, mentoring, and living.

The Awakened Path is not just another self-help title; it is a masterclass in resilience and human potential.

At its core, Natasha Pinto delivers a truth I have seen transform thousands of lives: your internal architecture, not your circumstances, is what ultimately shapes your outcomes.

In a world obsessed with external noise—the economy, the market, the childhood story, the “luck” factor—this book cuts through the excuses with surgical precision.

Natasha reminds us (through sharing her own story) that every result we experience is first designed in the invisible architecture of our beliefs, our mindset frameworks, our emotional defaults, and our daily psychological habits. Change the blueprint, and the building changes. Blame the weather outside and you remain stuck in the same house forever.

Natasha doesn’t peddle fluffy positivity. She demands rigorous self-audit. She shows, with clinical clarity and real-world case studies, how high performers don’t wait for better circumstances—they engineer a superior internal operating system that makes better circumstances inevitable. This is exactly the philosophy I built my own life and businesses on.

I went from commission housing and manual supermarket jobs to global impact and financial freedom not because the world suddenly became kinder, but because I rewired my inner architecture first. I stopped accepting my own bullshit excuses and started living by non-negotiable principles. Natasha’s work validates that journey on every page.

The book is practical. You won’t just read theories, you’ll be handed tools to map your current internal blueprint, identify the hidden limiting

structures, and replace them with high-performance architecture. Her frameworks for “rearchitecting” identity, decision-making, and emotional resilience are clean and actionable.

Whether you are a CEO, an entrepreneur, or simply someone who refuses to settle for mediocrity, this book gives you the exact blueprint to build the life you were meant to live.

I am recommending it without hesitation.

Ron Malhotra

Executive Leadership Coach | Thought Leader | Global Speaker

Preface

A Note from My Soul to Yours

This book is a bridge between chaos and significance, built from a life that refused to end at survival.

In psychology, significance can refer to the human need to feel that we matter. But in *The Awakened Path*, I use the word more broadly. Significance is the conscious expression of what matters most to us through purpose, contribution, alignment, and the life we are here to live.

At its deepest level, significance is about discovering and living our calling, our soul's purpose, rather than simply proving our worth to the world.

This book exists because there are far too many people who look "fine" on the outside while silently falling apart inside, wondering if anyone can see what they are carrying. It is for those who have been misdiagnosed, misunderstood, minimised, or told "it's all in your head" when you knew, deep in your bones, that something much deeper was happening.

Awakening rarely arrives as a dramatic moment like a "ta-da, here I am". It comes as a series of small, inconvenient truths that refuse to be ignored. It feels like losing the life you thought you were building, titles, timelines, relationships, certainty, so that a truer life can take shape underneath. Awakening is not glamorous. It is raw, tender, sometimes lonely, and often uncomfortable.

If you have picked up this book, I trust your life has already brought you here for a reason. Perhaps you are exhausted from holding it all together. Maybe your body has started whispering or screaming. Maybe you have checked every box of "success" and still feel strangely empty. Somewhere inside, a wiser part of you knows this is not all you came here for.

The Awakened Path is my story, but it is also an invitation to expand yours. It weaves my journey with Multiple Sclerosis, heartbreak, reinvention, and

leadership with the tools and frameworks that emerged from that journey. You will read about collapsing on an airport runway, being told I might never run again, and then choosing to run half-marathons, climb mountains, and build a life and business that feel deeply aligned.

This is not a textbook or a quick-fix manual. It is a companion for the days your faith shakes, your identity crumbles, and your nervous system feels like it is on fire. My promise to you is simple: I will not sugarcoat the hard parts, and I will not leave you in the dark without a lamp. In these pages, you will find both, the truth of the abyss and the tools to rise from it.

May this book remind you that you were never broken. You were always becoming.

Author's Note

I wrote the first line of this book on my phone while lying on a hospital bed, waiting to share it with the world.

That is, I think, the most accurate description of how this book was written. In the gaps. Between infusions and office and bungee jumps and board breaks and long walks where I talked to the trees. Not in a quiet study with a cup of tea and a beautiful view. In the actual middle of the life it is describing.

An Author's Note is supposed to be the part where I explain myself. Tell you what the book is about, why I wrote it, what I hope you take from it. But the Preface already does that.

So instead, I will tell you the thing I almost did not write. The thing I cut seventeen times and put back in eighteen. This book took eight years. Eight years of starting and stopping, of thinking I was not yet qualified, not healed enough, not far enough from the story to tell it clearly. I kept waiting to arrive somewhere. To be fixed. To have a tidy ending. To be able to say: and then everything was fine.

Everything is not fine. Everything is also, simultaneously, more than I ever imagined. Both are true. That is the part nobody told me about awakening. It does not resolve. It expands. You do not reach a place where the difficulty stops. You reach a place where the difficulty no longer has the final word.

This note is for the person who picked up this book wondering if they are too far gone, too late, too complicated, or too invisible to matter. You are not. I was all those things on the day I started writing. I am still some of them on certain Tuesdays.

The book is real. The mess is real. The transformation is real. Walking with a walker followed by the half-marathon is real. The snoring husband and the mosquito alibi and the Cerelac and the bungee jump in the Himalayas are all real.

With everything I have,

Natasha

For The Reader

Who this book is for, and how to use it

You built a life. You followed the rules. You did everything expected of you.

And somewhere along the way, you lost sight of who you truly are.

Multiple Sclerosis forced me to stop and ask the question most of us spend a lifetime avoiding: who am I beneath everything I have been taught to become?

This book is what I found.

Someone gets you. You are not alone in this. And if I did it, so can you.

It is for anyone who has arrived at that question, by diagnosis, by heartbreak, by burnout, by a quiet Tuesday when the life you built suddenly felt like someone else's. Whether you are still standing or already in the wreckage. Whether you know exactly why you picked this up, or you simply felt pulled.

You are not here by accident.

What this book offers is not a roadmap. It is a mirror. And what you see in it may change everything.

This book is written through the lens of a woman's experience, my experience, but the architecture of identity does not discriminate. If you are not a woman and this book found you anyway, welcome.

What this book will give you

By the end of *The Awakened Path*, you will understand something no amount of goal-setting has ever given you: the reason the patterns keep returning is not a failure of willpower. It is the architecture of your identity, and architecture can be redesigned.

How to read this book

Parts I through III are memoir: my story, told honestly, without performance. Parts IV through VI are the frameworks, tools, science and structure for doing this work yourself.

Read it from beginning to end the first time. The memoir earns the framework.

The tables are references. Return to them. Write in the margins. The 27-Day Integration Protocol at the back is the bridge between understanding and living. When you finish reading, start there.

One thing before you begin

You do not have to get this right. This is not a test.

The goal is not to finish this book. The goal is to finish it differently than you began it.

This book is meant to be marked. Underline what hits. Circle what challenges you. Star what you want to return to. Write in the margins. Dog-ear the pages that feel like they were written for you. A clean copy means you read it. A marked-up copy means it read you.

With love,

Natasha

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PART **I**

THE JOURNEY

**My Story of Gratitude, Grit,
Perseverance and Determination**

Chapter 1

Roots and Wings

It is better to wear out than to rust out.

Born in Cochin: The Queen of the Arabian Sea

As a four-year-old growing up in Cochin, I had three recurring dreams that I can only now see for what they were: previews.

The first was of flying, which years later perhaps explains my love for bungee jumping and skydiving, or maybe it meant something deeper.

The second was stranger. I was in a large black pot over a fire while tiny figures danced and celebrated around me. It had all the logic of a Looney Tunes cartoon, yet I never felt afraid. I only remember the feeling of celebration. Looking back, I wonder if it was my child mind trying to make sense of a calling I was not yet old enough to understand.

The third dream stayed with me the most. It was simple. I was teaching people who had been left behind by the world, showing them etiquette, hygiene, life skills, and the unwritten rules that many people absorb without ever being taught. I was equipping them and sending them back into the world.

At four years old, I could not have explained what it meant. Even today, I do not think it was ever pointing me towards a career. It felt more like a calling, a quiet responsibility that existed long before I had the language or the courage to embrace it.

I did not know the word for it then. Today, I do.

So anyways, coming to my roots, let us jump right in. I was born on a mystical island, a land far, far away.

Actually, scratch that. This is supposed to be my non-fiction masterpiece, not a fairy tale, haha!

So, let us reset.

I was born in a beautiful port city called Cochin, or Kochi, as they call it now, in Kerala, also known as God's Own Country. And honestly, having grown up there, I understand why someone gave it that name.

This is a city where nothing is just one thing. You have got Portuguese, Dutch, British, Jewish, Indian and more, all influences co-existing. Churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, and everyone just doing their thing. No drama, no identity crisis, just... happily existing. And I think that landed somewhere in me early.

I did not spend years growing up there, but clearly, I spent enough. Because one thing stuck: you do not have to fit into one neat box to make sense. You can be many things at once and still be whole. You can carry contrast without it confusing you.

Looking back now, that feels important because life did not exactly hand me a simple, linear story later on. And maybe the reason I did not completely lose myself in the chaos is because a part of me already understood this: things do not have to be perfect or predictable to work. They just have to be real.

Bahrain Years: The Tiny Island That Raised Me

My family relocated to Bahrain in the 70s. I was made here in the 80s, haha. Now you need to listen carefully when I tell you the island is tiny. The island is about 50 km long and 16 km wide. But that small island was everything for me during that time.

Rosary time in our home in Bahrain was its own institution. Every evening, the whole family would sit together for the rosary. Each of us, in our own world, half present, half somewhere else entirely. Mum was pious and earnest from start to finish. My younger brother and I would begin with intention and slowly drift. Then there was Dad. He would start the prayers at full volume, authoritatively, setting the pace, and then accelerate until the words ran together like a bullet train gathering speed, and then soften so completely that you had to pay very close attention just to know if he had finished. I am sure that is the story in many households. We used to tease my mum about burning so many candles that she was bribing all the saints

in heaven at once. It was family time in the truest sense, not because we were perfectly attentive, but because we were all there, together, in the same imperfect, beloved room.

The swings at the beaches were my haven. The blue water meeting the horizon, the warmth of the sand between my toes, the scent of salt in the air that seemed to bring promise to everything in sight. I would spend hours daydreaming while looking at the Arabian Sea. The parks are where the entire world came to play. People from nationalities from across the globe were mixing, chatting, eating and laughing in five separate languages. This, to me, is where I discovered that diversity is beautiful.

Anglo-Indian Heritage: Rhythm, Faith and Fierce Love

Running through everything is this golden thread of my heritage. I am Eurasian; now we are all called Anglo-Indian. Dutch, Portuguese, and Indian ancestry, all mixed together. My identity has always attracted a particular kind of confusion from strangers. Over years of travelling, I have been mistaken for South American, Portuguese, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Indonesian, Filipino, Latino. I have stopped correcting people. There is something quietly wonderful about being unclassifiable. It means you cannot be put in a box. Music was an integral part of our home. Jim Reeves singing "Welcome to My World" every Sunday morning. Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton as my mom prepared dinner. The soft voice of Don Williams making even sad songs sound like comfort. These were not just songs. They were the soundtrack of love, the soundtrack of families, the soundtrack of life happening the way it should. We Anglo-Indians are loud. We laugh with our bodies. We celebrate everything: birthdays, promotions, Tuesdays if we feel like it. But family does not end at mom and dad and brothers and sisters. Family means second cousins, third cousins, people who are not necessarily related to you at all, but you know what? They showed up and they stayed. That is family. It is like what you see in the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," where everyone knows what you are up to and everyone has two cents, and yet it all magically hangs together because love is louder than all the crazy. Of course we fight. In a community this loud and interwoven, clashes are to be expected. But forgiveness is part of who we are. We do not nurse a grudge (we try not to, at least). We do not alienate one another. We

yell and we cry and we have our say, and then we show up for each other anyway. We certainly know how to celebrate life.

Family

In 1852, my great-great-grandfather Ignatius Rozario founded one of India's earliest bakeries, Rozario's Bakery in Cochin.

He did so at the invitation of the ruling Maharaja, Veera Kerala Varma, who wanted Western-style baked goods for the European traders, and large communities like seminaries, convents, medical and educational institutions, which were run largely by Catholic Orders from Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Ignatius baked sourdough bread, what the locals called savdo bread, alongside cakes, biscuits, and more, deftly adapting traditional European recipes with local ingredients and talent.

The iconic Rozario's bakery surely established and shaped a huge facet of the regional culinary landscape for almost 140 years till 1992.

Now, coming to my dad, he is one of those men who never announces his achievements. You find out years later, through stories that slip out in conversations.

In the late 1960s, my father, Ronald Pinto, played as a Forward wearing Jersey No. 8, representing the Kerala University Football Team. It was one of the most competitive university teams to get into. Before that he had already been College Football Captain and won Best Player in school.

Here is the part that gets me. As an Anglo-Indian, hockey was the sport many traditionally played. The selection committee told him the same. But my dad chose football. And he played it well enough to represent Kerala University, something extremely difficult to achieve even then. No boasting. No dramatic stories. No reminders of what he had done. Just quiet excellence. I have worn his jersey, the same one that carried Number 8 on those fields in the late 1960s.

If he is missing from the room, you will find him behind the fridge door with a spoon in the condensed milk tin, grinning when caught like a child who knows exactly what he has done and has absolutely no regrets about it.

He texts in English so elevated that I keep a dictionary nearby just to understand what he has sent. Shashi Tharoor, consider yourself warned.

He wears the most deliberately wrong combination of clothes to family functions, specifically to wind my mother up. You can see the plan in his eyes before he even leaves the *room*.

He still does fifty crunches every morning. He has done them since forever. I have never understood it and I have stopped trying to. He is almost eighty.

Every year on my birthday, he is always the first to call at midnight. Not a message. Not a notification. A call. He has never once missed it. And when it comes through, right on the dot, you can feel his joy through the phone, the inner child in him, still wanting to be first.

He has a line he returns to often. I grew up hearing it. It became the epigraph of this book.

It is better to wear out than to rust out.

He is living proof of it.

My mother, on the other hand, still kills it in her 70s. Ask her to climb a tree and she is all in.

What my mother, Odette Pinto, does not realise is how genuinely funny she is. Not funny in the way someone tries to be funny. Funny in the way that only people who are completely, unselfconsciously themselves can be. She will say something entirely matter-of-fact that has the whole family in tears.

She also never misses a birthday. Not one. She sends birthday cards without fail. She stocks goods as though preparing for an apocalypse, buys in bulk at a discount, and arrives at every celebration ready. She is a devoted fan of fruits, window shopping, and bargains. She was the kind of mother that other children feared a little. If you were causing trouble, the magic words were: I will call 'Aunty Ode'. That was usually enough. She had very particular standards. No hands on the wall. No jumping on the sofas. Greet people properly. I used to pluck her grey hair strands, one at a time, and she paid me Re.1 per strand. That was the deal and it was my first business. I kept raising the cost over the years like a true businesswoman at 8 would do.

My grandmother, my father's mother, Mary Pinto; whom we called Nana, had a lane named after her by the Corporation of Cochin in Kerala. She kept her grandchildren's secrets and spoiled us all equally. Even in her nineties, former students in their sixties and seventies still came to her birthdays, a testament to her impact as a teacher who wore skirts and dresses to school in an era that expected something else entirely. I come from women like that.

My grandfather, my dad's father, Richard Pinto adored Nana completely. By all accounts, he waited years for Nana to finish her studies before he would even consider courtship. Kathleen Rozario, my mother's mother, was more like Marilyn Monroe in spirit: stylish, a singer, the life of the party, a doting mother and great at crafts. She unfortunately succumbed to breast cancer. She left too soon. But she left a mark on every room she ever walked into.

My grandfather, Francis Rozario, built a legacy that lives to this day. When I pass by, people say 'That is Rozario's granddaughter' and I find that pretty astonishing. He was in the army and built up Rozario's bakery after that. He was a very handsome man. He had many admirers, but his eyes were only on my Nana Kate.

My great grandma, Clara Rozario, was married at 12, had kids at 14, and lost her husband at 21. She brought up all her kids by herself and continued the legacy with Rozario's bakery.

Coming to my siblings, my older brother, David, is extraordinarily artistic and entrepreneurial.

Over a decade ago, he did not just dream. He built something. He started what he called a 'Lap of India', a 10,000-kilometre journey across the country in 20 days. But it was never just about the distance. It was about what the journey could stand for. Moving through a country layered with history, people, and stories, and choosing to give something back. Creating impact through education, through opportunity, and through increasing employability for the next generation. That is how he sees the world.

My younger brother, Michael, known as Mike to all of us, was the kind of child who could get away with anything, helped greatly by a smile that made it impossible to stay annoyed for long.

He is a father now, and if there is one thing I have learnt from him, it is perseverance. He kept showing up for his CFA exams until he cleared them all. Anyone who knows that journey understands it demands discipline, resilience, and consistency that most people do not sustain. That is who he is. I am incredibly proud of him.

Growing up, the two of us had a particular talent for testing David's patience. One afternoon, we pushed too far. We were annoying him while he was sleeping.

David looked at us, completely calm, and said that if we did not stop, he would flush our heads down the toilet. Naturally, we did not stop.

He followed through. He grabbed us, marched us to the bathroom, and ceremonially introduced our heads to the toilet bowl. We were laughing so hard at our plight. It is still so fresh in my memory.

So, among the three Pinto siblings, one drives, David. One climbs mountains, Mike. And one jumps out of planes. My three sisters-in-law are each their own kind of warmth, and then there is my little niece, a small, joyful presence who has no idea yet how much light she carries into every room.

My mother-in-law, Mama Pledger, reminds me of the characters from *The Sound of Music*, full of life, always wanting to be part of everything. She takes her prayers seriously, loves her animals, her serials, her games of cards, and, above all, her children.

When I was 23, my cousin Teena wrote this about me on Orkut, this was the time when conversations were reduced to letters and fragments on social network that predated Instagram by a decade, for those keeping score.

Reproduced with Teena's kind permission.

Tash,,,my dahlin cousin..here's yet another medium for me to embarass u..ha ha ha..well, for starters she's a complete lunatic..she eats masala dosa wid sugar...she carries her camera around like its her pacemaker,,she blames me for every penny she spends shoppin 4 herself..she goes dancin with a torn ligament in her foot..she straightens her hair nly to curl it the nxt day..she nearly has an accident with a 'parked' vehicle..ha ha ha..shud i keep goin?? dnt wna run d risk of u rejectin my testimonial, so ill halt for

now..But b4 i end, for the record..If theres anyone whom i can count on at anytime,,its her..if thers anyone i can laff wid 4 no apparent reason,,its her..with tasha wot u see is wot u get..she's sweet, charmin, beautiful, intelligent, caring n a helluva dancer..she's my cousin aftr all!! cheers to u couz..luv u loads!!

That woman, the one dancing with a torn ligament, eating masala dosa with sugar, camera around her neck like oxygen, had no idea what was coming. Neither did I. But she was completely, chaotically, unapologetically alive. I hold onto her on the hard days. She reminds me what I am fighting to get back to.

Twenty years later, my testimony has not changed much. You are still a lunatic. But now I would add a few more adjectives: fierce, brave, with two scoops of drama on the side.

Updated list of antics: her phone has replaced her camera and is always out of space. She calls me old when she is the exact same age. She once pooped while bungee jumping due to IBS and still managed to look good for the camera. She will turn up with bandages on her neck for a cousin's night out, come rain or shine, we shall dance. We still laugh uncontrollably every time we meet for the silliest things. I honestly feel someone should study our brains.

But some things have changed. We live different lives, have taken different paths and are not in each other's faces like we used to be. But from where I stand, you are nothing short of a walking, talking miracle. You took something that could have broken your spirit and turned it into an unshakable zest for life. And woman, am I proud. You inspire me, my soul sister. Here's to the rest of our lives and whatever comes with it.

Cheers!

Teena

My house also had a British Bulldog named Zoe. She snored so loudly that I can still hear it. She weighed 25 kilograms and refused to walk if she disagreed with the direction. She had more opinions than most people I have met, and zero apology about any of them. I liked that about her.

Growing Up Years with My Wild Imagination and My 13th Birthday

When I look back, my childhood does not come to me as a single story. It comes in fragments. Moments that seemed small at the time, but quietly shaped how I saw myself, my body, and the world around me.

I should tell you about my relationship with school toilets. They were the Indian-style ones, and at some point, in my early years I became convinced that if I were not careful I would go straight to China. Not a logical fear. But I was a child with a wild imagination. So I held it. Every single day. For hours. I held it so consistently and so stubbornly that I gave myself a urinary infection. This is either a testament to extraordinary willpower or early evidence of a deeply stubborn streak. Possibly both.

But looking back, it was one of my earliest lessons in how fear, when left unspoken, begins to live in the body.

I should also tell you about the photographs.

As a child, I looked like a boy. People would look at me and ask, with genuine confusion, why I was wearing earrings.

"I am a girl," I would say.

But something about being repeatedly misread stayed with me.

I tore up many of those photographs. Not out of shame, but out of frustration. A child's quiet rebellion against being seen incorrectly.

I regret it now.

Those photographs were not mistakes. They were evidence of who I was becoming.

It was the year 1997, a beautiful day in sunny Bahrain, the place that had been home to me for many years. On December 8th, I turned thirteen. Now you know how old I am, haha. Jokes apart, it is a privilege to grow old.

I was all excited to go to school in a "coloured dress". I wore this pretty cute knee-length skirt and top, and was all set to celebrate my birthday in school as a teenager.

My day was going great until during one of the classes, my teacher asked everyone to open their textbooks. I panicked when I realised, I could not find it in my bag. I kept checking and re-checking but to no avail. She asked me to stand up, stared at me, and yelled at me. Her face turned colour and she said, "You stupid child" over and over in a high-pitched voice. I had a whirlwind of emotions going on within my body and I thought I would faint. I was flooded with embarrassment and sadness. But that moment quietly became one of my earliest lessons in how easily words can shape identity, and how powerful it is to reclaim your own. I stood there listening to her yelling, wishing in my head that I had kept that textbook in my bag. I had been reading it at home to prepare for class the next day. Irony indeed.

A few hours later, she called me out of class and apologised. She admitted she had a bad day and taken it out on me. I felt seen again. Inside, I was thinking: So, she does not think I am stupid? I am not stupid. I am not stupid.

Words are sharp. They can become internal scripts that last decades. Choose kindness with others, and learn to speak to yourself in a way that builds you, not breaks you. I share this because it taught me something I never forgot: if you have ever internalised someone else's careless words, you can edit that script. I also spent hours designing my home, not any real home, but the one I was building in my head. Sketches of how each room should look, where the light would fall, what the walls would feel like. I did not know then that this would translate into the way I eventually built my life, always designing forward, always sketching what did not yet exist.

Growing up, part of my childhood was anchored at my grandparents' home on MG Road in Cochin. A premium address by any measure. The friends I played with came from humbler homes nearby. I used to play small around them. Downplay what we had. Pretend I did not have things I actually had, just to fit in, just to be included. I was six, perhaps seven, and already negotiating my identity against someone else's circumstance. It is astonishing how early we start meeting our human need for love and connection, and at what cost to ourselves.

Looking back now, none of these moments felt significant on their own. But together, they were shaping how I would see myself for years to come.

The Tiny Red Mark That Changed Everything

I was not exactly a scholar growing up. I was definitely "send me to the playground" rather than "hand me a textbook", kind of girl.

In my 10th grade, a red mark emerged under my math score one day. They informed my mom that they were taking away my school captaincy duties.

Sport, house captain, the buzz of my name being called, my whole identity at that point was tied up in those things. It was all under threat, and that lit a fire inside me. In my head, I was like: How dare they complain about me to my mother! Although to this day, I do not know whether my mother made up that story, either way, I studied harder.

At the same time, I heard my uncle asking my father, "Is your daughter looking for a rank? It is her 10th grade; these are her board exams..."

My dad, in his humble, laughter-first form, replied, "Hahaha... no, no, no, no."

It was not meant that way. I know that. But what my younger self heard was: Damn, my own dad does not believe in me. He could have just lied for my sake and said YES! Ha. It hurt. A quiet fire ignited within my chest.

I walked back to my room, closed the door, took a deep breath, and wrote myself a schedule. Nothing fancy, just a ruthless schedule. TV time including cartoons, breaks, tuitions, sleep, lunch and so on.

A few months later, June 2000, a day etched so sharply in my memory that I can replay it like a movie. We were all getting dressed to attend my friend's First Holy Communion at the Diplomat Hotel in Bahrain. Hair half-done, clothes all over the bed, everyone rushing and right in the middle of that chaos, the board exam results decided to arrive. **TIMING!**

My mom picked up the phone. It was my principal, calmly and excitedly reading out my marks one subject at a time. My dad was there. My baby brother was there. All of us suddenly still, listening like our entire future depended on that phone call.

He started sharing the marks.

Then he reached the subject called Social Studies.

He said, "97."

I froze.

I told my mom, "Ask again."

So she asked again.

He said, "97."

"Ask one more time, Mom."

The same answer.

I genuinely could not believe it. Yes, I studied like my life depended on it, prayed to every saint, nailed the novenas, showed up daily, and yes, straight-up bribed the higher beings (ha-ha, mothers' daughter after all). But hearing that number? Felt surreal. I wondered if they'd mixed my marks with someone else's. Too big. Too overwhelming. Too unexpectedly perfect.

The second she hung up, I ran to my room and started jumping, literally jumping, up and down, did all the power poses known to mankind, screaming, laughing, not knowing what to do with all that happiness.

I will never forget that day. June 2000. A day that changed something deep inside me, a day that still brings tears to my eyes when I think about it.

I received my scholarship from CBSE. It felt like a victory, like the Universe patting me on the back saying, "See, you did it." But the irony was, I could not even use it. The rule said your father's salary had to be below a particular salary package, and we exceeded that criteria.

However, not many knew that we were quietly navigating a financial stretch at home during that season, and still choosing education, dignity, and forward momentum.

Strangers stepped in. Strangers. The church came together and paid my fees. I will never forget that. That kind of kindness marks you forever. It planted in me a lifelong commitment to become that bridge of opportunity and belief for others.

When I reached 11th grade, the unspoken rule was simple: exceptional marks meant Science stream, "okay" marks meant Commerce stream, and barely scraping through meant Arts stream. I was not a fan of that hierarchy,

but that was the conditioning at the time. I knew I did not want to take Science; in my head, that meant becoming a doctor or an engineer. I did not want to accidentally kill people, and I had no idea what an engineer's life even looked like. Commerce felt safer. At least I had some control there. The truth is, my heart would have chosen Arts, Law, Psychology, or Teaching, anything they did not focus on in schools at the time, or Architecture, Interior Design. But those doors were not open for me. Exposure was not a luxury we had back then. So I picked Commerce, scoring in the 80s and 90s, knowing I was not meant for Science, no matter how much society glorified it.

I sometimes look back and think, "If only I had the choices students have today." But then I also recognise that every constraint shaped me. Every limitation forced me to think differently. Every closed door made me create my own windows. And maybe that is exactly how it was supposed to be.

I followed that schedule. Relentlessly. Through Grade 10. Through Grade 11. Through Grade 12.

And here is the magic part: even to this day, after 25 years, I still remember this timetable in my head. That is how defining it was.

My achievement was also published in newspapers in Bahrain. But the key achievement was not the marks. It was not the scholarship either.

It was the system. It was the belief. It was the discipline. It was proof that I could build myself into whoever I chose to be.

I learnt that systems work. Clarity works. Getting rid of distractions, a.k.a. noise, works.

I did it again in 12th grade, with a boyfriend by my side who was more invested in my success than I was sometimes. My mother was convinced I would flunk because of him. Meanwhile, he made sure I studied, stayed focused, and pushed for another rank. Sure enough, I made it to the newspaper again, with a rank in Business Studies.

University Days: Identity, Freedom, and Self-Discovery

Moving from a co-ed school to an all-girls college was wild. Suddenly, everyone was wearing bell-bottom jeans and crop tops, and there was a new kind of freedom that felt both thrilling and terrifying at the same time.

Hostel life was an education in itself. Living in a small room with four other awesome women is an experience like no other. There are some things in life that no textbook will ever teach you.

Learning to share a bathroom with 50 others. Pay ₹5 if required, for half a bucket of hot water, and as ₹5 felt like a fortune back then, I would skip that and do a little dance before the cold water finally hit my body.

Learnt to live on ₹500 for an entire week. Used a washing stone instead of a washing machine, a weekly ritual. And again, praying that a coconut does not fall on my head.

I did have a near-miss incident, though.

We had a curfew of 6 PM. The nuns turned off the electricity at 9 PM. That just did not work for us, we had homework and gossip sessions that waited on no one. So, what did we do?

We'd use induction tape, put plastic bags on our feet so we would not get electrocuted, slid a mat under the door so the light would not escape, and RIG ELECTRICITY after curfew. Reckless? Absolutely. Genius? Also, yes. We used that power to study, read the Bible, and gossip about everything under the sun. Our parents should honestly be proud of the teamwork and creativity involved.

Oh, and we had a roommate named Jerry. Jerry was a rat. I named him and made peace with his existence.

Long before smartphones gave everyone a camera, I walked around with one in my bag. A proper camera with a film roll. My Bahrain gang who came down to India to do their higher studies as well used to make fun of me for it. We had the best times though. Those same people now come to me for those old pictures. Each film roll was expensive. I spent my pocket money on it without a second thought. Some things you just know are worth the cost.

Corporate Life and Building Bridges

When I joined the corporate world, I did not dip my toes and leave. I stuck around for nearly 20 years. Twenty years of ladder climbing, vertically and horizontally. I am so thankful for everyone who was part of my journey.

I learnt how to lead. I learnt how systems work. I learnt how to show up.

In those 20 years, I was building something, although I did not realise it yet. Skills. Resilience. The strength to lead not just others but myself. All of these would count one day, when life would ask me to rebuild parts of myself.

There was a phase where my office cab drivers had a nickname for me, AC duty because they needed to switch on the air conditioner for me. Not out of mockery, but out of familiarity. They knew I would step in with the air conditioning on full, ice packs strapped to my body, doing what I needed to do to function through the day.

On the surface, it may have looked unusual. But beneath it was something far more important: adaptation, resilience, and a refusal to opt out of life.

At the same time, I was supported in ways that mattered deeply. My workplace gave me space to contribute at my best: flexible hours when my body needed recovery, time off without judgement, work I genuinely cared about. That kind of support is not something I take lightly. Because environments shape expression. And when you are given space to function with dignity, you do not just survive, you contribute meaningfully.

My last week at work, I had a grand farewell or should I say farewells, I was blown away with the love, gratitude, and support. What was supposed to be a one-hour team meeting ended up being a three-hour meeting as the team was not ready to say goodbye yet, I had to finally tell them that I would disconnect and did a countdown from 10 to 0, that was such a hard goodbye, I had tears rolling down my eyes as I do now while I type this, "Thank you for making it so special, you could have been doing something else with your time but you chose to be on video with me instead, dancing the macarena, laughing, listening to wisdom and more, I wish each one of you nothing but the best that life can offer you.

I will always be grateful for that."

The Bamboo Season

There were seasons during those corporate years when people assumed I was scattered. That I was 'just doing things.' Reading widely. Exploring disciplines that did not obviously connect. Taking roles that did not always signal aggressive promotion. From the outside, it may have appeared unfocused. But I was not drifting. I was rooting.

The bamboo spends years strengthening its underground network before anything visible appears above the soil. For a long time, it looks dormant. Unimpressive. Almost stagnant. But beneath the surface, a dense foundation was forming, one strong enough to support rapid growth when the time comes. I was in my bamboo season.

I studied deliberately. Not casually. Not to collect certificates. I invested deeply in my education, success, quantum physics, the soul's journey, theosophy, philosophy and metaphysics to examine meaning, psycho-cybernetics to understand self-image, behavioural science to decode patterns, wealth principles to understand leverage, performance psychology, leadership, systems thinking, and models of reality that expanded perception. I was not consuming information. I was learning to create. I was learning other subjects before and after work hours too. I would stay awake for hours because I loved learning, I would continue until 2 or 3 AM and then I tell myself, Tasha, Go sleep!

I was learning how to make the complex simple. I wanted to take ideas that felt abstract or intimidating and translate them into frameworks people could actually apply.

There was even a running joke that I had invested "four lakhs" into a course and the returns were nowhere to be seen. What amused me was not the number, they had missed a zero, but the assumption. They were measuring returns on a quarterly timeline; I was investing on a legacy one.

I was intentional about my personal brand long before I exited corporate. I wrote. I spoke. I appeared in podcasts, books, publications, and speaker sessions. I was not waiting for permission to begin my calling. I was laying the groundwork. By the time I left, people already knew what I stood for. The bridge had been built while I was still walking on the corporate side of it.

There were moments when people mistook my stillness for confusion. I would pause mid-discussion, quiet, sometimes with a puzzled expression, and it may have looked like I was slow to grasp the topic. The truth was the opposite. My mind does not process linearly. It maps. While a conversation was unfolding, I was already running permutations and combinations in the background, ten steps ahead, testing consequences, visualising structures, anticipating ripple effects. What appeared as hesitation was computation. What looked like slowness was systems thinking in motion.

I also learnt something about how I was wired. If my brain detects that something lacks depth, growth, or constructive possibility, it disengages. Not out of arrogance, but efficiency. Give it repetition without meaning and it resists. Give it complexity, integration, identity, strategy, and it ignites. That resistance became data. It revealed where my zone of genius lived.

I was trying to answer one question long before I had the language for it: how do human beings lead themselves consciously instead of living reactively? I knew my calling was not simply to climb structures. It was to understand the architecture of the human operating system and one day enable others to build theirs. I wanted to elevate human potential through awareness and education.

And when I finally stepped out of corporate, the roots surfaced. Within days, high-ticket clients invested in my programs. I did not broadcast it. I did not perform it. But it was proof. The investment others were willing to make reflected the years I had already invested in depth and visibility. Growth above the soil looked sudden. It was not. It was years of quiet compounding, the same kind of unseen work you are capable of starting today.

Chapter 2

When the Body Whispers

The body keeps its own records. It will speak quietly for years before it decides to shout. Listen before it has to. — Natasha Pinto

There is a form of violence in being dismissed while you are asking for help. It does not leave scars. You cannot take a picture of it. But it breaks down something deep in you: your trust in your own observation, your right to be understood.

One appointment in particular stays with me. I had looked up optic neuritis after experiencing the vision disturbances and arrived at the doctor with the name and a list of symptoms written on a small piece of paper. He looked at me the way some doctors look at patients who arrive having read things. As if I had insulted him with my curiosity.

"Stop Googling it," he said. "You don't have any of that. It's all in your head."

I walked out of that appointment and I kept walking. I do not remember where I went. I remember the feeling of needing to move, to put distance between myself and a room where I had just been told, again, that I was performing. The thing my body was experiencing daily: the blur, the vertigo, the fatigue that sat inside my bones, was a story I was telling myself.

The bitter, laughable irony? They were partly right. It WAS all in my head.

Multiple Sclerosis lesions live in the brain, spine, and optic nerves. My symptoms WERE neurological. So yes, it was literally in my head. Just not in the way they meant.

I would not know this for years.

But to understand how I arrived in that room, you need to go back to the beginning. To the child who had already learnt to stay quiet.

Early Signs: Being the Outlier

I have always been the exception.

Even before Multiple Sclerosis gave me a diagnosis, before I had the language to describe it, I knew I lived slightly outside what was considered "normal."

The migraines began when I was still a child. Not occasional headaches, but deep, aching, persistent pain. It felt like something at the back of my head was trying to push its way out.

I never spoke about them.

Children learn quickly that pain is often dismissed. If you complain too much, it is seen as an excuse to avoid school, escape responsibility, or get attention. So I adapted. I stayed quiet.

When the pain became unbearable, I would quietly open my mother's purse, find her tablets, and take one. She always carried them. I assumed that if they worked for her, they would work for me.

For years, I believed this was normal. That this level of fatigue was simply the cost of being alive, and that this kind of pain was something everyone carried, just silently.

School only reinforced that feeling of being different. I was not a straight-A student, and Mathematics and I were never on the same page.

But on the sports field, I came alive.

I was house captain. The one who lived for the next race, the next match, the next moment to prove that my body was capable of something extraordinary. And it was.

I had already learnt how to push myself. How to perform. How to rise when it mattered.

You saw that in the 97 I scored.

But here is what no one saw.

The headaches did not leave. The fatigue did not leave.

That quiet feeling of being slightly misaligned within my own body stayed.

Achievement changed how the world saw me. It did not change how my body felt. I had simply learnt how to function despite it.

2009: The First MRI

By 2009, I was in my twenties. Most people that age are revelling in youthful exuberance, building careers, falling in love, planning futures. I was doing all those things too, but underneath it all was this growing certainty that something was wrong.

I did not have a prescription. I did not have a doctor's referral. I just had this deep, primal knowing, the kind that lives in your gut when your body is screaming and nobody else can hear it.

I just walked into a hospital and asked for an MRI.

The medical staff looked at me as if I were insane. Young and healthy-looking. Where was the pain? Why the MRI? But I pushed ahead. I had already learnt that sometimes you must insist on what you know is right even if you cannot quite explain why. Your body knows.

I remember the feel of that tunnel, the machine pulsing and clanking around me, the sense of being strangely tranquil. Whatever they discovered, whatever they failed to discover, at least I will know.

The pictures returned. Doctors examined them. They found nothing seriously disturbing.

"Some anomalies," they explained vaguely. *"Not to worry about."* *"Stress, most likely."*

I departed with more questions than answers, yet with this peculiar sense of validation too. Something was THERE. It was small, quiet, not yet shouting, yet it was there. My body had not been deceiving me all these years.

I had no idea that this was only the start.

The Hospital Horror

I think it was the year 2010 and before any final diagnosis was made, there was my experience at the hospital.

My memory is not entirely vivid. My mind had already started playing tricks on me. But the tubes. Oh yes. The drips. And the shots that made my head spin.

My body jerked, uncontrollably, like something you would see in a werewolf film. I screamed. I pleaded to be loosened, to be released. I had no idea why I was bound.

The faces around me became a kaleidoscope, each one blurring into the next with a glimmer of concern. Within this commotion, my cousin's voice stood out clearly from the fog, begging for the insanity to cease. But my cries for relief were drowned.

The nurses were trying to comfort me.

And all the while, tied to that hospital bed, my body was continuing its rebellion. Muscles randomly contracting. Nerves sending signals that had no meaning. My mind was unable to control my own reactions. I was sedated which helped me calm my body down.

I was allowed to go home after a few days, though nothing was ever resolved. No diagnosis was made, no explanations given.

The illness remained a mystery, a danger which would torment me for many more years to come.

Misdiagnosis Years (Until 2018): The Lost Decade

What made it all harder was that my body was sending signals I had no framework for. Eat cornflakes, run to the bathroom. Bread and Nutella, the same. Cheese, mayonnaise, the same. At some point, I stopped knowing what I could eat without consequence. I was told, much later, that I had IBS, that lactose was a trigger. My body had been trying to tell me something about what it could and could not process. By 2018, I finally knew what to stay away from. Before that, it was just chaos. My body would heat up to what felt like the point of explosion. The period between 2009 and 2018 was almost surreal. I was living, working, and achieving, but through everything that occurred, my body was at war, even though I could not see it, and the doctors could not see it either.

The blurriness of my eyes came and went. Some days were crystal clear. Others blurred together as if through frosted glass. On the bad days, light became the enemy. Not bright sunlight specifically. Any light. The kind that filters through curtains. The glow of a screen. The overhead fluorescent light in an office. Each one arrived like a needle directly behind the eye.

I started wearing a pirate's eye patch. Then I would tie another cloth over the top of it, layering the darkness, trying to block every last thread of light from reaching the nerve underneath. I still do this now on the difficult days. At the time, I did not know why the light hurt. I just knew that covering my eyes was the only thing that gave me any relief. It was simply another thing I had learnt to manage in silence.

The vertigo simply decided to make an entrance when it wanted to. The world tilted beneath my feet even when I was standing upright. And then there was the fatigue. My goodness, the fatigue. It was not normal fatigue. It was bone-deep exhaustion.

I saw doctors. Lots of them. I kept records: symptoms, triggers, timing. This is what you are supposed to do. But they kept telling me I was stressed, anxious, over-sensitive. I was a woman whose illness did not fit the template of what a sick person was supposed to look like.

Whenever I did raise it, whenever my symptoms made me act differently from what people expected, I was called a drama queen. That label settled in quietly. And quietly, I started to believe it.

That, I would eventually understand, is a systemic failure.

The gaslighting was insidious. It was sneaky. It was like being slowly submerged underwater. I doubted my own reality. Was I imagining this? Was I just being anxious and stressed and over-sensitive? Was everyone feeling this way? Was I just being weak because I was not pushing through hard enough?

There was a period where I genuinely wondered. My symptoms were so varied, so inconsistent, attacking different systems on different days, that I started to ask the question they had been planting: what if none of this is connected? What if it really is just stress, just IBS, just me?

Food had become bewildering. Cornflakes sent me running to the bathroom. Bread and Nutella, the same. Cheese, mayonnaise, anything with lactose, my body would heat up from the inside, a heat so intense it felt like combustion from somewhere I could not locate or cool down. I did not yet know that lactose intolerance was part of the picture. I just knew that eating had become a game I was losing, and that I had started to wonder whether I was the problem.

That is what sustained gaslighting does. It does not arrive as a single moment of doubt. It seeps in through the accumulated weight of being disbelieved. I had been told so many times that I was imagining things that a part of me had started keeping a separate record, not for the doctors, but for myself. Evidence that this was real. Evidence that I was not inventing it. It was only in 2018 that the full picture assembled itself. But those years of not knowing, of eating carefully and still losing, of working hard and still collapsing, those years were not wasted. They were the spine of every ounce of empathy I now carry.

However, there were times when there was nothing to explain away. It became hard to walk. Not impossible, but similar to walking through mud, with needles shooting through my legs. My hands would become numb for no reason at all. I would be talking, and I would forget what I was saying, my brain unable to access certain words I had used my whole life. Dysphasia is what it is called.

By 2016, the pain was just too much. Finally, FINALLY, I received a diagnosis: it was Vitamin B12 deficiency.

I breathed a sigh of relief. A NAME! At last! A solution! But the Vitamin B12 pills did little to alleviate the symptoms. The problems persisted. Lurked. Grew. Waited.

I learnt to adapt to my condition. I learnt to smile with everything going on. I learnt to participate in key meetings with a room spinning in vertigo. I pushed forward with stinging nerve endings.

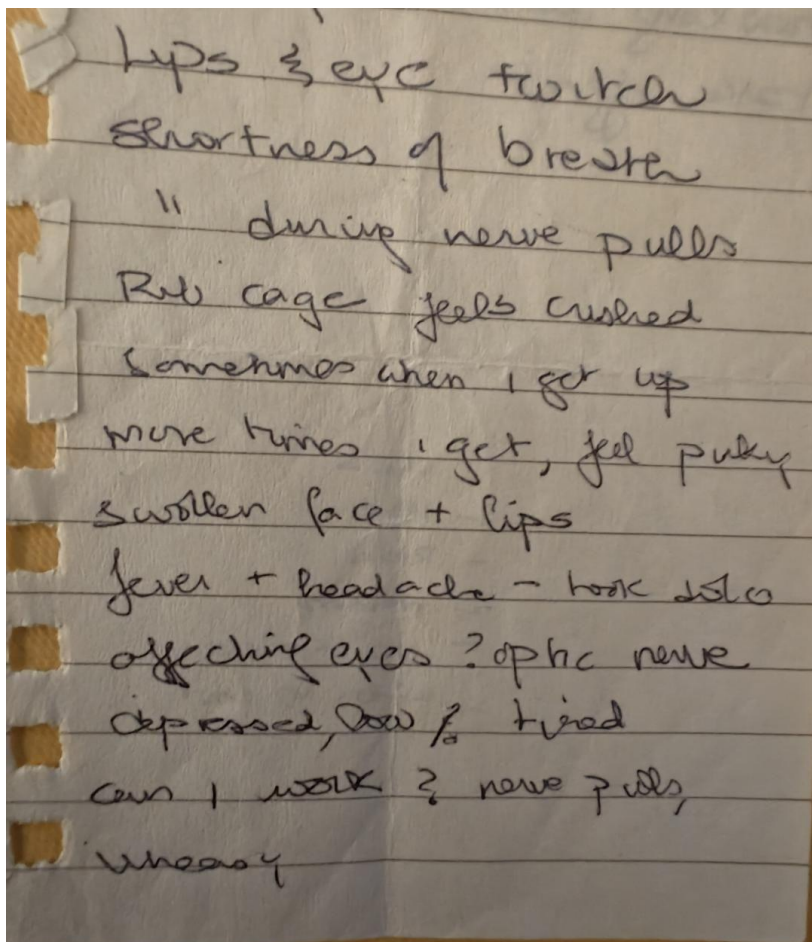
I learnt to become an expert at appearing normal while simultaneously disintegrating inside.

"Stop Googling It": When Doctors Dismiss You

"Stop Googling it" was the soundtrack to those years.

I kept records. Not because anyone asked me to. Because I needed evidence that I was not inventing it.

Here is what one of those pages looked like, written in the years nobody believed me:



"Lips and eye twitch, Shortness of breath during nerve pulls, Rib cage feels crushed, Sometimes when I get up, I used to feel nauseous. Swollen face and lips. Fever and headache. Affecting eyes, optic nerve? Depressed. Low. Tired. Can I work? Nerve pulls. Uneasy."

That list lived on a torn piece of paper tucked inside my bag. The doctors would listen politely. And then they would tell me it was stress, or anxiety, or that I was overthinking it.

It is an experience that women are very familiar with. Your experience of pain is doubted to greater and greater degrees. Assumed to be somehow related to your emotions and psychology when what you are experiencing is physical. You are hysterical, anxious, too sensitive.

I smiled and nodded and tried everything the well-wishers said. When the establishment has let you down, you look to alternatives. But when those fail, then you begin to wonder if maybe everyone is right and you are going nuts.

But I was not crazy. I was just years away from the correct diagnosis, lost in a healthcare system that did not have eyes to see what was happening in my body.

My vision continued to blur.

I did not stop Googling it. The body keeps its own records. I was simply trying to find the language to read them.

Chapter 3

The Breaking Point, 2018

Walk, run, crawl, whatever it took.

The Body That Would Not Be Ignored

By 2018, I could not ignore what my body was telling me anymore. It had stopped asking nicely.

I was having 40 to 50 spasms a day. Not little twitches. These were full-body muscle contractions. Walking felt like wading through concrete with a knife plunged through my foot. Pain. Fatigue. Optic neuritis, which caused my vision to blur and sent pins into my eyes like harpoons. Heat sensitivity. Burning sensations across my body. Speech problems. Cognitive issues. Vertigo. Tremors. Pins and needles everywhere.

The symptoms seemed unending, and no one believed me.

The Airport Collapse

The day that broke through my denial was in the office cafeteria. I was carrying two plates, the kind of ordinary thing you do without thinking, and my left hand simply stopped cooperating. The plate began to slide. My colleague saw me struggling, ran across, and caught the plate before it fell. My body had been going through back-to-back spasms by this point.

I knew I was playing with time. My body was shouting that time was running out. I had never felt urgency like that before. So, I packed my bags in a hurry and flew to Cochin the following day, where my parents were, looking for answers with a sense of desperation.

It was at the airport is that it all came undone.

When the aircraft door opened in Cochin, a wave of heat rushed in. I did not realise at the time, but heat worsened my symptoms significantly.

Heat management became its own private ritual. To this day, when the temperature climbs past bearable, I stick my head in the freezer. Not as a joke. Not metaphorically. Literally: open the freezer door, lower my head into the cold air, and hold it there until my body stops trying to revolt. If you have visited my home and wondered why I open the freezer with such intention, now you know.

The runway was in front of me. I found myself immobilised in front of the airport bus. One minute I was limping, the next I was frozen with spasms and debilitating pain. I became paralysed by my own body's mutiny.

I somehow managed to drag myself inside the airport. I began to weep as I stood at the baggage carousel, utterly exposed and shattered.

Then I spotted my dad.

"Dad!" I screamed. My voice was a plea flung into the crowded arrivals area. "Dad, I can't move!"

"I can't move!"

Without a second of hesitation, he removed the security cordon and ran towards me. The security did not stop him, and the other onlookers waiting for their loved ones felt helpless, but I could see empathy in their eyes as they saw me in gripping pain. That look, the helplessness, the empathy, the silent I hope you are okay, I can still see it in my mind. It speaks to something that lives beneath all our masks. Our shared humanity. The instinct to care, even for a stranger.

We immediately went to an ayurvedic doctor, a vaidhya/vaidhyar, who asked me if I had a stroke. The pain was unbearable. He said I needed to go to the hospital immediately; he could not do anything at this stage.

The Hospital: At Last, a Name to It

We went straight to the hospital.

More doctors. More tests.

But this time, they could not simply sidestep what was going on. My body was too loud. The symptoms too severe. The situation too urgent.

They ordered an MRI, and after a lumbar puncture, where they put a needle into your spine and take cerebrospinal fluid, they finally had the answers I had been chasing for over a decade. After a few days, the doctor called my husband at the time aside saying he wanted to talk to him separately. I told him to tell me how severe it was, in front of me.

The doctor delivered the verdict carefully. Multiple Sclerosis. They explained what it meant. Demyelinating disease. The immune system turning on itself.

I knew what MS could do to a person.

At that moment all I could think was Oh. Fuck.

Two words I was hoping I would never hear. It was an illness I dreaded, but there was also relief because suddenly we had a name for it.

I was not imagining it. I was not crazy. I was not weak. My body had been trying to tell me something for years, and now we knew what that was.

I had spent years co-leading the Accessibility Network, previously called the Disability Network, at work. I had sat with colleagues who were speech and hearing impaired, learnt to communicate in sign, and watched how easily people with disabilities could be excluded from important conversations, not through cruelty or intentionally, but through genuine oversight. Accessibility had become something I actively cared about long before my own body asked for it. Some of those colleagues showed up at my farewell and threw me such a grand and heartfelt farewell. Their personalities are so warm and full of life.

The MRI results showed multiple lesions in my brain. Lesions on my optic nerves. Lesions on my spine. A depiction of mayhem sketched all over my nervous system.

My immune system was at war with my own nerves, fighting the protective myelin sheath, leaving me disconnected from myself. The signals from my body to my brain were becoming scrambled or lost altogether.

It explained everything. The headaches I had since I was a child. The vision problems. The vertigo. The spasms. The pins and needles. All of it.

Here are my symptoms, which I used to battle regularly, and I share these not to invite pity, but to ensure awareness. If you or someone you know experiences several of these persistently, please seek a neurological evaluation.

Pain, fatigue, optic neuritis, double vision, blurred vision, pins going into the eyes like harpoons. Heat sensitivity. Burning and stabbing sensations across the body. Speech disorders. Dysphasia. Seizures. Cognitive issues. Swallowing problems. Irritable bowel syndrome. MS Hug, a painful tightening around the chest. Bladder problems. Bowel problems. Spasticity. Tremors. Breathing problems. Pins and needles. Flushing. Jerking movements of legs and arms. Vertigo.

I used brain teasers daily while with the neurologist and physiotherapist, like translating letters to their corresponding numbers, repeating 1A, 2B, 3C and then backwards 26Z, 25Y, 24X, just to keep my mind functioning, try to walk straight without limping, try moving my hands etc.

Even after the diagnosis, there were moments I could not trust my own mind. I would walk into my office washroom and suddenly lose my sense of direction. The space would feel unfamiliar, almost like a maze. I knew, logically, that there was a door. But I could not find it.

I would walk back and forth, touching walls, trying to reorient myself. From the outside, nothing looked unusual. Inside, everything was disoriented. That was one of the hardest parts to explain. You can look completely ‘normal’ while your brain is misfiring in ways no one can see.

After my divorce, that unpredictability shaped how I lived. I did not always lock my front door at night. Not out of carelessness, but out of precaution. If I fell, if something happened, I needed a way for someone to get in. I kept emergency contacts written down and placed where they could be easily found. By the bedside. Near the entrance.

These were quiet systems. Not visible. Not spoken about. But necessary.

My then husband once said he would only move out once I found another partner. That was the kind of heart he had. But I could not accept that. It was not fair to him. And it was not the life I wanted to build. I was not going

back to Cochin. And I was not going to choose a relationship out of fear. Even in uncertainty, I chose to stand on my own terms.

What hit me hardest was not the diagnosis itself. It was what came with it.

The medication I would need to manage MS carried a condition. If I ever fell pregnant while on it, I would have to abort. That was the clinical reality.

I have never been on birth control pills or any sort of family planning. Not because I was careless, but because becoming a mother was something I had always wanted since I was a child. I had looked forward to it.

That sentence from the doctor, the abortion requirement, killed something in me at that moment.

I told the doctor clearly: that is not going to happen. I will pay whatever it takes. Whatever medication exists that does not carry that condition, find it.

My medication cost over thirty-eight thousand rupees a month, which was a lot of money in 2018. That was in addition to the cost of other medications. This was every month, for years. So, God willing, if one day I get to be a mother, that door will still be open.

I was not going to let MS close it.

The Prayer That Changed Everything

As I lay in that hospital bed after weeks of tests, exhausted, terrified, and strangely hopeful all at once, I whispered a prayer.

Dear God, I am not ready. Please give me one more day, even if it's a boring one. I will treasure it.

Looking back, I know that was not a strong prayer. A healthy life, that is what I should have said. But I was in the middle of bargaining for time. Just a little more. Just hoping I would be alive to see tomorrow.

But in that storm, a light of strength shifted.

I said to myself: I am going to get out of this hospital bed, go back to work, even if I had to crawl, to raise awareness about invisible disabilities.

I was not going to become defined by the letters of my diagnosis. I was going to craft my story. The doctors' predictions and the long list of terrifying symptoms would not keep me from living.

My breaking point became my becoming. What felt like collapse was actually a confrontation. The version of me that had been coping could not survive what was coming. Something more deliberate had to emerge.

I was not going to let this be the whole story.

The diagnosis was not the end. It was the beginning of everything I was about to become.

I did not want to sit with it. That has never been my way. The moment the diagnosis had a name, something in me shifted from confusion into clarity. I wanted out of that hospital bed. Not to escape what had just been named, but because naming it meant I could finally do something about it. I had spent years watching many people with invisible disabilities navigate a world that did not see them. I knew what that silence cost. And I knew, lying in that bed, that I was not going to add my silence to it. If my body was going to insist on this path, I was going to make sure it meant something.

Hearts: Universe's Love Notes

Long before hospital rooms and uncertainty, I had a habit of doodling tiny hearts everywhere, in the margins of my mother's books just to annoy her (I still do it, by the way, sorry, Mom 😊), on scraps of paper, even for strangers who would never know I had silently wished them well. It was my private way of sending love into the world.

Then one day, lying on that hospital bed, the world started sending it back.

I began seeing hearts everywhere, on a stranger's T-shirt, in rice grains, in clouds, on billboards, in leaves, even in random patterns on the floor. It did not feel accidental. It felt playful, almost intimate, as though something unseen was whispering: You are seen. You are loved. You are enough.

In a place where fear could have taken over, I felt supported instead.

And what still amazes me is that it has not stopped. To this day, people randomly send me photos of hearts they stumble upon, a shadow, coffee

foam, a crack in the pavement and I tuck each one into my little treasure box as a reminder that what you send out returns, often multiplied.

Maybe it is psychology. Maybe it is faith. Maybe it is simply training your Reticular Activating System to notice what has always been there. I call it grace.

When you train your mind to look for love, you find it. When you decide you are supported, the world rearranges to confirm it. And to this day, I remain blessed beyond measure.

What happened in that hospital room did not end at diagnosis. It began something. A different kind of life was on the other side of that bed, one that required rising from the very ashes the illness had created. That is where we go next.

PART **II**
THE FALL

Collapse, Ego Death and Spiritual Reckoning

Chapter 4

Into the Ashes

I did not survive the hard parts to live a small life afterwards. — Natasha Pinto

For most of my life, I believed that if I pushed hard enough, I would eventually feel okay. If I achieved more, proved more, held everything together better, something inside me would settle. It did not.

From the outside, things looked like they were working. On the inside, something was always off. I had learnt how to perform, but I had not learnt how to understand myself. Everything began to shift when I stopped asking what I should do and started asking why I kept doing what I did.

After the diagnosis, life did not pause. It moved forward, and I had a choice. I could shrink into what was predicted for me, or I could rise into something that had not been accounted for. I chose to rise. Not perfectly, not without pain, but deliberately.

I asked the doctor a simple question. Would I be able to walk and run again? The answer was careful. I was told I would not likely be able to run more than two kilometres. Two kilometres. In my world, that was barely a warm-up. Others were measuring limitations. I was remembering who I had been.

Right before my diagnosis was confirmed, I made a quiet decision. If there was even a chance I might not walk again, I was not going to go down without one last run. So I ran ten kilometres. Not because I was strong, but because I did not want regret to be stronger than me. The following month, I was in the hospital.

In that hospital room, I wrote a list. Not goals, not plans. A list titled Dream. To walk. To run. To dance. To skydive. To clean my own home. To help with the dishes. That last one mattered the most. When your body becomes uncertain, the simplest acts become sacred.

Recovery did not look like a comeback. It looked like small, stubborn decisions. There was a time my goal was simply to walk a yellow line on the pavement near my home, step by step, rebuilding balance, coordination, and focus. People would even stop and ask what I was doing.

Months later, I ran again. Not easily, not gracefully, but I ran. Somewhere along the way, I returned to something that had always been mine. The Macarena. I had danced it everywhere before, at airports, in hospital corridors, in the middle of moments that needed lightness. It was never about the dance. It was about reminding myself that my body was still mine. When the music played, something in me knew what to do. Even when everything else felt uncertain, that did not.

One day, Google Photos showed me something I had not been ready to see. Two images. One of me holding onto a walker, unsure if I would ever walk without it again. And another of me, years later, moving through the world in a body that had once refused to cooperate. I had not shared that first image for a long time, not out of shame, but because I was still becoming the person who could look at it without breaking. I am ready now.

I returned to the Pinkathon, the same race I had once feared I might never run again. That day, it was not about distance. It was about reclaiming something I thought I had lost.

The half marathon was harder. My body was not fully with me. There was numbness, blurred vision, fatigue. At one point, I got lost and ran extra kilometres. But I kept moving. I was no longer running to compete. I was running to prove something to myself. And I finished.

Not every victory looks like a finish line. Some look like cooking a meal, standing without support, taking one more step when your body resists.

The world was beginning to see what had been quietly built. In 2021, I received the NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Award. I started Day One of 2022 with a big bang, an appearance on National TV on CNN-News18. What a way to begin a year.

Through all of this, one thing became clear. Resilience is not built in the big moments. It is built in the invisible ones, the ones no one claps for, the ones no one sees.

I learnt to speak to my body differently. To thank it, even when it was not cooperating, and to work with it instead of fighting it.

This is not a story about defeating something. It is a story about choosing how to live with it, fully and intentionally.

Rising from the ashes is not a single moment. It is a daily decision. And even as I was choosing life, something else was happening beneath the surface, something quieter, deeper, and more confronting.

That is where we go next.

Chapter 5

The Dark Night of the Soul

*In the depth of winter, I finally learnt that within me
there lay an invincible summer. — Albert Camus*

Silences That Echo

Living with Multiple Sclerosis sometimes feels like a game of snakes and ladders. You move forward, you hit moments that feel like ladders, small wins that remind you what is still possible. And then you hit the snakes. Blurred vision. Numbness. Pins and needles. Internal tremors. The tightening of an MS hug. Symptoms that arrive without warning and refuse to follow logic.

Some days, it feels like you are back at the beginning.

But I refused to let that be the full story.

There is a silence in the middle of the night that is difficult to explain. Not the quiet of rest. Not peace. A kind of stillness that grows louder the longer you sit in it. A silence where your body feels unfamiliar and your thoughts have nowhere to go.

Those were the moments no one saw.

I would take myself to the hospital alone, for infusions or steroids that would last the entire day. No announcement. No conversation. Just another day that needed to be handled. The only time I chose caution was during my MRIs. Everything else, I managed by God's grace.

People often ask me now how I did it all alone.

The truth is, I did not want help if I could do it myself. Not from ego, but from something deeper. Asking for help has always been harder for me than enduring the situation itself. Perhaps it comes from the quiet understanding that the people you once expected to show up do not always do so. And somewhere along the way, you learn to become your own support system.

That does not make it easy. It just makes it familiar.

And yet, even in those years, life had a way of showing up in unexpected ways.

I remember a day in 2016. I was at a pharmacy with my then husband, trying to buy painkillers.

I was so low on energy until my eyes were drawn to a box of Cerelac.

Something in me lit up instantly. The child in me did.

I wanted it. But suddenly, I felt shy asking for it myself. A 31-year-old woman standing there, wanting baby food.

So I nudged him and asked if he could get it for me.

At the counter, the pharmacist looked at him and asked, very helpfully, "How old is the baby? One month? Two months? Six months?"

Without missing a beat, he said, "The baby is over six months."

I burst out laughing. Right there in the pharmacy, too exhausted to even hold myself properly, laughing harder than I had in a long time.

That moment stayed with me.

Not because of the Cerelac, but because even in the middle of exhaustion, something in me still knew how to feel joy.

I still eat Cerelac. Some things do not need explanation.

That moment stayed with me for another reason too. It reminded me that even on the hardest days, something in me was still alive enough to respond to joy. That mattered more than I realised at the time.

Gratitude, for me, was never a concept. It was a discipline. On the hardest days, I would look for what was still working. The breath. The hands. The ability to see. Something was always working.

I chose to build from there.

Not as denial. Not as forced positivity. But as a way of staying in partnership with my own body.

Because I realised something important.

My body was not my enemy.

It was doing the best it could.

And I had a choice.

To fight it.

Or to work with it.

I chose to work with it.

The Loneliness of Being Misunderstood

The thing about invisible disabilities is that you cannot see them. When people look at you, they see someone who looks okay. They are not privy to the drama taking place inside.

Can you see my disability? Most probably not. I have to keep most of it hidden in my facial expressions, because I want to concentrate on what is working in my body. But reality is cruel and humbling.

Do I pee my pants and wear a pad whenever I leave the house? Yes. Am I embarrassed? Hell no. Do I lose my train of thought in the middle of a sentence? As much as I hate losing memories, yes, I do. I am aware. I strive and push myself each day to remember. If you saw the movie "50 First Dates," that is how some days unravel.

There were mornings I walked into the office in my formal skirt, in heels, holding my bag like someone who had everything together, and I was quietly, invisibly managing what no one could see: a pad soaked through, no bladder control, my body doing something I could not stop or explain to my colleagues. I sat through meetings. I held conversations. And underneath all of that, I was just trying to get through the hour.

What is on my social media is of course not my whole life. It only has what I decide to share, and I am mindful about what I do share because that is my digital safe space.

But the loneliest moments are not the physical battles. They are the moments when someone says, "But you look so good!" or forgets that grinning does not mean you are not fighting a war in your own beautiful body.

The Spiritual Significance of Falling Apart

My mother was not a touchy-feely person. She was not the kind who sat beside you and held your hand through the hard nights. Her love had its own language. Discipline. Food. A steady, firm presence that said I am here, even when it was never spoken out loud.

She showed up through structure.

It took me years to understand that her way of loving was not less than mine. It was simply different. She had stronger boundaries than anyone I had known, and I did not recognise their value until I began losing my own. She was teaching me something I was not yet ready to receive.

I receive it now.

Someone who loved me said it more than once.

"Stop minimising it. I can see you struggle every day. Why are you not asking for help?"

And the truth is, I did not even know what he was talking about.

There were days when my mind was completely clear and my body refused to cooperate with it. I would know exactly what I wanted to say and the words would not come out the way I had formed them. I was lisping. Stammering. Reaching for a sentence and finding it had collapsed somewhere between thought and speech. It is a particular kind of helplessness, in which you are articulate inside and incoherent outside. To have something to say and no reliable way to say it.

So I started writing things down. Small notes. Recordings on my phone. Photographs of things I wanted to remember. Not because I was sentimental. But because I was afraid of losing the thread of my own mind. I did not know then that I was building an archive. I did not know that those notes and recordings and photographs were quietly becoming a book.

What I could not say out loud, I kept. And what I kept eventually became this.

Because from the inside, I was not falling apart.

I had built something that looked like strength. A way of functioning where everything appeared fine, even when it was not. It was not denial in the way people imagine. It was an adaptation. A system that allowed life to keep moving, even when clarity was missing.

I had learnt how to regulate myself without fully realising I was doing it. To shift my focus. To manage my emotional state. To keep going.

At the time, I did not have the language for it. I could not explain it in terms of physiology, attention, or the nervous system.

But looking back, I can see it clearly.

I was influencing my internal state through what I focused on, how I spoke to myself, and how I held my body. Not perfectly. Not consciously. But consistently enough to function.

And that mattered.

Because it showed me something I would only understand later.

Even when life feels like it is falling apart, the system is still trying to stabilise itself.

What we often call coping is not weakness.

It is intelligence.

But coping is not the same as awareness.

And that is where the shift begins.

Because once you become aware of the patterns that are holding you together, you are no longer limited to surviving through them.

You can begin to consciously design them.

Around that time, my house help said something that stayed with me.

"The reason people think you are not old enough or experienced enough is because you are always smiling. People with experience look tired. They don't smile."

I laughed.

But something in me paused.

Do we slowly trade away our lightness to fit into what the world considers seriousness? Do we give up being ourselves in order to be taken seriously?

I realised I did not want to lose that part of me.

Not after everything I had fought to keep.

I owed it to myself to make sure I was always thankful for my second chance at life. To be able to see, to touch, to walk around, to breathe the air for my own self. There are so many things that we do not truly appreciate.

But here is the spiritual insight I have gleaned: sometimes you have to lose it all before you can see what you are really made of. The hospital horror, the diagnosis, the years of being dismissed and gaslighted by medical professionals, the moments when I completely broke down physically, these were not punishments. They were initiations.

In spiritual traditions around the world, there is something called the dark night of the soul. That moment when you are suddenly at a complete loss for everything you believed to be true about yourself, your life, your mission. When the material you created to protect yourself falls apart. When the identity you held onto does not fit anymore.

It is terrifying. It feels like death. And in many ways, it is death, death of the old self, the little self, the self that was wired to survive rather than thrive.

What seems like falling apart is really just falling together.

Would I wish harm to anyone? No. Do I get angry? Yes. Am I okay with all of this? Some days yes, some days no. What am I gaining from hanging onto the anger? Nothing.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Step back when irritated, always. Respond instead of reacting. Life will continue to throw the same challenges at you unless you learn the lesson.

I have learnt to become deeply conscious about how this condition has stolen a life of "normalcy" from me. Things we all regard as mundane were my daily victories. But it also provided me with something that was infinitely more valuable: perspective.

I am a firm believer in the creator, the creation, and the universe. I believe you are a spiritual presence having a human experience in a physical body.

The pain awakened me to what actually counts. Not the corporate title. Not the perfect life I envisioned as a girlish dreamer waiting to be rescued by my knight in shining armour. Not the external metrics of success society tells us to pursue.

What matters is presence. Gratitude. Connection. Purpose. Turning your pain into something that serves not only you, but others on their journey.

The moments I thought would destroy me turned out to be the ones that rebuilt me. My apocalyptic moments became transformational ones, shaping me into someone with courage, wisdom, and compassion.

Gratitude for the Good, Bad, and Ugly

I am grateful for the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good for the beautiful memories. The bad for the life lessons. The ugly for enabling me to step out of my bubble.

And then there is the reality check, I am experiencing a disability that has shut doors in my life and opened new ones. I built myself a sanctuary where I have been able to adjust to a new kind of normal.

I have a quiet, private prayer when I wake in the morning. I treasure the mundane. I embrace the ordinary. And I wear my experiences with grace.

This kind of reckoning is not something you get through once and it is over. It comes in waves. Some days, you are the warrior. Other days, you are barely able to hold it together.

But here is what I know today: darkness is not the adversary. It is the teacher.

And when you come out the other end, you are not the same person who went in.

You are someone who understands that falling apart is sometimes the start of becoming more whole.

You are someone who has discovered the paradox of pain: that it can break you open to a life that is more real, more extraordinary, and more powerful than you ever dreamed possible.

The dark night is not the end of your story. It is the start of your awakening.

The darkest nights produce the most honest reckonings. What falls away in the abyss reveals what is permanent. What remains are the lessons.

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”

Maya Angelou

Chapter 6

Lessons from the Abyss

The wound is the place where the light enters you. — Rumi

One morning, I was brushing my teeth when I noticed an ant trapped near the edge of the wash basin, struggling against the water.

Determined. Refusing to be washed away.

I was like Oh my Goodness! That was one determined ant!

I placed my finger beside it, offering a dry surface, a bridge to somewhere safer.

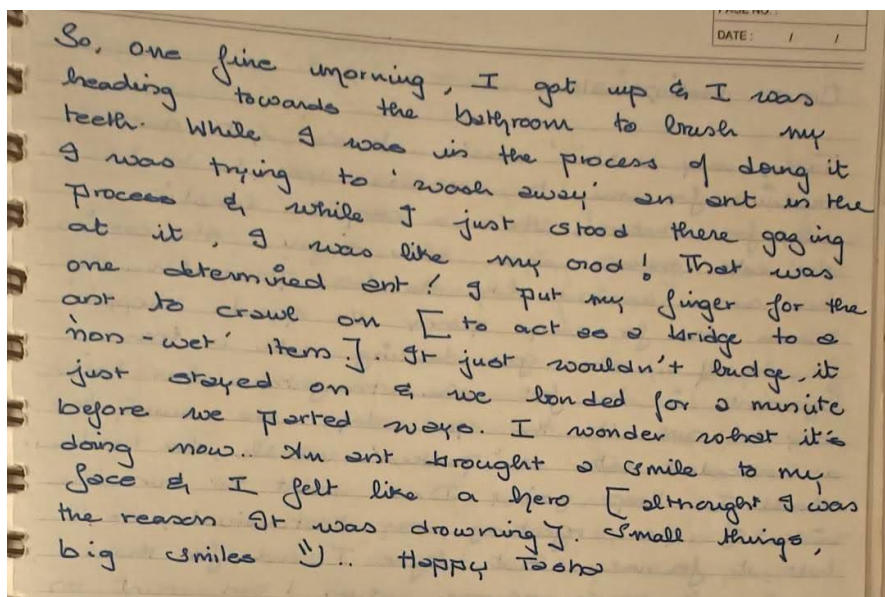
It climbed on immediately.

For a few seconds, we simply stayed there, the ant on my finger, both of us suspended in this strangely quiet moment before I placed it down safely and we went our separate ways.

And somehow, that tiny interaction made me smile. Deeply.

I even wrote about it in my journal later that day:

Small things. Big smiles.



That is what I was learning. To stop measuring my life only by achievements, milestones, or productivity, and start measuring it by presence. By noticing. By being awake enough to experience the moment I was in.

Multiple Sclerosis gave me that. Not the illness itself, but what the illness demanded of me. It stripped life down to its essentials. And in doing so, it revealed how much I had been moving through unconsciously.

The mornings I woke up and could see clearly, use my fingers, feel my toes, or breathe without hesitation were no longer ordinary to me. They were gifts. Things I once overlooked became sacred. Breathing. Walking. Feeling. Even cutting fruit felt like a small victory.

MS also taught me that the body keeps score. All those years of ignoring the whispers, pushing through exhaustion, pretending I was fine when I was not, my body remembered all of it. Every buried emotion. Every time I chose productivity over presence. Every moment I abandoned myself to keep life moving.

Eventually, the body stops whispering and begins speaking through symptoms. Sometimes loudly enough to demand attention.

The lesson was simple.

Listen before your body is forced to shout.

I had believed I knew what heartbreak was after my first breakup. My future with the boy I thought I would marry, losing that felt like the end of the world. You know how childhood puppy love goes.

Up until then, my entire life plan was simple. Go to college. Find a boy. Fall in love. Get married. Sit on a lawn with a dog and a kid and call it life. That was the dream, and honestly, there is nothing wrong with wanting that kind of life.

But that was not the real heartbreak.

That was only the death of a fairy tale.

Life had other plans. Bigger ones. Unexpected ones. Plans that needed me to grow up, break old identities, and step into someone I did not even know I could become.

Real heartbreak happened later, when I realised that I had been abandoning myself all along to keep a relationship going. I had a belief about love that needed to die: that in order to maintain a relationship, you have to slightly betray yourself. That selflessness, even at the expense of your own truth, is honourable.

Later on, when I got divorced, the hushed refrain in many people's conversations was, how could he walk away from her because she has a disability?

What amused me most was the way stories and assumptions are quietly stitched together by people who know very little of the truth.

He did not leave because of MS. He is far bigger than that. I will always respect him, and I genuinely wish him and his family a beautiful life, come what may.

The disability was not the villain. Neither was he.

Heartbreak taught me that love cannot survive without truth. Not just truth with another person, but truth with yourself.

I began to recognise a pattern in my own life, constantly putting others first to the point where I was slowly abandoning myself in the process. Over time, I realised that love is not meant to cost you your sense of self. It requires honesty, self-respect, communication, and the courage to acknowledge when something is no longer aligned for the people involved.

One of the hardest lessons I learnt was that sometimes choosing peace is not an act of failure, but an act of self-preservation.

I stopped viewing myself through the lens of who I thought I was supposed to be, and instead began asking how I wanted to live more truthfully. I started peeling away timelines, expectations, and identities that no longer fit.

It was not glamorous. It was uncomfortable, confronting, and deeply honest.

Growing up, I also became aware of certain stereotypes attached to Anglo-Indian women. There were assumptions, spoken and unspoken, that we were meant to be admired, enjoyed, or desired, but not always deeply valued or chosen with seriousness.

I once heard a sentence that stayed with me for years, a crude reflection of how some people viewed women like me. Someone's father actually said this to his son.

Just fuck her and leave her.

It was dismissive. Reductive. Dehumanising. And whether we admit it or not, words like that settle quietly into a person over time.

And then came someone who chose differently. Not loudly. Not performatively. Just clearly.

In that choice, something healed in me that I did not even realise had been wounded. It restored a sense of dignity, not because my worth depended on another person choosing me, but because it reminded me that the right kind of love sees a human being fully, beyond labels, assumptions, or social narratives.

That, to me, is the mark of real character.

Heartbreak became one of my first teachers in understanding that falling apart is sometimes how you fall into yourself.

The worst endings are often the most necessary beginnings.

For most of my life, stillness was synonymous with laziness. I was the adrenaline fiend: rush, yes; stay still, never; prove yourself until you are raw.

MS forced stillness upon me. Those days when my body would refuse to listen. Night after night in hospital rooms with nothing but silence and my thoughts. Situations when all I could do was just lie there and be.

At first, I fought it. But eventually, I grew to listen.

And while listening, something unexpected happened. I began to hear a voice I had spent years drowning out, the one that knew things before my mind caught up with them. The one that had been whispering long before my body started screaming.

Your inner compass communicates through gut feelings that murmur yes or no. Physical sensations that say right on track or fundamentally wrong. Flashes of insight that come only in silence. Synchronicities that happen too often to be mere coincidence.

Stillness, I learnt, is not the absence of movement. It is the presence of truth.

When you stop filling every moment with noise, motion, and distraction, truth has room to surface. Not the truth others have handed you. Not the truth you have been performing. The quiet, steady, inconvenient truth that has been waiting patiently underneath all the noise.

MS gave me stillness I did not ask for. And in that stillness, I found out who I actually was.

That, in the end, was the gift I never knew I needed.

Chaos taught me that strength is not about never breaking. It is about learning how to meet yourself gently in the pieces. What feels like falling apart is frequently falling into place. And in the falling, I found the voice I had been silencing for years.

Chapter 7

The Silence I Carried and the Voice I Found

*Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is
the bravest thing we will ever do. — Brené Brown*

Author's note: *This chapter contains accounts of sexual harassment, assault, and boundary violations. Please engage at your own pace and with care for yourself.*

The Silence Before Language

There is a part of my story that I once believed I would never speak about. Not in public. Not in writing. Not even in my own mind. It is the part where people I trusted crossed boundaries I did not yet know how to defend. These were not strangers in dark corners. People who took advantage of innocence, silence, and confusion.

For a long time, I did not understand what had happened. I did not have the language for it. I did not have the education. I did not have the awareness. Back then, no one taught young children what consent means. No one taught you that your discomfort is a full sentence. No one taught you that adults can be wrong, even if they look kind. No one taught you that being quiet from fear is not the same as agreeing.

So I carried the confusion quietly. I carried the fear. I carried the shame that never belonged to me. My mind tried to bury it, but my body remembered everything. The anxiety. The tension. The fear of confrontation. The people pleasing. The instinct to freeze. All the patterns that silently bloom in a child who learns very early that safety is not guaranteed.

I am sharing this part of my life for one purpose only, to prevent it from happening to someone else. And when I say someone, I mean girls, boys, and every young person who has never been told that their voice matters.

Assault does not choose victims by gender. Silence affects everyone. Confusion affects everyone. And healing is needed by everyone.

I want young people to know that danger does not always look dangerous. Sometimes it looks familiar. Sometimes it looks friendly. Sometimes it looks like an older friend. Sometimes it looks like someone the whole family trusts. That is exactly why awareness is important.

You have the right to walk away. You have the right to question behaviour. You have the right to protect your body. You have the right to say no, even if you cannot explain why. You have the right to trust your instinct when something feels wrong. You have the right to tell someone, even if you are scared that they will not believe you.

Every single child deserves safety. Every single child deserves protection. Every single child deserves to be heard and believed.

What happened to me should not have happened. But if my voice today helps even one person recognise a red flag, understand a strange feeling, or speak up sooner, then my story becomes a shield instead of a scar. If one child becomes more aware. If one parent listens more closely. If one young boy or girl knows they are allowed to say no. Then this chapter has done its job.

This is not a chapter for blame. It is not a chapter for pity. It is not a chapter for anger. It is a chapter for awareness. It is a chapter for protection. It is a chapter for courage. It is a chapter for every child who thinks silence is their only option. It is a chapter for every survivor who wonders if they imagined it. It is a chapter for every human being who needs to hear that it was never their fault.

I am speaking so that someone else does not stay silent. I am speaking so that someone else does not face what I faced. I am speaking so that awareness becomes our first form of protection.

The Experiences Carried in Silence

From a very young age, I experienced inappropriate touching on buses, hands sliding between my thighs in broad daylight, long before the 'Me-Too movement' existed. There was no public conversation. There was no language for what was happening. There was no safe space to speak. My

voice stayed buried because, like many people at the time, I believed I was somehow attracting this behaviour. That was the conditioning of the era. Blame yourself. Stay quiet. Move on.

I remember men climbing onto my train berth at night. Men crossing boundaries and pretending it was an accident. Men touching my body while I slept. Men who took advantage of crowded public spaces. I remember the feeling of being watched like prey. I remember the shame that never belonged to me.

There was a moment at a concert that has stayed with me forever. I had been so excited for that night. I bought a new T-shirt. I wore a jacket over it. I wore a beanie to cover every inch of skin because I wanted to protect myself. I hoped that my clothes would keep me safe. I hoped that covering my body would make me invisible.

It did not.

An elderly man, the kind people would probably describe as respectable at first glance, grabbed my breast in the middle of the crowd and looked at me with a smirk and said “Sorry,” that made my entire body freeze.

But something inside me reacted before my mind could. My reflex pushed him forward into the crowd. It was the only moment of power I felt in that entire situation, but it was enough to remind me that something in me refused to stay silent.

That night scarred me. I felt exposed. I felt violated. I felt used. I could not go to work the next morning because I was still shaking from the shock of it. The innocence and excitement I carried into that concert disappeared in seconds.

For years, society taught us to excuse this behaviour. People would say it was a mistake. They would say men are just being friendly or playful. They would normalise it by saying he is like that only. They would label them as touchy or harmless. But there was nothing harmless about it. It was degrading. It was violating. And for far too long, it was normalised.

Today, I call it out. I no longer silence myself. I no longer protect the behaviour. I no longer minimise it. I no longer justify it. And I no longer carry shame for something I never caused.

The truth is simple. This happens to girls. This happens to boys. This happens to adults. This happens to children. It happens in public. It happens in private. And it must be spoken about, not to create fear, but to create awareness.

Public spaces were never truly safe. But I believed, naively, that if I dressed the right way or stayed alert enough, I could manage the threat. It took one night alone on a dark street to understand what I had not yet learnt: danger does not require a crowd, and neither does courage.

The Night on the Dark Street and Its Aftermath

I have had many moments in my life that felt like crossroads, but this one, this night on that dark, empty street, split my life into "before" and "after."

It started with something as ordinary as an argument with my boyfriend at the time. A heated fight outside a restaurant. I do not even remember what it was about. What I do remember is him storming off, getting into his office cab in the night, and leaving me standing alone on a road with no streetlights.

There I was in formal pants, a shirt, and heels, the one day I decided to look like a corporate adult, and I was abandoned in the middle of the night. I do not think he paused long enough to realise what he had done.

A group of men had seen us arguing. I did not pay attention until I did.

I heard footsteps behind me.

A voice calling, "Excuse me... excuse me..."

At first, I ignored it. I continue to walk.

I turned around after a while.

When I did, the man said, "I think I know you."

I said no.

He kept following me anyway.

Then he asked, "What is your rate?"

My heart sank. My blood boiled. My innocence cracked.

It felt like being punched in the soul.

I was barely out of college. I looked like a child. And somehow, he still had the audacity to say that to me.

This was before we had vocabulary for harassment. Before we openly spoke about boundaries and consent.

I tried calling friends. No one picked up.

Finally, I dialled someone I had not spoken to in ages, a friend who worked nearby. My voice was shaking so much he could not tell if I was laughing or crying.

He reached me in a few minutes.

I updated my then boyfriend, not because I needed him, but because I felt he should know. His reaction was more drama, more manipulation, more guilt.

My friend stood in front of me.

My ex came from behind and grabbed my shoulders. For a second, I thought it was one of the men and I screamed.

At that moment, something inside me snapped awake.

All the lies. The emotional abuse. The isolation. The way he locked me inside so I would not meet friends. The money he withdrew from my bank account after forging my signature.

It all rose to the surface.

My friend dropped me back to where I stayed safely, but the nightmare did not end there. My ex called over a hundred times until the call log reset back to "1."

He waited outside my building the next morning. Followed me to work. Created a scene at the office entrance. Followed me home again.

I got into the lift. He got in too.

So I stepped out and did the only thing my body knew to do. I ran.

Three floors. Heart pounding. Praying: Please God, please, let me reach my door. Please do not let me fall.

I slammed the door shut a second before he reached it. I was with him for only six months. Just six.

But those six months changed everything.

They taught me more about human behaviour, boundaries, safety, intuition, and self-respect than any psychology course ever could.

And this is where my body shifted too.

Slowly, without even realising it, I began putting on weight. I stopped looking after myself. I thought that if I made myself less visible, less approachable, less "looked at," men would stop touching me, stop stalking me, stop assuming they could access me.

My body became my armour. A subconscious attempt to stay safe in a world that felt unsafe at the time. He later spread lies about me. Rumours. Nonsense. But by then, I genuinely did not care.

Something had further awakened in me. A fire. A strength. A bring-it-on attitude. He had stripped many things from me, but not my spirit.

Not anymore.

That night of fear, footsteps, running and prayer was when I realised I was not weak. I was waking up.

I had believed that familiarity was protection. That the danger of the dark street was an exception, something that happened with strangers, in unsafe places. What came next dismantled that assumption entirely. Because the next violation did not come from a stranger. It came from inside the circle of people I called safe.

A Different Kind of Betrayal, By a Friend

What I never expected was that years later, after everything I had already faced and survived, something else would happen. And not by a stranger. Not by an abusive partner. But by a friend.

A person I trusted. A person I felt safe around. A person I never imagined would cross a line.

It happened after the Me-Too movement. After we had words. After the world had already woken up. And yet, it still happened.

The violation shattered something deeper than my body: it shattered trust. It made me rethink familiarity, safety, and the myth that "friends don't cross boundaries." They can. Some do. And that betrayal stays with you in a different way.

I did not scream. I did not tell anyone immediately. I did not know how to even process it. Shock can be quiet, heavy, suffocating.

What the Me-Too movement did for me was not prevention; it was recognition.

It helped me understand that what happened was real. That it was not my fault. That I was not imagining it. That boundaries are not optional. And that silence is not the path to healing.

This experience, painful as it was, became another reclaiming. A fiercer clarity. A renewed promise: I will never apologise for protecting my body, my boundaries, my truth. Ever again. What these experiences taught me, across years of carrying them in silence, was that the instinct to stay quiet is not a personal failing. It is a pattern that is taught, reinforced, and rewarded in ways so subtle that most people never question it. But silence has a cost. It accumulates in the nervous system. It shapes the way you move through the world. The moment you begin to name what happened, something shifts.

The Moment of Reclaiming

There is a moment most women do not notice when it happens. It does not look dramatic. It does not feel like a big decision.

It sounds like:

"It's fine." "Let it go." "Don't make it awkward."

And in that moment, something small but significant happens. You leave yourself to stay in the situation.

You override the discomfort. You silence the hesitation. You negotiate with your own instincts. Not because you do not know. But because you have been taught to maintain harmony.

The real shift was not in how I understood the past. It was in how I moved forward.

I stopped negotiating my discomfort. I stopped explaining my boundaries. I stopped prioritising harmony over truth.

Stopping self-abandonment is not about becoming aggressive. It is about becoming honest sooner. It is about catching that moment and choosing differently.

Instead of, "It's okay." You say, "Actually, I am not okay with this." Instead of, "I'll just get through it." You say, "I don't want to continue." Instead of, "Don't make a scene." You say, "No."

When you stop abandoning yourself, you do not wait for things to become extreme. You trust early discomfort. You speak before resentment builds. You choose clarity over harmony.

And something subtle but powerful happens.

You stop asking, "Is this bad enough to say something?"

And you start asking, "Am I okay with this?"

If everything else feels hard to remember, remember this:

I choose myself, even if it disrupts the moment.

Language for Self-Protection

These words are not tools to control someone else. They are anchors to bring you back to yourself. Use them the moment you feel yourself slipping.

When you start overriding yourself, "This doesn't feel right to me." "I need to pause."

When you feel pressure, "I am not comfortable." "Don't push me on this."

When you know your answer, "No." "I don't want this." "Stop."

When you need to choose yourself fully, "I am leaving." "I am done here."

For a long time, many women were taught to stay.

Stay agreeable. Stay kind. Stay quiet. Stay accommodating. But no one taught them this:

You are allowed to stay with yourself instead.

My intention in sharing these parts of my story is not to reopen wounds. It is to ensure that the generations to follow grows up recognising what is acceptable and what is not. It is to ensure they never confuse someone else's behaviour with their worth. It is to ensure silence does not become their normal. It is to ensure they know they have the right to speak, to protect themselves, and to walk away.

This is not just my story. It is the story of countless people who never had the chance or the courage to say anything at all.

Understanding good touch and bad touch, I wish someone had taught us these things when we were young. It would have saved so much confusion. It would have protected so many of us from blaming ourselves.

A good touch feels safe. It feels respectful. It does not confuse you. It does not create fear. A good touch honours your comfort level. A good touch never asks for secrecy. A good touch never forces silence.

A bad touch feels different. Your body knows the truth before your mind does. A bad touch makes your stomach twist. A bad touch creates discomfort even if the person smiles. A bad touch may feel wrong even if you cannot explain why. A bad touch crosses your personal space. It makes you freeze or want to move away. A bad touch can be disguised as an accident or a joke. But your instinct can feel the difference between clumsy and predatory.

A good touch is respectful. A bad touch is secretive. A good touch feels safe. A bad touch feels confusing. A good touch never forces silence. A bad touch always depends on silence.

Children need to know that their instincts matter. Teenagers need to know that their boundaries are valid. Adults need to know that it is never too late to recognise what they went through. And parents need to know that conversations about safety are not scary. They are essential.

Your body is yours. Your space is yours. Your voice is yours. And your safety is not negotiable.

What I have shared in these pages took years to find language for. And yet, in the naming of it, something was reclaimed. Not just for me, but for every

person who has ever stayed silent when they deserved to speak. The awakening that follows was built, in part, on this reclaiming. That is where we go next.

There comes a point where the story is no longer enough.

Not because it did not matter, but because it no longer explains everything.

For a long time, I saw my life as a series of events. Things that happened to me. Moments I had to endure, survive, or make sense of.

But that perspective only told part of the truth.

Because beneath every experience was something far more consistent, the way I thought, the meaning I gave things, and the identity I carried through it all.

That is what shaped my choices. That is what shaped my reactions. That is what shaped my life.

And once I saw that, I could no longer unsee it.

This is where the journey changes.

Not from story to theory, but from unconscious living to conscious understanding.

Marianne Williamson wrote in *A Return to Love* that our deepest fear is not inadequacy, but the power we carry within us — that it is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us most. And that playing small has never served the world. I have returned to that idea more times than I can count. If you have not yet read those words in full, find them. They will find you at exactly the right moment.

— Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*

PART **III**
THE RISE

Awakening, Alignment and Personal Power

Chapter 8

The Awakening Moment

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. — Anaïs Nin

One morning I folded a bedsheet.

That was all. I picked up one end, walked it to meet the other, smoothed the fold, and set it down.

And I stood there for a moment, quietly astonished. Because three months earlier I could not have done that. My hands would not have cooperated. My body would not have agreed. That morning, they did. And I understood something that no one had been able to explain to me in a hospital room: the body knows when it is ready to come back. You just have to be paying attention when it does.

Breathing became a triumph. Feeling became a celebration. Folding a bedsheet became living proof that my body still functioned in ways that mattered.

That was the awakening moment. Not when I accepted the diagnosis. But when I noticed the bedsheet.

In every crisis, there is a moment when reality dawns. Not the dramatic moment of diagnosis or collapse. Not the whirlwind of hospital rooms and medical procedures. But the hush after, when you are there alone with every truth, and you have to reckon: now what?

For me, that moment came in 2018, when I was forced to stop pretending everything was fine.

I had the stubbornness of someone who was not going to give up on their life. The prayer I had whispered in Chapter 3 was already working its way through me, long before I understood how.

This is real. AND I am still going to keep pushing forward.

Not despite the reality. Not by denying it. But in the face of it, I chose who I would become. What felt like collapse was actually a confrontation. The version of me that had been coping could not survive what was coming. Something more deliberate had to emerge.

The diagnosis was not the end. It was the beginning of everything I was about to become.

The shift was not instant or magical. It was a deliberate rewiring that happened one thought, one choice, one day at a time.

Your brain is designed to survive. My entire life, I had been operating in survival mode, doing what had to be done, meeting expectations, pushing through pain, carrying burdens that were not mine to bear. My survival brain was in charge, just trying to get through the day.

But awakening required engaging a different part of my brain. The part that thinks, plans, creates, and imagines what is beyond pure survival. The part that asks: what do I really want? Who am I beyond these conditions?

The rewiring started with awareness. I had to pay attention to the prevailing soundtrack in my head. Which voice was driving my choices? What reality was my mind constructing for me?

I discovered that what I focused on, I found more of. If I told myself I was broken, I found proof everywhere. If I told myself I was healing, I started noticing evidence of that too. One new thought, practised day after day, becomes a belief. One new emotional response, regularly chosen, stops being optional and becomes your new baseline.

I began each morning asking: can I see? Can I move my fingers? My toes? My body? I started treasuring the ordinary like breathing, touching, living without the need to immediately fear. What had once simply been taken for granted became something worth noticing.

This was not toxic positivity. This was strategic rewiring.

It was not about denying the pain, the spasms, the pins, and needles, or even those days when my bathroom became a maze and I could not find my way out. I was choosing what to focus on. I was teaching my brain to notice the victories alongside the obstacles.

Clarity did not arrive as a lightning bolt. It emerged as small sparks in the darkness, moments when I could see through the fog of fear and pain to something truer.

I am not my diagnosis. MS was something happening in my body, but it was not who I was. I was Natasha, who also happened to be navigating this condition, and so much more.

Limitation is a point of view. When the doctors told me I would probably never run two kilometres again, that was their conclusion from the data they had. But I knew myself. I was an athlete in school. I kept telling myself: when I get out of this hospital bed, I am going to run that distance again, even if I have to crawl over the finish line. That was not delusion. That was clarity about who I really was beneath the label.

Systems work. I had learnt that lesson decades earlier when I made that study schedule in the tenth grade, the one I still remember a quarter-century later. Discipline works. Clarity works. Cutting out what does not serve you works. So I applied that same wisdom here. A list each quarter of what I wanted to do, and then I did those things. Every accomplishment, no matter how small, was celebrated.

The suffering had purpose. Chaos to Significance was so much more than just a brand. It was a mission born from healing. Because I knew far too many high-performing, deeply unfulfilled people. People who were fine on the outside but suffocating inside. I made a decision: my pain would become a pathway, and my voice would become a lighthouse.

This is not the end. It is the portal. What if the mess I was wading through was not what would finish me, but where I would be called back to myself? What if this diagnosis, this devastation, were not punishment but initiation? Chaos can catalyse breakthrough. What feels like falling apart is frequently falling into place.

Awakening is not a one-time event. It is a daily practice of returning to clarity, again and again, especially when chaos threatens to pull you back under.

I began each day with mindful awareness, choosing to move through the day with curiosity, openness, and a commitment to be as fully present as possible, even in pain, even in uncertainty.

I took deep breaths regularly. I returned to my breath when fear whispered in the shadows, when symptoms flared, or when doubt crept in. Your breath is your remote control. Your posture is your statement. Your presence is your frequency.

I learnt to name what I was experiencing. This is overwhelm. Not truth. Not me. Just passing weather. This simple habit allowed me to stop identifying with each emotion that moved through my system and instead investigate it as information, not identity.

I moved my body intentionally. Even when everything felt heavy, movement was a force that broke things loose. Walk. Dance. Stretch. The body holds emotional memory, and movement helps free what is stuck.

I practised gratitude, not as a spiritual bypass but as an act of strategic refocusing. Good for the memories. Bad for life lessons. Ugly for the growth it forced.

There is a reason some of these practices work. They are not merely feel-good rituals. They interact with the biology of how we experience motivation, connection, mood, and resilience.

I think of it as DOSE

DOSE: The Chemistry of a Well-Lived Life

MOVEMENT, GRATITUDE, CONNECTION AND LAUGHTER ARE NOT SOFT SKILLS.

THEY ARE PART OF THE BIOCHEMISTRY OF A WELL-LIVED LIFE.

There is a reason some things make you feel inexplicably better.

You finish something you have been putting off and suddenly feel ten feet taller.

You go for a walk when you were convinced you were too tired to move.

You have one of those conversations with a friend where you laugh so hard you forget what you were upset about in the first place.

Someone hugs you properly, not the polite one-arm pat that says, *lovely to see you, now please move along*.

You sit in the sun with a cup of tea and, for five minutes, remember that life is not actually a spreadsheet.

Your brain and body are responding to these experiences.

One useful way to remember some of the chemistry involved is **DOSE**:

Dopamine

Oxytocin

Serotonin

Endorphins

Think of it as your brain's little reminder that being human is not only about getting through the day. It is also about having experiences worth staying alive for.

D is for Dopamine: Progress

Dopamine is often called the pleasure chemical, but that description is incomplete. It has an important role in motivation, anticipation, learning, reward, and goal-directed behaviour.

This is why progress feels good.

Finish the chapter.

Tick the box.

Send the email you have been avoiding for three days.

Finally clean that drawer that has been threatening to collapse since 2019.

Go to the gym.

Take the first step towards something that matters.

Your brain responds to movement towards a goal. The size of the achievement is not always the point. **Progress itself can become rewarding.**

This is why small wins matter.

Your brain does not need you to win an Olympic medal every Tuesday. Sometimes it just needs evidence that you are moving.

And this is where identity becomes interesting.

Every time you do something that aligns with the person you say you want to become, you give your brain another piece of evidence.

I said I would do it. I did it.

That builds something far more valuable than a tick on a to-do list.

Self-trust.

O is for Oxytocin: Connection

Oxytocin is strongly associated with bonding, trust, and social connection.

In other words, humans are not designed to thrive entirely on their own.

You can have the perfect morning routine, meditate for twenty minutes, drink your green juice and journal about your inner child, but sometimes what you actually need is your best friend saying:

"Come here."

That conversation where you finally tell someone what is really going on?

Connection.

The hug that lasts long enough for your nervous system to believe it?

Connection.

Laughing with someone until your stomach hurts?

Connection.

Being able to sit beside someone without performing, explaining, or pretending?

That matters too.

We often treat connection as something optional, something we will get around to once the work is done.

But connection is part of the work.

You do not heal your life entirely in isolation.

S is for Serotonin: Stability, Mood and Feeling Seen

Serotonin plays a role in mood regulation, learning and a range of other functions throughout the body. It is also involved in social behaviour and our experience of status, competence and belonging.

Which explains why being constantly compared with everyone around you can mess with your internal state.

You open Instagram.

Someone has bought the house.

Someone else has launched the business.

Someone is travelling through Bali while apparently having the most emotionally regulated relationship known to humanity.

Someone is younger than you and already has a six-figure business.

Suddenly your perfectly good Tuesday feels like a personal failure.

Comparison has a way of turning someone else's highlight reel into evidence against your own life.

But feeling competent matters too.

So does being acknowledged.

So does doing something that reminds you:

I know what I am doing.

I am getting better.

I belong here.

That does not make you needy.

It makes you human.

E is for Endorphins: Your Built-In Support Crew

Endorphins are involved in the body's response to pain and stress and can be released during physical activity and other experiences such as laughter.

This is one reason movement can change how you feel.

Sometimes you do not need another twenty-minute conversation about why you feel terrible.

Sometimes you need to put your shoes on and walk.

Or dance.

Or swim.

Or stretch.

Or, if you are anything like me, put on music and dance badly enough that your dignity leaves the room before you do.

Laughter counts too.

There is something wonderfully rebellious about laughing in the middle of a difficult season.

It does not mean the problem is not real.

It means the problem does not get to occupy every square inch of your emotional landscape.

Your body has its own ways of helping you regulate pain, stress, and mood.

Sometimes we just forget to use them.

The point is not to chase chemicals

This is not about becoming obsessed with engineering the perfect hormonal cocktail.

You do not need to wake up tomorrow and announce:

"Today I shall optimise my DOSE."

Please do not.

The point is much simpler.

- Move your body.
 - Make progress.
 - Connect with people who make you feel safe enough to be real.
 - Notice what is good.
 - Let yourself laugh.
 - Do things that give your brain evidence that your life is moving in a direction that matters.
- These are not frivolous extras you earn after becoming successful.
- They are part of what makes success worth having.
- Because what is the point of building a bigger life if your nervous system never gets to experience it?
- A well-lived life is not just about what you achieve.
- It is also about what your body gets to experience while you are achieving it.

The Brain Has Rhythms Too

Your brain is constantly active, even when you are doing absolutely nothing that looks productive. Researchers can measure rhythmic patterns of electrical activity in the brain using electroencephalography, commonly known as EEG (Yep! Did you know that before?). These patterns are commonly described in frequency bands, measured in **hertz (Hz)**, meaning cycles per second.

Brainwave	Approx. frequency	Commonly associated with
Delta	0.5–4 Hz	Deep sleep and slow-wave activity
Theta	4–8 Hz	Drowsiness, memory processes and some meditative states

Brainwave	Approx. frequency	Commonly associated with
Alpha	8–13 Hz	Relaxed wakefulness, particularly with reduced sensory input
Beta	13–30 Hz	Alertness, active thinking, attention and cognitive processing
Gamma	30+ Hz	Various forms of attention, perception and information processing

These ranges are **approximate**, not rigid biological boxes. Different studies use slightly different boundaries, particularly for beta and gamma.

And here is the part I want you to remember:

Do not turn this into a hierarchy.

Alpha is not automatically better than beta. Theta is not automatically more spiritual. Gamma is not automatically a higher level of consciousness.

Your brain does not work like a staircase where you climb from one wave to the next.

Different rhythms can occur together, change with context and serve different functions. What matters is not chasing a particular number, but understanding that **your brain and body are constantly shifting states in response to what you experience, think, feel and do.**

And that is where this becomes relevant to awakening.

Awareness begins when you start noticing your state before your state starts running you.

You notice the racing thoughts.

You notice the tension in your body.

You notice when you are exhausted but still pushing.

You notice when you are calm enough to hear yourself think.

And then you have a choice.

There is a creed by Christian D. Larson from 1912 that I return to often. You will find it in the appendices. Some wisdom has no expiry date.

I journaled. What feeling have I been running away from, and what is it trying to tell me? The frequency I transmitted from became the frequency I received back.

The awakening moment does not wait for perfect circumstances. It is not waiting until you are healed, until the crisis has passed, until you have more energy or clarity or resources.

The awakening moment is now. In the mess. In the middle. In heartbreak or perplexity.

It is when you say: I will not abandon myself for the sake of belonging. I will lead, not just exist. I am significant.

Conversations I had, just because someone needed to be heard, became the work I was built for. I knew before I could articulate why. It felt like home calling.

This story is not just mine. It is yours too, if you have ever had the feeling that you are destined for something more but just do not know where to start. If you have lost your spark between the hustle and the heartbreak. If you are done allowing those who never truly saw you to keep you small.

The mess you are wading through is not the end of you. It is the call back to you.

Awakening is the recognition that your life has been running on a design you never consciously chose. The chapters that follow are about understanding that design and rebuilding it, deliberately, from the inside out. Not as theory. As life.

**STOP SHRINKING.
TAKE UP SPACE.**

Chapter 9

The Cost of Self-Abandonment

*You cannot pour from an empty vessel. But first you have to admit
the vessel is empty. — Natasha Pinto*

This chapter discusses sexual violence and its impact.

Please read at your own pace.

There was a time I believed harm would be obvious. That it would arrive loudly, look unmistakably wrong, and come from strangers.

Life has a way of dismantling assumptions you did not know you were carrying.

Because harm does not always look dangerous. Sometimes it arrives educated, articulate, respected, the kind of person the world easily calls a good man.

The moment that changed my understanding of this was not dramatic. There was no visible struggle. No scene anyone else would recognise as significant. Just a shift. The kind your body notices before your mind has words for it.

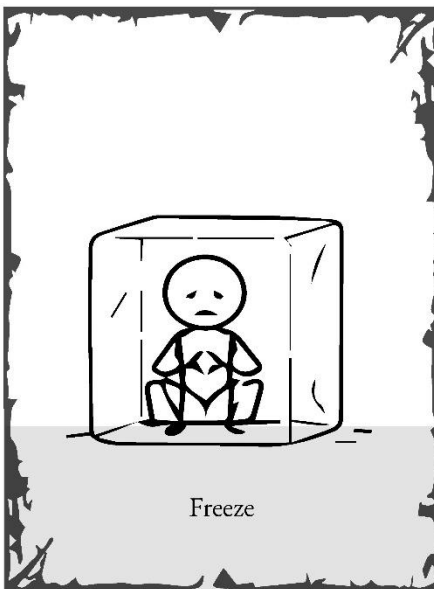
And in that moment, something else took over. Not logic. Not clarity. Instinct. For a while, I struggled to name what had happened. It was rape.

Because the person did not fit the narrative I had been taught to associate with harm. The mind resists contradiction. It searches for explanations that make things easier to carry.

Maybe it was not that serious. Maybe I misunderstood. Maybe it is easier to move forward than to disrupt everything by naming it.

But clarity came later. And it came through a truth that does not bend. Consent is not the absence of resistance. Consent is the presence of freedom. Freedom to say no. Freedom to stop. Freedom to not comply in order to stay safe.

Nervous System & Self Regulation



When that freedom is not present, something essential has already been taken.

One of the most misunderstood aspects of experiences like this is how the body responds in the moment. We like to believe that when something is wrong, we will fight or walk away. But the nervous system is not built on ideals. It is built on survival.

When the brain senses threat, it activates responses that are older than thought, fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. Fight confronts. Flight escapes. Freeze shuts down. Fawn complies to reduce risk. These are not decisions. They are biological responses.

TABLE 4

Identity, Survival and the Nervous System Response

Through Common Behavioural and Identity Pattern

Polyvagal Theory suggests that many of our behaviours are adaptive responses to perceived safety and threat. The autonomic nervous system continuously scans the environment and adjusts our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours accordingly.

NERVOUS SYSTEM RESPONSE	COMMON BEHAVIOURAL EXPRESSION	POSSIBLE IDENTITY PATTERN OR SURVIVAL ROLE
Fight	Confrontation, criticism, control, defensiveness, truth-telling	Scapegoat, Rebel, Protector
Flight	Overworking, hyper-achievement, perfectionism, constant busyness	Performer, Hero, Achiever
Freeze	Withdrawal, numbness, indecision, invisibility, procrastination	Lost Child, Observer, Invisible One
Fawn	People-pleasing, appeasing, over-accommodating, humour, rescuing	Mascot, Caretaker, Enabler

KEY INSIGHT

- | What appears to be personality may sometimes be a survival strategy that became an identity.
- | When safety increases, people often discover they are more than the roles they learned to play.

When someone goes quiet or complies, it does not mean they agreed. It often means their system chose the safest available option at that moment. What once felt like confusion became clear. My body had not chosen consent. It had chosen survival.

Biology explains part of the response. Conditioning explains the rest. For generations, women have been taught to maintain harmony. To avoid escalation. To keep situations manageable. To prioritise the comfort of others. So when instinct and conditioning align, silence becomes predictable. Not because the boundary is unclear, but because expression feels more dangerous than suppression.

For a long time, I believed what happened to me was complicated. Rare. It is not.

Globally, about one in three women, over 800 million, experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Most of it does not come from strangers. It comes from people they know, partners, acquaintances, colleagues, friends. An estimated one in eight girls worldwide experience sexual violence before the age of eighteen. And in many countries, the majority of these cases are never reported. Not because they do not matter, but because of shame, self-doubt, fear of consequences, social pressure, and not wanting to create conflict. In many cases, silence is not a conscious decision. It is conditioning.

By the time I reached this point in my own journey, I had already begun to understand where the silence came from. Chapter 7 tells that story in full. What I want to explore here is what that silence actually costs, not just emotionally, but physically, economically, and socially, because the price turns out to be far higher than most people realise.

What Is This Costing Women?

The psychological impact is not confined to the moment itself. Sexual violence leaves an imprint on the nervous system. Women who experience it have significantly higher risks of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal thoughts. Many carry flashbacks, confusion, guilt, and emotional shutdown, not because they are weak, but because the brain is trying to process a violation of safety.

The physical and health impact is equally real. Many women experience chronic pain, reproductive health issues, sleep disturbances, and long-term physiological dysregulation. The body carries what the mind cannot always resolve.

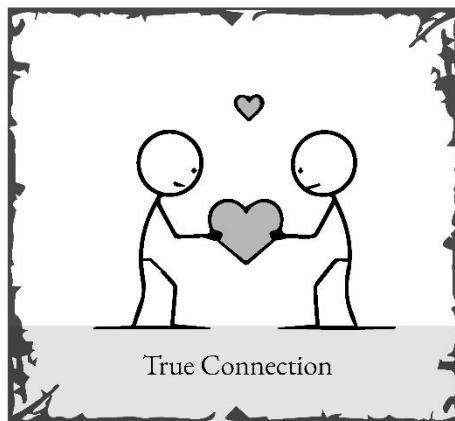
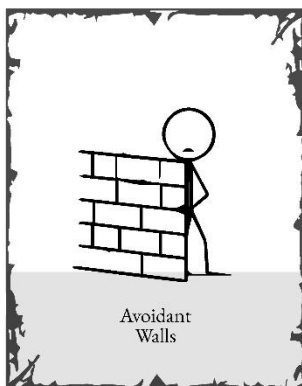
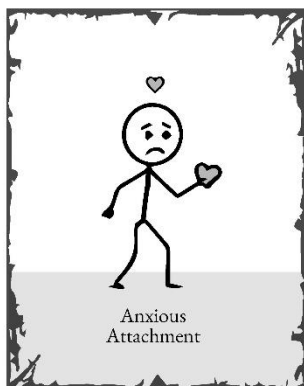
The economic impact extends into how women live and work. Many experience reduced career progression, difficulty concentrating, missed opportunities, and withdrawal from professional environments. Globally, violence against women costs economies billions through healthcare, lost productivity, and social systems. But the deeper loss is harder to measure. It is the potential that never fully expresses.

But the deepest cost is this:

It teaches women to doubt their own boundaries.

And when women begin questioning their instincts instead of trusting them, something powerful is lost, their voice, their leadership, their freedom to exist without fear.

Emotional & Relationship Patterns



The Silence Around It

What shocked me even more was how rarely these experiences are reported.

In large surveys across countries, most women never report sexual violence to authorities. The reasons are painfully familiar:

Shame, Self-blame, Fear of consequences, Not wanting to damage someone's reputation.

In other words, many women remain silent for the very same reason they stayed quiet in the moment. To maintain harmony.

The Social Impact

Perhaps the most invisible cost: women change how they move through the world.

Many women begin to doubt their instincts, avoid confrontation, silence their voice, and second-guess their boundaries. And when this happens at scale, society shifts. Women speak less boldly. Lead less freely. Take fewer risks. The loss is not just personal. It reshapes how women participate in the world.

To understand this pattern fully, it is not enough to look at individual behaviour. For much of human history, women's survival depended on maintaining relational stability. They could not easily leave. They could not always earn independently. They could not always afford conflict.

Harmony was not politeness. It was protection.

Over time, this became an expectation. A good woman keeps the peace. But when harmony becomes more important than autonomy, silence becomes the price of belonging.

Understanding this changed something fundamental in me. My experience was not an isolated moment. It was part of a larger system, biological, psychological, and cultural.

Proximity does not grant permission. Familiarity does not replace consent. Respect is revealed in the moment someone encounters a boundary and chooses to honour it. That moment, quiet, often invisible, is where integrity lives.

And the truth I carry forward is this:

Harmony is not a virtue when it requires silence.

Real respect does not ask you to shrink in order to maintain comfort. It honours your autonomy. Your voice was never meant to be the price you pay for keeping the peace.

The Moment You Stop Abandoning Yourself

There is a moment most women do not notice when it happens. It does not look dramatic. It does not feel like a big decision.

It sounds like:

"It's fine." "Let it go." "Don't make it awkward."

And in that moment, something small but significant happens. You leave yourself, to stay in the situation.

You override the discomfort. You silence the hesitation. You negotiate with your own instincts. Not because you do not know. But because you have been taught to maintain harmony.

Reclaiming Yourself in Real Time

Reclaiming yourself does not happen in one dramatic moment. It happens in the small ones. The moment you notice the discomfort before you talk yourself out of it. The moment you say something honest before the old habit of smoothing things over kicks in. Each of those small choices is a neurological event. Your brain is literally building a new response pattern. The more consistently you practise it, the more natural it becomes, until one day the honest response arrives before the conditioned one even has a chance to form.

Your Armoury, Not for Others, For You

These words are not tools to control someone else. They are anchors to bring you back to yourself. Use them the moment you feel yourself slipping.

When you start overriding yourself:

"This does not feel right to me." "I need to pause."

When you feel pressure:

"I am not comfortable." "Do not push me on this."

When you know your answer:

"No." "I do not want this." "Stop."

When you need to choose yourself fully:

"I am leaving." "I am done here."

The Real Shift

For a long time, many women were taught to stay.

Stay agreeable. Stay kind. Stay quiet. Stay accommodating. But no one taught them this:

You are allowed to stay with yourself instead.

Someone recently asked me: are you dependent, independent, or interdependent? Without hesitation I said interdependent. They were expecting me to say independent, the classic strong-woman-does-it-all-alone answer. But I paused, smiled, and thought: that is actually a really good question. We are not independent people. And I say that with love, not limitation. This whole idea that we are meant to do it all alone is one of the most damaging stories we tell ourselves. Self-abandonment often hides behind the mask of self-sufficiency. Reclaiming yourself sometimes means admitting you need people. That is not weakness. That is wisdom.

I spent almost 20 years across what was effectively the same amazing business through successive acquisitions, starting at Reuters, moving through Thomson Reuters, then Refinitiv, and finally LSEG, the London Stock Exchange Group, which acquired Refinitiv in 2021. On April 4th, 2025, that era ended. Many people thought I would retire from there. I might have thought so too, for a time. But the version of me that started in 2005 and the version that walked out in 2025 are not the same woman. Looking back, I do not just see the years. I see the fire, the growth, the becoming. I left with nothing but gratitude, and everything I had become.

On the last day, a colleague, practically a stranger, walked me to the cab. It was late. He noticed no one was with me as I kept delaying my departure to ensure everything was done right. He said: no one should go alone on their

last day. And he walked me out. Almost twenty years of a career, and that one gesture from someone I barely knew is one moment I carry with me.

What Changes After This

When you stop abandoning yourself, you do not wait for things to become extreme. You trust early discomfort. You speak before resentment builds. You choose clarity over harmony.

And something subtle but powerful happens.

You stop asking, "Is this bad enough to say something?"

And you start asking, "Am I okay with this?"

If everything else feels hard to remember, remember this:

I choose myself, even if it disrupts the moment.

The real shift was not in how I understood the past. It was in how I moved forward.

I stopped negotiating my discomfort. I stopped explaining my boundaries. I stopped prioritising harmony over truth.

Reclaiming yourself is not a single declaration. It is a daily practice of choosing your own truth over the comfort of the room.

And it begins, as most things do, in the architecture of the mind. That is where we go next. The daily practice of speaking differently to yourself begins simply. In my book - Bold, Beautiful & Blunt, Reflection 79 says: Speak to yourself gently. That is where it starts. Not with a framework. With one sentence, repeated until it becomes true.

Chapter 10

Rewiring the Brain and Escaping the Herd

A man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of all his thoughts. Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armoury of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy, strength, and peace. By the right choice and true application of thought, man ascends to the Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought, he descends below the level of the beast.

— James Allen

I have always planned in decades and lived in moments. Even when I had very little, I thought about finances in terms of what I wanted five or ten years from now, and what I wanted to leave behind for generations.

Knowing the future was being considered strategically allowed me to live fully in the present. Not from naivety, but from design.

I had flunked my 10th-grade midterm exams in Mathematics, you may remember that from earlier, and that quickly became the story. Not a numbers person. Case closed. But later, I did well in Math during my degree, and my dad could hardly believe it. Neither could I. That is the thing about the stories we absorb early in life. The brain does not lie to us intentionally. It simply repeats what it has rehearsed until something interrupts the pattern.

When my neurologist told me I probably would not run two kilometres again, he was not being cruel. He was interpreting data.

But data does not account for what happens when a human being decides the prediction is not the final word.

My brain rewired itself long before I understood the science behind it. I learnt the theory later. I lived the proof first.

That is what this chapter is about.

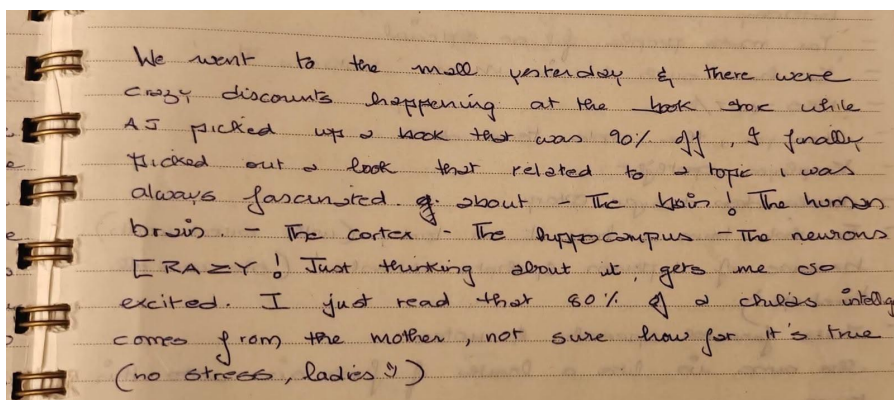
Awakening Is Neurological

When my body began failing in ways I could not explain, and when Multiple Sclerosis eventually became undeniable, I realised something confronting: if I waited for the system to hand me answers, I might wait forever.

So I did what survival forced me to do.

Long before any of that became formal study, there was an afternoon in a mall bookshop. I was with my then-husband. He picked up a book. I found one that stopped me, the word "Brain" on the cover. I pulled it out.

The cortex. The hippocampus. The neurons. The human brain.



I remember writing in my journal that night: CRAZY. Just thinking about it gets me so excited. That was the beginning. Not the beginning of my diagnosis, not the beginning of my coaching practice, but the beginning of the question that would shape everything that followed: how does this work? What is actually happening inside a human being when they change, when they stay the same, when they recover, when they collapse?

Curiosity came first. The methodology came later. In my experience, it is always in that order for the things that last.

I researched. I read. I studied neuroscience, behavioural psychology, regulation, performance science, and identity formation. Not casually. Intensely.

I wanted to understand what separated those who reorganise under pressure from those who collapse. Why do some remain in reaction while others rebuild? Why does the majority follow the herd even when the herd is clearly exhausted?

No one hands you a map. Most people never go looking for one. The deeper I studied, the clearer it became.

The Survival Brain: Why Fear Speaks First

The brain evolved for survival long before it evolved for self-actualisation. Within the limbic system sits the amygdala, often described as the brain's alarm system. It constantly scans for danger and threat.

What is fascinating is that the brain can react before the rational mind fully catches up. Your body responds first, and the story forms afterwards.

The amygdala does not always distinguish clearly between physical danger, financial uncertainty, rejection, embarrassment, failure, emotional discomfort, or even a medical diagnosis. To the nervous system, uncertainty itself can feel threatening.

During the height of my health crisis, my body was constantly alert. Even stillness felt loud. That hypervigilance was not weakness. It was survival circuitry doing exactly what it was designed to do.

The problem is not that the amygdala activates. The problem is when it begins governing your entire life.

This is why people snap before thinking, avoid difficult conversations, emotionally eat after stress, panic during uncertainty, abandon goals within weeks, or stay inside familiar dysfunction because it feels safer than change.

The brain prioritises safety over growth.

The herd lives here. In reaction. On autopilot. In nervous-system default. Herd mentality is not moral failure. It is a neurological default.

The Prefrontal Cortex: Where Agency Lives

Above the brain's survival circuitry sits the prefrontal cortex, particularly the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the area involved in planning, impulse control, long-term thinking, self-reflection, and conscious decision-making.

In simple terms, this is the part of the brain that helps us pause before reacting. It allows us to think beyond immediate fear or emotion and ask questions like: What would my future self-choose? Is this reaction helping me or hurting me? Do I want temporary relief or long-term growth? This is where agency lives.

But here is the uncomfortable truth. Chronic stress weakens our ability to access this part of the brain consistently. Sleep deprivation affects it. Inflammation affects it. Emotional overwhelm affects it.

When the nervous system becomes dysregulated, survival responses grow louder than conscious reasoning.

You do not rise to your goals. You fall to your conditioning.

During my own recovery, I had to learn something deeply humbling: I could not out-motivate a dysregulated nervous system.

Breathwork was not a spiritual performance. It was nervous-system regulation. Stillness was not laziness. It was recovery. Structure was not rigidity. It was stabilisation.

Calm physiology supports clearer thinking.

Awakening is not hype. It is learning how to create enough internal safety for conscious choice to return.

Why New Year Resolutions Fail

Every January, millions declare reinvention.

"I'll wake up at 5 AM." "I'll eat clean." "I'll invest aggressively." "I'll finally get disciplined."

And by mid-February, the resolve dissolves.

Why?

Because the neocortex plans. But the limbic system decides.

Habits are reinforced through cue-routine-reward loops. Junk food after stress is not simply hunger, it is conditioned dopamine relief. Avoiding the gym is not laziness, it is avoidance of discomfort the nervous system interprets as threat.

Most of your habits are not conscious choices. They are programmes running in the background, deeper than thought, deeper than intention. You did not decide to reach for your phone first thing in the morning. Something older and faster than your decision-making brain decided for you.

That is why logic alone cannot dismantle them. Willpower is weaker than wiring.

Change fails when it targets behaviour without addressing physiology and identity. Sustainable transformation requires interruption.

Pause. Slow your breath. Name what you are feeling. Ask, "Is this survival or strategy?"

That gap strengthens prefrontal engagement. Repeated over time, it rewires.

The Reticular Activating System: Identity Filters Reality

The Reticular Activating System, or RAS, is part of the brain's filtering system. Every second, your brain is receiving an overwhelming amount of information, far more than you could ever consciously process. The RAS helps decide what reaches your awareness based on what your mind repeatedly believes is important.

Which means your brain is constantly filtering reality through identity.

If your internal dialogue sounds like, "I am unlucky." "I am bad with money." "I never stick to anything." your attention naturally begins searching for evidence that confirms those beliefs. Not because the universe is punishing you, but because the brain strengthens and notices what it repeatedly rehearses.

This is not mysticism. It aligns with what psychology understands about attentional bias and confirmation bias.

Shift identity, and perception begins shifting too.

Normally, when people experience illness, heartbreak, failure, or uncertainty, the question often becomes, “Why is this happening to me?”

A more useful question is, “What remains within my control?” “What is this trying to teach me?”

That shift may sound small, but it changes more than people realise.

As perception shifts, behaviour often begins shifting too, though not always in some dramatic movie-montage kind of way where suddenly you wake up at 5 AM, drink green juice, meditate for an hour, and become a completely evolved human being overnight. Real change is usually far less glamorous than that.

It starts quietly.

You pause before reacting in a situation where you normally would have exploded. You recover faster from disappointment. You start noticing patterns in yourself that you were too distracted to notice earlier. You make one better decision, then another, and somewhere along the way you realise your inner world is no longer operating exactly the way it used to.

Over time, those repeated behaviours begin producing different outcomes, and those outcomes slowly start reshaping identity itself. You begin trusting yourself more. You stop seeing yourself only through the lens of old mistakes, old fears, or old labels.

And that is really the loop most human beings are living inside, whether consciously or unconsciously. We become what we repeatedly rehearse.

Which is honestly both empowering and slightly concerning when you realise how many strange habits quietly become part of our identity over the years. One day you are stress-eating chips while watching random late-night television because you had a difficult day, and before you know it your nervous system has filed it away under emotional support strategy.

Human beings are fascinating like that.

The brain pays attention to what is repeated, and eventually what is repeated starts feeling normal. Then normal starts feeling like personality.

Conditioning: The Scripts We Inherit

Most people are not limited by ability. They are limited by installed beliefs.

In early childhood, the brain is highly receptive to repetition and emotional tone. Beliefs about money, safety, ambition, and worth are absorbed long before they are questioned.

Many of us did not grow up in poverty. But we grew up in poverty thinking.

"Money doesn't grow on trees." "Be realistic." "Don't aim too high." "People like us don't become wealthy." "Better safe than sorry." "Government job is security."

Individually, these phrases sound practical. Repeated consistently, they become neural architecture. They wire caution into risk. Fear into ambition. Guilt into earning. Shame into visibility.

Over time, they stop sounding external. They sound like you.

Did you know repeated thought patterns strengthen neural pathways? The brain becomes more efficient at what it rehearses most often.

If scarcity is rehearsed daily, scarcity becomes perception.

Empowering beliefs are not about lying to yourself. They are about refusing to let old conditioning become a permanent identity.

"Money is a skill I can learn." "Risk can be assessed intelligently." "Growth builds capacity." "Starting late is better than not starting."

Humour helps expose conditioning. "Money doesn't grow on trees." True. But income grows from skill. "Be realistic." Often translated as: stay small enough to keep everyone comfortable. Conditioning sounds responsible. Until you question it.

Age, Plasticity, and the Myth of "Too Late"

One of the most common beliefs people carry is, "I am too old to change."

But neuroscience does not fully support the idea that the brain becomes fixed after adolescence. While learning and adaptation may look different as we age, the brain continues changing throughout adulthood. New neural

pathways can still form. New behaviours can still be learnt. New ways of thinking can still be practised and strengthened over time.

Yes, it may require more repetition, more patience, and more conscious effort than it did at fifteen. But the capacity for change does not suddenly disappear one day because society decides you have crossed some invisible age limit.

I have met people in their sixties and seventies who were more emotionally self-aware, open-minded, and willing to evolve than people half their age.

And honestly, many capable people hide behind age because it feels safer than admitting fear. "I am too old" is often easier to say than "I am scared to fail," "I am scared to start again," or "I am scared of looking foolish while learning something new."

More often than not, the real limitation is not age. It is identity.

Failure as Feedback

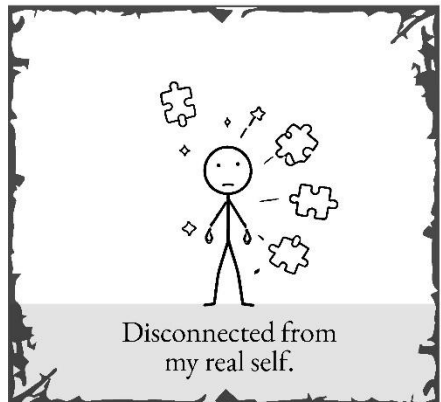
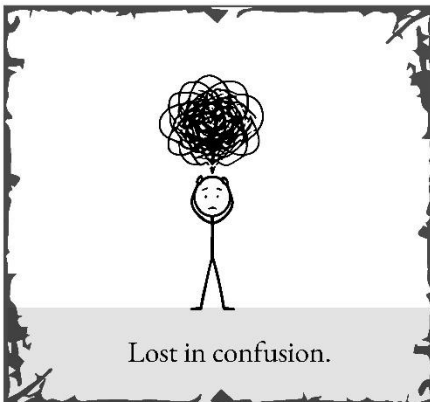
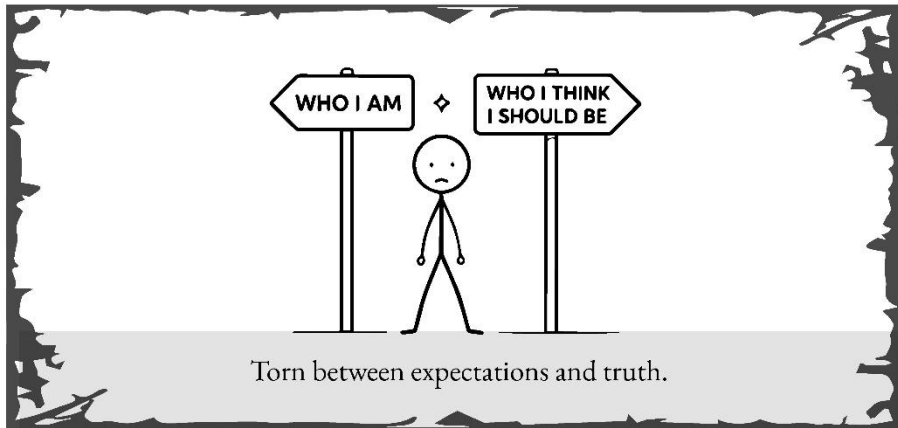
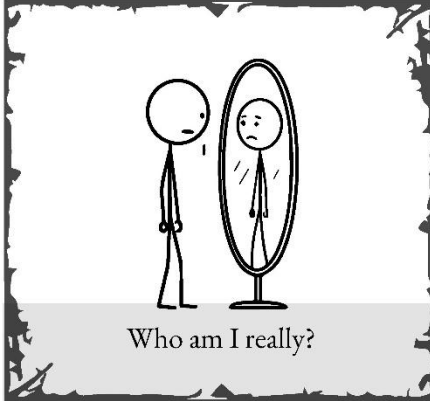
Thomas Edison conducted years of experimentation before successfully developing a commercially viable light bulb. People love quoting the whole "ten thousand attempts" thing, though apparently the exact number is debated. Still, the larger point remains true. He kept experimenting long enough for the thing to finally work.

What I find interesting is that he did not seem to interpret failure as proof that he himself was a failure. The experiments simply told him what did not work yet. There is a psychological difference between those two things, and honestly, many people never recover from confusing them.

When mistakes begin feeling emotionally dangerous, the nervous system starts avoiding risk altogether. People stop trying things. They overthink. They stay where it is familiar because failure starts feeling personal instead of instructional.

But some of the smartest people I know have made absolutely ridiculous mistakes: financial mistakes, career mistakes, relationship mistakes, human mistakes. The difference is not that they avoided failure. The difference is that they kept moving without allowing every setback to become a permanent identity crisis.

Identity Crisis



Sometimes intelligent mistakes are simply evidence that you had the courage to move at all.

Most people overestimate the danger of failure while underestimating the long-term cost of never trying at all.

Responsibility and the Space Between

There is a powerful idea often associated with Viktor Frankl: between stimulus and response, there exists a space, and within that space lies our freedom to choose. The Viktor Frankl Institute notes that the precise source of the wording is uncertain, but the essence of the idea runs deeply through his work in *Man's Search for Meaning*.

That idea stayed with me for years because it quietly changes the way you look at human behaviour.

Most people live as though life simply happens to them. Something goes wrong, emotions take over, old conditioning kicks in, and before they realise it, they are reacting automatically. The nervous system takes the wheel, and the conscious mind arrives afterwards trying to explain what just happened.

But that small space between what happens to us and how we respond to it is where real agency begins.

Not perfection. Not emotional suppression. Not becoming some endlessly calm spiritual robot who never gets triggered by anything. Just awareness. Even a few extra seconds of awareness can change the trajectory of a conversation, a decision, a relationship, or sometimes an entire life.

Taking responsibility does not mean blaming yourself for everything that has happened to you. It does not mean denying trauma, difficulty, illness, upbringing, or circumstance.

But over time, I began realising that the most empowering shift was moving from the belief that life was simply happening to me, toward the possibility that perhaps, in some strange and difficult ways, life was also happening for me.

Installing Identity

Transformation does not begin with goals. Goals matter, but they sit on top of something deeper: the identity underneath them. You can tell yourself "I will save more money" and still slip back into old patterns, because the brain is paying attention to who you believe you are, not just what you want to do. That is why the language matters. Instead of forcing behaviour through sheer will, the shift begins with becoming. "I am becoming financially disciplined." "I am learning how to regulate myself." It sounds subtle, but subtle is often where the real change starts. The brain does not usually transform through one dramatic burst of motivation. It changes through repetition, through small acts of alignment repeated often enough that they slowly start feeling natural.

And that is the part most people underestimate. Not the big, shiny declaration, but the quiet daily return. The tiny decisions. The ordinary moments. The repeated choice to act in a way that matches the person you are trying to become. That is what rewires you over time.

Rewiring Exercise: From Conditioning to Conscious Identity

Before behaviour changes, awareness usually has to come first. Most people are trying to fix patterns they have never actually stopped to examine properly.

Take a blank sheet of paper and write down some of the phrases you heard repeatedly growing up about money, success, relationships, health, ambition, or self-worth. Not just the obvious ones, but the subtle comments too. The things people said casually at the dinner table. The beliefs that quietly floated around the house often enough that they eventually started sounding true.

Then ask yourself a harder question:

How are those beliefs still showing up in my behaviour today?

Sometimes the connection is surprisingly obvious once you slow down enough to look at it honestly. A fear of visibility. Difficulty charging for

your work. Guilt around rest. Fear of risk. Staying small to avoid criticism. Constant overworking to feel worthy.

After that, try rewriting those beliefs into something healthier and more conscious. Not fantasy. Not blind positivity. Just perspectives that create more room for growth instead of limitation.

And yes, repetition matters more than people realise.

The brain strengthens what it rehearses repeatedly. Which means the words you consistently speak to yourself eventually stop feeling like language and start feeling like identity.

That is why self-talk matters.

Not because positive thinking magically fixes life, but because repeated thought patterns slowly shape perception, behaviour, and emotional response over time.

In many ways, rewiring begins the moment you become aware of the script you have been unconsciously rehearsing for years.

The Inner Rebirth

One of the most freeing things I began understanding through all of this was that many of the things we criticise ourselves for are not fixed character flaws. They are patterns. Conditioning. Repeated emotional responses and survival strategies that became automatic over time.

For years, people call themselves lazy when in reality they are exhausted, overwhelmed, dysregulated, or emotionally disconnected from what they are doing. Others call themselves broken when what they are actually carrying is years of fear, shame, rejection, grief, or conditioning they never properly examined.

That does not mean we avoid responsibility for our lives. It simply means we stop treating ourselves like defective human beings for having learnt unhealthy patterns.

Because patterns can be interrupted. Conditioning can change.

The brain adapts constantly to repetition, environment, behaviour, and attention. Which means transformation is often less about becoming

somebody entirely new and more about becoming conscious of what has been unconsciously running your life all along.

Most people live reactively without even realising it. Stress dictates behaviour. Fear dictates decisions. Familiarity dictates identity.

But conscious living asks something different of us. It asks us to pause long enough to examine the patterns underneath the performance.

Before you redesign your finances, relationships, leadership, health, or future, you eventually have to examine the architecture underneath all of them.

The nervous system. The beliefs. The habits. The identity.

Awakening, at least in my experience, is not some mystical escape from being human. It is becoming aware enough to participate consciously in the life you are creating instead of operating entirely on inherited patterns and unconscious reactions.

That is where the real rebirth begins.

Neurochemistry: Why Comfort Wins Before Discipline

By this point, you might be wondering: if we already know what is good for us, why is it still so difficult to do those things consistently? Why do intelligent people procrastinate, self-sabotage, overspend, stay inside unhealthy patterns, or abandon goals they genuinely care about?

A large part of that answer lies in neurochemistry, the internal reward systems influencing motivation, stress, comfort, attachment, and behaviour every single day.

We like to believe our decisions are entirely rational, that if something is clearly beneficial, we will naturally choose it. But human beings are far more emotionally and biologically driven than we like to admit.

Dopamine is usually introduced as the "pleasure chemical," but that description is incomplete. It is less about pleasure itself and more about anticipation, pursuit, and the expectation of reward.

That explains a lot about modern life.

It explains why scrolling on your phone to get an OTP suddenly turns into forty-five minutes disappearing into the internet. Why online shopping can feel strangely comforting after a stressful day. Why checking notifications becomes automatic before we even realise we are doing it.

The brain begins anticipating reward, and the anticipation itself becomes stimulating.

Short-term rewards create quick dopamine loops. Long-term goals like investing consistently, rebuilding health, studying deeply, or strengthening relationships create much slower reward signals.

Which is precisely why discipline often feels emotionally unrewarding in the beginning.

When people say, "I just don't feel motivated," what they are often describing is a reward system trained toward immediacy.

That is not a character flaw. It is conditioning.

Serotonin plays a role in mood regulation and perceived social positioning. Feeling respected, progressing, and competent supports emotional stability. This partly explains why comparison destabilises people so quickly.

When someone appears wealthier, more successful, or further ahead in life, the nervous system can interpret it as a kind of status threat. Confidence dips. Mood changes. Suddenly people begin questioning their own progress.

The herd instinct is not only psychological. Belonging feels biologically stabilising.

Oxytocin is associated with bonding and trust. It strengthens attachment to groups, environments, and familiar people. That is one reason leaving unhealthy social circles can feel deeply uncomfortable, even when we know they are limiting us.

The brain often prefers familiar discomfort over unfamiliar freedom.

Transformation sometimes requires tolerating temporary loneliness while building healthier alignment.

Endorphins help regulate pain and stress, which is one reason disciplined physical movement strengthens emotional resilience. When the body learns it can tolerate controlled discomfort, the mind often becomes steadier too.

None of this means you are controlled entirely by chemistry.

It simply means behaviour is influenced by it. And honestly, understanding that softens self-blame.

Scrolling instead of studying is not stupidity. Emotional spending is not weakness. Avoiding discomfort is not some sort of moral failure. Often, it is simply a reward system trained toward relief.

The empowering part is that neurochemistry also responds to repetition.

If you consistently associate satisfaction with progress, finishing difficult tasks, strengthening your body, tracking savings, or keeping promises to yourself, the reward system slowly begins attaching dopamine to effort instead of escape.

And this is where things become deeply practical.

Your portfolio reflects your behavioural patterns as much as your financial literacy.

If your nervous system is trained only for immediacy, long-term compounding will always feel boring. But if the brain learns to associate progress with reward, patience starts becoming powerful.

Transformation is not simply about willpower.

It is about retraining what the brain repeatedly rehearses.

The brain can be rewired. The question is whether you will take responsibility for what it rehearses. That responsibility and the architecture it creates, is where we go next.

Chapter 11

Reclaiming Authority, Designing the Self

Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate. — Carl Jung

I choose to live life with zero excuses and zero regrets. The good, the bad, the ugly, the whole bloody beautiful life of mine.

From Conditioning to Conscious Authority

Power is misunderstood.

Most people think power is loud, dominant, external. But the deepest form of power is architectural. It is invisible. It quietly governs how you think, how you interpret events, how you make decisions, and ultimately how you live your life.

For a long time, I believed circumstance held more authority than design. A diagnosis. A relationship ending. Cultural conditioning. Economic realities. Dismissal. Gaslighting. Illness. These felt larger than me, and in many ways they were. Certain experiences do shape you. They affect the nervous system, confidence, identity, and perception in ways people often underestimate.

But somewhere along the way, I realised something important. Circumstances influence experience, but they do not fully dictate trajectory. What shapes trajectory more deeply is the internal architecture through which those circumstances are processed.

I remember periods of my life when my body felt unpredictable and the future felt uncertain. Fear could very easily have become my identity. Survival could have quietly become my entire personality. Honestly, many people would have understood if I had chosen to live cautiously after that.

But slowly, almost invisibly at first, I became less interested in defining myself by what had happened and far more interested in understanding what kind of human being I could still become from it.

That shift changed more than my mindset. It changed my orientation toward life itself.

Psychological research has long explored the idea of locus of control, the degree to which people believe they can influence outcomes in their lives. Individuals with a stronger internal locus of control often adapt more effectively, persist longer through difficulty, and take greater initiative. Those with a dominant external locus can begin feeling as though life is simply happening to them while they stand there absorbing the impact.

This is not about blame. It is about orientation.

There is a difference between acknowledging hardship and surrendering authorship.

And I think that was one of the biggest shifts of my life. Not pretending difficult things did not affect me, but refusing to believe they were the only forces shaping me. Somewhere between survival and self-awareness, I began realising that authority is not about controlling everything around you. It is about learning how to consciously participate in what you become despite it.

The Invisible System Running Your Life

Every life is quietly shaped by a pattern of repeated decisions.

Not usually the dramatic, movie-scene kind of decisions people imagine. More often, it is the ordinary ones that slowly accumulate over time. What you tolerate. What you avoid. What you confront. What you invest energy into. What you keep postponing because dealing with it feels uncomfortable.

And underneath most of those decisions sits something deeper: belief.

Cognitive psychology has long explored how thoughts influence emotional responses, which then influence behaviour. In simple terms, the way we interpret reality affects how we feel, and how we feel affects what we do next.

Over time, those patterns begin reinforcing themselves.

Beliefs lead to Thoughts, which lead to Emotions, which lead to Actions, which lead to Results, which reinforce Beliefs. This loop becomes self-validating.

If somebody carries the belief, "I am not capable," they often begin interpreting challenges as proof of inadequacy. That interpretation creates anxiety, hesitation, withdrawal, or avoidance. Avoidance then produces limited results, and those results quietly reinforce the original belief.

And that is how patterns slowly become identity over time.

Not necessarily because fate decided it would, but because repetition quietly strengthened the same pathways over and over again until they began feeling true.

For example, imagine somebody grows up repeatedly hearing, "Money is the root of all evil."

At first, it just sounds like a sentence adults say casually around the house. But over time, the brain begins attaching morality to money itself. Wealth starts feeling associated with greed, selfishness, corruption, or losing one's humanity.

So later in life, that person may unconsciously undercharge for their work, avoid building wealth, feel guilty earning more than others around them, sabotage financial opportunities, or judge financially successful people without fully understanding why.

Consciously, they may say, "I want financial freedom."

But unconsciously, another part of the nervous system still associates money with danger, shame, or moral compromise.

And when those internal systems conflict, behaviour becomes inconsistent. That is how conditioning quietly shapes reality.

That is also why two people can endure similar adversity and still build radically different lives afterwards. It is not always because one person was spared pain while the other suffered. Often, both suffered deeply.

The difference is that one eventually began changing the meaning attached to the experience.

Because human beings do not respond only to reality itself. We respond to the interpretation of reality running through the nervous system, the identity, and the stories we repeatedly tell ourselves about who we are, what is possible, and what the future means.

That invisible system quietly shapes entire lives.

State-Dependent Decision Making

What many people describe as "vibration" can often be understood more simply through state and regulation. The emotional baseline we live from, shaped by nervous system conditioning, belief systems, and repeated thought patterns, influences the kinds of decisions that feel available to us in a given moment. Neuroscience has shown that when the nervous system is dysregulated, stress hormones rise, cognitive flexibility narrows, and the part of the brain responsible for thoughtful planning and self-control becomes less efficient. In practical terms, this means the brain starts prioritising short-term relief over long-term strategy.

I became very aware of this in my own life when I was physically unwell, exhausted, inflamed, and emotionally overwhelmed. My thinking narrowed in ways I did not always notice at the time. Things that would normally have felt manageable suddenly felt bigger, heavier, more urgent. Clarity was not something I could simply force through willpower. It required physiological stability first. Once I was more regulated, I could think more expansively again, and with that came a very different quality of decision-making.

What I learnt from that, more than anything, is that power is not force. Sometimes power is simply being regulated enough to see clearly.

Personal Values: The Compass of Authority

For a long time, I thought good decisions came mostly from intelligence, discipline, or experience. But over time I realised something else was sitting underneath all of that quietly shaping the direction of a person's life: values.

Not the values people write on professional platforms or say out loud because they sound impressive. The real ones. The ones revealed by what you consistently prioritise, tolerate, defend, pursue, or walk away from.

Power without values eventually becomes ego. Authority without alignment slowly becomes performance.

Your values quietly organise your life more than most people realise. They shape relationships, career choices, boundaries, finances, health, ambition, even the kind of exhaustion you are willing to tolerate.

Behavioural science has explored this repeatedly. Research suggests that when actions align with deeply held values, people generally experience less internal conflict and greater psychological stability. But when behaviour constantly contradicts what somebody truly values, friction builds internally. Anxiety rises. Resentment grows quietly. People begin feeling disconnected from themselves without always understanding why.

I think many people attempt to change habits without first clarifying what actually matters to them. They chase goals that look successful from the outside but feel strangely empty once achieved because those goals were never truly aligned to begin with. The result is often fragmentation, a life where different parts of the self are pulling in completely opposite directions.

For example, somebody may say they value family, health, or peace, but continue working fourteen-hour days in environments that leave them chronically stressed, emotionally absent, exhausted, and disconnected from the people they love most. Another person may deeply value freedom and creativity, yet build an entire life around external approval and constant people-pleasing. Over time, that misalignment creates internal strain, even if life appears successful from the outside.

I noticed this in my own life too.

Once I became clearer about what genuinely mattered to me, dignity, truth, growth, depth, peace, discipline, certain decisions stopped requiring endless negotiation inside my own mind. That did not make life easier. It made life cleaner. There was less internal confusion because my decisions were no longer pulling in completely opposite directions.

And honestly, I think that is one of the quiet gifts of values. They stabilise identity in a noisy world. When everything around you feels uncertain, values become a kind of internal compass that helps you return to yourself again.

Self-Image: The Ceiling of Your Life

Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon and psychologist, suggested in *Psycho-Cybernetics* that self-image functions a bit like a psychological thermostat. The language was metaphorical, but the underlying idea is a powerful one. Human behaviour tends to organise itself around the identity a person believes to be true, even when that identity is unhelpful, outdated, or quietly limiting their life.

If you unconsciously see yourself as undeserving, you may resist success without fully realising you are doing it. If you see yourself as fragile, you may avoid risk even when risk is exactly what growth requires. If you identify as resilient, you are more likely to stay with difficulty long enough to move through it rather than retreat at the first sign of discomfort.

I have seen this play out in my own life and in the lives of others too. People can temporarily outperform their self-image through discipline, external pressure, or sheer determination, but eventually the system tends to drift back towards what feels psychologically familiar.

There have been real cases of lottery winners receiving enormous amounts of money almost overnight, only to lose most or all of it within a few years. Some overspent recklessly. Others made impulsive decisions, trusted the wrong people, struggled emotionally, or returned to the same financial patterns they had before becoming wealthy. On the surface, it looks irrational. People often ask, "How could someone lose that much money?"

But psychologically, sudden external change does not automatically create internal stability. If somebody's self-concept, emotional regulation, financial habits, and sense of identity have not evolved alongside the money, the nervous system often struggles to sustain the new reality. The external life changes faster than the internal architecture can hold.

That is why a person who internally identifies as "someone who struggles with money" may improve their income temporarily, yet still make

decisions that unconsciously restore the old financial baseline. Not because they are unintelligent, but because the internal model of self has not yet expanded enough to hold the new reality.

And honestly, this does not apply only to money. The same pattern appears in relationships, health, confidence, success, leadership, and self-worth. People often return to what feels emotionally familiar, even when something healthier becomes available.

That is why personal change based only on goals often produces temporary results. Goals can modify behaviour, but identity is what organises behaviour. Unless the internal self-concept evolves, new habits struggle to stabilise, and old patterns quietly pull the person back towards what feels normal.

Personal power therefore requires identity work, not just goal setting. It is not enough to change what you do. You have to change your self-concept.

Radical Responsibility Without Self-Blame

Responsibility is one of those words that has been twisted so much over the years that people often hear it and immediately think blame, shame, guilt, or self-punishment. As though taking responsibility means carrying the weight of everything that ever happened to you and deciding it was all somehow your fault.

That is not what I mean at all.

Taking responsibility does not mean you caused your trauma. It does not mean your illness was your fault. It does not mean injustice did not exist or that painful experiences did not leave real marks on your life. Human beings are shaped by all kinds of things: childhoods, relationships, grief, fear, systems, environments, heartbreak, loss, conditioning, timing. Some wounds are very real, and pretending otherwise helps nobody.

But somewhere along the way, life still quietly asks, “What do you want to do from here?”

And honestly, I think that is where responsibility begins. Not in blaming yourself for the past, but in recognising that your next step still belongs to you.

As explored earlier, the space between stimulus and response is where identity work actually lives

Most people are reacting far more than they realise.

Someone says something hurtful and the body reacts before the mind has even caught up. Fear appears and suddenly old coping mechanisms come rushing back in. Stress rises and people return to the same habits they swore they had outgrown, not because they are weak, but because the nervous system loves familiarity, even when that familiarity is unhealthy.

What awareness does is create a pause in the middle of all that automatic behaviour.

Sometimes it is only a few seconds long. A moment before sending the angry message. A breath before speaking from pain. A split second where you suddenly recognise, "I have done this before."

And in that moment, something new becomes possible.

I also began understanding something that initially felt confronting but later became deeply freeing: there is power in taking full responsibility for your life moving forward, even when you may not be fully responsible for everything that happened to you.

Those are not the same thing.

One keeps you stuck in shame. The other asks, "What do I choose to do from here?"

And honestly, I think that shift changes lives.

Because the moment people stop waiting for the past to magically become different and begin focusing on what they can actually do from here, something starts changing internally. People begin trusting themselves a little more again. Decisions become clearer. There is less helplessness in the system. Less emotional chaos. You stop feeling quite so dragged around by life all the time because, slowly, you realise you still have influence over the direction you are moving in, even after everything that happened.

The more I understood this in my own life, the more I realised that reclaiming yourself is rarely one grand dramatic decision. Most of the time it happens quietly, through small moments where you begin responding

differently to life than you once did. You pause longer. You speak more honestly. You stop abandoning yourself so quickly. You stop handing old wounds complete authority over every new decision.

And over time, those small shifts begin changing the direction of an entire life.

From Reaction to Design

In simple terms, I think a lot of people spend their lives reacting to circumstances while very few consciously design the direction they want their life to move in.

Reaction is usually driven by urgency, fear, emotion, conditioning, or the need for immediate relief. It asks, "How do I escape this feeling right now?" "Why is this happening to me?"

More conscious living asks a different question, "What kind of life am I slowly building through my decisions?"

That difference may sound subtle, but over years it changes everything.

One path keeps repeating the same emotional patterns, the same relationships, the same coping mechanisms, the same cycles of exhaustion and regret. The other slowly begins creating reinvention because decisions become less driven by momentary emotion and more guided by values, awareness, and long-term alignment.

And honestly, I think most transformation happens there, quietly, in the small, repeated choices that eventually reshape a person's entire life.

In other words, most people either spend their lives reacting to what is happening around them or consciously participating in what they are building.

One way of living is driven mostly by emotional reflex and immediate relief. The other requires a little more awareness, a little more honesty, and the willingness to tolerate temporary discomfort in service of something deeper and more aligned long-term.

And while the difference between those two approaches may appear small in a single moment, over years it compounds into completely different lives.

The Governing Principle

Most people do not realise how much of their life is being shaped by patterns they stopped questioning a long time ago.

The way they speak to themselves. What they tolerate. What they avoid. What they believe they deserve. How they react under stress. The stories they repeat about who they are and what life means.

At some point, repeated patterns stop feeling like patterns and simply start feeling like personality.

That is why people often stay inside emotional cycles for years without fully understanding why. The brain becomes familiar with certain ways of thinking and reacting, and familiarity starts feeling normal even when it is unhealthy.

Circumstances absolutely shape people. Illness shapes people. Trauma shapes people. Rejection shapes people. So do privilege, opportunity, family dynamics, money, heartbreak, culture, timing, and environment. All of it matters.

But two people can go through similar experiences and still build completely different lives afterwards.

One person may become more fearful, closed, and emotionally guarded. Another may become wiser, more self-aware, more compassionate, and more intentional about how they live.

The pain may be real in both cases.

The difference is often the meaning attached to it.

Psychology and neuroscience support this more than most people realise. The brain strengthens whatever is repeatedly practised. Fear can become a habit. So can avoidance. So can confidence, discipline, emotional regulation, gratitude, courage, or self-respect.

Human beings slowly become what they repeatedly rehearse. That is why unconscious patterns can quietly shape entire lives.

And honestly, I think that is where awareness changes everything. Because the moment people begin noticing their patterns instead of automatically

obeying them, new choices become possible. You pause before reacting. You question old assumptions. You stop treating every emotion as truth. You begin making decisions that align more closely with the kind of person you actually want to become.

That shift rarely looks dramatic from the outside. Most of the time it happens quietly, through repeated small decisions that slowly change the direction of a person's life over time.

And maybe that is what real power actually is. Not controlling everything around you, but becoming conscious enough to participate in who you are becoming instead of living entirely on autopilot.

Authority is built from the inside out. But to build it consciously, you need a map of how the human system actually works. That is where we go next.

Chapter 12

The Awakened Human Framework

Pain does show up, but it does not get a vote. A week after the neck pain began, cervical facet joint dysfunction, I chose to skip the 7th bungee jump in Sri Lanka for my birthday. Physio started when the pain became unbearable, and everything else? I showed up. Trekking holding my neck. Attended a progressive heavy metal concert holding it there too. Travelled, laughed, made memories. Because I can live with pain. I will not live with regret. I listen. I adapt. I decide. That is the difference between a reactive life and a designed one. That is what this framework is built from, not theory. Lived proof. I live fully. Not recklessly. Deliberately.

A quick note before we go further. You are about to meet three frameworks. They sound different. They live in different chapters. But they are not separate things. Think of them as three ways of looking at the same person — you — from three different distances.

Chaos to Significance is the whole journey seen from 30,000 feet, the arc from inherited identity to intentional life that this entire book is built around. The Awakened Human Framework is the internal architecture at ground level. The Identity Spiral is the timeline of who you have been and who you are becoming. These are not three separate tools. They are three lenses on the same truth, each one showing you a different dimension of the same human being. You.

Most people try to change their lives by adjusting circumstances. They change jobs, relationships, routines, cities, strategies, or goals. For a while things feel different. But eventually the same patterns return.

This is not because people lack intelligence or discipline. It is because the deeper architecture shaping their choices has not changed.

Beneath every life sits an internal system: beliefs, identity, emotional regulation, needs, and unconscious conditioning. That system quietly

determines what we perceive, what we tolerate, what we pursue, and what we repeat.

Circumstances may change temporarily, but architecture recreates familiar outcomes.

The purpose of this framework is to reveal the architecture beneath your choices so it can be consciously redesigned.

A Human Operating System for Conscious Design

Every device you own runs on an operating system. Beneath the screen, beneath the apps, beneath the visible interface, there is architecture. Code. Structure. Rules. Without it, nothing functions coherently. Human beings are no different.

What we call personality, behaviour, ambition, fear, love, success, or failure is not random. It is the visible output of invisible architecture. If your life feels chaotic, inconsistent, or misaligned, it is not because you lack intelligence or discipline. It is because your internal operating system is running on unconscious design.

I was fascinated by Tony Robbins' model of the six human needs. It felt like someone had finally put language to what I had been observing in people for years, their needs were being met, just through crude vehicles. So, I went deeper. I began studying it alongside Maslow's hierarchy of needs and David Hawkins' levels of consciousness, testing how these ideas could sit inside one coherent human operating system rather than as separate motivational theories.

The Human Operating System is a structural model that explains how regulation, motivation, identity, belief systems, and conscious choice interact to produce results.

To understand this, we must first understand human needs.

The Direction of Motivation: Towards and Away Values

Human motivation does not move in a single direction. Psychologically, people are driven by two different emotional forces.

The first are towards values, the emotional states we want to experience more of in life. These might include love, freedom, peace, adventure, success, connection, security, or joy. Towards values act as pull forces. They represent the experiences we hope to create and move toward.

The second are away-from values, emotional states we are trying to avoid. These might include rejection, failure, humiliation, loneliness, frustration, or loss. Away-from values act as push forces. They move us away from perceived pain or danger.

Both forms of motivation influence behaviour, yet they operate differently. Towards values tend to inspire growth and aspiration, while away-from values create urgency by helping us avoid discomfort.

Conflicts arise when these forces collide. A person may deeply desire success while simultaneously fearing rejection. The desire pulls forward while the fear pulls back. The result is hesitation, inconsistency, or self-sabotage.

Understanding this internal tension helps explain why behaviour sometimes appears contradictory. People are not always lacking motivation; they are often navigating competing emotional priorities.

Clarity of values therefore becomes essential. When values are consciously examined and aligned, behaviour becomes more consistent and purposeful.

The Three Decisions That Shape Experience

Much of human behaviour appears complicated on the surface. Yet when examined carefully, it often traces back to three unconscious decisions we make in every moment of life.

These decisions happen so quickly that most people never notice them, yet they shape emotional experience, behaviour, and ultimately identity.

In every situation, the mind is continuously answering three questions:

1. What am I focusing on? Attention determines perception. The brain's filtering system, the Reticular Activating System, selects which pieces of reality we notice and which we ignore. Two people can live through the same experience and walk away with entirely different interpretations simply because they focused on different aspects of the situation.

2. What meaning am I giving this? Once attention selects an event, the mind assigns meaning to it. That meaning generates emotion. The same event can create anger, curiosity, gratitude, or fear depending on the interpretation attached to it.

3. What action will I take? Focus and meaning together determine behaviour. Behaviour repeated over time becomes a habit. Habit shapes identity. Identity ultimately influences the trajectory of a life.

What appears to be personality is often the accumulation of these repeated micro-decisions.

Most people never consciously examine these decisions. They inherit them through conditioning, past experiences, and emotional patterning.

But once awareness develops, the pattern can change.

Because if behaviour is driven by interpretation, then changing interpretation changes behaviour. And behaviour repeated consistently reshapes identity.

The Needs Foundation

In the mid-20th century, psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed that human development follows a progression. Physiological survival forms the base. Safety follows. Then love and belonging. Then esteem. Then self-actualisation. Later in his work, he added self-transcendence, service beyond the self.

Maslow described development as a ladder. But ladders do not explain behaviour in real time.

Decades later, Tony Robbins articulated six driving human needs: certainty, variety, significance, love and connection, growth, and contribution. Where Maslow described structure, Robbins described psychological tension. Certainty and variety exist as a polarity pair. Humans crave safety and stimulation simultaneously. Too much certainty produces stagnation. Too much variety produces instability.

Two invisible forces operate constantly inside the human system: pressure and tension. Pressure arises from unmet needs. Tension arises from competing needs pulling in opposite directions.

A person may crave stability yet simultaneously crave freedom. They may desire belonging while fearing vulnerability. They may want growth but resist the discomfort required to achieve it.

These tensions generate psychological movement.

When the system is unconscious, that movement produces reactive behaviour. When the system becomes conscious, the same tension can be harnessed as fuel for intentional growth.

Pressure pushes. Tension stretches. Awareness directs.

But neither model explains why two people at the same developmental level behave entirely differently. For that, we turn to paradigm.

Bob Proctor described paradigm as the subconscious conditioning that shapes thought, feeling, and behaviour. Paradigm precedes conscious intention.

More than a century ago, James Allen captured this truth with striking clarity in his classic work *As a Man Thinketh*. Long before neuroscience began explaining neural pathways and cognitive conditioning, Allen understood the creative power of thought.

"Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armoury of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace." — James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*

Allen's language may be old-fashioned, but the insight is timeless. The ideas repeatedly entertained by the mind gradually shape character, behaviour, identity, and ultimately the structure of a life.

Paradigm leads to Thoughts, which lead to Feelings, which lead to Actions, which lead to Results.

But the human system is more complex than a simple sequence. Your nervous system, your belief structures, and your self-image determine what you perceive as possible. Perception generates thought. Thought influences emotion. Emotion drives behaviour. Repeated behaviour reinforces identity. Identity influences future choice and results. Results can, in turn, reinforce the underlying paradigm.

This is the loop.

Consider two people pursuing significance. One may seek it through mastery, building expertise and contributing meaningful work. Another may pursue it through domination, criticism, or constant comparison with others.

In both cases the underlying need is identical: significance. The difference lies in the vehicle chosen to meet that need.

This is why judging behaviour without understanding needs often misses the deeper architecture driving it.

Human beings are constantly trying to meet psychological needs, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. Awakening begins when people stop blindly obeying those patterns and start observing them.

6 Human Needs

Here is how your 6 Human Needs shift from unconscious to awakened.

Certainty Healthy/Awakened: Routines, savings, trust-based relationships, sleep hygiene, breath rituals, boundaries
Unhealthy/Unconscious: Control, addiction, emotional eating, staying in toxic situations, destructive habits, people-pleasing

Uncertainty/Variety Healthy/Awakened: Learning, travel, creative projects, new workouts, aligned risks, new challenges
Unhealthy/Unconscious: Risky thrills, drama cycles, gambling, serial crises, distraction

Significance Healthy/Awakened: Mastery, leadership, authorship, internal standards
Unhealthy/Unconscious: Arrogance, bullying, status obsession, victimhood, external validation.

Here, significance has a specific psychological meaning: the human need to feel that we matter. Throughout this book, however, I use significance in a broader sense. It is the conscious expression of what matters most to us through purpose, contribution, alignment, and the life we are here to live. At its deepest level, significance is about discovering and living our calling, our soul's purpose, rather than simply proving our worth to the world.

Love/Connection Healthy/Awakened: Deep intimacy, vulnerability, community rituals, vagal safety Unhealthy/Unconscious: Clinging, manipulation, co-dependency, crisis-bonding, toxic bonds

Growth Healthy/Awakened: Therapy, skill-building, feedback, spiritual practice, neuroplasticity, daily learning Unhealthy/Unconscious: Obsessive self-optimisation, avoidance disguised as "growth", comfort zones, stagnation

Contribution Healthy/Awakened: Volunteering, mentoring, effortless service, ripple service, lighthouse living Unhealthy/Unconscious: Martyrdom, over-giving to control, burnout, self-focus, isolation

Key: Needs are neutral. Vehicles determine frequency. A dysregulated system channels needs through force. A regulated system channels through power.

TABLE 1

The Six Human Needs

Through Conscious and Unconscious Expression

NEED	CONSCIOUS / EMPOWERED EXPRESSION	UNCONSCIOUS / DISEMPOWERED EXPRESSION
 Certainty	Healthy routines, self-trust, savings, sleep hygiene, emotional regulation, boundaries, dependable relationships	Control, rigidity, addiction, emotional eating, toxic attachments, people-pleasing, avoidance
 Variety	Learning, travel, creativity, new experiences, healthy challenges, calculated risks	Drama, chaos, thrill-seeking, gambling, impulsivity, distraction, crisis cycles
 Significance	Mastery, leadership, contribution, authorship, personal excellence, internal validation	Arrogance, superiority, status-seeking, victimhood, comparison, external validation
 Love & Connection	Vulnerability, intimacy, belonging, community, trust, healthy interdependence	Clinging, manipulation, codependency, jealousy, fear of abandonment, toxic bonding
 Growth	Learning, therapy, self-awareness, skill development, spiritual practice, integration	Perfectionism, self-improvement driven by inadequacy, avoidance disguised as growth, stagnation
 Contribution	Service, mentoring, generosity, stewardship, legacy, creating positive impact	Martyrdom, rescuing, overgiving, burnout, giving for approval, self-neglect

KEY INSIGHT

- | The need itself is never the problem.
- | Every human being seeks certainty, variety, significance, connection, growth, and contribution.
- | The difference lies in the vehicle we use to meet the need.
- | Conscious vehicles create freedom, resilience, and fulfilment.
- | Unconscious vehicles create dependency, suffering, and limitation.

SOURCES

This table is a synthesis of:

- Tony Robbins
- Attachment Theory
- Positive Psychology
- Nervous System Regulation research
- Adult Development literature

The Sixth Need: Why Contribution Changes Everything

Of the six human needs, the first four, certainty, variety, significance, and love, are needs of the personality. They keep us functioning. They protect us. They connect us. But they can be met at any level of consciousness, including destructive ones. A person can meet their need for significance through achievement or through cruelty. They can meet their need for certainty through wisdom or through control.

The final two needs, growth and contribution, are different in nature. They are needs of the spirit. And of these, contribution is the one that carries a frequency unlike any other.

When you contribute, genuinely, from a place of fullness rather than depletion, from a desire to add rather than to be seen, something shifts in the body that no amount of personal achievement can replicate. The research on this is unambiguous: people who live in service of something beyond themselves report higher levels of meaning, resilience, and sustained wellbeing than those whose lives are organised entirely around personal gain.

This is not a moral argument. It is a frequency argument. On the consciousness scale, contribution and service operate at the level where love and joy live, the levels where the nervous system is most regulated, most available, most fully alive. You cannot fake your way to this level. You cannot achieve your way there. You arrive by giving.

You can build an impressive life and still feel like a stranger inside it. The moment I oriented my life toward what I could contribute rather than what I could accumulate, something opened. Not metaphorically. Physically. The work felt different. The conversations felt different. I was no longer trying to prove something. I was trying to add something. The distinction is small in words and enormous in experience.

Contribution is not charity or self-sacrifice. It is not emptying yourself for others at the cost of yourself. It is the recognition that your gifts, your specific, irreplaceable, hard-won gifts, were never only for you. They were always meant to move through you.

Human behaviour becomes far more coherent when viewed through the lens of needs.

The system is not designed for balanced decision-making. It is designed for protection. Avoiding discomfort is prioritised over long-term expansion. This is why individuals remain in environments that limit them, repeat patterns that deplete them, and delay decisions that would create meaningful change.

The discomfort of growth feels immediate. The cost of staying the same feels distant. The system responds to what feels urgent, not necessarily what is important.

Understanding this shifts how behaviour is approached. It is not enough to make change appealing. The cost of inaction must become visible.

Within this structure lies a more confronting reality: people will often violate their own values in order to meet their psychological needs.

Someone may stay in a toxic relationship to preserve connection. Someone may create conflict because it provides significance or variety. Another may overwork because achievement simultaneously satisfies certainty, growth, and contribution.

In these moments, the need itself is not the problem. The need is valid. What is often unconscious is the vehicle through which that need is being met.

This is why logic alone rarely changes behaviour. Needs are universal. Vehicles are learnt.

The work of conscious design is not eliminating needs. It is upgrading the vehicles through which those needs are met.

The Addiction Trap: When Vehicles Meet 3+ Needs

Robbins discovered: any behaviour meeting three or more needs becomes addictive, good or bad.

Human behaviour often appears irrational from the outside. But once the needs beneath the behaviour are understood, the pattern becomes logical.

People will frequently violate their own values in order to meet psychological needs. A person may remain in a damaging relationship to

preserve connection. Another may create constant crisis because drama satisfies the needs for variety and significance.

The brain does not label behaviours as good or bad. It simply reinforces behaviours that meet multiple needs simultaneously.

Understanding the need beneath the behaviour is often the first step in transforming the behaviour itself.

Examples:

Drinking Alcohol: Certainty (numbness) + Variety (state change) + Connection (drinking buddies) + Significance ("I can handle it") = 4 needs met. Brain says: Keep doing this.

Workaholism: Certainty (pay cheque) + Significance (titles) + Growth (skills) + Contribution ("I provide") = 4 needs met.

Breaking addiction: Keep the needs. Change the vehicle.

People often think unhealthy habits exist because somebody is weak, lazy, careless, or lacks discipline. But human behaviour usually makes far more sense once you understand the needs sitting underneath it. Most habits survive because they are meeting multiple psychological needs at the same time.

Smoking, for example, is rarely just about nicotine. For some people it creates certainty through familiarity and routine. For others it creates variety by shifting emotional state during stress. It can also create connection through social bonding or significance through identity, rebellion, or the feeling of "this is my thing." The brain is not sitting there morally evaluating the habit. It is simply recognising that several emotional needs are being met at once and reinforcing the behaviour accordingly.

The same thing happens with unhealthy relationships. Someone may remain in a relationship that is emotionally draining, inconsistent, or even damaging because it is still meeting important needs underneath the surface. Certainty through familiarity. Connection through attachment. Variety through emotional highs and lows. Significance through feeling needed, pursued, rescued, or validated. From the outside people ask, "Why don't they just leave?" But psychologically, the nervous system is often protecting access

to needs it has learnt to associate with survival, love, identity, or emotional safety.

Money patterns work similarly too. A person may say they want financial freedom while unconsciously using spending to meet emotional needs in the moment. Shopping can create variety, temporary excitement, significance, comfort, or even connection if money becomes tied to generosity, approval, or status. Emotional spending is often less about the object itself and more about the emotional state attached to buying it.

Even health struggles can follow this pattern. Emotional eating may create certainty through comfort and familiarity, connection through shared food experiences, or temporary relief from stress, loneliness, exhaustion, or emotional overwhelm. The behaviour survives because the brain associates it with regulation, even if the long-term consequences are harmful.

Workaholism is another powerful example because society often rewards it. Excessive work can simultaneously meet certainty through income, significance through achievement, growth through progress, and contribution through providing for others. That is why burnout can feel strangely difficult to walk away from. The nervous system is not only attached to the work itself, but to the emotional needs the work is satisfying underneath.

And honestly, I think this is where compassion matters. Because once you understand that people are often trying to meet legitimate human needs through unhealthy vehicles, behaviour stops looking purely irrational.

The goal is not to eliminate the need. The need itself is usually valid.

The real work is learning how to meet those needs through healthier, more conscious, and more sustainable vehicles instead.

TABLE 2

The Same Need Expressed from Different Levels of Awareness

Through Force-Based and Power-Based Expression

NEED	FORCE-BASED EXPRESSION (FEAR, SCARCITY, EGO)	POWER-BASED EXPRESSION (COURAGE, LOVE, WISDOM)
 Certainty	Control, rigidity, micromanaging, addiction, dependency on external conditions	Inner stability, self-trust, resilience, faith, healthy routines
 Variety	Chaos, drama, impulsivity, thrill-seeking, constant distraction	Curiosity, creativity, exploration, healthy challenge, conscious risk-taking
 Significance	Arrogance, superiority, status-seeking, validation, victimhood	Mastery, authentic leadership, self-respect, contribution, purpose
 Love & Connection	Clinging, codependency, jealousy, manipulation, fear of abandonment	Vulnerability, intimacy, healthy boundaries, belonging, compassion
 Growth	Self-improvement driven by inadequacy, avoidance disguised as growth, perfectionism	Learning, self-awareness, integration, expansion, lifelong development
 Contribution	Martyrdom, rescuing, overgiving, burnout, giving for approval	Service, generosity, stewardship, legacy, creating positive impact

KEY INSIGHT

- | Human needs are neutral.
- | Consciousness determines how they are expressed.
- | The same need can be pursued through fear, scarcity, and external validation.
- | The same need can also be pursued through self-awareness, purpose, love, and contribution.
- | As awareness expands, the need itself does not disappear. The way we meet it evolves.

The 5 Layers of the Human Operating System

Over time, I began organising these observations into a framework that helped me make sense of human behaviour more clearly. It drew from psychology, nervous system research, behavioural science, Tony Robbins' work on human needs, Maslow's developmental model, and my own lived observations about how people grow, protect themselves, sabotage themselves, and eventually transform.

The first layer is regulation.

Before goals, identity work, productivity, or personal growth, the body needs a basic sense of safety. When the nervous system is constantly overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, inflamed, or stuck in survival mode, decision-making changes. People become more reactive. Certainty can turn into control. Variety can turn into chaos. Emotional regulation becomes harder, long-term thinking narrows, and immediate relief starts feeling more important than long-term wellbeing.

That is why regulation matters so much. Sleep matters. Rest matters. Boundaries matter. Nervous system stability is not weakness or laziness. It is part of the foundation that allows clearer thinking and healthier decision-making to happen in the first place.

The second layer is motivation.

This is where models like Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Tony Robbins' six human needs became deeply interesting to me. Human needs themselves are not the problem. Everyone needs certainty, connection, significance, growth, and variety in some form. What changes lives is often the vehicle through which those needs are being met.

One person may seek significance through mastery, contribution, and meaningful work. Another may seek it through control, superiority, criticism, or constant attention. The need underneath is often the same. The behaviour surrounding it is what changes the outcome.

The third layer is identity.

Over time, people start behaving in ways that match the story they carry about themselves. Somebody who quietly believes they are "not enough" may constantly seek external validation, overwork, over give, people-please, or struggle to feel secure regardless of achievement. Someone with a more stable sense of self often approaches life differently because their identity is not being rebuilt from scratch every day through other people's approval.

And honestly, I think this is why sustainable change is so emotional for many people. You are not only changing habits. You are slowly changing the relationship you have with yourself.

The fourth layer is design.

This is the space between automatic reaction and conscious choice. Psychology, neuroscience, and behavioural research all support the idea that human beings can interrupt patterns once awareness develops. That interruption may look small externally, but internally it changes everything. You pause before reacting. You question an old belief instead of automatically obeying it. You choose a different response even when the old pattern still feels familiar.

And over time, repeated conscious decisions begin reshaping identity itself.

The fifth layer is integration.

What I have noticed is that life becomes less exhausting. The constant inner conflict starts quietening down. You think more clearly. You stop chasing things that do not really matter to you. Decisions become easier because they are no longer being pulled in ten different directions. Even the way you contribute changes. It comes less from needing validation and more from simply being who you are.

None of this means life suddenly becomes perfect, or that you transform into some endlessly enlightened human being floating above ordinary life.

Just increasing levels of internal coherence where the way you think, feel, choose, and live stop pulling in completely opposite directions all the time.

And honestly, I think that is what many people are truly searching for underneath all the noise: not perfection, but congruence.

The Architecture of Human Motivation

Maslow's Level 1: Physiological Needs Basic survival: food, water, air, sleep, shelter Parallel Need: Implicit foundation Interpretation: Biological survival is the base layer

Maslow's Level 2: Safety Needs Security of body, health, employment, resources Parallel Need: Certainty Interpretation: The nervous system seeks predictability and control

Maslow's Level 3: Love and Belonging Connection, family, intimacy, friendship Parallel Need: Connection and Love Interpretation: Humans regulate through attachment

Maslow's Level 4: Esteem Self-respect, confidence, achievement, recognition Parallel Need: Significance Interpretation: The ego organises identity around worth

Maslow's Level 5: Self-Actualisation Personal growth, fulfilment, realising potential Parallel Need: Growth Interpretation: Expansion beyond ego preservation toward mastery

Maslow's Level 6: Self-Transcendence Service beyond self-parallel Need: Contribution Interpretation: Legacy, service, impact, significance without ego attachment

Maslow shows us what develops. Robbins shows us what drives. The Awakened Human Framework integrates both into conscious design.

TABLE 3

THE ARCHITECTURE OF HUMAN MOTIVATION

MASLOW'S LEVEL	MASLOW'S DESCRIPTION	ROBBINS PARALLEL NEED	INTERPRETATION
 PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS	Food, water, air, sleep, shelter	FOUNDATIONAL SURVIVAL LAYER	Biological survival forms the foundation of all higher needs
 SAFETY NEEDS	Security of body, health, employment, resources	CERTAINTY	The nervous system seeks safety, predictability, and stability
 LOVE & BELONGING	Connection, family, intimacy, friendship	LOVE & CONNECTION	Humans regulate, heal, and thrive through attachment and belonging
 ESTEEM	Self-respect, confidence, achievement, recognition	SIGNIFICANCE	Identity and self-worth develop through competence, achievement, and contribution
 SELF-ACTUALISATION	Personal growth, fulfilment, realising potential	GROWTH	Expansion beyond survival towards mastery, fulfilment, and potential
 SELF-TRANSCENDENCE*	Service beyond self	CONTRIBUTION	Legacy, service, impact, and meaning beyond personal achievement

* Self-Transcendence was introduced in Maslow's later work as a level beyond Self-Actualisation.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON VARIETY

ROBBINS' NEED FOR VARIETY (UNCERTAINTY) DOES NOT MAP NEATLY ONTO MASLOW'S HIERARCHY.

VARIETY REFLECTS THE HUMAN DRIVE FOR NOVELTY, LEARNING, CHALLENGE, EXPLORATION, CREATIVITY, AND ADAPTATION.

RATHER THAN EXISTING AT A SINGLE LEVEL, IT CAN BE EXPRESSED ACROSS MULTIPLE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT.

KEY INSIGHT

MASLOW HELPS US UNDERSTAND WHAT HUMANS DEVELOP.

ROBBINS HELPS US UNDERSTAND WHAT HUMANS SEEK.

TOGETHER, THEY REVEAL THE ARCHITECTURE OF HUMAN MOTIVATION.

THE AWAKENED HUMAN FRAMEWORK INTEGRATES BOTH INTO CONSCIOUS DESIGN.

The Conscious Bridge Framework: 5 Foundational Pillars

Once I began understanding how these different layers interacted, regulation, needs, identity, beliefs, behaviour, and conscious choice, I started thinking about transformation less like a dramatic breakthrough and more like building a bridge between an unconscious life and a conscious one.

Because most people are not lacking potential. They are lacking integration.

One part of them wants growth while another part is terrified of change. One part wants peace while another part keeps recreating chaos because chaos feels familiar. One part wants connection while another still operates from fear, self-protection, or emotional armour built years earlier.

And honestly, I think a lot of human suffering lives inside that internal conflict.

So over time, I began organising this into what I think of as five foundational pillars that support meaningful change.

Stability → Awareness → Agency → Identity → Design

The first is stability. Before somebody can consistently grow, the nervous system needs some degree of regulation and safety. An exhausted, chronically overwhelmed, emotionally dysregulated person will struggle to make long-term aligned decisions because the system naturally prioritises immediate relief over future expansion.

The second is awareness. People cannot change patterns they cannot see. Awareness means recognising beliefs, emotional habits, conditioning, coping mechanisms, and inherited narratives that have quietly been shaping behaviour for years without being questioned.

The third is agency. Once people become more aware of their patterns, they often begin reassessing the way they live. Priorities shift. Boundaries become clearer. Values become more intentional. Rather than reacting automatically, they start asking, "What kind of life am I actually trying to build?"

The fourth is identity. Because sustainable change eventually requires self-image to evolve too. Otherwise, people keep returning to emotionally

familiar patterns even after temporary progress. The external behaviour changes briefly, but the internal story remains the same.

And the fifth is design. This is where awareness becomes structure. Daily behaviour changes. Financial habits change. Relationship standards change. Boundaries change. Health changes. Decisions become more intentional instead of purely reactive.

And over time, those repeated decisions begin creating a very different life.

What fascinated me most while studying human behaviour was realising that the needs themselves are rarely the problem. Human beings will always need certainty, connection, significance, growth, love, contribution, and variety in some form. The real issue is often the vehicle being used to meet those needs.

Somebody may use alcohol to create certainty through numbness, connection through social drinking, significance through identity, and variety through emotional escape. Another person may meet very similar needs through a workout community, meaningful friendships, discipline, challenge, and shared growth.

The needs remain. The vehicle changes.

And honestly, I think that distinction changes the way we look at people completely. Behaviour stops looking purely irrational once you understand the emotional need underneath it.

The ultimate goal of all of this is not perfection. It is coherence.

A life where your nervous system, values, identity, behaviour, and decisions are no longer constantly fighting each other. A life where growth does not require abandoning yourself. A life where contribution comes from fullness instead of exhaustion. A life where you stop living entirely from unconscious patterns and begin participating more consciously in the person you are becoming.

Because you are not trapped by circumstance alone.

Many people are also trapped by patterns they stopped questioning years ago. And patterns, once recognised, can change.

The Conditioned Human

Most people are not consciously designing their lives as much as they think they are. They are often living from patterns they absorbed long before they were old enough to question them properly.

From childhood onwards, beliefs begin forming quietly. Ideas about money, success, love, safety, conflict, self-worth, achievement, and belonging are picked up from families, schools, cultures, environments, emotional experiences, and repeated conversations. The nervous system adapts too. Some people grow up around calm and stability. Others grow up around unpredictability, criticism, emotional shutdown, scarcity, pressure, or chaos.

Over time, those experiences stop feeling like conditioning and simply start feeling like, "This is just who I am."

That becomes The Conditioned Human.

The conditioned human is not broken. Most people are doing the best they can with the emotional programming, nervous system patterns, and beliefs they inherited and repeated over time. But many people are reacting far more than they realise. Decisions become filtered through fear, familiarity, emotional survival, old wounds, and unconscious habits that were never fully examined.

That is why somebody can consciously want peace while repeatedly choosing chaos, want financial freedom while constantly self-sabotaging around money, or deeply desire love while still pushing healthy people away.

Goals may change, but behaviour usually drifts back towards what feels emotionally familiar.

And honestly, I think many people spend years criticising themselves without realising that much of what they call personality is actually conditioning that has simply gone unquestioned for too long.

The Consciously Designed Human

The consciously designed human does not erase their past or pretend painful things never happened. They simply stop allowing old conditioning to have complete authority over every decision moving forward. They begin

noticing patterns instead of automatically obeying them. They start questioning inherited beliefs instead of assuming every thought running through their mind is absolute truth. They become more intentional about the kind of life they are building and more aware of the emotional habits quietly shaping it underneath the surface.

Where the conditioned version reacts automatically from fear, familiarity, emotional survival, or old coping mechanisms, the consciously designed version learns how to pause long enough to respond with greater awareness. That pause changes more than people realise because it interrupts the old loop where the nervous system reacts first and the conscious mind arrives afterwards trying to explain the damage.

This version of a person still feels emotions deeply. They still get hurt, overwhelmed, uncertain, frustrated, and triggered at times because being conscious does not mean becoming emotionally numb or spiritually detached from ordinary human experience. It simply means they stop allowing every emotional state to completely dictate the direction of their behaviour.

Instead of chasing temporary relief at any cost, they begin making decisions with greater alignment between values, behaviour, identity, and long-term wellbeing. They become more honest about what drains them, what regulates them, what repeatedly creates chaos, and what genuinely brings peace, meaning, growth, or stability into their lives.

Most of the time this transformation happens quietly through repeated small decisions that slowly begin changing the direction of someone's life. A healthier boundary. A more honest conversation. A different response during conflict. Walking away from environments that constantly dysregulate the nervous system. Learning to rest without guilt. Choosing discipline over self-destruction. Trusting yourself a little more than you did before.

Real transformation rarely happens through one giant breakthrough moment where life suddenly becomes perfect overnight. It happens through repeated conscious choices that slowly create a different internal reality over time.

The 6 Dimensions of the Awakened Human

1. **Conditioning** - The beliefs and patterns you inherited
2. **Regulation** - The state of your nervous system and emotional stability
3. **Identity** - The story you carry about who you are
4. **Values** - What truly matters and guides your decisions
5. **Design** - The choices, habits, and behaviours shaping your life
6. **Expression** - The life you create and how it shows up in the world

Dimension 1: Conditioning, The Inherited Code

Before people consciously design their lives, they first absorb patterns from the environments around them. Every human being begins as a receiver long before they become a critical thinker. Beliefs about money, safety, authority, success, love, conflict, self-worth, and even what it means to be "good enough" are often installed early in life, long before we are mature enough to properly question them.

The brain strengthens what is repeated. Emotional experiences strengthen those patterns even faster. A child repeatedly hearing things like:

"Money is hard." "Do not trust people." "You must keep everyone happy." "Strong people do not cry." "Success comes through struggle." may carry those ideas into adulthood without fully realising how deeply they shaped identity.

Conditioning is also shaped by the generation and environment people were raised in.

Different generations inherited different emotional survival strategies based on the world around them at the time. Many older generations were shaped by war, economic instability, scarcity, rigid family structures, social conformity, and emotional suppression. Survival, responsibility, sacrifice, and endurance were often prioritised over emotional expression.

That is where many people inherited beliefs like, "Men do not cry." "Just get on with it." "Do not talk about family problems outside." "Work comes before wellbeing." "Rest is laziness." "Good girls do not speak loudly."

For many families, these beliefs were not coming from cruelty. They were often inherited forms of protection passed from one generation to the next.

Younger generations, meanwhile, have grown up in a very different environment, one shaped more by conversations around mental health, emotional awareness, identity, self-expression, boundaries, and psychological wellbeing. But every generation carries its own conditioning too. Social media comparison, constant stimulation, performance culture, digital validation, and identity anxiety shape modern nervous systems in completely different ways.

No generation escapes conditioning. The form simply changes.

Over time, what originally formed as emotional protection quietly becomes a pattern. And once patterns are repeated long enough, they stop feeling like conditioning and simply start feeling like personality.

That is why conditioning can be so powerful. Most people continue living inside inherited beliefs, fears, emotional habits, and definitions of success without ever asking, "Do I actually believe this?" "Does this still serve my life?" "Who would I be without this story?"

Dimension 2: Regulation, System Stability

A dysregulated nervous system struggles to design a healthy life clearly.

When somebody is chronically stressed, emotionally overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, inflamed, or constantly operating in survival mode, thinking changes. Patience narrows. Emotional tolerance narrows. Long-term thinking weakens. Immediate relief starts feeling more important than long-term alignment because the nervous system is focused on getting through the moment, not strategically building the future.

This is biology, not weakness.

The brain and body are designed to prioritise protection when stress becomes overwhelming. That is why people often return to familiar coping mechanisms during difficult periods, even when those habits are unhealthy. The nervous system usually chooses familiarity before growth.

I became deeply aware of this during periods of illness myself. When the body is struggling, everything can start feeling heavier emotionally,

mentally, and physically. Clarity becomes harder to access when the system itself feels overloaded.

That is why regulation matters far more than people sometimes realise.

Sleep matters. Rest matters. Breathing matters. Movement matters. Boundaries matter. Quiet matters. Reflection matters.

These are not luxuries. They are stabilisers that allow human beings to think, respond, and function more consciously under pressure.

Because without regulation, even the best intentions collapse quickly when stress rises.

Dimension 3: Identity, The Core Interface

Identity quietly determines what feels possible for a person.

Over time, behaviour begins organising itself around self-image whether people realise it or not. Someone who sees themselves as capable will usually approach challenges differently from someone who carries a deep belief that they are inadequate, undeserving, broken, or destined to fail.

People can temporarily outperform their identity through discipline, pressure, fear, or motivation, but eventually behaviour tends to drift back towards what feels psychologically familiar. That is why lasting transformation is rarely only about changing habits. The deeper work is often changing the relationship somebody has with themselves.

Take the person whose identity quietly became, "I must always be the responsible one."

This pattern often develops early in life when emotional stability depends on them playing that role. They become the mediator, the caretaker, the fixer, the one who absorbs tension so everyone else remains comfortable.

Years later the environment may change, but the identity remains.

So, they overwork professionally, over-accommodate in relationships, struggle to rest without guilt, feel responsible for everyone's emotions, and regulate everybody else before regulating themselves.

From the outside this often looks admirable. Internally it can become exhausting. Behaviour is rarely the deepest driver. Identity usually is.

Beliefs function like invisible filters through which people interpret reality. Human beings do not experience life purely objectively. They experience life through meaning, memory, expectation, fear, identity, and emotional interpretation.

Someone who believes, "I am capable," usually notices opportunities differently from somebody who believes, "I always fail."

And over time, people naturally start noticing evidence that confirms what they already believe while overlooking evidence that contradicts it.

Dimension 4: Values, The Decision Filters

Values shape decisions far more quietly than most people realise.

Not the values people post online because they sound impressive. The real ones. The ones revealed through behaviour over time.

What people tolerate. What they repeatedly sacrifice for. What they prioritise when life becomes difficult. What they protect. What they keep abandoning themselves for. What they refuse to walk away from even when it is costing them peace. That is where real values usually become visible.

A person may say family is their highest value while being emotionally unavailable to the people they love most. Someone else may claim they value health while constantly sacrificing sleep, rest, emotional wellbeing, and nervous system stability in pursuit of achievement. Another person may say they want peace while repeatedly choosing relationships, environments, or habits that keep their nervous system in chaos because chaos still feels emotionally familiar.

And honestly, I think this is why so many people feel internally conflicted without fully understanding why. Their external goals and their deeper values are often pulling in completely different directions.

People chase success that looks impressive from the outside while quietly feeling disconnected from themselves internally. They pursue approval instead of alignment. They build lives that satisfy expectation but not necessarily truth.

When values remain unclear, decision-making becomes emotionally reactive and inconsistent because people keep trying to move forward without a stable internal compass. But once values become clearer, something begins settling internally. Decisions may not suddenly become easier, but they often become cleaner because there is less confusion about what genuinely matters and what no longer aligns.

I noticed this in my own life too. Once I became clearer about values like truth, dignity, growth, freedom, peace, contribution, and emotional honesty, certain decisions stopped requiring endless internal negotiation. Not because they became painless, but because the direction itself became clearer.

And honestly, I think values do something very powerful for human beings: they reduce inner fragmentation. They create a stronger relationship between who somebody says they are and how they actually live.

Dimension 5: Design, Intentional Architecture

Awareness alone does not change lives.

A person can understand their patterns intellectually for years and still continue repeating them if behaviour never changes alongside awareness. That is why insight, while important, is not enough on its own. Eventually awareness has to become structure. That is where design begins.

Design is the process of consciously shaping the way somebody lives day by day instead of leaving life entirely at the mercy of mood, habit, emotional reaction, or unconscious conditioning. It shows up in routines, finances, boundaries, relationships, environments, standards, health, time management, emotional habits, and the repeated decisions somebody makes over time.

And honestly, I think people underestimate how much environments shape behaviour.

The people around you shape behaviour. The conversations around you shape behaviour. What you repeatedly consume shapes behaviour. What you tolerate shapes behaviour. What you normalise shapes behaviour.

Human beings adapt constantly to their environment, which is why intentional design matters so much. Somebody trying to build peace while remaining surrounded by constant chaos will eventually feel the friction of that conflict internally. Someone trying to rebuild self-worth while remaining inside environments that repeatedly reinforce shame, criticism, disrespect, or emotional instability will struggle to sustain progress no matter how motivated they initially feel.

Design is where people stop asking only, “How do I escape discomfort?” and begin asking, “What kind of life am I slowly building through my repeated choices?”

That shift changes more than people realise because it moves life away from short-term emotional survival and towards conscious long-term alignment.

This is also where responsibility becomes practical. Not as punishment, pressure, or perfectionism, but as participation. People begin understanding that the small, repeated choices they make daily are slowly shaping identity, nervous system patterns, confidence, emotional stability, relationships, finances, health, and future outcomes over time.

And honestly, I think that is both confronting and empowering.

Because it means transformation is not only found in huge life-changing moments. It is also found in ordinary repeated behaviours that gradually reshape the direction of a person's life from the inside out.

Sometimes the identity built around surviving can become so familiar that letting it go feels frightening too. The patient. The victim. The rescuer. The martyr. Even an identity that hurts can provide certainty when the alternative is becoming someone you have never been before.

That does not mean people want to suffer. It means the familiar can feel safer than the unknown.

Dimension 6: Expression, What Your Life Begins Reflecting

Eventually, what is happening internally starts becoming visible externally, often in ways people do not immediately recognise. The way somebody handles relationships, money, pressure, conflict, leadership, boundaries, health, success, rest, or even ordinary everyday conversations usually

reflects something much deeper happening underneath the surface. Over time, the external life begins reflecting internal patterns, beliefs, emotional regulation, identity, values, and the repeated decisions a person keeps making consciously or unconsciously.

That does not mean life is perfectly fair or that difficult things only happen to people with "bad mindsets." Reality is far more complex than that. Illness happens. Loss happens. Grief happens. Trauma happens. Injustice exists. Human beings do not control every circumstance they face, and pretending otherwise removes compassion from the conversation entirely.

But even within that truth, patterns still shape outcomes more than many people realise.

Some people repeatedly build lives that leave them emotionally exhausted because over-functioning quietly became part of their identity years earlier. Others remain in relationships that drain them because unpredictability feels more emotionally familiar than peace. Some sabotage financial progress because a part of them still associates money with guilt, pressure, fear, or conflict. Others struggle to rest because their self-worth became tied to productivity so early in life that slowing down now creates discomfort instead of safety.

Once people begin understanding the deeper patterns underneath their behaviour, life stops feeling completely random all the time. Certain emotional cycles finally begin making sense. Repeated struggles become easier to trace back to old conditioning, identity, nervous system patterns, beliefs, or values that were never consciously updated.

That awareness does not magically solve everything overnight, but it does create the possibility for different choices, and over time different choices begin creating different lives.

Wealth, leadership, relationships, contribution, confidence, peace, impact, and legacy are often influenced by what somebody repeatedly reinforces internally over years through thought patterns, emotional habits, standards, behaviour, identity, and conscious or unconscious design.

Eventually, the internal world always finds ways to express itself externally whether people are aware of it or not.

The framework reveals the map. The chapters that follow navigate it, dimension by dimension, concept by concept, from conditioning through to expression. That is where we go next.

Chapter 13

The Awakened Human

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
— Viktor Frankl

Consciousness, Choice, and Courage

The Human Beneath the Conditioning

I often return to a word: Namaste.

Not as a casual hello, but as recognition. The soul in me sees the soul in you. That is what it means at its deepest level, a bow not to the personality, not to the role, not to the achievement, but to the original being underneath all of it. The part that existed before the conditioning began.

Underneath all the conditioning, all the fear, all the labels, there is still something deeply human underneath it all. Something original. Something worthy. Something that existed before the world started telling people who they should become.

I became interested in ancient wisdom traditions. I was searching for language, language for things I had always sensed but had never heard explained clearly enough. And across different philosophies, cultures, and traditions, I kept finding the same underlying truth appearing again and again: your spiritual life is not separate from your ordinary life. It is revealed in how you speak to people, how you behave when you are hurt, how you handle power, how you treat people who cannot offer you status, how honest you are with yourself, and how much awareness you bring into the ordinary moments most people overlook.

Character is not built through inspirational quotes, podcasts, retreats, or intellectual conversations alone. It is built quietly through repeated choices that nobody applauds. It shows up in whether you keep your word when

keeping it becomes inconvenient, whether pain turns you bitter or wiser, whether you regulate your emotions before throwing them at somebody else, and whether you remain respectful even when there is nothing to gain from it.

Years ago, I wrote something in my journal that stayed with me:

"Respect, whether it's an eight-year-old or an eighty-year-old."

Around the same time, I came across another line that hit me just as hard: a person who is kind to you but rude to the waiter is not a kind person.

That landed deeply because it exposed something important about human behaviour. Character is not revealed by how people behave around power. It is revealed by how they behave when there is nothing to gain.

And honestly, I think that is why this work matters so much, because people can build successful-looking lives externally while still remaining deeply unconscious internally.

People who become more conscious of their patterns are not people who have escaped suffering or mastered perfection. They are people who have become aware enough to notice what is happening inside them before automatically becoming it.

Most human beings are reacting far more than they realise. A tone changes during a conversation and suddenly the body tightens. An unexpected message appears and anxiety rises instantly. Somebody feels rejected and an old emotional wound quietly takes over the moment before conscious thought has even caught up. The response feels personal and immediate, but very often it is patterned.

I know this deeply through my own life.

At my worst with MS, I was experiencing violent spasms throughout the day, not small twitches, but full-body jerks that arrived before my mind had even fully processed what was happening. My nervous system reacted before awareness had time to engage. And emotionally, I was living similarly too. Life pressure. People-pleasing. Pushing through exhaustion. Pretending everything was fine while quietly overwhelmed underneath it all.

Then slowly, something started changing.

Instead of immediately becoming consumed by the reaction, I began noticing it. I started recognising:

"This is fear." "This is stress." "This is my nervous system reacting."

And strangely enough, the more awareness entered the experience, the less power the fear seemed to hold over me. That is not theory to me. That is a lived experience.

Awareness changes behaviour.

And before anybody imagines awakened living as some perfectly peaceful spiritual existence involving endless serenity and candlelight, let me bring this back to reality for a moment.

My husband Daniel snores magnificently. So my first nightly practice is usually attempting to close his nose, so he stops snoring. If that fails, there may be a tiny kick involved, which I later blame on a mosquito. The mosquito has taken responsibility for a lot over the years.

I say this because I think people sometimes imagine conscious living as becoming detached from ordinary humanity. It is not. Awakened living still looks like real life, messy life, funny life, exhausting life, deeply human life. It simply means bringing more awareness into it.

I remember being at a workshop once where we were asked to break a wooden board with our bare hands. My immediate thought was, "You have MS. Your hands are not what they used to be. What if you cannot do this?"

And then another thought quietly appeared, "I did not do it then."

I did it a few months later through another workshop. First try.

I stood there genuinely shocked afterwards, grinning like an idiot, because somewhere in that tiny moment I realised something important. Consciousness in action rarely looks dramatic from the outside. Sometimes it is simply the decision to move forward despite the fear running through your body at the same time.

That is courage.

Not the absence of discomfort, but the willingness to move with awareness through discomfort without allowing it to completely dictate your behaviour.

The brain naturally prefers familiarity because familiarity feels safer to the nervous system, even when the familiar pattern is unhealthy. That is why people often remain trapped inside emotional cycles, unhealthy relationships, destructive coping mechanisms, or limiting identities long after they consciously know those things are hurting them. The body learns familiarity first. Awareness interrupts it later.

And honestly, I think awakening begins there, not in becoming perfect, transcending ordinary life, or pretending painful emotions no longer exist, but in developing the ability to pause long enough to notice, "What is actually happening inside me right now?" before automatically reacting from it.

Because that pause changes more than people realise.

The more awareness enters a moment, the more choice becomes possible, and the more conscious choices are repeated, the more identity slowly begins changing too. Eventually, the way somebody experiences life itself begins changing.

Real mindset work also looks very different from the way social media often presents it. It is not forcing fake positivity on top of genuine pain or pretending difficult emotions should simply disappear because somebody repeated an affirmation enough times. Human beings are not designed to suppress emotion and call it healing. Avoided emotion rarely disappears. It usually waits quietly underneath behaviour until it finds another way to express itself.

The awakened human does not deny emotion. They learn how to experience emotion without building an entire identity around it.

There is a difference between saying, "I feel fear right now" and "I am a fearful person."

That difference matters because one is a temporary human experience while the other slowly becomes identity.

I also think healing requires far more patience and compassion than modern culture often allows. Trauma is not healed through motivational quotes or pretending the nervous system should simply "move on." Human beings heal gradually, often layer by layer, as safety, awareness, trust, and emotional capacity slowly rebuild over time.

I learnt that personally too.

After my MS diagnosis, there were predictions about mobility aids and physical limitation, and while I absolutely needed support during some seasons and remain deeply grateful for it, I also refused to let fear become the only story defining my future. So, I started slowly building capacity instead through breathwork, awareness, movement, identity work, and small repeated choices, not because I was trying to become superhuman, but because I wanted to participate consciously in my life instead of surrendering completely to fear.

And honestly, I think that is what the awakened human really is.

Not enlightened. Not flawless. Not emotionally untouchable.

Just conscious enough to notice patterns instead of endlessly repeating them, conscious enough to respond more intentionally, and conscious enough to take responsibility for what is being reinforced internally over time.

Because repeated reactions eventually become personality, but repeated conscious choices can slowly become transformation too.

The awakened human is not a final destination someone magically reaches one day. It is a daily practice of noticing, choosing, adjusting, learning, regulating, rebuilding, and becoming more intentional about the life being created from the inside out.

And that changes everything.

The Space Between Reaction and Awareness

One of the most important things I began understanding through all of this was that human beings often believe they are responding to the present moment when, in reality, they are reacting to accumulated memory, conditioning, fear, expectation, and emotional imprinting from the past. The mind is constantly comparing present experiences against previous

experiences, trying to predict what is safe, what is dangerous, and what might lead to pain, embarrassment, rejection, abandonment, uncertainty, or emotional discomfort.

That is why people sometimes react so strongly to situations that appear relatively small from the outside. The reaction is rarely only about the present moment itself. Often the nervous system is responding to years of accumulated emotional memory underneath it.

A simple tone change in a conversation can activate old fears of criticism. Being ignored can trigger deeper feelings of rejection. Financial uncertainty can activate childhood memories of instability, stress, or fear around survival. And unless somebody becomes aware of those deeper patterns, they often continue reacting automatically while believing life itself is the problem.

I think this is why awareness matters so much. Because awareness creates space.

And inside that space, choice slowly becomes possible. Not perfect choice, not instant mastery, and not becoming some endlessly calm human who never feels anger, fear, grief, insecurity, jealousy, frustration, or emotional pain. Just enough awareness to begin noticing:

"This reaction feels bigger than the moment itself." "This fear feels familiar." "This pattern keeps repeating."

And honestly, that awareness alone can begin changing the trajectory of a life because people stop blindly identifying with every emotion passing through them.

The Courage to Become Conscious

And honestly, I think courage is misunderstood too.

Most people associate courage with dramatic moments, public bravery, huge risks, or heroic acts that look impressive from the outside. But some of the deepest courage I have ever witnessed in human beings looked much quieter than that.

Sometimes courage looks like somebody finally admitting they are unhappy after years of pretending everything is fine. Sometimes it looks like

apologising sincerely instead of protecting ego. Sometimes it looks like setting boundaries after a lifetime of over-accommodating everyone else. Sometimes it looks like asking for help after years of trying to appear strong all the time. Sometimes it looks like resting after tying self-worth to productivity for so long that slowing down almost feels unsafe.

And sometimes courage simply looks like staying present inside discomfort long enough to stop running from yourself.

Because growth often requires people to loosen emotional identities they have carried for years without realising how deeply those identities shaped their behaviour. The victim. The fixer. The overachiever. The rescuer. The people-pleaser. The emotionally unavailable one. The strong one who never needs help.

Most of those identities did not begin as weakness. They usually began as protection. Human beings adapt to survive emotionally, relationally, psychologically, and socially. But eventually many people outgrow the survival strategy while still unconsciously carrying the identity built around it.

And honestly, I think awakened living asks something difficult of people. It asks them to become conscious enough to examine who they became in order to survive and whether that version of themselves is still aligned with the life they genuinely want to build now.

Conscious Living in an Unconscious World

I also think modern life makes unconscious living incredibly easy.

There is constant stimulation, constant distraction, constant comparison, constant urgency, constant noise. People rarely sit quietly with themselves long enough to truly observe what is happening internally anymore because the moment external distraction disappears, unresolved thoughts, emotions, fears, insecurities, grief, and exhaustion often begin surfacing underneath.

So people stay busy.

They scroll endlessly. They consume constantly. They distract themselves. They overwork. They numb themselves emotionally. They fill every silent moment possible.

Not because they are weak, but because many human beings were never taught how to sit safely with themselves without immediately escaping into stimulation.

And honestly, I think this is why conscious living has become so important now. Not as some spiritual performance. Not as superior. Not as pretending to be endlessly evolved or emotionally untouchable.

But because awareness changes the quality of decisions, and decisions repeated over time eventually shape the quality of a person's life.

That is why awareness matters so deeply, because without awareness people often spend years reinforcing patterns they never consciously chose in the first place. Choice matters because small, repeated decisions eventually become direction, and courage matters because real change usually requires people to confront parts of themselves, they become emotionally attached to surviving through.

And honestly, I think people eventually become whatever they repeatedly rehearse internally over long enough periods of time.

The Awakened Human

The awakened human is not somebody who never struggles. They still experience grief, fear, disappointment, stress, heartbreak, uncertainty, frustration, pain, and moments where life feels deeply heavy. The difference is that they no longer live entirely unconscious to what is happening inside them.

They begin observing patterns instead of automatically becoming consumed by them. They pause more before reacting. They regulate more intentionally. They take greater responsibility for their behaviour, emotional patterns, decisions, boundaries, relationships, and inner world. Over time they become far more aware of what they are reinforcing mentally, emotionally, physically, relationally, and spiritually through repeated choices.

And honestly, I think that changes the direction of a life far more than most people realise because awareness slowly interrupts automatic living. Change does not happen overnight, and human beings do not suddenly become perfectly healed or endlessly wise, but conscious living gradually

reshapes the way somebody thinks, responds, chooses, relates, and moves through the world over time.

Mindset Mastery: Integration, Not Denial

There is also a huge misunderstanding around mindset.

A lot of people think having a "positive mindset" means pretending painful emotions do not exist, forcing optimism, spiritually bypassing reality, or constantly trying to "stay high vibe" no matter what is happening internally. But human beings do not heal by denying what they genuinely feel.

In fact, emotions that are constantly suppressed often continue affecting the body and nervous system underneath the surface anyway. Stress does not disappear simply because somebody refuses to acknowledge it.

The awakened human does not pretend difficult emotions are absent. They learn how to experience emotion without completely building their identity around it.

There is a difference between, "I feel fear right now" and "I am a fearful person."

There is a difference between, "I feel rejected" and "I am unworthy."

That difference matters because the brain listens to the language people repeatedly use about themselves. Over time, repeated internal language slowly shapes identity, behaviour, confidence, and emotional patterns.

Mindset also works best when the body and mind are working together rather than fighting each other.

If somebody is exhausted, overwhelmed, panicking, emotionally dysregulated, sleep-deprived, or physically burnt out, forcing powerful affirmations on top of that often feels fake because the nervous system itself still feels unsafe.

That is why regulation matters so much.

Sometimes before changing thought patterns, the body first needs safety, rest, breath, stillness, sleep, movement, nourishment, or emotional release. A slower breath can calm the nervous system. Better sleep can improve

emotional stability. A regulated body often creates clearer thinking naturally.

And honestly, gratitude is misunderstood too.

Gratitude is not pretending life is perfect. It is training the mind to notice that difficulty is not the only thing that exists. Human beings naturally become highly focused on threat, stress, fear, and what feels wrong because the brain is designed to prioritise survival. But over time, consciously noticing support, safety, progress, love, stability, opportunity, or even small moments of peace helps create a more balanced internal perspective.

Not because hardship disappears, but because suffering stops becoming the only thing the mind is trained to see.

Trauma Alchemy: Safe, Slow, Sacred

Trauma also needs to be approached carefully because human beings do not store painful experiences only through logical memory. Sometimes the body remembers long before the mind fully understands what is happening. People may consciously know they are safe now while their nervous system still reacts as though danger is present.

That is why healing is rarely as simple as "just think positively and move on."

Fear, tension, hypervigilance, shutdown, emotional overwhelm, exhaustion, numbness, or overreactions often develop because the body has adapted around survival for long periods of time. And honestly, I think many people become frustrated with themselves because they expect healing to happen intellectually while the nervous system is still carrying unresolved stress underneath.

Real healing usually requires safety first.

Not forced positivity. Not pretending nothing happened. Not emotionally flooding the body all at once. Just slowly building enough internal stability for the nervous system to realise, "I am safe enough now to stop surviving every moment like a threat."

That process takes time.

The awakened human respects that pacing. They do not force healing violently or expect themselves to become completely transformed overnight. They build capacity gradually, emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

I understand this deeply because after my MS diagnosis, doctors told me I would likely need a mobility aid for life. And for a period of time, while I was limping, I did use one. I am genuinely grateful it existed because support is not weakness.

But I also decided I did not want that prediction to become the final identity I built my life around.

So before anything external changed, I began rebuilding internally first. Breathwork. Regulation. Identity work. Small repeated choices. Small repeated victories. Slowly teaching my body and mind that limitation did not have to become the centre of who I was.

And over time, I ran, trekked, bungee jumped, skydived and so on.

Not because trauma magically disappeared or healing was linear. But because capacity was built gradually before confidence fully returned.

A Simple Daily Reset

Over time, I realised awareness is rarely built through one dramatic breakthrough. More often, it is built through small, repeated moments of noticing, regulating, reflecting, and choosing differently throughout ordinary life. Human beings change through repetition far more than intensity.

A simple daily reset can help interrupt automatic patterns before they completely take over the day.

In the morning, before immediately reaching for your phone or rushing into stress, pause for a few minutes and breathe slowly. One technique often used for calming the nervous system is the 4-7-8 breath: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 7, and exhale slowly for 8. Even a few rounds can help slow stress responses in the body and create a greater sense of steadiness before the day begins.

Pairing that moment with a conscious intention such as, "I want to respond more consciously today instead of reacting automatically" can quietly begin shifting awareness over time.

During the day, especially in emotionally charged moments, simply naming what you are feeling can create surprising emotional distance from it. Instead of immediately becoming consumed by anger, fear, stress, shame, or overwhelm, pause long enough to notice:

"Anger is coming up." "Fear is active right now." "Stress is rising."

That small shift matters because awareness interrupts automatic emotional spirals before behaviour takes over completely.

Gratitude also becomes far more powerful when it is grounded in ordinary reality rather than forced positivity. It is simply noticing:

"I am safe right now." "I have support." "I handled that conversation better than I used to." "There is still stability in my life even during uncertainty."

At night, reflection helps reinforce conscious change. Not perfection, evidence. One small moment where you responded differently than an older version of yourself might have. Maybe you paused instead of exploding emotionally. Maybe you rested instead of overworking. Maybe you set a boundary instead of abandoning yourself to keep somebody else comfortable.

Those moments matter more than people realise because repeated choices slowly reshape identity over time.

The shift from reacting to creating does not happen overnight. Fear, stress, anger, insecurity, and emotional activation will still arise because human beings are not machines. But over time, awareness creates more space between feeling and behaviour, and inside that space people slowly begin realising they can experience emotion without automatically becoming controlled by it. That is where conscious living begins.

The Shift: From Reacting to Creating

A lot of human behaviour is reactive before it is conscious.

Something happens externally, the nervous system reacts internally, and behaviour often follows almost immediately. A person feels criticised and becomes defensive. They feel rejected and emotionally withdrawn. They feel unsafe and attempt to control everything around them. The emotional centres of the brain, particularly the limbic system, are designed to react quickly because their primary role is survival, protection, and threat detection.

That is why awareness changes so much.

Because awareness interrupts automatic reaction and allows the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain associated with reasoning, emotional regulation, decision-making, and long-term thinking, to become more involved before behaviour takes over completely.

Over time, people begin noticing the difference between feeling an emotion and immediately obeying it. Fear may still arise. Anger may still arise. Stress, insecurity, frustration, jealousy, grief, and disappointment may still appear. But awareness slowly creates more space between the emotional reaction and the behavioural response.

And inside that space, choice becomes possible.

Not perfect choice every time. Not becoming emotionally numb or endlessly calm. Just enough awareness to pause before old patterns completely take over.

That pause changes more than most people realise because repeated choices eventually begin reshaping identity itself. The more consciously somebody responds to life, the less controlled they become by automatic conditioning, emotional impulses, or unconscious survival patterns from the past.

Over time, emotional activation may still be felt strongly in the body, but it stops completely dictating direction. The nervous system becomes more regulated, reactions become less consuming, and behaviour becomes more intentional rather than purely emotional or instinctive.

And honestly, I think that is where real personal power begins.

The Full-Spectrum Human

I think many people struggle not because they are incapable of change, but because different parts of their life are constantly pulling in opposite directions.

The mind wants peace while the nervous system is addicted to urgency. The body is exhausted while identity still believes rest equals laziness. Somebody says they want healthy love while repeatedly choosing emotional chaos because chaos still feels emotionally familiar. Another person wants confidence while continuing to rehearse self-criticism internally every single day.

Over time, that internal contradiction creates fragmentation. People begin feeling disconnected from themselves because what they think, what they feel, what they say they value, and how they actually live are no longer aligned.

And honestly, I think most human beings are not searching for perfection nearly as much as they are searching for coherence.

They want their inner world and outer world to stop fighting each other all the time.

A more integrated human being slowly learns how to bring awareness to all parts of themselves, the mind, the body, emotional patterns, intuition, behaviour, values, and repeated choices. The thinking mind matters because attention shapes perception. The body matters because a constantly dysregulated nervous system affects emotional stability, clarity, energy, and decision-making. Intuition matters too, not as magic, but as the quieter pattern recognition human beings often sense before logic fully explains it.

When those parts begin working together instead of against each other, something shifts internally. Decision-making becomes clearer. Emotional exhaustion reduces. Self-trust strengthens. Growth feels less forced because the system itself is no longer operating in constant internal conflict.

Awakening is not becoming superhuman or emotionally untouchable. It is becoming aware enough to recognise that many reactions are learnt, many emotional patterns are reinforced through repetition, and identity itself is far more adaptable than most people realise.

Over time, awareness creates more space between stimulus and behaviour. Emotional waves still arise because human beings will always feel fear, grief, stress, insecurity, disappointment, anger, and uncertainty at times. But those emotions stop completely controlling behaviour in the way they once did.

Because eventually people realise they are not trapped forever inside the first version of themselves that survival once created.

And that changes everything.

The awakened human is not a destination. It is a daily practice of choosing who you reinforce in yourself. The identity spiral is where that practice deepens.

Before we go further, I want to be honest with you about what is coming.

The chapters ahead are different from the ones you have just read. You have been in my story. Now you are entering my work.

I am going to put my mentor hat on for a while. The book will feel more structured. More direct. More like a map and less like a diary. That is intentional.

But I want you to know: the woman who built these frameworks is the same woman who lay in that hospital bed and whispered a very imperfect prayer. The theory came from the living. The map came from the mess.

So if the chapters ahead ever feel too structured or too far from the story, come back to that. The story is why the frameworks exist. And the frameworks are what the story was always building toward.

PART **IV**
THE PATH

**Frameworks, Tools and Transformative
Spiritual Psychology**

Chapter 14

The Identity Spiral - The 9 Layers of Becoming

You are not your diagnosis. You are not your worst day. You are the stubbornness that keeps showing up anyway.

What Is Identity?

Most of us spend years acting out stories we never consciously chose. Over time, those stories shape the patterns we repeat, the choices we make, and the lives we build around them.

It shapes the labels you accept, the roles you perform, the traits you reinforce, the standards you tolerate, the future you believe is available to you.

When I was in school, the diary had a column for mother tongue. I wrote English because for Anglo-Indians, English is the mother tongue. The other kids could not understand it.

"Why are you writing English?" "Did you just land from the UK?"

I was so confused and embarrassed that I went home and asked my mum to change it to Malayalam just to avoid the ridicule. I hid my Anglo-Indian identity for years. If Google had existed back then, I would have had the receipts to say, "Actually, look it up."

But it took decades to stop explaining myself and start owning exactly who I am. Dutch. Portuguese. Indian. Eurasian. Anglo-Indian. All of it. Unapologetically.

I was not kind to myself in those early years, particularly about how I looked. I did not feel pretty. I thought I looked like a boy. I tore up photographs of myself, literally tore them, because when I looked at them, I felt something close to shame.

People would ask why I was wearing earrings, "you're a boy right?" It sounds like a small thing. It is not a small thing. Identity confusion sits in the body long before it finds language.

I am telling you this because the woman writing this book is not the girl who tore those photographs. But she remembers her. And she would like, on her behalf, to say:

You were never ugly. And you were never a boy.

The woman I was before would not recognise me now. She was a people pleaser of Olympic standard. She lived everyone else's version of her life while her own version sat quietly in the background waiting. She was talented, funny, insightful, full of fire, but she kept those parts of herself small so other people would feel comfortable around her.

That was one of the greatest disservices I ever committed. Not only to myself, but to every gift I was born with that never fully got the chance to breathe.

Identity is not just personality. It is not just culture. It is not just your past. It becomes the internal lens through which human beings interpret themselves, other people, failure, success, rejection, relationships, risk, love, safety, possibility, and the future itself.

Two people can experience the exact same setback and walk away with completely different interpretations of what it means. One person internalises it as proof they are inadequate. Another sees it as part of learning, growth, timing, or experience. The external situation may be similar, but the identity interpreting the experience changes the direction that follows afterwards.

Most identity is built far more unconsciously than people realise. Human beings repeat emotional patterns, behaviours, reactions, language, coping mechanisms, and internal stories so consistently that eventually those patterns stop feeling temporary and start feeling like personality.

Confidence, for example, is rarely built through thought alone. It is built when people repeatedly act in ways that slowly teach the nervous system, "I can handle this." "I can survive discomfort." "I can trust myself here."

That is what eventually changes self-perception. And here is the uncomfortable truth: if you do not consciously choose your identity, you will unconsciously defend the one you were handed, even when it limits your growth, your relationships, your confidence, your healing, and the life you are capable of building.

The 9 Layers of Becoming

Every time you catch yourself saying, "It's just the way I am," pause for a moment. Because maybe, just maybe, that is who you were, not who you are.

During my recovery, I began seeing identity differently. It was not a fixed thing hiding somewhere inside me waiting to be discovered. It felt more like a series of layers, each one shaped by a different season of life, each one serving a purpose until it no longer did.

We do not move through these layers in a straight line. We spiral through them. We revisit old versions of ourselves, outgrow them, return to them under pressure, and sometimes discover there was another layer underneath all along.

The question is not whether identity changes.

The question is: what identities do people move through as they transform?

Layer 1: The Passed-Down Identity This is who you were told you were before you could choose. The responsible one. The sensitive one. The achiever. The quiet one. Cultural roles. Family expectations. Labels absorbed without consent.

Layer 2: The Survival Identity This is who you learnt to be to stay safe. The peacekeeper. The overachiever. The invisible one. The strong one who does not ask for help. This identity was intelligent. It protected you when you needed it. But it may no longer be required.

Layer 3: The Achievement Identity This is who you became to prove you were enough. Titles. Results. Recognition. External markers that signal worth. Achievement can be empowering, until it becomes your only measure of value.

Layer 4: The Social Identity This is who you are in the mirror of others' expectations. The good partner. The dependable friend. The one who holds everything together. You begin shaping yourself around who you think you must be to be accepted.

Layer 5: The Crisis Identity This emerges when life destabilises you. The patient. The abandoned one. The betrayed one. The bankrupt one. The divorced one. Crisis identities form quickly because the mind wants certainty, even if that certainty is limiting.

Layer 6: The Rebel Identity This is the backlash layer. The "watch me" version. The defiant one who refuses to accept the script. It can be powerful, but it is still taking its cues from the script it is trying to escape.

Layer 7: The True Identity This is who you are when no one is watching. Beyond the titles, achievements, expectations, and roles. Beyond whom you have been trying to prove yourself to be. It is the version of you that exists beneath performance.

Layer 8: The Integrated Self By this stage, you stop fighting parts of yourself. You no longer feel the need to deny your past, minimise your pain, or apologise for your ambition. The parts that once seemed contradictory begin finding a place beside one another. You can be strong without becoming hard. Ambitious without becoming consumed. Disciplined without forgetting how to rest. Life feels less fragmented because you are no longer at war with yourself.

Layer 9: The Legacy Identity This is who you are becoming by conscious choice. Unlike the layers that were largely inherited, adapted, or shaped by circumstance, this identity is intentionally created. It is future-oriented and asks a different question, "What kind of human am I committed to being?" The focus shifts away from external approval and towards living in alignment with the values, character, and contribution that matter most.

And honestly, I do not think people move through these layers once and for all because human growth is far messier, more emotional, and more beautiful than that. People revisit old versions of themselves. They uncover deeper layers beneath the ones they thought they had already healed. They outgrow parts of themselves. They rediscover parts they abandoned years ago. They rebuild themselves many times over the course of a life.

That is why I think of identity as a spiral rather than a ladder. We do not simply move forward and leave every previous version behind. We revisit, refine, integrate, and evolve. Each layer has something to teach us, and each season asks something different of us.

What Is Your Identity Costing You?

Identity is often misunderstood as personality, biography, or the labels we attach to ourselves over time. In reality, identity operates at a far deeper level. Identity is the nervous system's predictive architecture for survival. You cannot outperform your self-image.

Long before ambition, preference, or personal philosophy emerge, the developing brain is mapping safety. The question the nervous system asks is not "Who do I want to become?" but "What behaviour ensures belonging and protection in this environment?"

Repeated relational experiences under emotional intensity shape neural circuitry. When a behaviour restores connection, reduces conflict, or preserves belonging, dopaminergic reinforcement strengthens that pathway. When behaviour produces shame, instability, or rejection, the amygdala heightens threat encoding around that experience. The hippocampus consolidates the memory. The basal ganglia automate the behavioural response.

Over time, adaptation becomes identity. Not chosen. Encoded.

The Reticular Activating System, the brainstem's filtering network, begins prioritising information consistent with that identity. Attention narrows. Perception organises around confirmation.

You do not experience reality objectively. You experience it through installed prediction models.

The brain does not simply perceive reality. It predicts reality and then looks for confirmation.

If achievement once protected you, your nervous system scans for performance metrics and dismisses unconditional care. If emotional expression once destabilised connection, vulnerability triggers caution even in safe environments. If silence preserved peace, assertion feels dangerous.

This was intelligent.

But intelligence under stress optimises for survival, not expansion. And survival architecture, when left unexamined, becomes cost.

How Identity Is Installed

Identity is shaped primarily through two things: environment and repetition.

The environment teaches people what feels safe, what feels dangerous, what gets rewarded, what gets rejected, and what helps them belong. Repetition then strengthens those patterns until they slowly stop feeling like behaviour and start feeling like personality.

A child growing up in a calm and emotionally safe environment may learn that vulnerability, expression, honesty, and emotion are safe. A child growing up in unpredictable, critical, emotionally volatile, or unstable conditions may learn that safety depends on staying quiet, performing well, avoiding conflict, pleasing others, becoming hyper-independent, or constantly trying to manage everybody else's emotions.

The brain does not sit there judging these adaptations morally. It simply learns, "This helped me survive." "This reduced pain." "This helped me stay safe." And then it repeats the pattern.

Over time those repeated behaviours become automatic. The people-pleaser no longer notices how much they abandon themselves because the behaviour feels normal. The overachiever no longer realises how deeply their worth is tied to productivity because achievement feels familiar. The emotionally guarded person may genuinely believe they are "just independent" without recognising how unsafe vulnerability still feels internally.

And honestly, I think this is why identity work can feel so emotional for people because they are not simply changing habits. They are questioning patterns that may have protected them for years.

That does not make those identities foolish. In many cases, they were intelligent adaptations to difficult environments.

But eventually people have to ask themselves an uncomfortable question, "Is the identity that helped me survive still helping me live well now?"

That question changes lives.

Brain Development and Identity Encoding

Identity formation begins long before human beings are consciously reasoning through who they are.

In the earliest years of life, the brain is developing at an extraordinary rate and constantly absorbing information from the environment. During this stage, learning happens less through conscious reasoning and more through emotional experience, attachment, repetition, sensory input, and interaction with caregivers.

Experiences during this period are not stored the way adults consciously remember events later in life. Instead, they are often encoded through emotional tone, bodily sensation, safety, stress, and repeated relational patterns.

Between roughly the ages of two and six, children remain highly impressionable because the analytical part of the brain is still developing. Repeated messages, emotional experiences, behaviours, and environmental patterns are absorbed very deeply during these years.

"You're the responsible one." "Don't upset people." "You're too sensitive." "Be strong." "Good girls don't argue." "Boys don't cry." "You always cause problems." "You're the smart one." "You need to make everybody proud."

Statements like these may appear small in isolation, but repeated often enough they can quietly begin shaping identity scripts that children carry into adulthood without fully realising it.

Neuroscience often summarises this process through the phrase, "Neurons that fire together wire together."

In simple terms, repeated thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and experiences strengthen certain neural pathways over time. During adolescence, the brain also continues refining itself through a process known as synaptic pruning, where frequently used pathways become stronger while less-used pathways weaken.

What feels fixed in adulthood is often repetition reinforced over many years.

Children are also biologically designed to learn rapidly during these stages of development. This is why they absorb language so quickly. A child can learn multiple languages simply through repeated exposure because the developing brain is highly adaptable and extraordinarily receptive to information.

But the brain is not only learning language during these years. It is also learning emotional behaviour, relational patterns, coping strategies, beliefs about safety, and unconscious ideas about who somebody must become in order to feel loved, accepted, valued, protected, or safe within their environment.

And honestly, many adults spend years believing certain patterns are simply "their personality" without realising how much of identity was quietly shaped long before they were old enough to consciously choose it.

Wounds and Adaptation

A wound is what happened. Identity is often how somebody adapted to what happened.

Human beings respond to pain differently. Some children learn to stay invisible because invisibility feels safer than attention. Some become exceptional because achievement brings approval and emotional safety. Some become the peacemaker who keeps everybody calm. Some become hyper-responsible far too early in life because chaos around them forced them to grow up quickly. Some become funny because humour softens tension. Some become fiercely independent because depending on people stopped feeling emotionally safe.

In my own life, I became the strong one. The listener. The emotional anchor. The person who could handle things when others could not. The one who did not complain much. The one who kept moving forward even when life became very heavy.

From the outside, a lot of that looked admirable. People often see resilience, competence, maturity, capability, and strength. But what they do not always see is how the nervous system slowly begins organising itself around those behaviours over time until eventually the adaptation stops feeling temporary and starts feeling like identity.

That is what happens to many people. Coping strategies repeated long enough begin feeling like personality traits rather than survival responses.

The child who learns not to express anger may grow into an adult who believes emotional suppression is maturity. The teenager who discovers that achievement brings praise and validation may slowly begin tying self-worth entirely to productivity and performance. The young girl who learns not to disappoint people may become the woman who carries everybody emotionally while quietly abandoning herself in the process.

And honestly, I think this is important for people to understand because many of these adaptations were never stupidity or weakness. In many cases they were intelligent responses to difficult environments, painful experiences, emotional unpredictability, criticism, instability, rejection, neglect, or pressure.

Human beings adapt because adaptation helps them survive.

The difficulty begins when the same strategies that once protected somebody continue operating long after the original environment has changed. Over time, constantly living inside identities built around hypervigilance, emotional suppression, people-pleasing, overperformance, perfectionism, self-abandonment, or endless emotional responsibility can become exhausting for the mind, body, relationships, and nervous system itself.

And sometimes healing begins the moment somebody finally realises, "This protected me once, but I do not want to spend the rest of my life living inside survival mode."

Why Insight Is Not Enough

One of the most frustrating things about human behaviour is that understanding a pattern does not automatically change it.

People can become deeply self-aware and still repeat the same emotional cycles, relationship dynamics, fears, reactions, coping mechanisms, and self-sabotaging behaviours for years. Somebody may intellectually understand that they struggle with people-pleasing, emotional avoidance, perfectionism, hyper-independence, anger, insecurity, or fear of rejection and still find themselves falling back into the same patterns under stress.

That happens because insight alone does not immediately rewire the nervous system.

The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain associated with reasoning, reflection, planning, and conscious decision-making, may understand something logically. But many behavioural patterns are reinforced much deeper through emotional memory, conditioning, repeated experience, and automatic nervous system associations built over long periods of time.

The amygdala, which plays a major role in emotional processing and threat detection, does not operate primarily through logic. Its role is survival. It constantly scans for what feels safe, dangerous, familiar, emotionally risky, or potentially painful based on previous experiences. Over time, repeated emotional experiences create automatic associations in the brain and body that can continue reacting long after the original situation has passed.

This is why people sometimes say, “I know better, but I still react this way.”

The pattern is not only intellectual. It has become emotionally and physiologically familiar too.

A person who grew up around criticism may logically understand they are safe now and still become highly reactive to disapproval because the nervous system has learnt to associate criticism with emotional danger. Somebody who spent years tying worth to achievement may consciously want rest and still feel guilt the moment they stop being productive. Somebody who learnt emotional self-protection early in life may genuinely desire intimacy while still instinctively withdrawing when vulnerability appears.

In many cases, the brain is not trying to sabotage people. It is trying to protect them based on old information.

This is also why healing usually requires more than insight.

People need new experiences repeated consistently enough to slowly teach the nervous system something different. Safety. Trust. Boundaries. Rest. Expression. Healthy connection. Emotional regulation. Self-respect. Being seen without performing. Being loved without constantly earning it.

And honestly, that process takes time because the nervous system changes more through repeated lived experience than through intellectual understanding alone.

That is why regulation matters so much. A dysregulated nervous system often pulls people back toward familiar emotional patterns even when those patterns are painful because familiarity itself can feel safer than change. But when people slowly build more emotional safety internally, new behaviours become easier to sustain because the body no longer experiences every unfamiliar choice as danger.

And that is where real change begins becoming possible.

The Body That Listens

What these patterns look like in real life is rarely dramatic at first. Often, they appear as strength, responsibility, competence, or emotional resilience.

Psychosomatic does not mean imaginary. The word simply reflects the integration between psyche and soma, mind and body.

Research in psychoneuroimmunology demonstrates that chronic stress influences immune signalling, inflammatory pathways, cortisol rhythms, and autonomic regulation.

The body does not distinguish sharply between psychological and physical threat. Both activate the same stress systems.

Autoimmune diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis are multifactorial, involving genetic predisposition, viral triggers such as Epstein-Barr virus, immune dysregulation, environmental exposure, hormonal factors, microbiome variables, trauma history, and chronic stress load.

Illness rarely has a single cause.

But patterns create load. Load accumulates. Architecture matters. What is not processed mentally is often carried physiologically.

Emotional patterns do not disappear simply because they are unacknowledged. They are stored as tension, reactivity, fatigue, or shutdown within the body. Over time, the nervous system begins to treat these patterns as baseline.

For years before my diagnosis, I lived inside multiple survival roles simultaneously.

I over-achieved. I over-functioned. I carried emotional weight. I suppressed anger. I spoke truth when it destabilised systems. I withdrew when situations became overwhelming.

From the outside this looked like strength.

From the inside it was continuous nervous system activation. My body was not betraying me. It was adapting to what I was putting it through.

There was a period where even light felt aggressive.

I wore a pirate-style eye patch, often tightening it further with a thin strap just to block out as much light as possible. My left eye would react as if pins were hitting it all at once, sharp, disorienting, unpredictable. Vision was not just blurred. It doubled. It distorted.

Simple things were no longer simple.

One of the decisions I made during that time was to stop riding a bike. Not because I could not push through it, but because I refused to risk harming someone else if my vision failed in a critical moment. That choice was not about limitation. It was about responsibility.

There were days I lived alone, managing all of this quietly. I kept a sheet of paper near the door, listing what I was going through, symptoms, conditions, context. Not out of fear, but out of preparedness. If something happened, someone needed to understand the situation quickly.

Looking back, what stands out is not the difficulty itself. It is the level of awareness it demanded.

The body was unpredictable. The environment had to be controlled. Decisions had to be made consciously, not reactively.

This is where a deeper understanding began to form.

The body does not operate in isolation. It responds, adapts, signals. And identity is not something separate from that process. It is expressed through how we respond to those signals.

Even in constraint, there is choice.

Not always in what happens, but in how it is held, interpreted, and acted upon.

Taking responsibility, therefore, is not an act of self-blame. It is an act of system awareness. It is the recognition that what once ensured survival may require recalibration for expansion.

My body was not a moral verdict. It was an interruption of architecture that had been switching between mobilisation, appeasement, suppression, and hyper-responsibility for too long without conscious regulation.

That interruption became awareness. And once I could see the pattern, I had options.

Breaking the Survival Architecture

Real change is not just about thinking differently. Human beings often need repeated experiences that slowly teach the nervous system, “It is safe to live differently now.”

Over time, I began realising that meaningful reconstruction usually requires three things.

1. Regulation Before Redesign

Most people try to change behaviour while their nervous system still feels unsafe. That is why so many people intellectually understand what they need to do and still struggle to sustain change under stress. When the body feels overwhelmed, emotionally overloaded, threatened, exhausted, or constantly activated, survival patterns usually take over automatically because the nervous system prioritises protection before growth.

This is why regulation matters so much. Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to form new patterns and pathways, works far more effectively when the body feels safe enough to learn.

The parasympathetic nervous system, which helps regulate rest, recovery, and calm states, plays an important role here. Slower breathing, especially longer exhales, can help stimulate vagal tone and reduce physiological stress activation. Deliberate movement, stillness, sleep, rest, emotional safety, and

even small pauses during difficult moments can interrupt automatic reactions long enough for more conscious choices to become possible.

Without some degree of internal safety, behavioural change often feels threatening rather than freeing.

2. Small Contradictions to the Old Identity

Identity usually changes through repeated experiences that challenge old emotional predictions. If somebody's internal script says, "I am only safe or valuable when I achieve," then resting without guilt may initially feel deeply uncomfortable because the nervous system associates stillness with danger or loss of worth.

If somebody's identity says, "I must hold everything together for everyone," then asking for help or delegating responsibility may feel emotionally unsafe even when it is healthy.

If somebody learnt, "My needs create problems," then speaking honestly, setting boundaries, or expressing emotion may trigger fear long before confidence appears.

This is why growth often feels uncomfortable before it feels natural.

The brain and nervous system constantly predict what will keep somebody emotionally safe based on past experience. But when people repeatedly experience healthier outcomes without the feared catastrophe occurring, those internal emotional predictions slowly begin updating over time.

The amygdala, which plays a major role in emotional learning and threat detection, gradually learns, "This situation is no longer dangerous." That is how change slowly becomes embodied rather than merely understood intellectually.

3. Environmental Recalibration

Identity is also reinforced socially. Families, friendships, workplaces, and relationships often become organised around the roles people repeatedly play. So when somebody changes, the system around them sometimes reacts too.

The over-responsible person who finally steps back may suddenly be called selfish. The high performer who chooses rest may be labelled lazy. The quiet person who begins expressing boundaries may be described as difficult or dramatic.

That does not automatically mean the growth is wrong. Sometimes it simply means the people around somebody became comfortable with the older version of them.

And honestly, growth often requires people to tolerate a certain amount of relational discomfort while they stop abandoning themselves in order to maintain familiar roles for everybody else.

Putting It Into Practise

Phase 1: Pattern Mapping (7 Days)

Simply observe yourself without immediately trying to fix everything. Pay attention to what triggered you, what automatic thought appeared, what emotion followed, what behaviour came next, and what happened in the body.

Did your chest tighten? Did you shut down? Did you become defensive? Did you over-explain? Did you people-please? Did you withdraw? Did you overwork? Did you immediately try to control the situation?

The goal here is not self-judgement. It is awareness. Most people cannot change patterns they have never consciously noticed.

Phase 2: Regulation and Nervous System Safety (14 Days)

For the next two weeks, focus less on changing your personality and more on creating internal steadiness. Simple things matter more than people realise.

A few minutes of slower breathing with longer exhales. Pausing before reacting emotionally. Moments of intentional stillness. Rest without guilt. Sleep. Movement. Silence. Time away from constant stimulation.

These small actions help calm survival activation inside the nervous system and create more space between emotion and reaction.

And honestly, that space changes lives. Because eventually people realise, "I can feel something without immediately becoming controlled by it."

Phase 3: Small Contradictions to the Old Identity (21 Days)

This is usually where people discover whether they want change or whether they are willing to practise it.

Choose one pattern that has quietly been shaping your life.

If your identity is built around constant performance, intentionally leave one small task unfinished without spiralling into guilt.

If your identity is built around hyper-responsibility, allow somebody else to make one decision without immediately taking over.

If your identity was built around self-erasure, express one honest preference each day without apologising for it.

If humour became your defence mechanism, allow one serious moment without immediately softening discomfort with jokes.

If you became the scapegoat or peacekeeper, practise disagreeing calmly without collapsing emotionally.

At first these moments may feel uncomfortable because the nervous system often interprets unfamiliar behaviour as danger. But over time, repeated safe experiences begin teaching the brain, "This new way of being is survivable too." And slowly, identity begins shifting.

Phase 4: Reinforcing the New Identity

Sometimes transformation begins with a very simple question, "Who am I becoming if I stop reinforcing the old story?"

One practice that helped me was completing the sentence:

"I am safe even when I ____."

"I am safe even when I rest." "I am safe even when I disappoint somebody."

"I am safe even when I say no." "I am safe even when I am not performing."

"I am safe even when everybody does not approve of me."

The nervous system learns through repetition. And honestly, many people spend years unconsciously rehearsing fear without ever realising they can also begin rehearsing safety, honesty, boundaries, rest, expression, and self-trust instead.

So again: What is your identity costing you?

Are you admired yet exhausted? Needed yet unsupported? Successful yet anxious? Independent yet lonely?

Because if identity is never examined consciously, life eventually forces the conversation through burnout, crisis, illness, heartbreak, collapse, resentment, disconnection, or exhaustion.

You are not trapped forever inside old conditioning. Human beings can change. But change usually begins the moment somebody becomes conscious enough to stop automatically rehearsing the identities that once helped them survive.

Stress-Linked Personality Patterns

Physician and trauma researcher Gabor Maté has spoken extensively about certain personality patterns that often appear in people living under prolonged emotional stress. What I find important about his work is that he does not approach these patterns as character flaws or moral failures. He approaches them as adaptations.

And honestly, I think many people spend years calling something "their personality" without ever questioning whether it was actually survival training.

Some people become excessively responsible very early in life. Some become emotionally hyper-attuned to everybody else's moods while disconnecting from their own needs completely. Some feel guilty resting. Some cannot tolerate disappointing anybody. Some suppress anger so deeply that they no longer even recognise it until it leaks out as exhaustion, resentment, shutdown, anxiety, over-functioning, or emotional numbness.

For years, many of these behaviours are rewarded socially.

The responsible one is praised. The self-sacrificing one is admired. The agreeable one is considered easy to love. The one who carries everybody else emotionally is called strong.

But what people often do not see is the nervous system underneath those roles constantly working to maintain safety, connection, approval, belonging, or emotional stability.

And over time, adaptation can become identity.

One thing I also think people misunderstand deeply is anger.

Healthy anger is not abuse. It is not violence. It is not emotional destruction. It is not cruelty.

Healthy anger is often a boundary signal. It is the body recognising that something feels unsafe, unfair, intrusive, violating, painful, disrespectful, or emotionally misaligned.

At its healthiest, anger simply says, "This matters." "That hurt." "Please stop." "You are crossing a line."

But many people were never taught how to experience anger safely. Some grew up in homes where anger created fear. Some were punished for expressing emotion. Some learnt that speaking honestly threatened connection. Some learnt that being "good" meant staying quiet, agreeable, pleasant, accommodating, emotionally convenient, or endlessly understanding.

So instead of learning how to process anger consciously, they learnt to suppress it, minimise it, intellectualise it, joke through it, spiritualise it, or redirect it inward against themselves.

And honestly, the body often carries what the mind keeps trying to silence.

Over time, emotional suppression can begin showing up physically and psychologically in ways people do not immediately connect together: tension in the body, constant vigilance, digestive issues, fatigue, burnout, people-pleasing, resentment, anxiety, emotional shutdown, overachievement, difficulty resting, or the feeling that the nervous system never truly powers down.

The nervous system is constantly responding to cues of safety and threat whether people consciously realise it or not.

Researcher Stephen Porges developed Polyvagal Theory as one framework for understanding how human beings shift between different nervous system states depending on whether the environment feels safe, dangerous, overwhelming, connected, emotionally unpredictable, or threatening.

And honestly, I think many people begin healing the moment they stop asking, "What is wrong with me?" and begin asking, "What happened to me, and what did my nervous system learn from it?"

Because that question changes everything. It replaces shame with awareness. And awareness creates the possibility of change.

Identity and the Nervous System

Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory explains how these behavioural roles often correspond to nervous system states. The autonomic nervous system continuously scans the environment for cues of safety and threat.

What appears as personality is often a nervous system regulation strategy.

Pattern Upgrade Statements:

"I achieve because I choose to, not because I must." "I can care without carrying what isn't mine." "My truth can be calm and still be powerful." "My presence and my needs are safe."

Why Identity Predicts Outcomes

Identity predicts behaviour.

Studies of lottery winners repeatedly show that many individuals eventually return to their previous financial baseline. The reason is not simply poor financial planning. Identity drives behaviour.

If someone's internal identity is organised around scarcity or instability, their nervous system unconsciously recreates circumstances that match that prediction.

The same dynamic appears in relationships. A person whose nervous system expects tension may feel uneasy when life becomes calm. When a day

begins to go unusually well, the mind may begin scanning for signs that something bad will follow.

This is not intuition. It is threat prediction.

The healthier response is different.

When life feels peaceful, allow the nervous system to register safety. Pause. Breathe. Let the experience complete itself without anticipating disruption.

Safety must be experienced repeatedly before the brain updates its predictions. Identity sets the ceiling of results.

HALT: Physiological States and Decision-Making

There is a simple principle used in psychology and addiction recovery that applies equally to identity regulation.

HALT: avoid making significant decisions when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.

When these physiological states are active, the brain becomes more reactive and less reflective.

For identity transformation, this matters profoundly. Decisions made in dysregulated states tend to reinforce existing survival patterns rather than create new behavioural pathways.

Sometimes the most intelligent decision is not to decide yet. Pause. Regulate. Then choose.

TABLE 6

HALT, Physiological States, and Decision-Making

There is a simple principle used in psychology and addiction recovery that applies equally to identity regulation:

Halt: Avoid making significant decisions when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired

STATE	NEUROBIOLOGICAL EFFECT	COMMON BEHAVIOURAL CONSEQUENCE
 Hungry	Hunger and low energy availability can impair attention, impulse control, and executive functioning	Impulsive decisions, reduced patience, short-term thinking
 Angry	Sympathetic nervous system activation increases amygdala reactivity and narrows perspective	Defensive thinking, aggressive interpretation, reactive decision-making
 Lonely	Social pain networks activate pathways similar to those involved in physical pain	Heightened sensitivity to rejection, emotional vulnerability, seeking unhealthy connection
 Tired	Sleep deprivation reduces prefrontal cortex functioning and emotional regulation	Poor judgement, reduced focus, emotional reactivity, decision fatigue, reduced self-control

WHY THIS MATTERS

- When these physiological states are active, the brain becomes more reactive and less reflective.
- For identity transformation, this matters profoundly. Decisions made in dysregulated states often reinforce existing survival patterns. Lasting change is more likely when choices are made from a regulated and reflective state.

Before asking:

What is the right decision?

It can be helpful to ask:

What state am I making this decision from?

Sometimes the most intelligent decision is not to decide yet.

The HALT Pause

Pause. Regulate. Then choose.

Source Note: The HALT framework originates from addiction recovery and relapse-prevention work. The neuroscience explanations are informed by contemporary research on executive functioning, emotional regulation, stress physiology, social connection, and sleep. This section integrates those findings within the context of identity and behavioural change.

Pattern Recognition, Utilisation, and Creation

As Tony Robbins often explains, transformation begins with recognising patterns before consciously creating new ones.

And honestly, I think many people spend years trapped inside emotional loops simply because they never pause long enough to observe them clearly.

Pattern Recognition

This is the stage where people begin noticing the loop without immediately collapsing into shame, denial, defensiveness, or self-judgement.

You start recognising, "This keeps happening." "This reaction feels familiar." "I always abandon myself here." "I keep over-functioning." "I keep needing approval." "I keep choosing survival over honesty."

Awareness changes things because people stop automatically identifying with every reaction as absolute truth.

Instead of, "This is just who I am," the question slowly becomes, "Why did I learn to become this version of myself?"

Pattern Redirection

Most survival strategies contain strengths hidden inside them.

The overachiever may contain discipline, drive, and resilience. The hyper-responsible person may contain leadership and dependability. The deeply empathetic person may contain emotional intelligence and compassion. The independent one may contain courage and adaptability.

The goal is not to destroy the person. The goal is to separate the strength from the compulsion.

Because eventually people realise, "I do not need to remain trapped inside survival mode in order to keep the strengths I developed there."

Pattern Reinforcement

Real change usually requires repeated experiences that teach the nervous system, "It is safe to live differently now."

If somebody spent years believing, "I am only safe when I perform," then rest may initially feel emotionally threatening.

If somebody believes, "I must hold everything together," delegating responsibility may trigger anxiety.

If somebody learnt, "My needs create problems," assertion may feel uncomfortable long before it feels empowering.

But over time, repeated safe experiences begin creating new emotional associations inside the brain and nervous system.

"I am safe when I rest."

"I am safe when I ask for help."

"I am safe when I disappoint somebody."

"I am safe when I express a boundary."

"I am safe when I stop performing constantly."

What begins to change is not the world around them, but the meaning their nervous system assigns to those experiences.

The goal is not perfection, freedom from every wound, or the complete absence of fear. The shift happens when authenticity, rest, boundaries, honesty, stillness, vulnerability, and self-respect no longer feel threatening.

That is often the moment identity starts changing from the inside out.

Two Ways Identity Breaks, and Rebuilds.

Identity does not dissolve in comfort. It usually dissolves when life challenges the story we have been living by.

Two Ways Identity Breaks, And Rebuilds

Identity does not dissolve in comfort. It dissolves in one of two ways.

The first is crisis.

Crisis destabilises prediction. Illness. Divorce. Public failure. Financial collapse. Betrayal. Diagnosis. Something interrupts the architecture so abruptly that the nervous system can no longer rely on the old model.

That is what happened when I collapsed on that airport runway. The identity of the unbreakable high performer could not survive that interruption. The system cracked.

Crisis forces identity disruption. But there is a second way.

Conscious environmental reorganisation.

Identity is not formed in isolation. It is reinforced relationally. Roles are maintained by systems. If you are the responsible one, others unconsciously benefit from that role. If you are the peacemaker, others rely on your diffusion. If you are the performer, others reward your output.

When you change internally but remain in the same environment, the system will often attempt to pull you back into your assigned role.

The over-responsible one who steps back is labelled selfish. The truth-teller who regulates instead of reacts is labelled distant. The high performer who rests is labelled complacent. The one who asserts boundaries is labelled difficult.

This is not regression. It is systemic resistance.

Identity rebuild requires environmental calibration.

Sometimes that means new boundaries. Sometimes that means new conversations. Sometimes that means new communities. Sometimes that means walking away from systems that only know the old version of you.

Internal rewiring without environmental shift creates friction. Environmental shift without internal rewiring creates repetition. Both are required.

Recognition Without Shame

Taking responsibility does not mean taking blame. It means recognising patterns without shaming the self who needed them.

I do not shame the younger version of me who believed she had to hold everything together. I honour her. She survived. She built capability. She developed discipline.

But strength without boundaries becomes strain. Resilience without regulation becomes depletion. Identity without conscious revision becomes a cage.

The turning point in awakening is not diagnosis. It is recognition.

Recognition that I am not my coping strategy. Recognition that anger is not dangerous. Recognition that rest is not laziness. Recognition that disappointment is survivable. Recognition that being responsible for everyone is not the same as being loving.

How Identities Are Broken

Identities are shattered in two ways: crisis or choice.

The crisis breaks your identity whether you want it to or not. My body giving out at the airport. The diagnosis. The hospital horror. Each destroyed a fraction of who I thought I was.

I was no longer the immortal adrenaline junkie. I did not have it all together the way I thought a high-flying corporate professional should. I was not the wife who thought sacrifice equalled love. Those personas cracked under the pressure of real life.

Joseph Campbell referred to it as the Hero's Journey. Rebirth occurs after the fall. You have to die to who you were in order to become who you are meant to be.

But you can also shatter identities by conscious choice. Through awareness. By asking, "Is this still me, or is this the person I used to be?"

I decided to divest myself from the identity of "the patient who accepts limits." I decided to shatter "the one who stays because someone needs to keep the peace." I elected to shatter the identity constructed around titles and external validation.

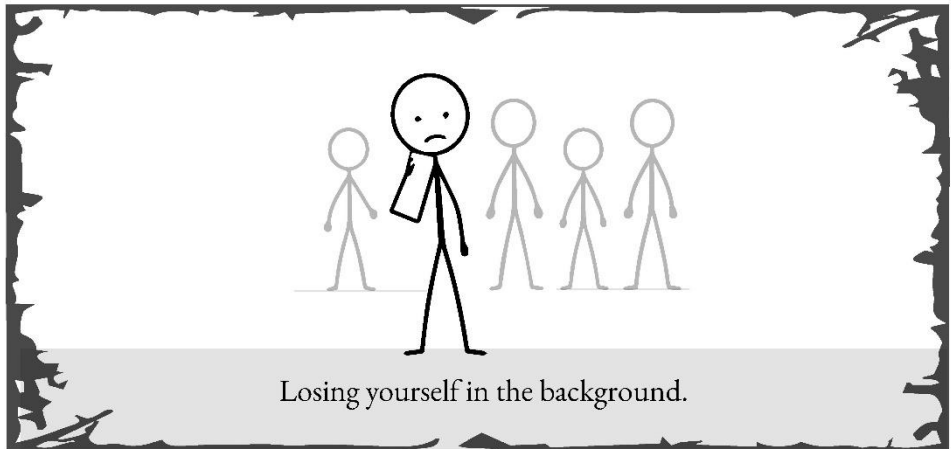
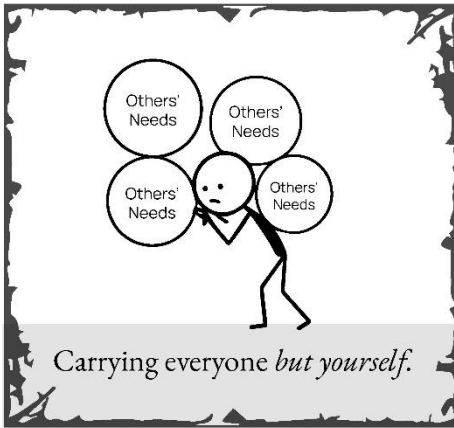
Breaking identity requires courage. Because when you release an old identity, there is a terrifying void before the new one solidifies. You stand in this void and ask, "But if I am not this, then who am I?"

That chasm is where transformation resides.

When we break identity, we must confront questions such as: Who am I apart from the masks I wear? What beliefs am I carrying that are not mine? Where did I lose myself in order to belong? What did I give up of me for safety?

There are no easy answers. But they are required for the rupture that leads to rebirth.

The People Pleaser



How Identities Are Reborn

Rebirth is not always dramatic. Sometimes it is subtle.

Deleting the number. Changing the tone. Investing in that course. Saying yes to the right client. Saying no without apology.

It is you returning to your frequency, identity, and direction. Identity rebirth is realised through these steps:

Acknowledge what is dying. New identity cannot be birthed while clinging to the old.

Create space for emergence. Whether through stillness, prayer, or reflection, do not race to fill the void with the next iteration. Allow yourself to not know for a moment.

Identify the new self accurately. Not vague wishes like "I want to be rich," but something specific, "I am someone who creates from alignment, not approval."

Before you are it, become it. Neuroplasticity means your brain rewires in accordance with new focus, belief, repetition, and behaviour. Move like her. Speak like her. Your nervous system will follow.

Reinforce through action. Every time you choose aligned action over comfortable pattern, you are signing a contract with your new identity. The first time I ran a 10k after the diagnosis, it was not just running. It was saying, "This is who I am now."

Release the need for others to witness it. Your identity rebirth is first within. Not everyone will understand. Not everyone will celebrate. Your job is to become, irrespective of observers.

The Evolution of Self-Discovery and Transformation Is Never-Ending

Self-discovery is followed by transformation, and each layer of the self that is transformed only reveals a deeper level. It is a spiral that keeps climbing.

The thing most people get wrong about identity change is that they see it as a ladder, leave the old self behind, climb to the new self, never turn back.

But it is not a ladder. It is a spiral.

You are going to circle back around to old ways. You will find yourself people-pleasing after you thought you had moved past it. You will notice survival identity creeping in when you are stressed.

That does not mean you failed. It means you are human.

The spiral means you come back to themes at a higher level of awareness. Every time you loop around, you have more insight, more awareness, and better tools. You see the pattern from further above.

I still find myself wanting to perform for approval. But now I recognise it. I pause. I choose differently. That recognition is the elevation.

The identity spiral teaches us: becoming is not about perfecting. It is about evolving. Not about arriving, it is about always choosing alignment over comfort, truth over performance, soul over ego.

And the most beautiful part? The spiral never ends. There is always another layer to uncover, another version to emerge, another evolution waiting.

That is not exhausting. That is what it is to be alive.

Reflection: Where in your life are you still performing a role that once protected you but no longer serves the life you want to live?

Identity shifts the moment a pattern becomes visible.

Identity is the architecture beneath behaviour. But even identity exists within a larger structure, the movement from chaos to clarity that shapes everything you build next. That is where we go next.

Chapter 15

Chaos to Clarity

Clarity is not the absence of noise. It is the decision to stop letting the noise make your choices for you. — Natasha Pinto

There was a season of my life where I was doing everything and none of it was working. Not because I was not capable. But because I was so full of noise, I could not hear what actually mattered. I was saying yes to things that were draining me, chasing outcomes that were not mine, and calling it productivity. The turning point was not dramatic. It was a quiet moment of honesty where I sat down and asked myself one question: what is actually in my control right now? Everything I could not control, I put down. Everything I could, I worked on. That is not a framework. That is a decision. And from that decision, something I had not felt in a long time arrived. Clarity. This chapter is about how that happens, not as a coincidence, but as a practice.

There comes a point in a person's life when effort stops producing progress. From the outside, nothing appears broken. You are functioning. Achieving. Holding it together. Yet internally, something is misaligned. The energy required to maintain your life begins to exceed the meaning you derive from it. What once felt purposeful begins to feel mechanical.

This was me at year eighteen in corporate life. I was functioning but I would sit in meetings and feel a particular kind of emptiness that I could not name. It was not unhappiness. It was misalignment. The life I was living was well-constructed. It just was not mine. Chaos to clarity is not a dramatic collapse. Sometimes it is the slow, creeping recognition that the building you have been inside was never your address.

Clarity did not arrive in a lightning bolt. It came quietly, in a moment when I stopped running from the truth. I was lying there, surrounded by all the evidence that my body was unreliable and that the life I had been living was built on suppression, and something very clear arrived: I need to voice this.

Not suppress it. Not manage it. Voice it. Not just for me, for every person in a similar situation being dismissed, ridiculed, told it was all in their head. That was the moment. Not dramatic. Just clear. I knew exactly what I was here to do.

Most people misinterpret this moment. They assume they need more discipline, better habits, a refined strategy. They double down on productivity, time management, and performance, attempting to outwork a structural problem with surface effort.

I did the same. I refined my tone. My productivity. My emotional regulation. My resilience. I adjusted how I responded, how I planned, how I showed up. Yet the pattern returned. Different circumstances, same fatigue. Different context, same internal friction.

What I eventually realised was this: behaviour was never the root. My life did not shift because I modified actions. It shifted when the structure beneath those actions changed. Results do not transform when behaviour is forced. They transform when the identity generating that behaviour evolves.

The Structural Reality

One of the strangest things about human beings is that familiarity often feels safer than freedom.

Even painful identities can become psychologically comforting once they are familiar enough. People stay inside exhausting patterns, unhealthy relationships, over-functioning roles, emotional suppression, endless performance cycles, or lives that no longer fit them because the nervous system tends to prefer predictable discomfort over uncertain change.

And honestly, I think this is why transformation feels so destabilising for many people.

The mind may consciously want growth, peace, rest, honesty, expansion, or change while another part of the nervous system quietly asks, "But who will I be without this version of myself?"

That question sits underneath far more behaviour than people realise.

Some people cling to productivity because slowing down would force them to feel emotions they have spent years outrunning. Some cling to

responsibility because usefulness became tied to worth very early in life. Some cling to chaos because peace feels unfamiliar. Some cling to suffering because identity has quietly organised itself around survival.

This is why behavioural change alone often fails long-term.

Human beings can temporarily modify habits while still remaining emotionally loyal to the identity producing those habits underneath.

And eventually life creates friction wherever there is misalignment between who somebody truly is becoming and the identity they continue rehearsing automatically.

That friction is what many people experience as chaos. Not because life is punishing them. But because the old internal structure can no longer fully support the level of awareness trying to emerge.

Chaos: Structural Exposure

Chaos is not random suffering. It is structural exposure.

It occurs when the identity you have been living from can no longer sustain the awareness emerging within you. Coping mechanisms lose efficiency. Roles begin to feel restrictive. Habits that once ensured belonging feel performative. The nervous system interprets this destabilisation as threat. Familiarity dissolves. There is confusion. Restlessness. Sometimes fear.

But beneath the discomfort lies something precise: truth pressing against denial.

If you respond by pushing harder, you reinforce the existing paradigm. If you pause and observe, something far more important becomes visible.

Confrontation: Disciplined Self-Observation

What emerges next is confrontation, not with the world, but with yourself.

Confrontation is disciplined self-observation without self-deception. It is the willingness to examine beliefs you have treated as facts.

I had to confront the belief that my worth was proportional to my utility. The more I carried, the more I mattered. The more I endured, the stronger I was. The more I stayed silent, the more dignified I appeared. This belief was

never consciously chosen. It was reinforced through praise, responsibility, and survival until it became indistinguishable from truth.

That belief shaped my thoughts. My thoughts created pressure. That pressure dictated behaviour. And my behaviour reproduced exhaustion and resentment. The results were predictable because the programming was intact.

Confrontation requires dismantling the illusion that your suffering is accidental.

Where am I repeating the same emotional cycle? What belief sustains this behaviour? Who did I become to survive and is that identity still necessary?

Without this confrontation, growth remains cosmetic. You may alter behaviour temporarily. But the pattern returns because the identity remains untouched.

Clarity: Perceptual Accuracy

When confrontation is sustained, clarity forms.

You begin to see that productivity is not worth. That endurance is not virtue when it violates integrity. That belonging purchased through self-erasure is a quiet betrayal.

Clarity simplifies life because it removes internal contradiction. Decisions become evident. Not easy, evident. When conscious intention aligns with subconscious belief, behaviour stabilises naturally. There is less negotiation. Less turbulence. Action feels clean.

Many mistake this for confidence. It is not confidence. It is congruence.

Repetition: Structural Reinforcement

Yet clarity alone does not reconfigure identity. Insight without reinforcement fades under pressure. Transformation stabilises through repetition. Identity is constructed through repeated experience. The nervous system learns safety through familiarity.

If you repeatedly choose alignment, even when discomfort arises, the internal definition of safety recalibrates. Each boundary maintained. Each

truth spoken. Each decision made from integrity rather than approval. These are not dramatic acts. They are structural reinforcements.

Over time, the new behaviour ceases to feel foreign. The old reaction loses urgency. Identity shifts not because it was declared, but because it was practised.

The Sequence

The movement from chaos to clarity is not mystical. It is sequential.

Destabilisation reveals misalignment. Honest examination exposes programming. Accurate perception removes distortion. Consistent aligned action stabilises identity. The cycle will repeat at higher levels of awareness. Each return demands greater honesty and greater responsibility. What determines your trajectory is not the disruption you face. It is the identity you choose to reinforce.

The Choice

You can return to familiarity. Or you can refine your structure. You can defend the old paradigm. Or you can dismantle it.

Understand this clearly: your results are loyal to your identity. If your life is not shifting, it is not because you lack effort. It is because you are protecting a version of yourself that must evolve.

No one can perform this work for you. No mentor can override a paradigm you insist on preserving. No circumstance will force this shift sustainably. The interruption has already happened. You are reading this because something in you is no longer willing to live unconsciously.

The only question that remains is this: Will you upgrade the operating system, or continue optimising the surface?

That decision determines everything that follows.

The Power of Leverage

Human beings rarely change simply because something would be beneficial. Change occurs when the cost of staying the same becomes greater than the cost of transformation.

Psychologically, behaviour is more strongly driven by the avoidance of pain than the pursuit of pleasure. This is why individuals can tolerate unhealthy patterns for years, until the consequences become undeniable.

When the long-term impact of a belief or behaviour is seen clearly, not only in the present, but across the future it creates, the motivation shifts. What once felt optional begins to feel necessary.

Transformation often begins at the moment when change becomes a must, not merely a should.

Most people do not fail to change because they lack knowledge. They fail because change remains optional.

As long as something is a preference, the system defaults to familiarity. The known, even when uncomfortable, feels safer than the unknown.

Real change begins when staying the same becomes intolerable, when the cost of the current pattern outweighs the discomfort of disrupting it.

At that point, change is no longer a negotiation. It becomes a necessity.

Clarity is not the destination. It is the beginning of a different kind of work, the work of becoming the person your life is waiting for. That work has a structure, a sequence, and a daily practice. That is where we go next.

Chapter 16

The Energetics of Becoming Significant

Energy cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be changed from one form to another. - Einstein

I did not arrive at energy work through a course or a book. I arrived through signs I kept ignoring. Things I kept sensing but brushing away because they did not fit neatly into the rational world I had been taught to trust. And then one day I stopped brushing and started listening. Not because I had proof. Because I was tired of abandoning my own intuition. We are all intuitive beings. The question is not whether you have access to that knowing. The question is whether you are willing to trust it. The chakra system is one of the oldest maps of that inner knowing. This chapter is not asking you to believe in it. It is asking you to consider what you might be feeling that you have not yet allowed yourself to name.

What Is Frequency?

When I speak about frequency, I am not speaking only about Hertz, brainwaves, or measurable electrical activity, although human beings do operate electrically and physiologically in fascinating ways. Nor am I speaking about the oversimplified social media version of 'just vibrate higher' while ignoring reality entirely.

I am speaking about something human beings have sensed long before they had scientific language for it. Presence. Emotional tone. Energetic impact. The feeling certain people, spaces, conversations, environments, music, or experiences leave inside the body.

Most people have walked into a room and immediately felt tension without anyone saying a word. Most people have met someone whose presence felt calming, safe, grounding, expansive, or alive. Others leave you exhausted without anything visibly dramatic happening at all.

Human beings affect each other constantly through emotion, nervous system regulation, attention, stress responses, tone, body language, and behaviour, and what many people spiritually describe as energy.

Science explains parts of this. Neuroscience shows that the nervous system continuously scans for safety and threat. Emotional states influence perception, attention, hormonal activity, immune response, behaviour, and decision-making. Brain activity operates through measurable electrical patterns. Music, breath, environment, relationships, stress, prayer, meditation, and emotional regulation can all influence physiological state.

But honestly, I also think there are aspects of human experience people feel long before they can fully explain them scientifically. A mother sensing something is wrong with her child before receiving the phone call. The emotional atmosphere after conflict. The calm presence of somebody deeply grounded. The exhaustion that follows prolonged exposure to manipulation or emotional inauthenticity.

Spiritual traditions have spoken about these experiences for centuries using words like spirit, energy, intuition, alignment, consciousness, prayer, presence, vibration, discernment, or frequency. Science uses different language, but both are often observing different dimensions of the same human reality.

And honestly, I think becoming significant has less to do with becoming louder externally and more to do with becoming internally coherent. Because eventually people realise that what they repeatedly think, feel, tolerate, practise, consume, suppress, believe, and emotionally rehearse slowly becomes the atmosphere they live inside every day.

Frequency, Consciousness, and the Energy of Human Experience

Across both spirituality and modern psychology, there has long been a recurring idea that human beings do not merely experience life intellectually. We experience life energetically, emotionally, physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually all at once.

Many spiritual traditions describe this through the language of vibration, frequency, consciousness, or energetic state. Higher emotional states such

as love, gratitude, compassion, peace, courage, joy, and acceptance are often described as higher frequencies, while chronic shame, fear, resentment, apathy, or despair are described as denser or lower emotional states. Whether interpreted spiritually, psychologically, or physiologically, most people intuitively recognise some version of this experience.

Spiritual teacher and psychiatrist David R. Hawkins explored these ideas through what he called the Map of Consciousness, a philosophical and contemplative framework (not an empirically validated scientific scale) that attempted to describe different emotional and spiritual states as levels of consciousness. In his model, emotions such as shame, guilt, fear, and apathy reflected constricted states of awareness, while courage, willingness, love, and peace reflected progressively expanded states.

Some people interpret these ideas symbolically. Others interpret them spiritually. Some attempt to connect them with neuroscience and nervous system regulation. I think there is value in approaching them with both openness and discernment.

The Law of Attraction, often simplified online into 'just think positively and the universe gives you everything you want,' reduces a far more nuanced idea into motivational wallpaper. At a deeper level, the principle is less about magical wish fulfilment and more about the reality that internal state influences perception, behaviour, decision-making, emotional energy, relationships, resilience, and ultimately the kinds of experiences people repeatedly move toward or reinforce over time.

A person organised around chronic fear behaves differently from somebody organised around internal trust. A person living in resentment interprets reality differently from somebody living in gratitude. Internal state shapes lived experience more powerfully than many people realise.

This is why spiritual practices across cultures often focus so heavily on attention, prayer, meditation, gratitude, silence, breath, music, forgiveness, presence, and emotional regulation. These practices influence not only emotional experience, but also physiological state, nervous system regulation, perception, behaviour, and meaning-making over time.

And honestly, perhaps the deepest insight underneath all of this is simpler than people make it: human beings become shaped by what they repeatedly

live inside emotionally. What somebody repeatedly rehearses internally through thought, attention, emotion, environment, behaviour, fear, prayer, gratitude, resentment, hope, or belief, slowly becomes part of the atmosphere through which they experience life itself.

The Chakra Map: Ancient Architecture for Modern Wiring

Long before neuroscience began mapping autonomic pathways, nerve plexuses, and stress responses, ancient traditions had already developed symbolic ways of describing something human beings still spend their lives trying to understand: how survival, emotion, identity, intuition, expression, and meaning all seem to sit on top of one another inside the same living system.

In yogic philosophy and later theosophical interpretations, these centres came to be known as chakras, often described as wheels or centres of consciousness aligned along the spine. While the language is spiritual rather than scientific, the pattern it points to still feels remarkably familiar if you spend any amount of time observing actual human beings rather than just reading theories about them.

What I find interesting is that the body does not need to be treated as mystical fluff for this map to make sense. The spine is real hardware. The spinal cord carries communication between brain and body. The autonomic nervous system is constantly regulating stress, digestion, breathing, heart rate, and hormonal activity. The vagus nerve, which threads through so much of the body's internal communication, has enormous influence on emotional regulation and social engagement. Ancient systems did not use the vocabulary of cortisol or prefrontal integration, but they clearly observed that human beings do not function as isolated parts, and that when one part of the system is thrown off, the rest tends to follow.

The chakra model, stripped of excess dogma, mirrors an ascending architecture of human development, beginning with survival at the base and gradually moving upward toward connection, expression, perception, meaning, and transcendence. At the most basic level, people want to feel safe. They want to connect. They want to speak truthfully. They want to trust their own perception and feel that their existence is part of something

larger. The symbolic map may be ancient, but the human experience it describes is still painfully current.

Use these affirmations as anchors during meditation or reflection, repeating them until they resonate internally rather than remaining purely intellectual:

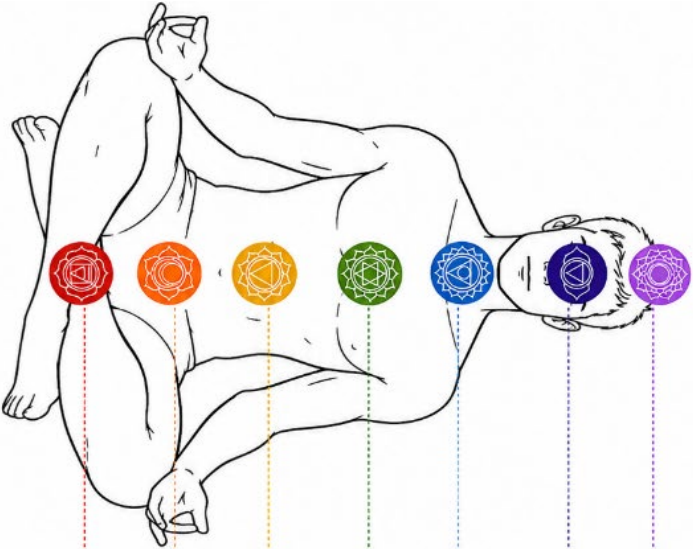
All my chakras are in perfect alignment, creating harmony within me.

I release any blocked energy and allow it to flow freely.

I am attuned to the balance and flow of my energy centres.

The Seven Energy Centres

Chakras - The Architecture of Your Inner Life



COLOUR	CHAKRA	MANTRA	MEANING	AFFIRMATION
VIOLET	CROWN <i>Sahasrara</i>	AUM 963 Hz	Divine Connection, Faith, Higher Consciousness, Surrender, Meditation.	<i>I understand</i>
INDIGO	THIRD EYE <i>Ajna</i>	OM 852 Hz	Intuition, Clarity, Discernment, Inner Wisdom.	<i>I see</i>
BLUE	THROAT <i>Vishuddha</i>	HAM 741 Hz	Expression, Speaking Up, Communication, Boundaries.	<i>I speak</i>
GREEN	HEART <i>Anahata</i>	YAM 639 Hz	Love, Compassion, Forgiveness, Gift, Intimacy, Giving and Receiving Love.	<i>I love</i>
YELLOW	SOLAR PLEXUS <i>Manipura</i>	RAM 528 Hz	Self-worth, Confidence, Self-trust, Personal Power.	<i>I do</i>
ORANGE	SACRAL <i>Svadhishthana</i>	VAM 417 Hz	Pleasure, Creativity, Fluidity, Emotions, Relationships.	<i>I feel</i>
RED	ROOT <i>Muladhara</i>	LAM 396 Hz	Safety, Survival, Grounding, Security, Belonging, Finances.	<i>I am</i>

The frequencies (Hz) shown are modern associations used in sound healing and meditation practices. They are not part of the original 'yogic' texts and should be viewed as complementary rather than scientifically established.

The Seven Primary Centres

The following seven centres describe the ascending architecture of human development from survival to transcendence. Read each section as an invitation for self-reflection rather than a diagnostic checklist.

Root Chakra (Muladhara) — Survival, Safety, and Grounding

The Root Chakra is associated with survival, stability, safety, belonging, and the basic human need to feel anchored in life. So much of human behaviour begins with one underlying question the nervous system asks constantly: Am I safe?

When somebody grows up in unpredictability, chronic stress, instability, trauma, or environments where safety feels inconsistent, the body often adapts by remaining slightly braced all the time. Modern neuroscience would describe this through heightened stress responses, adrenal activation, and chronic fight-or-flight conditioning. Ancient systems described similar patterns through imbalance at the root.

You can often see this in ordinary life without needing a spiritual seminar to explain it. Some people struggle to rest because their nervous system associates slowing down with danger. Others constantly overwork or overcontrol because unpredictability once taught them that safety had to be earned through vigilance. Grounding practices like slow breathing, walking barefoot, physical movement, routine, sleep, and nourishment, help because they communicate safety back to the body in ways logic alone sometimes cannot.

Sacral Chakra (Svadhithana) — Emotion, Creativity, and Flow

The Sacral Chakra is associated with creativity, emotional fluidity, pleasure, sensuality, relational openness, and the ability to experience life with movement rather than rigidity. When this part of life becomes constricted, people often experience emotional numbness, shame, creative stagnation, disconnection from joy, or difficulty expressing emotion. And honestly, many adults are functioning this way without realising how disconnected they have become from spontaneity and aliveness.

Burnout culture has somehow convinced people that being emotionally exhausted and permanently reachable by email is a personality type. Movement, rhythm, dance, art, music, emotional honesty, play, connection, creativity, and healthy pleasure often restore parts of the self that chronic stress slowly shuts down.

Solar Plexus Chakra (Manipura) — Identity, Agency, and Self-Trust

The Solar Plexus Chakra is associated with willpower, agency, self-trust, confidence, direction, and the ability to move through life with an internal sense of authority rather than constant self-doubt. Some people move through life with a stable internal belief that they are allowed to take up space, make decisions, and trust themselves. Others spend years second-guessing themselves, apologising excessively, or shrinking their voice to avoid discomfort. Often this has less to do with capability and more to do with conditioning.

And honestly, self-trust changes lives far more than motivational culture admits. There comes a point where people stop asking 'What if I fail?' and begin asking 'What kind of life am I building by constantly abandoning myself?'

Heart Chakra (Anahata) — Connection, Compassion, and Emotional Integration

The Heart Chakra symbolises love, compassion, grief, forgiveness, emotional openness, and the human need for meaningful connection. Emotional pain is never experienced as 'just mental.' Grief affects breathing. Loneliness changes physiology. Heartbreak alters appetite, sleep, and nervous system state. Love changes people biologically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

When people emotionally close themselves for too long, isolation often intensifies stress rather than reducing it. Some people become so adapted to self-protection that vulnerability itself begins feeling threatening. And honestly, emotional maturity is not becoming emotionally numb. It is learning how to remain open without abandoning discernment, and compassionate without disappearing entirely inside everybody else's needs.

Throat Chakra (Vishuddha) — Truth, Expression, and Boundaries

The Throat Chakra is associated with communication, truth, expression, authenticity, boundaries, and the ability to voice what is real instead of permanently suppressing it. Many people spend years swallowing what they actually feel in order to preserve peace, maintain approval, or keep relationships stable. Over time that suppression often turns into resentment, emotional fatigue, passive aggression, or the strange exhaustion that comes from constantly editing yourself before speaking.

Some adults have become so adapted to self-silencing that speaking honestly feels physically uncomfortable at first. Truth changes the nervous system because authenticity reduces the internal strain of maintaining multiple versions of yourself simultaneously.

Third Eye Chakra (Ajna) — Perception, Awareness, and Vision

The Third Eye Chakra symbolises intuition, perception, insight, foresight, imagination, self-awareness, and the ability to recognise patterns beneath surface appearances. When people are chronically overstimulated, emotionally dysregulated, or exhausted, perception often becomes clouded. Impulsivity overrides reflection. Reaction overrides discernment. Stillness becomes uncomfortable because silence begins revealing things people have spent years outrunning.

And honestly, clarity usually does not arrive because life suddenly becomes quieter. It arrives because we finally become quiet enough internally to notice what has been true for a long time.

Crown Chakra (Sahasrara) — Meaning, Consciousness, and Transcendence

The Crown Chakra symbolises transcendence, unity, spiritual connection, consciousness, meaning, and the human longing to experience life as something larger than isolated survival and ego identity. Human beings consistently seek something beyond material achievement alone. People do not merely want success. They want meaning. They want their existence to matter in some deeper way than productivity, status, or external validation.

When this dimension of life becomes neglected, many people experience a strange kind of fragmentation even while appearing externally successful. Everything may look functional on paper, yet internally there is often a quiet emptiness that achievement alone cannot fully solve. Awakening is not about escaping humanity. It is about integrating it.

Minor Energy Centres and Somatic Feedback

Ancient systems also described smaller energetic centres throughout the body, particularly in areas associated with touch, movement, perception, expression, and interaction with the external world. The palms, soles of the feet, ears, tongue, joints, and regions surrounding the eyes were often viewed as subtle points of energetic exchange and sensory feedback, which is fascinating because modern neuroscience also recognises how densely interconnected these areas are with perception, regulation, communication, and bodily awareness.

The hands are deeply linked with connection, reassurance, creativity, interaction, and nervous system signalling. Human touch can calm distress, regulate emotional states, and communicate safety long before language enters the picture. Feet influence grounding, posture, and balance. The ears continuously scan for tone, rhythm, safety, and threat in the environment. The tongue and throat sit at the centre of communication, self-expression, and emotional restraint.

Most people have experienced moments where the body seemed to recognise something before the conscious mind fully caught up. A room suddenly feels heavy. A conversation leaves an unexplained tightness in the chest. Certain environments create agitation without any obvious reason. The body keeps communicating regardless. The question is usually whether somebody has learnt how to listen before the signal becomes impossible to ignore.

Practices such as breathwork, grounding, stillness, touch, meditation, movement, prayer, and sensory recalibration often shift internal state in ways people sometimes struggle to explain logically at first. Whether somebody interprets this through bioelectric signalling, somatic processing, energetic sensitivity, or spiritual language, the broader principle remains

consistent: the body often communicates long before the conscious mind fully understands what is happening.

And that architecture goes deeper than most people realise. Traditions from theosophy and esoteric philosophy describe seven distinct bodies of consciousness, from the physical through the etheric, astral, mental, causal, buddhic, and atmic. Each a subtler layer of the same being, each carrying its own intelligence, its own wounds, and its own capacity for awakening. The chakra system explored in this chapter is one map of that inner terrain. But knowing that the map extends further matters — because it means the work of becoming is far vaster and far richer than any single framework can contain. What we are doing here is beginning the journey, not completing it.

TABLE 7

Affirmations tailored for each of the seven main chakras:

CHAKRA	KEYWORD	THEME	DAILY AFFIRMATION
Root Chakra (Muladhara)	I AM	Security, grounding, survival, belonging	I am grounded. I am safe. I belong. I trust life to support me.
Sacral Chakra (Svadhithana)	I FEEL	Creativity, emotion, pleasure, flow, relationships	I honour my emotions. I embrace creativity and joy. I allow life to flow through me.
Solar Plexus Chakra (Manipura)	I DO	Willpower, confidence, identity, personal power	I trust myself. I act with courage. I honour my inner strength and personal power.
Heart Chakra (Anahata)	I LOVE	Love, compassion, connection, acceptance, healing	I give and receive love freely. I accept myself fully. My heart remains open.
Throat Chakra (Vishuddha)	I SPEAK	Communication, truth, expression, integrity	I speak my truth with clarity, courage, and compassion.
Third Eye Chakra (Ajna)	I SEE	Intuition, insight, clarity, inner wisdom	I trust my inner wisdom. I see clearly. I am open to insight and truth.
Crown Chakra (Sahasrara)	I UNDERSTAND	Connection, transcendence, purpose, the sacred	I trust the wisdom of life. I am connected to something greater than myself.

KEY INSIGHT

- The chakras can be viewed as symbolic centres of awareness.
- Each represents a different aspect of human experience, from safety and belonging to intuition, purpose, and transcendence.
- The affirmations below are modern reflective practices inspired by these themes and intended to support self-awareness and conscious living.

The Law of Consciousness

In *Power vs. Force*, David R. Hawkins proposed a Map of Consciousness, a philosophical and contemplative framework, presented here as a tool for self-reflection rather than a scientifically validated measurement system. The structural insight, regardless of how one views the calibration method, remains worth sitting with: emotional states are not equal in generative capacity.

Below the level he termed *Courage*, behaviour tends to be driven by force, compensatory, validation-seeking, or domination-oriented. Force consumes energy because it must constantly defend identity. Above *Courage*, behaviour shifts toward power, internally stabilised, no longer requiring manipulation or approval, simply coherent.

Courage marks the inflection point. The moment a human being stops defending and begins constructing.

Whether you adopt Hawkins' framework fully, partially, or not at all, the psychological reality it points toward aligns with what neuroscience describes through nervous system regulation and emotional integration. Chronic lower states correlate with sympathetic overactivation and defensive bias. Higher-order states correlate with improved vagal tone, integration between emotional and executive networks, and increased behavioural resilience.

Upward movement in consciousness is not about feeling good. It is about increasing energetic efficiency. And efficiency compounds.

The Frequency of Your Life

There is a conversation happening inside every human being constantly, though most people were never taught how to recognise it clearly. It is not a conversation in ordinary language. It is expressed through emotional state, nervous system regulation, attention, physiological response, energy allocation, and the overall quality of consciousness somebody repeatedly lives inside.

What people consistently feel internally shapes what they notice externally.

The state somebody repeatedly inhabits gradually becomes the lens through which life itself is interpreted. When a person lives primarily inside chronic shame, fear, resentment, anxiety, or emotional contraction, the nervous system naturally becomes more attentive to threat, rejection, danger, and scarcity. In simple terms, people start noticing more of what they repeatedly rehearse emotionally.

This is one reason low-vibration states feel so psychologically consuming. Not because somebody is morally flawed for experiencing them, but because these states narrow perception significantly. Creativity reduces. Curiosity weakens. Risk tolerance decreases. Behaviour becomes increasingly organised around protection rather than expansion.

High-vibration living is better understood as the disciplined ability to orient toward possibility, meaning, creation, responsibility, openness, gratitude, courage, and intentional action even while life remains imperfect. When emotional regulation strengthens and internal coherence increases, perception changes. Ideas emerge more freely. Relationships deepen. Creativity expands. Behaviour becomes cleaner. Opportunities become more visible because the nervous system is no longer filtering reality entirely through survival.

Not because the universe suddenly became generous overnight. But because the person themselves became more capable of recognising, receiving, and acting upon what was already available.

Low Vibration States and What They Cost You

These are not moral judgements. They are honest observations about the states that limit what somebody can see, build, and become. Name the ones you recognise in yourself, not with shame, but with the clear intention to move through them.

Shame: I am fundamentally flawed. Creates hiding, self-sabotage, and the inability to receive love or opportunity.

Guilt: I did something wrong. When chronic, it creates punishment cycles and keeps you anchored to the past.

Blame: It is their fault. Surrenders your power entirely to the person or situation you are blaming.

Fear: Something bad will happen. Activates the survival brain and shuts down the creative brain simultaneously.

Doubt: I cannot do this. Becomes a self-fulfilling instruction to the nervous system.

Worry: What if it goes wrong? Is the imagination used against you instead of for you.

Anger: Can be fuel when directed with intention. When chronic, it corrodes the vessel carrying it.

Resentment: Is anger held too long. It hardens into the walls of your own prison.

Jealousy: Is desire without belief. The belief part is fixable.

Boredom: Is not the absence of things to do. It is the absence of meaning. Fix the second one.

Frustration: Is often a signal that you are close to a breakthrough but stopping just before it.

Overwhelm: Is too many things competing for the same bandwidth. It requires prioritisation, not more effort.

Disappointment: Is an expectation that did not match reality. The expectation is worth examining.

Unworthiness: Is the most expensive belief a human being can carry. It quietly caps everything.

You cannot create sustainably in low vibration. You are not blocking the world. You are blocking your own consciousness, your own channel, your own access to what is available to you. These states are deeply human. Every person reading this will recognise at least one. The work is not to pretend they do not exist. It is to learn to move through them with increasing speed and decreasing residence time.

Chapter 17

The Architecture of High Consciousness

The previous chapter explored frequency, consciousness, and the chakra map as a spiritual and philosophical framework for understanding human experience. This chapter moves into the neuroscience, biology, and daily architecture that makes high-consciousness living structurally possible rather than merely aspirational. Both chapters belong together. The first maps the landscape. This one shows you how to build inside it.

High consciousness does not look the way most people imagine it. It does not look like constant serenity or perfect decisions or never feeling low. It looks like pausing before you respond. It looks like noticing the emotion without becoming it. It looks like asking yourself, before you communicate, where am I vibrating right now, and is this the place I want to speak from. And it looks like this: when a difficult feeling arrives, you feel it fully, you do not brush it away, but you also do not pitch a tent and live there. You acknowledge it. You move through it. And you move up. That is not detachment. That is mastery. And it is available to anyone willing to practise it. This chapter is about building that practice deliberately, one conscious choice at a time.

Physics, Perception, and Coherence

Albert Einstein is frequently quoted in spiritual and self-development spaces as saying: match the frequency of the reality you want, and you cannot help but get that reality. Whether or not the quote is perfectly documented in the form people repeat online, the broader fascination with energy, frequency, and resonance reflects something human beings have been trying to understand for a very long time, which is how internal state influences external experience.

Nikola Tesla also famously encouraged people to think in terms of energy, frequency, and vibration. Modern culture often turns ideas like these into

oversimplified manifestation slogans, and I think there is a more intelligent and grounded way to approach them. Human beings are not passive observers walking through reality unaffected by their own internal condition. The nervous system, emotional state, attention, beliefs, physiological regulation, and perception filters somebody carries internally influence how they interpret situations, recognise opportunity, engage with people, respond to stress, and move through life over time.

That does not mean reality magically rearranges itself because somebody repeated affirmations beside a Himalayan salt lamp while ignoring every practical responsibility in their actual life. Sometimes the internet speaks about manifestation as though the universe is an exhausted customer service department waiting to process vision board requests before close of business. It is not. But internal coherence does matter.

A person whose nervous system is organised around chronic threat, shame, hyper vigilance, insecurity, or emotional exhaustion will often unconsciously prioritise protection over expansion even when opportunities appear directly in front of them. The brain becomes more attentive to danger, rejection, uncertainty, and potential loss. Behaviour narrows accordingly. Risk feels heavier. Creativity reduces. Possibility becomes harder to perceive because survival consumes so much cognitive and emotional bandwidth.

A more regulated and internally coherent person does not suddenly become immune to difficulty, disappointment, grief, or uncertainty. What changes is their relationship with reality itself. They tend to notice opportunities more clearly, recover from setbacks more adaptively, think more strategically under pressure, regulate emotion more effectively, build healthier relationships, and tolerate uncertainty without collapsing psychologically every time life becomes unpredictable.

Modern neuroscience shows that the brain is constantly filtering information rather than perceiving reality in some perfectly objective way. Attention is selective. Emotional state influences interpretation. The reticular activating system helps determine what reaches conscious awareness. Predictive processing models suggest that the brain continuously anticipates and interprets reality partly through prior conditioning, expectations, emotional memory, and learnt patterns.

In simple terms, people do not merely see reality. They also see through themselves.

Someone organised around distrust may interpret neutrality as rejection. Someone organised around shame may experience opportunity as exposure. Someone organised around fear may unconsciously avoid the very expansion they consciously claim to want. Over time, these patterns shape behaviour, and behaviour shapes outcome.

Spiritual traditions often described similar observations through different language, teaching that consciousness, emotional state, belief, attention, prayer, gratitude, and energetic alignment influence the quality of human experience. Science explains parts of this biologically and psychologically. Spirituality explores it experientially and symbolically. I do not think the two always need to compete with each other as aggressively as modern culture sometimes insists.

What matters most, at least to me, is recognising that coherence changes engagement. When somebody's thoughts, nervous system, emotional life, behaviours, values, and deeper sense of self become more aligned internally, perception changes. Behaviour changes. Decision-making changes. Life itself may not suddenly become effortless, but the way somebody moves through life becomes fundamentally different.

And honestly, I think that shift changes far more than people realise.

TABLE 5

Identity Adaptations and Nervous System States

CORE BELIEF	SURVIVAL ROLE	NERVOUS SYSTEM PATTERN	COMMON ADULT EXPRESSION	REGULATED EXPRESSION	REGULATED STATE
"I must prove my worth."	Hero / Performer	Fight-Flight (Overdrive)	Burnout, overwork, perfectionism, achievement addiction	Purposeful and secure	Calm mobilisation
"If I don't hold it together, everything falls apart."	Enabler / Over-Responsible One	Chronic Flight (Hyper-responsibility)	Exhaustion, resentment, difficulty delegating	Supportive with boundaries	Grounded engagement
"If I speak my truth, I'll be rejected."	Scapegoat	Fight (Protective activation)	Conflict cycles, defensiveness, reactivity	Courageous and steady	Regulated assertiveness
"My needs create problems."	Lost Child	Freeze (Shutdown)	Withdrawal, emotional numbing, invisibility, avoidance	Quietly present and engaged	Safe connection
"I must keep everyone comfortable."	Mascot / Caretaker	Fawn (Appeasement)	People-pleasing, humour as deflection, guilt, over-accommodation	Warm, authentic, and boundaried	Authentic connection

Note: These patterns are not personality types. They are adaptive strategies that often develop in response to early experiences, perceived threats, and relational environments. With awareness, safety, and practice, survival adaptations can evolve into more regulated expressions.

Qualities of People Who Consistently Operate at High Frequency

Over years of coaching and observation, I have noticed that the people who build extraordinary lives share a set of qualities that have very little to do with talent and almost everything to do with frequency. These are not personality traits they were born with. They are practiced states, frequencies chosen repeatedly until they became the default.

They break rules that were never theirs to follow.

They understand that most of society's rules were written by people playing a different game. They identify which rules serve their growth and which ones serve someone else's comfort. They do not rebel for the sake of it. They simply refuse to inherit limitations they never consciously chose.

They find small talk exhausting.

Not because they are antisocial. Because they are hungry for depth. They want to know what you actually think, what you are actually building, what you are actually afraid of. Shallow conversation feels like wasted time to someone whose internal world is rich. (They will absolutely still ask how your weekend was. They just genuinely hope you say something interesting.)

They are obsessed with personal growth.

Not as a performance. As a private, relentless compulsion. They are always reading, learning, questioning their own assumptions, and uncomfortable with stagnation. Growth is not something they do. It is who they are.

They do not need external motivation.

The fire is already burning from the inside. They go to coaches, mentors, and inspiring people for tools and perspective, not to be lit up. They are already lit. They are looking for fuel, not a spark.

They are not defeated by failure.

They are educated by it. There is a fundamental difference between those two responses, and it determines everything. Failure is information. High-frequency people process it faster, extract the lesson, and keep moving.

They do not seek approval from everyone.

Only from the people whose judgement they have earned the right to respect. The rest is noise. They are genuinely indifferent to criticism from people whose opinion they did not ask for and have not earned.

Their circles are small and built slowly.

Trust is not given freely. It is built over time and protected fiercely. Quality over volume, always. They would rather have two people who genuinely see them than two hundred who vaguely know their name.

They are not afraid of hard work.

They are afraid of wasted effort. They work with extraordinary focus, and they rest with equal intention. They understand that recovery is part of performance, not a reward for it.

They are financially intentional.

They understand that money is energy and that energy follows focused attention. They do not spend unconsciously. They do not complain about money while refusing to study it. They treat wealth as a responsibility, not a personality trait.

They do not complain.

Complaining is a declaration of powerlessness and they refuse powerlessness. If something is wrong, they fix it or they leave it. Venting occasionally is human. Chronic complaining is a choice they are not willing to make.

They can hold pressure without breaking.

They have developed the nervous system capacity to stay present under stress. But they also know the difference between pressure that builds and pressure that destroys. They push. And they also know when to stop.

They are inspired by other people's success.

Not threatened by it. Other people's achievement is evidence that achievement is possible. They see a winner and think 'good, that means the door is open.' They do not resent what they want.

They are resourceful above all else.

They do not wait for the right conditions. They build with what they have, where they are, right now. They are never victims of circumstance for longer than the situation strictly requires.

They build their presence deliberately.

How they enter a room. How they listen. How they speak. How they follow through. None of it is accidental. Presence is a practiced frequency, not a natural gift.

They invest in high-value skills continuously.

They understand that their income, their impact, and their influence are a direct reflection of the problems they can solve for others. Learning is never finished. The moment you stop growing, you start declining.

These are not people who have it all figured out. They are people who have decided, clearly and repeatedly, that low-frequency living is not available to them as a permanent address. They visit it occasionally, everyone does, but they do not stay.

You are not born at high frequency. You choose it. And you choose it again every morning, every time a low-frequency state tries to pull you under, every time life offers you a reason to contract instead of expanding.

Consciousness, Coherence and Compounding Power

Significance is not fame. It is not visibility. It is not applause. Significance is energetic coherence sustained over time.

When people speak of frequency, they often reduce it to metaphor. But beneath the language lies something structurally real: human beings operate from baseline states of consciousness. Those states determine perception. Perception determines decision. Decision determines trajectory.

You do not attract what you want. You compound from the state you stabilise.

At the neurological level, your baseline emotional state determines which neural networks dominate. Chronic fear, guilt, anxiety, or resentment activate survival circuitry, primarily amygdala-driven threat detection, and stress hormone release. When this circuitry is dominant, cognition narrows. Risk tolerance decreases. Creative problem-solving diminishes. Behaviour becomes protective.

Protective behaviour compounds into protective lives.

When the nervous system is regulated, when parasympathetic tone increases and prefrontal integration strengthens, perception broadens. This aligns with the broaden-and-build theory in positive psychology: elevated emotional states increase cognitive flexibility, social openness, and exploratory behaviour. Exploratory behaviour compounds into expansive lives.

This is what people loosely call high frequency. It is not mysticism. It is baseline regulation.

Alignment Is Not Romance, It Is Structural

Most people assume exhaustion comes only from workload. But one of the deepest forms of exhaustion comes from prolonged self-contradiction, from continually living against your own nervous system, values, and deeper sense of truth. The body carries that strain even when the mind keeps rationalising it away.

Alignment is not spiritual performance. Not the appearance of having it together. Alignment is what happens when thoughts, behaviours, emotional life, values, and nervous system responses stop moving in opposing directions internally.

Psychology explores parts of this through cognitive dissonance, the measurable stress that emerges when beliefs and behaviours remain

chronically misaligned. Someone who values honesty while constantly suppressing truth experiences strain. Someone who craves peace while feeding chaos experiences strain. The mind may rationalise these contradictions temporarily, but the nervous system registers them regardless.

Misalignment leaks energy quietly. It shows up through indecision, emotional fatigue, chronic overthinking, resentment, the strange heaviness of repeatedly betraying what you already know internally. When behaviour constantly conflicts with identity, even ordinary decisions feel heavier because you are not just making choices, you are negotiating against yourself.

Alignment reduces that negotiation. When identity, values, behaviour, and emotional truth become more integrated, something stabilises. Decisions become cleaner. Boundaries become clearer. Behaviour requires less force because actions begin emerging from self-concept rather than constant self-correction.

This is also why authentic confidence feels different from performative confidence. Human beings are remarkably sensitive to incongruence. People sense when someone is performing certainty while internally collapsing. What people call magnetism is often less about charisma and more about coherence, the steadiness of a person whose inner and outer worlds are no longer permanently at war.

Research on heart rate variability, emotional regulation, and autonomic nervous system functioning shows that physiological coherence is associated with improved resilience, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and executive functioning. When the body is not constantly bracing against internal conflict, you think more clearly, respond more intentionally, and recover from stress more effectively.

Alignment is not perfection. It is the gradual reduction of internal civil war.

The Neurobiology of Confidence

Confidence is frequently misunderstood as loudness, dominance, charisma, social ease, or the ability to appear certain in front of other people. Modern culture often rewards performance so aggressively that many people

confuse visibility with self-trust. But genuine confidence feels very different from performance because real confidence is usually much quieter underneath the surface. It is not built primarily through appearance. It is built through coherence.

At a neurological level, confidence develops through repeated behavioural evidence that reinforces self-trust over time. Every time somebody keeps a promise to themselves, follows through on a difficult action, maintains a boundary, speaks honestly despite discomfort, or acts in alignment with their values, the brain begins updating its internal model of that person. Identity gradually becomes more believable to the nervous system because behaviour is providing evidence instead of fantasy.

This is one reason confidence cannot be built entirely through affirmations disconnected from action. Positive self-talk may temporarily influence emotional state, but if behaviour repeatedly contradicts identity, the nervous system continues receiving evidence of inconsistency. Someone may repeat 'I am confident' every morning while avoiding every conversation, opportunity, boundary, decision, or risk that would actually reinforce confidence behaviourally. Eventually the body trusts evidence more than language. You can tell yourself you are a marathon runner every morning and still have no business wearing those shoes if you have not left the couch.

Neuroscience helps explain part of this process through dopaminergic reinforcement systems. Dopamine is often misunderstood as the pleasure chemical, when in reality it is more deeply connected with motivation, anticipation, pursuit, learning, and goal-directed behaviour. The brain releases dopamine not simply when people experience reward, but when it detects meaningful movement toward something important. Progress matters neurologically.

When behaviour aligns consistently with identity, motivation loops strengthen because the nervous system begins associating action with capability and forward movement. Self-trust increases because the brain repeatedly observes the person acting congruently with what they claim to value or become. When behaviour repeatedly contradicts declared identity, motivation often weakens because the system detects incongruence. Over time, the gap between aspiration and action begins creating internal distrust.

And honestly, I think this is why so many people feel stuck in cycles of overconsumption without embodiment. They absorb books, podcasts, motivational content, courses, insights, strategies, and inspirational language, yet their nervous system never receives enough lived evidence to fully believe the new identity intellectually imagined in the mind. You cannot think yourself into a transformed life. You have to live your way into it.

Confidence grows through enacted evidence.

Embodiment matters here far more than many people realise because the body continuously feeds information back into emotional and nervous system regulation. Posture influences breathing. Breathing influences autonomic state. Tone of voice influences both internal regulation and relational perception. Slow diaphragmatic breathing increases parasympathetic activation and vagal tone, helping stabilise emotional reactivity and physiological stress responses. Upright posture has been associated with shifts in emotional processing, attentional state, and behavioural confidence. Vocal steadiness influences not only the speaker's nervous system, but also how safety, certainty, and emotional regulation are perceived socially by others.

Human beings are deeply responsive to these nonverbal signals because communication occurs far beyond words alone. People constantly interpret emotional congruence through tone, pacing, facial expression, nervous system regulation, posture, and behavioural consistency, often without consciously recognising they are doing it.

This is why performative confidence eventually feels fragile. If somebody's external presentation depends entirely on performance while the internal nervous system remains organised around fear, shame, insecurity, or self-rejection, maintaining the image becomes exhausting. The person often requires increasing amounts of validation, achievement, attention, control, or external reinforcement simply to stabilise their sense of self temporarily.

Regulated confidence feels different. It tends to appear steadier, less reactive, less performative, and less dependent on constant approval because it is not being held together entirely through external feedback. The person trusts themselves more deeply because their nervous system has repeatedly

experienced evidence of capability, resilience, adaptation, honesty, recovery, and behavioural congruence over time.

Confidence is not something human beings perform convincingly enough for others to believe. It is something the nervous system gradually learns to trust through repeated experiences of internal coherence.

Hustle vs Regulated Performance

One of the biggest misunderstandings in modern culture is the assumption that exhaustion automatically means ambition, and that constantly operating at maximum intensity is somehow evidence of importance, discipline, or success. People wear burnout like a personality trait now. Entire identities are built around being busy, sleep-deprived, emotionally unavailable, permanently overstimulated, and one email away from spiritual collapse, all while calling it high performance.

But the real distinction is not effort versus ease. It is dysregulated effort versus regulated performance.

There is a form of hustle driven almost entirely by insecurity, fear, hyper vigilance, scarcity, comparison, or the desperate need to prove worth externally. From the outside, this kind of performance can look impressive for a while. Internally, however, the nervous system is often functioning under sustained sympathetic activation, meaning the body remains in prolonged states of stress mobilisation. When cortisol and adrenaline remain chronically elevated, the body eventually begins paying a price. Attention becomes fragmented. Emotional regulation weakens. Working memory decreases. Impulsivity increases. Sleep quality suffers. Creativity reduces.

This is why so many high achievers eventually reach a point where they are technically functioning but psychologically depleted. They can produce, respond, perform, and deliver, yet internally they often feel emotionally disconnected from the very life they are working so hard to sustain. The body may continue moving forward while the nervous system quietly remains organised around pressure, vigilance, and chronic internal bracing.

Regulated performance feels very different. A regulated person can still work intensely, build ambitiously, create consistently, lead effectively, and pursue excellence. The difference lies in the internal cost. When effort is

delivered from a more regulated nervous system state, people retain greater access to executive functioning, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, strategic planning, nuance, creativity, and adaptive decision-making. They are no longer relying entirely on adrenaline spikes to maintain momentum. The body is working with them rather than constantly fighting to recover from them.

This is one reason sustainable excellence often looks calmer than people expect. Some of the most effective individuals I have ever met are not the loudest, most frantic, or most performatively hustling people in the room. In many cases they appear steadier, more intentional, less reactive, and more capable of sustaining effort over long periods without emotionally collapsing every few months and announcing on social media that they are finally choosing themselves after ignoring every nervous system warning sign since 2017.

Sustained significance is not built through endless adrenaline, chronic overextension, or nervous system martyrdom. It is built through regulated energy, internal coherence, recovery, clarity, emotional maturity, and the ability to sustain meaningful effort without becoming psychologically consumed by it. Because eventually the goal is not merely to survive success. It is to remain whole while creating it.

Emotional States and Neurochemistry

Modern culture often treats emotions as though they exist separately from the body, when in reality emotional states influence physiology, cognition, attention, motivation, behaviour, and nervous system regulation in remarkably measurable ways. The emotional atmosphere somebody repeatedly lives inside gradually affects not only how they feel psychologically, but also how they think, respond, decide, remember, connect, and create over time.

Research in neuroscience and psychology increasingly shows that emotional states alter neurochemistry in ways that shape cognition and behaviour. Practices associated with gratitude, meaning, connection, achievement, purpose, and positive social bonding have been linked with shifts in neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin, both of which play

important roles in motivation, mood regulation, learning, and emotional resilience.

Chronic fear, shame, hypervigilance, and prolonged emotional stress tend to elevate cortisol and increase survival-oriented processing within the nervous system. When somebody remains chronically organised around fear or emotional contraction, perception itself often narrows. Attention becomes increasingly threat-focused. Creativity reduces. Risk tolerance shrinks. Behaviour becomes more protective than expansive because the nervous system is prioritising safety over possibility.

Over long periods of time, baseline emotional states quietly compound because they influence the kinds of risks somebody takes, the opportunities they pursue, the relationships they tolerate, the environments they enter, and the futures they imagine as possible. People do not build lives only through isolated decisions. They gradually construct them through the emotional states they repeatedly stabilise into over time.

Biology That Supports Awakened Living

Awakening is often spoken about almost entirely through spiritual or philosophical language, yet human awareness is also profoundly biological. The clarity of thought, emotional steadiness, resilience, motivation, focus, and quality of decision-making somebody experiences are deeply influenced by the condition of the body producing those experiences. Physiology influences psychology. Emotion influences biology. The body and mind are in constant conversation whether somebody consciously notices it or not.

A dysregulated nervous system narrows perception. Chronic exhaustion reduces emotional resilience. Poor sleep alters cognition, impulse control, and mood regulation. When physiology is neglected for long enough, awareness itself becomes harder to sustain because the body is continuously allocating resources toward survival and recovery rather than reflection, creativity, or growth.

And honestly, I think this is one reason many people attempt to awaken intellectually while remaining physically depleted, overstimulated, under-rested, emotionally dysregulated, nutritionally neglected, sedentary, and

disconnected from the body carrying them through life. Eventually the nervous system begins protesting the lifestyle even while the mind continues trying to optimise itself through podcasts, productivity systems, and existential quotes saved on Instagram at two in the morning.

Breath:

Your breath is the fastest available route to nervous system regulation. Extended exhalation directly stimulates the vagus nerve, signalling to the body that it is safe to settle. Even two minutes of slow diaphragmatic breathing before a difficult conversation, a high-stakes decision, or a moment of overwhelm changes the physiological conditions in which that moment is experienced.

Nutrition and hydration:

The brain runs on glucose, and the gut is in constant communication with the nervous system through the gut-brain axis. A large proportion of the body's serotonin is produced in the gut, and while gut serotonin does not directly enter the brain, the gut and brain communicate continuously through pathways including the vagus nerve. When gut health is disrupted, it influences mood, stress response, and mental clarity. Processed foods, chronic stress, and excess sugar create inflammation that eventually reaches the brain and manifests as cognitive fog, emotional instability, and poor decision-making.

Movement:

Movement shifts biochemistry - dopamine, endorphins, serotonin and clears the physiological residue of stress and rumination. Exercise is not merely fitness. It is biological maintenance for the systems that sustain vitality and awareness. Even a twenty-minute walk changes the internal landscape significantly.

Sleep:

The nervous system consolidates learning, processes emotion, and restores regulatory capacity during sleep. Chronically under-sleeping is not a badge of dedication. It is a guaranteed way to reduce the quality of every decision,

relationship, and creative output the following day. Rest is not a reward for hard work. It is a requirement for it.

Posture and environment:

The body communicates posture back to the nervous system continuously. Upright posture has been associated with shifts in emotional processing and attentional state. The environments somebody repeatedly inhabits also shape baseline nervous system state. Human beings adapt to the atmospheres they live inside, whether those atmospheres are calm or chaotic.

Strategic Spirituality

Spiritual language often speaks about alignment, destiny, purpose, awakening, and becoming, but many people struggle because those ideas remain abstract unless they are translated into behaviour, physiology, environment, repetition, and daily lived reality. Insight alone rarely changes a life.

Awareness may begin the process, but transformation requires embodiment. At some point, spirituality has to move beyond beautiful language and enter the nervous system, the calendar, the habits, the relationships, the body, the environment, and the decisions somebody repeatedly makes when nobody is watching.

This is where strategy becomes important, not as something separate from spirituality, but as the structure that allows insight to stabilise into identity over time.

Spiritual alignment asks: Who am I becoming?

Strategic alignment asks: What behaviours reinforce that identity consistently enough for the nervous system to begin recognising it as safe, familiar, and real?

That distinction matters enormously because human beings do not generally transform through occasional inspiration. They transform through repetition, reinforcement, emotional conditioning, and the gradual stabilisation of new internal patterns.

Neuroscience demonstrates that repeated behaviours strengthen neural pathways, emotional associations, and behavioural defaults through neuroplasticity. The nervous system adapts according to what is practiced repeatedly, not merely what is desired intellectually. Someone may say they want peace while continually feeding chaos through overstimulation, emotional suppression, unresolved resentment, and poor boundaries. Another person may say they desire confidence while repeatedly rehearsing avoidance, hesitation, and fear-based decision-making. Over time, the nervous system does not organise itself around aspiration alone. It organises itself around repetition.

This is also where many conversations around manifestation or destiny become incomplete. People sometimes speak as though reality changes purely through thought, while ignoring the fact that thought itself is constantly being reinforced or contradicted through behaviour, physiology, emotional state, relationships, and environment. Identity becomes believable to the nervous system when experience repeatedly confirms it.

Practical application:

Train autonomic regulation through breath, somatic awareness, and recovery cycles. Reduce cognitive dissonance by aligning declared values with actual behaviour. Remove energy leaks like resentment, boundary violations, unresolved commitments, relationships that require constant self-suppression. Place yourself in environments congruent with your emerging identity rather than your departing one.

Significance as Compounded Coherence

Significance is often misunderstood as visibility, influence, popularity, or external recognition, when in reality many highly visible people remain deeply fragmented internally. Visibility can be manufactured. Attention can be engineered. Performance can be rehearsed. But coherence is far more difficult to fake because it emerges from the gradual integration of identity, behaviour, emotional regulation, values, nervous system stability, and the way somebody consistently moves through life over time.

What people often describe as magnetism is not always charisma in the performative sense. In many cases it is the steadiness that comes from

internal congruence. There is something noticeably different about a person whose thoughts, behaviours, decisions, emotional life, boundaries, and nervous system are no longer constantly fighting one another beneath the surface. People feel safer around them. Communication becomes clearer. Decision-making becomes cleaner. Presence becomes more grounded because less energy is being consumed by contradiction, performance, or emotional fragmentation.

When identity, regulation, and behaviour begin moving consistently in the same direction, energy efficiency improves because less effort is wasted managing fragmentation. Strategic clarity strengthens. Relational stability improves. People become more capable of recognising and using opportunities effectively because perception itself becomes less distorted by chronic survival activation.

In that sense, significance is neither mystical nor accidental. It is coherence compounded over time until behaviour, identity, perception, regulation, and action become organised strongly enough to reshape the architecture of a life.

High-Consciousness Living as Strategic Practice

High-consciousness living becomes meaningful only when it translates into repeatable ways of thinking, regulating, choosing, relating, and living. Awareness alone does not transform somebody. Insight without embodiment eventually becomes intellectual entertainment. The nervous system changes through repetition, emotional reinforcement, behavioural consistency, and the environments somebody repeatedly inhabits.

One of the simplest but most powerful examples is how people begin their day. Many individuals wake up and immediately flood the nervous system with notifications, news, comparison, urgency, and other people's emotions before the mind has even fully settled into awareness. Creating even a short period of intentional stillness before immediate stimulation changes that dynamic significantly. Silence, breathwork, prayer, journalling, reflection, movement, or simply sitting without consuming information for a few moments allows the nervous system to establish greater internal regulation before the outside world begins competing for attention. It sounds small. It is not.

Another important shift involves interrupting conditioned reactions rather than living entirely through automatic emotional loops. Even a few seconds of conscious breathing or emotional awareness can create enough space for the prefrontal cortex to engage before older limbic survival patterns fully take over. Over time, these pauses gradually retrain behavioural responses because the nervous system begins learning that reaction is not the only available option.

Language matters too, far more than most people realise. The words people repeatedly use about themselves gradually reinforce identity structures within the nervous system. Someone who constantly rehearses deficiency, failure, shame, or self-rejection strengthens those emotional associations over time. This does not mean pretending difficulty does not exist. It means recognising that identity is shaped partly through repeated internal narrative, and that language can either reinforce limitation or support evolution.

When baseline state gradually becomes calmer, clearer, more regulated, and more coherent, decisions begin changing naturally alongside it. People tolerate less chaos. Boundaries strengthen. Relationships improve. Perception broadens. Behaviour becomes more intentional. The future somebody builds starts shifting because the person making decisions is no longer operating from the exact same internal architecture.

The Compounding Effect of Consciousness

Human beings often imagine transformation as a dramatic breakthrough moment, some single event where life suddenly changes direction overnight. But most meaningful transformation does not actually happen that way. What people usually experience as a sudden shift is often the visible result of patterns that were reorganising quietly beneath the surface for months or years beforehand.

Consciousness compounds long before outcomes visibly do.

When somebody gradually moves from shame toward courage, from fear toward willingness, from resentment toward acceptance, the changes initially appear subtle. Nothing external may seem dramatically different at first. Yet internally, the organising state of the system begins shifting. And

once internal organisation changes, behaviour slowly begins changing alongside it.

Over time, these shifts begin influencing entire networks of life simultaneously. Conversations change. Boundaries change. Friendships change. Professional positioning changes. Decision-making changes. The opportunities noticed begin changing. Even the way other people respond begins changing because behaviour, emotional regulation, and presence are no longer organised around the same internal state.

This is why growth can sometimes feel invisible while it is happening. Observers often see visible expansion and assume transformation happened suddenly, when in reality the person may have spent years rebuilding identity, regulation, emotional patterns, and self-trust privately long before external evidence appeared.

Significance is not a performance added onto identity. It is what begins emerging when consciousness stabilises deeply enough for coherent behaviour to compound consistently over time.

Integration

Human beings were never designed to spend an entire lifetime operating from chronic dysregulation, emotional fragmentation, hypervigilance, and survival-based identity structures while calling it normal. Yet modern culture often rewards exactly that.

Survival is not the highest expression of consciousness. It is the beginning of it.

When consciousness stabilises beyond constant survival orientation, something fundamentally changes in the way a person relates to life. Force gradually gives way to power. Performance gives way to alignment. Endless pursuit gives way to resonance. The person is no longer trying to manufacture worth through constant proving because identity itself is becoming more internally coherent.

There comes a point where external achievement alone stops feeling sufficient because the nervous system no longer wants to live entirely inside compensation patterns. The body begins asking for integration. Not more performance. Not more proving. Integration.

That shift changes everything because significance is not an isolated event waiting somewhere in the future after enough achievement finally accumulates. Significance is a state sustained long enough for behaviour, perception, identity, relationships, decisions, and emotional regulation to compound coherently over time.

The moment somebody stops operating purely on default conditioning and begins living more consciously by design, trajectory itself begins reorganising. Not magically. Not instantly. Structurally. Because the internal architecture generating decisions has changed.

Significance compounds from coherence. And coherence begins with knowing yourself deeply enough to hear what is true. That is where we go next.

Chapter 18

Living an Awakened Life

*The awakened life is not built in a single reading.
It is built for daily returning.*

A Tuesday in 2026 for me looks like this: writing books, studying theosophy and wealth and mindset, walking and talking to the trees, lifting water cans for fun, breaking wooden boards with my bare hands for the same reason, working only on things that vibrate high. In 2013, Tuesday looked like back-to-back meetings, someone else's agenda, twelve hours of performance, and collapsing at home wondering why I felt so empty. Same woman. Completely different life. That is what the awakened life actually looks like. Before we go further, it is worth remembering something that the film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* expressed beautifully, words from the screenplay by Eric Roth that have since taken on a life of their own:

"For what it's worth: it's never too late or, in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. There's no time limit, start whenever you want. You can change or stay the same, there are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of. And if you find that you're not, I hope you have the strength to start all over again." — Eric Roth, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (screenplay, 2008)

Awakening often begins with the realisation that the life we have been living was not fully chosen. It was inherited, conditioned, or built from expectation. The moment awareness arrives; a new possibility appears: the ability to consciously choose who we become. Purpose, then, is not something discovered like a hidden treasure. It is something we decide to embody.

What is Purpose?

In psychology, purpose is defined as a stable intention to pursue goals that are personally meaningful and positively impact others. Research shows a strong sense of purpose boosts well-being and even physical health. Viktor Frankl observed that a clear "why" helped people survive extreme hardship. Tony Robbins teaches that purpose is not something you wait to find, it is something you decide to unlock. " In other words, purpose lives at the intersection of your values, passions, and contributions. Your purpose ultimately reflects who you become when you commit to acting on what matters most. By shifting from seeking purpose to declaring it, you gain clarity and direction in life. Research consistently shows that a clear sense of purpose is linked not just to greater wellbeing, but also to longer life.

Your reason is written in your wants. What makes you come alive? What are you trying to solve? What conversations light you up? These are not random, they are breadcrumbs.

There is a whisper of purpose in your pain. That which scars is often also that which defines. The purpose with MS was not in the definition of the diagnosis, it was enabling others through their own chaos to clarity. That was the pain of purpose.

Your mission is reflected in recurring patterns. What themes keep cropping up in your life? What do people constantly bring to you? What can you talk about for hours and never get bored? Pay attention to the patterns.

Where your joy meets the world's needs, there lies your purpose. Not just what feels good to you, but what radiates ripples of change in others. That intersection, that is your sweet spot.

Your Zone of Joy multiplied by Zone of Impact equals your Clarity Sweet Spot.

3 Practical Takeaways:

Choose your why before life chooses it for you. I know what it costs to wait. There is a Japanese concept called Ikigai, your reason for being. It is found at the intersection of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what sustains you. I did not find my why through a framework.

I found it through a diagnosis and a very imperfect prayer. But the question underneath Ikigai is the right one: what are you here for? Reflect on your values and passions, then declare a direction. Decide that your life has meaning and it starts now. This active choice turns purpose into a guiding force.

Align actions with purpose. Set goals that fit your declared purpose. Use it as a filter: if a task or opportunity does not connect to your purpose, consider why. This focus will motivate you and reshape habits over time.

Embrace growth through challenge. Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, wrote extensively about meaning emerging through hardship. His core argument, that suffering becomes survivable when it carries meaning, is one I have returned to often. When facing pain or fear, ask: what is this teaching me about what I truly care about? Over time, these insights crystallise your purpose.

Creative Expression: The Evidence of an Integrated Self

An awakened life is not only understood internally; it is expressed.

Creative expression is often misunderstood as something reserved for artists, writers, or performers. In reality, it is far more fundamental. It is the way internal clarity takes form in the external world.

The way you speak. The way you make decisions. The way you build relationships. The way you respond under pressure.

All of it is expression.

When identity is coherent, expression feels natural. Decisions become clearer. Communication becomes direct. Energy is not scattered across contradiction.

When identity is fragmented, expression becomes strained.

People begin to tolerate what they do not agree with. They say yes where there is an internal no. They remain silent where clarity is required. They carry roles, expectations, and emotional weight that were never consciously chosen.

Over time, this creates pressure, not always visible, but consistently present. In the body. In relationships. In this way energy is depleted rather than directed.

This is not a failure of capability. It is a reflection of misalignment.

A person who is not expressing clearly is not lacking ability. They are operating within an internal system that is divided.

Consider a homemaker. Their expression may not be visible publicly, but it is present in the environment they create. A regulated system produces stability, warmth, and clarity. A dysregulated system produces tension, inconsistency, and emotional unpredictability. The difference is not effort. It is an internal state.

Consider a working professional. Their expression is visible in how they make decisions, handle pressure, and communicate boundaries. Two individuals may hold the same role, yet operate in entirely different ways. One reacts. The other responds. One avoids. The other directs.

Even in ordinary routines, expression is constant.

The way a meal is prepared. The way a conversation is held. The way a difficult moment is handled. These are not small actions. They are the daily outputs of identity.

Creative expression, then, is not about visibility. It is about congruence. It is the alignment between what is internal and what is lived.

Daily Practices That Shape Destiny

You do not rise to the top on accident. You cannot accidentally wander into an awakened life. You draw it up, rehearse it, live it, one day at a time.

Your body is not separate from your mind. It is the vehicle your mind travels in. After my diagnosis, movement was not optional. On good days it was a long walk. On difficult days it was a walk around the block or movement inside the house. All of it counted. None of it was wasted. Movement shifts biochemistry, improves cognition, regulates emotion, and reinforces the identity of someone who honours the body they have been given.

Before I talk about what to do each day, I want to say something about why it matters. Because if you do not understand the destination, the practices become another performance. Another set of boxes to tick. Another version of being very busy in the wrong direction.

Most people in the world are operating in one of four paradigms. The first is scarcity, where basic needs are unmet and survival is the whole agenda. The second is survival, where you can look after yourself and just about manage. The third is success, where you have a career, you can support yourself and perhaps your family, and the world would call you accomplished.

Here is where most people stop. And here is where I want to interrupt that plan. Success is a stopover. It is not the destination.

The fourth paradigm is significance. And it is where very few people consciously choose to go. A person living from significance is not driven by a job or even a career. They are driven by a calling. By their soul's purpose. They can look after themselves, their loved ones, and those in need. They are useful beyond their own circle. Their life has a ripple effect that outlasts their presence in a room.

I have seen many people arrive at success and still feel empty. I have not yet met a person who arrived at significance and said it was not enough. Significance has a fullness to it that success alone cannot provide, because significance is built on contribution rather than accumulation.

The only way to stay satisfied and genuinely useful as you grow is to move away from accumulating and occupying more, and towards adding value to others. That shift, from having more to contributing more, is not a sacrifice. It is an upgrade.

Make the decision now that you are not going to stop at success. That success is a chapter, not the ending. That you are moving towards significance. And then build your daily practices to reflect that decision, because a decision without a practice is just a thought.

These are the practices I return to. Not because they are glamorous. Because they work.

High-value living has nothing to do with designer labels or insider access. It is what you do for yourself when no one else is watching. It is about the quality you enforce, the energy you preserve, the dignity you manifest.

It feels spacious. Not because your schedule is empty, but because you are not constantly reacting to whatever is loudest. You have space inside yourself even when the outside is demanding. That spaciousness does not happen by accident. You create it by saying no to things that drain you before they have a chance to hollow you out.

It feels intentional. Every yes in your life is a free yes, not a compulsory one. You are not agreeing to things out of guilt or habit or the fear of what someone will think if you decline. You are choosing deliberately.

And that distinction, between chosen and obligatory, changes everything about how you show up.

It feels aligned. Who you are in the room matches who you are at home. What you say matches what you do. The gap between your values and your behaviour narrows until it almost disappears. That alignment is not perfection. It is consistency. And consistency, over time, becomes character.

What Self-Respect Actually Looks Like in Practice

Saying kind things to yourself in the mirror, not skipping it just because it feels weird. The way you treat yourself is the standard you set for every other relationship.

Honouring commitments to yourself, if you say you are going to do something, do it. Integrity with yourself is how you cultivate self-trust.

Opting for quality over quantity, in relationships, in opportunities, in how you spend your energy. Not every ask deserves a yes.

Investing in yourself without guilt, be it a course that terrifies you, a coach who pushes you, or time alone to recharge. Investing in yourself is not selfish. It is strategic.

Acting like you already are who you are becoming, not when you "deserve it," but now. What you put out there tells the world, and then yourself: this is who I am now.

When I began embodying how the version of me, I aspired to be, communicating clearly, shaping my boundaries positively, investing in my own growth, opportunities showed up. Not because I hustled harder. Because I became the frequency of what I wanted to attract.

Morning Reflection, “Where am I today on the spectrum, chaos, clarity, or significance?”

Before you reach for your phone, ask yourself one question: where am I today on the spectrum, scarcity, survival, success, or significance?

This is not a question to judge yourself with. It is a question to orient yourself. Are you in survival mode today, scattered and reactive? Are you in success mode, busy with outcomes but disconnected from meaning? Or are you choosing significance today? Choosing your calling over your comfort?

Calling your location removes the shame of not being there yet. It also empowers you to take control of where you go next.

Every decision you make today, every word you speak in congruence with who you are choosing to become, is contributing to the legacy you are leaving and the life you are leading right now.

Stillness Before Scrolling

Your first input of the day determines your internal climate.

If your first contact is social media, news, or email, you have outsourced your nervous system before you have even stood up. You are letting the world set your emotional baseline.

If your first contact is breath, silence, prayer, or a single intentional thought, you are leading from the inside.

Begin your day with stillness, not scrolling.

Five minutes is enough. Sit. Breathe. Journal a few lines. Anchor yourself. That simple pause recalibrates your nervous system and reminds you of something most people forget: You are the author of today, not its reactor.

Modern media is engineered for engagement, not your well-being. Your nervous system was never designed for 24/7 global trauma on demand. War, outrage, crisis, collapse, on repeat.

Consume deliberately. Create boundaries. Stay informed, but do not marinate in chaos.

In a world addicted to reaction, the person who can stay internally steady has the real edge.

Before you reach for your phone, ask:

What is my morning input protocol? When do I allow news into my system? What is my cut-off time at night? What does internal steadiness look like in my behaviour, tone, posture, decisions?

Gut-Check Journal Entry

Each night, consider: What did my body feel today? What aligned action did I choose? What do I have to be thankful for, the good, the bad, and the ugly?

This is not just reflection; it is reprogramming your Reticular Activation System (RAS) to notice what is working, who you are becoming, and what your body needs.

Ho'oponopono: Clearing Emotional Residue

Living an awakened life does not mean you stop encountering difficult emotions. It means you learn how to clear them, so they do not quietly shape tomorrow's decisions.

Many of us carry emotional residue from past conversations, misunderstandings, disappointments, and regrets. Even when events are over, the emotional imprint can linger in the nervous system. Left unattended, these residues influence how we interpret people's behaviour, how we respond to conflict, and how safe we feel in our relationships.

Sounds familiar?

One practice that helps restore inner harmony comes from the Hawaiian tradition known as Ho'oponopono, a method of reconciliation and emotional

clearing. At its heart is a simple but powerful shift in perspective: taking responsibility for your inner state rather than remaining trapped in cycles of blame or resentment.

The practice is often expressed through four phrases:

I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you.

These words are not meant to assign fault or excuse harmful behaviour. Instead, they acknowledge that healing begins within.

"I'm sorry" invites awareness. It is the moment you recognise that something inside you needs attention.

"Please forgive me" opens the possibility of release, letting go of guilt, resentment, or emotional heaviness that may have accumulated.

"Thank you" shifts the mind toward gratitude, even for experiences that carried difficult lessons.

"I love you" restores connection, reminding you that beneath pain, conflict, and misunderstanding lies the deeper human capacity for compassion and healing.

This is a contemporary adaptation of a traditional Hawaiian practice. Modern four-phrase version associated with Mornah Simeona (1970s).

Used intentionally, Ho'oponopono becomes a quiet daily reset. It clears emotional clutter so you can respond to life from presence rather than from old wounds.

An awakened life is not about avoiding emotion. It is about ensuring that yesterday's emotions do not dictate tomorrow's choices.

Sometimes the most powerful transformation begins with a few sincere words spoken inwardly.

Weekly Ritual: Re-align Yourself with Your Values

Take one day each week to pause and ask: Did I live in keeping with my values this past week? Where did I drift? Where did I stay true?

Your calendar is a moral document. It shows what you really value, not just what you say is important. If you say your values are family, health, and

creativity, yet on paper you are working a 60-hour week with no white space, that is a misalignment.

Realignment is not about perfection. It is about course-correction.

Visualise Your Aligned Self in Action

Five minutes with eyes closed, fully embodied. Do not just imagine who you are becoming, feel her in your body. How does she walk? How does she breathe? How does she make decisions? What happens when she is faced with adversity?

Neuroplasticity means your brain cannot distinguish between what you vividly imagine and what you actually experience. You are wiring for your future self, right now.

Move Your Body Intentionally

Your body is not separate from your mind. It is the vehicle your mind travels in. After my diagnosis, movement was not optional. On good days it was a run or the gym. On difficult days it was a walk around the block or movement inside the house. All of it counted. None of it was wasted. Movement shifts biochemistry, improves cognition, regulates emotion, and reinforces the identity of someone who honours the body they have been given.

So, walk. Dance. Stretch. Shake. Your body holds memory, wisdom, and emotion. Movement allows for processing what is stuck, moving stagnant energy.

Even just five minutes of mindful movement resets your frequency. You are not punishing your body, you are paying it homage, listening to it, marvelling at what it can still accomplish.

These are not aspirational habits. These are the non-negotiables that guided me from hospital bed to significance. Daily embodiment is the work.

Boundaries, Dignity and Standards

Boundaries are not walls. They are agreements. Declarations of what comes into your field.

And here is the kicker: boundaries are more about you than about other people. What you are willing to accept reflects what you think you deserve.

Setting boundaries requires:

Clarity about your non-negotiables. What helps you be at your best? What compromises your energy? Name it. Own it. Protect it.

The courage to disappoint people. Your boundaries are not going to be for everyone. Some will test them. Others will guilt you. That is not your problem. You are supposed to honour yourself, not manage their reactions.

Consistency. Boundaries are only effective if you stick to them. If you say "I don't work weekends" but return emails on a Saturday, you have taught people that your boundary is negotiable.

The knowledge that "no" is a full sentence. You owe no one an explanation or an apology for guarding your energy.

I learnt this the hard way. For years, I would take myself to hospital infusions alone because requesting help felt like a burden. I agreed to things that depleted me because I did not want to let anyone down.

But each time I sacrificed my needs to make someone else feel good, I leaked power. Each time I said yes when I meant no, my self-trust crumbled.

Real boundaries are not mean. They are kind, to yourself first, which lets you show up better for others. Dignity is non-negotiable.

You leave places that require you to shrink. You do not stay in relationships, romantic, professional, or personal, that require you to betray yourself in order to belong.

You do not explain, defend, or justify. You know it. You embody it. And people either meet you there or they do not.

Standards are the floor, not the ceiling.

You do not get to have your standards be what you wish for. They are what you will not settle for falling beneath. They are the baseline for how you let yourself be treated, how you treat yourself, and what you allow into your life as "good enough."

High standards are not about perfection. They are about integrity. They are about refusing to accept mediocrity, disrespect, or misalignment just because it is easier, in the short term, to tolerate than the pain of changing.

The Awakened Life

Being awakened does not mean you have solved everything. It means you are living with awareness, selecting, and deciding rather than sleepwalking through life.

It is asking, in the midst of disaster, “What does life want me to see here?” instead of just reacting.

It means abandoning the off-purpose project, even if it is lucrative, especially if it is lucrative because clarity is more important than comfort.

It is taking the leap into your soul work despite fear because it feels like home to be in alignment. The awakened life is not perfect. But it is yours. Fully, unapologetically, powerfully yours.

The awakened life is not built in a single reading. It is built in daily returning. If you want a companion for that daily practice, something you can open on any page, in any season, my book *Bold, Beautiful & Blunt* was written for exactly those moments.

Understanding the awakened life is one thing. Living inside it daily is another. Soul-led journaling is how that understanding becomes practice. That is where we go next.

Chapter 19

Soul-Led Journaling

*Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart. —
William Wordsworth*

Decoding the Inner Architecture

There is a difference between thinking and listening. Most people think constantly. Very few listen.

The human mind produces an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 thoughts per day. The majority are repetitive. Much of what we call "inner voice" is not intuition, it is conditioned cognition running on autopilot.

In one of my older journals, I drew four words stacked on top of each other: SHOULD. WOULD. COULD. DID.

That was the whole entry. No explanation. No paragraph. Just four words in a column, the last one underlined.

It is still one of the most complete things I have ever written. The gap between the first three and the last one is where most human potential lives and dies. Journaling is how I learnt to close that gap, not by being harder on myself, but by being more honest with myself about where the gap actually was.

Soul-led journaling is not about documenting your day. It is about differentiating between layers of consciousness.

Long before there were apps for this, long before the smartphone made the camera a permanent extension of the hand, I used to carry a notebook. I would sketch. I would jot. I would draw the shape of a feeling when the words had not yet arrived for it. Not because I was an artist, I am categorically not an artist, but because the act of putting something on paper externalised it. Made it real. Made it examinable.

A thought inside your head is a weather system. It shifts, it morphs, it doubles back on itself. A thought on paper is a fixed point. You can look at it from the outside. You can ask: is this actually true? Is this mine or is this borrowed? Does this serve me or have I just been carrying it for so long that I have started to think it is permanent?

I still do this. Not always with words. Sometimes a rough sketch of how something feels, the visual shape of a decision, the geography of a relationship, the architecture of a goal, tells me more than a paragraph ever could.

Here is an example from my own journals. Not a to-do list. A not-to-do list. I made these long before anyone told me journaling was a practice.

Avoid checking the phone first thing in the morning. Do not allow others to take the driver's seat of your life. Do not waste time. Do not forget to breathe. Do not be so hard on yourself. Do not forget the lessons learnt. Do not let 60 seconds of anger and sadness spoil the rest of the day. Let it pass.

No framework. No coach. Just a woman with a notebook and enough self-awareness to know the things she needed to stop doing. That is journaling. That is design. That is the beginning of everything.

For a long time, the question I kept returning to was: why do I put up with so much just to feel included? It took years to understand that belonging was a core human need I was trying to meet the wrong way. The cost was enormous. I shrank. I stayed quiet. I adjusted. I made myself smaller so that others would make room for me. Now I know: the rooms that require you to shrink are not your rooms. The belonging you earn by making yourself small is not belonging. It is performance and that is exhausting.

When you put pen to paper without performance, something shifts neurologically. You externalise internal noise. You convert implicit emotion into explicit language. You move activation from the limbic system into the prefrontal cortex. That shift alone reduces reactivity.

Journaling, when done intentionally, becomes cognitive integration.

The Four Voices Within

Inside you are multiple streams of perception. Most people confuse them.

The Surface Voice is immediate and reactive. It narrates. It criticises. It worries. It loops. This voice is tied to short-term threat processing and habit circuitry.

The Conditioned Voice is inherited. It carries internalised authority, parents, teachers, culture, religion, expectation. It sounds familiar because it was rehearsed for years. It is often mistaken for identity.

The Fear Voice is protective. It is rooted in the amygdala and survival memory. It anticipates rejection, humiliation, failure. It is not malicious; it is outdated.

Then there is **the Soul Voice**.

It does not argue. It does not panic. It does not rush. It is coherent. It often arrives as a calm knowing rather than a loud directive. It feels expansive rather than contracted in the body. It is aligned with long-term integrity rather than short-term relief.

The purpose of journaling is not to silence the other voices. It is to identify them. Clarity comes from differentiation.

The Neuroscience of Writing

Expressive writing has been extensively studied in psychology. Research from James Pennebaker and others has shown that structured emotional writing improves immune function, reduces rumination, and increases cognitive clarity.

Why?

Because writing converts emotional activation into narrative coherence.

When thoughts remain unarticulated, they loop in the limbic system. When articulated, they recruit cortical networks responsible for sequencing, reasoning, and meaning-making.

This process does three things:

It creates psychological distance from thought patterns. It allows reframing. It weakens old neural associations while strengthening new ones.

Neuroplasticity is not abstract. Neurons that fire together wire together. Each time you consciously write a new interpretation, you are altering synaptic reinforcement.

Journaling becomes rehearsal for identity.

Somatic Integration

Emotion is not only **cognitive**. It is physiological.

Unprocessed emotion is stored as autonomic activation, muscle tension, shallow breathing, gut disruption, fatigue. Writing while simultaneously noticing bodily sensation integrates top-down and bottom-up processing.

When you write and ask, "Where do I feel this?" you are engaging the insula, the brain's interoceptive awareness centre.

That awareness increases regulation.

You are not just analysing experience. You are metabolising it.

Journaling as Identity Calibration

Most people journal reactively. They vent.

Soul-led journaling is strategic. It asks:

What belief is generating this emotional pattern? What identity am I reinforcing through this behaviour? Is this aligned with the person I am becoming?

Each entry becomes calibration.

When done daily, this builds self-trust. And self-trust is the foundation of authentic confidence. Confidence does not emerge from achievement. It emerges from internal coherence.

How to Interpret Your Inner Voice

Write without editing. No need to worry about grammar or spelling or making sense. Let the words flow uncensored. The editing mind is the surface voice trying to control the message. Raw writing bypasses that.

Listen to what is happening in your body. Where do you feel tightness? Expansion? Resistance? Relief? Your body is the compass. Write from there, not from the head.

Ask and listen. Ask yourself a question and then write the very first thing that comes to mind without judgement. "What do I actually want?" "What is this teaching me?" "What's the most aligned version of me doing right now?"

Notice the shift in tone. When you transition from the conditioned voice to the soul voice, your writing changes. It gets softer and clearer, more definite. It ceases to debate.

How Journaling Rewires the Brain

Journaling is not just emotional processing. It is neurological rewiring.

Your brain is a pattern-making machine. It repeats what is familiar and reactivates existing neural pathways. That is why you may intellectually understand something and still feel stuck emotionally, your brain has yet to rewire the pattern.

Neuroplasticity is the science-supported ability of your brain to rewire itself according to new focus, belief, and behaviour. And one of the most powerful tools for neuroplasticity is journaling.

When you journal:

You externalise thoughts. When thoughts remain in your head, they loop. When you put them on paper, you transfer them from the limbic system to the cortex. This creates distance. You can witness the thought rather than be consumed by it.

You create new neural pathways. Each time you write something new, a reframe, an alternative perspective, a truth that has not left your lips yet, you are literally constructing new connections in your brain. The more you use the new thought, the more established that pathway becomes.

You process emotion somatically. When you write about what is happening inside your body, you are doing somatic processing. This can help to release held emotion from your nervous system.

You activate your Reticular Activating System. When you write about what you want, what you are grateful for, what is working, you are programming your brain's search engine to notice it more.

You strengthen self-trust. Every time you journal, you are having a conversation with yourself. You are proving that your inner voice matters. This builds the self-trust that becomes unshakable confidence.

Every morning, I do a gut-check journal entry: What did my body feel yesterday? What aligned action did I take? Where am I on the spectrum today, chaos, clarity, or significance?

These questions are not just reflection. They are reprogramming. They train my brain to notice patterns, honour my body, and consciously choose my frequency.

Prompts for Awakening, Clarity and Reinvention

AWAKENING PROMPTS, For when you are waking up to something new

What truth have I been avoiding? What happens if I finally face it?

Where in my life am I still performing instead of being authentic?

What would the most self-trusting version of me do right now?

If fear were not in the room, what would I choose?

What is this chaos trying to teach me? What portal is opening?

When was the last time I felt fully soul-led? What was different about that moment?

What part of my identity am I outgrowing? Who am I becoming?

CLARITY PROMPTS, For when you need to cut through the noise

What is one mental loop I am ready to rewire? What new thought will replace it?

How is my body asking to be supported today? What signal am I ignoring?

What aligned action can I take today, even if it is small?

Where am I on the spectrum today, chaos, clarity, or significance?

What is one clarity I am reclaiming right now? What confusion am I releasing?

What do my actions say about who I believe I am? Do they match who I want to become?

What is one habit I can commit to for the next 7 days that aligns with my future self?

What would I do differently if I fully trusted myself?

What emotion have I been avoiding and what does it need me to know?

REINVENTION PROMPTS, For when you are rebuilding yourself

Who am I without the story I have been telling? What is truer than the narrative I have been carrying?

What version of me am I outgrowing and what version am I stepping into?

What does my Legacy Self do differently with time, energy, and boundaries?

What one decision today would be the boldest act of identity rebirth?

What am I embodying today and is it aligned with my future self?

What part of my life requires me to dim? What would it mean to leave that?

If I designed my life from scratch, starting today, what would stay and what would go?

What story will my life tell when I am not in the room? Is that the legacy I want?

What does sovereignty feel like in my body? When have I experienced it?

What am I being called to create or offer that aligns with my highest self?

SOMATIC PROMPTS, For when you need to process through the body

Where in my body do I feel this emotion? What colour is it? What texture? What does it want to say?

If my body could speak right now, what would it tell me?

What sensation am I avoiding? What happens if I sit with it for just two minutes?

When I think about [situation], where do I feel it in my body? Expansion or contraction?

What does "safe" feel like in my body? Can I create that sensation right now through breath or posture?

GRATITUDE PROMPTS, For frequency shift

What three things worked today, even if everything else felt hard?

What capacity do I have right now that I once prayed for?

Who showed up for me recently in a way I did not expect?

What difficult experience taught me something I now treasure?

If I could send a message to my past self in the hardest moment, what gratitude would I share about where I am now?

The Sacred Practice

Soul-led journaling is not about doing it perfectly. It is about doing it honestly. Some days, you will write pages. Other days, three sentences. Both are valid.

Some entries will be poetry. Others will be messy, angry, and raw. All of it is sacred.

The practice is not about having something profound to say. It is about creating space for your soul to speak and your nervous system to integrate what you are experiencing.

John Ruskin wrote, *“Make yourselves nests of pleasant thoughts. None of us knows what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thought, proof against all adversity.”*

Your journal is that nest. That palace. The sanctuary where you build the thoughts that will carry you through anything.

In the silence of the page, you will find the voice that has been waiting to guide you all along. Not the one that sounds like everyone else. The one that sounds like home.

This is what journaling gives you when you let it go deep enough. Not a record of your days. A map of your becoming.

What you write, you become. What you become, you live. And what you live, you leave behind.

You have done the inner work. You have found the voice. You have begun the becoming.

Now it is time to build the life that holds it.

Part V is where the awakened inner world meets the outer one, where consciousness becomes architecture, where becoming becomes living. It begins with the foundation most people build unconsciously and few ever examine with clear eyes.

It begins with wealth.

PART **V**

THE BECOMING

Integration, Wealth, Love, Leadership and Legacy

Write your story. Whenever you need, close the pages and begin a new chapter. Scratch out the things that do not belong. Add in more of the things that bring you joy. Dream of your future and start writing the adventure towards it. Write it with passion, write it with love. Write a good one. — Walk the Earth

Chapter 20

The Architecture of Wealth

Financial freedom is not just about having more money. It is about having more choices. — Natasha Pinto

A Financial Awakening

Protection Before Prosperity

Growing up on MG Road in Cochin, Kerala and in another place called Vaduthala, Cochin, I would intentionally shrink around the other kids. Many of them lived in smaller homes. I thought if they knew where I lived, they would treat me differently. So, I adjusted. I made myself smaller. I was so determined to fit in that I accidentally manifested financial scarcity into my mindset, which is an irony I only fully appreciated much later. Be careful what you practise. It becomes real. That said, I was always a saver. Always mindful. I just had to learn, the expensive way, that saving in the wrong products, where the interest does not beat inflation, is not saving. It is a slow loss with a nice label. I learnt that young. I am glad I did. Money is not the goal. Money is the tool that buys you freedom. Learn to use it correctly.

Most people focus on income. Some focus on investments. Very few design a system. And wealth, without structure, eventually collapses under pressure.

If life teaches anything with clarity, it is this: stop being penny wise and pound foolish. Before you multiply money, protect it.

Insurance is not an expense. It is stabilisation.

Health insurance, term insurance, home insurance, and a properly funded emergency reserve form the base layer of wealth. A single hospitalisation costing ₹7 to 10 lakhs can erase years of disciplined investing. Redeeming long-term investments during a downturn to pay emergency expenses damages compounding twice, once financially and once psychologically.

Premiums rise with age. Pre-existing medical conditions narrow options. Waiting periods do not adjust themselves to urgency.

And not all policies are equal.

Quality matters. Coverage terms matter. Sub-limits matter. Disease-specific exclusions matter. Claim settlement ratios matter. Buying insurance blindly, for tax benefits or convenience, is not strategy. It is delegation without understanding.

Medical inflation in India has been consistently estimated at around 14% annually, according to IRDAI (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India) annual reports and the National Health Systems Resource Centre. At that rate, healthcare costs can double in five to seven years. What feels manageable today may feel overwhelming tomorrow.

There are moments in life when you realise the policy you assumed would protect you does not fully cover your medical condition. At that stage, flexibility reduces. Options shrink. Premiums increase. If financial education had entered earlier, the freedom to choose stronger coverage would have existed.

As Warren Buffett said, "Risk comes from not knowing what you are doing."

The Mathematics of Time: Inflation and Compounding

Once protection is secured, we confront the silent force most people underestimate, inflation.

Inflation erodes purchasing power quietly. If inflation averages 6%, ₹100 today becomes nearly ₹179 in about ten years. If your money earns 3 to 4%, you are not preserving wealth, you are losing ground slowly.

Idle money is expensive.

To put it simply, money buys less over time. ₹100 today buys considerably less than it once did. Today, ₹100 does not even buy you a Subway sandwich.

Wealth grows only when returns outpace inflation.

This is where compound interest becomes transformative. Compounding is money earning returns, and those returns earning returns again over time. It has often been called the "eighth wonder of the world," widely attributed to Albert Einstein. Whether he said it or not, the principle remains powerful: time magnifies discipline.

If you invest ₹10,000 per month consistently at an average 12% annual return for 20 years:

Total invested: ₹24,00,000 Approximate value after 20 years: ₹1,00,00,000

Wealth created purely from compounding: ₹75,00,000

Note: This illustration assumes a hypothetical 12% average annual return, consistent with long-term historical equity mutual fund performance in India. Actual returns vary based on market conditions, fund selection, and investment timing. Past performance does not guarantee future results. This is for illustrative purposes only. Please consult a SEBI-registered financial advisor before making investment decisions.

Observe the journey:

After 5 years: ₹8 lakhs. After 10 years: ₹23 lakhs. After 15 years: ₹50 lakhs. After 20 years: ₹1 crore.

The first decade can feel slow. Growth appears modest. But between year 15 and year 20, acceleration becomes dramatic. It can be tempting to stop during the slow phase, just before compounding begins to have a more noticeable effect.

A ten-year delay in starting can reduce the final corpus drastically, even if the monthly investment remains the same.

Time is more powerful than intensity.

Compounding rewards consistency. Interruptions reduce the time your money has to grow.

And before you start calculating your future crores, remember to read the fine print: mutual fund investments are subject to market risks. Read all scheme-related documents carefully. Because apparently, even compounding comes with a disclaimer.

Designing Backwards: Allocation, Risk and Retirement

Wealth planning begins with clarity. On Day 1, the question is not "Where should I invest?" It is "What life am I building?"

FEAR OPERATES FROM LACK.

VISION OPERATES FROM ABUNDANCE.

BOTH MAY BE PRESENT.

THE QUESTION IS WHICH ONE GETS TO LEAD.

WHERE YOUR FOCUS GOES, YOUR ENERGY FLOWS.

**CHOOSE THE PROBLEM YOU WANT TO BE CONSUMED BY,
BECAUSE YOU WILL BE CONSUMED BY SOMETHING EITHER
WAY.**

If you estimate that you will require ₹10 lakhs per year in retirement (in today's terms), you may need approximately ₹2.5 crores, adjusted for inflation, to sustain that lifestyle. The exact figure varies based on returns, longevity, and risk profile. But the principle remains: calculate backwards.

Define your desired lifestyle. Estimate annual expenses. Adjust for inflation. Subtract expected passive income. The gap becomes your target corpus.

When the destination is clear, contribution strategy becomes mathematical rather than emotional. A practical framework, however higher the savings and investment, the better.

I ONCE HEARD THIS FRAMING, AND IT STAYED WITH ME:

**THE WEALTHY TRUST THEIR VISION
AND DOUBT THEIR FEARS.**

**THE POOR TRUST THEIR FEARS
AND DOUBT THEIR VISION.**

I do not know who said it first.

But I know which one I choose.

50% toward needs, housing, utilities, food, insurance premiums, EMIs. 30% toward wants, travel, lifestyle, experiences. At least 20% toward savings and investments.

As income increases, lifestyle should not inflate proportionally. Savings rate should. Moving from 20% to 35 to 40% savings dramatically accelerates long-term compounding.

Financial products must be chosen consciously. Fixed Deposits offer stability but limited growth. Mutual funds provide diversification. Index funds reduce cost and track markets efficiently. Direct stocks offer ownership but demand emotional discipline. The National Pension System supports retirement accumulation. Crypto remains highly volatile and speculative. If you choose to invest in it, understand the risks and consider how it fits within your broader financial plan rather than treating it as the foundation of your wealth strategy.

High risk, high return is not a slogan. It is a trade-off.

Take informed decisions. Do not gamble. And remember, not taking a risk is a risk too.

Equity markets may fall 20 to 30% in certain years. If your time horizon is short, volatility can destroy your plan. If your time horizon is long, volatility becomes manageable.

Risk must align with time, temperament, and goals.

Professional guidance matters. Being financially educated enables you to ask better questions. Seek qualified financial advice to strengthen execution.

Behaviour, Identity and the Capacity to Hold Wealth

But beyond numbers lies something deeper. Money is mathematics but wealth is behaviour.

You can understand inflation and compounding and still struggle financially if behaviour sabotages structure. Impulse spending, lifestyle inflation, comparison-driven upgrades, panic during market corrections, and lack of planning destroy more wealth than poor products ever do.

Mindset matters.

Someone who carries a deep identity of scarcity, who constantly feels "there isn't enough," who believes money always leaves, who spends to signal worth or hoards out of fear, will struggle to build sustainable wealth. Not because they lack intelligence. But because behaviour follows belief.

If you feel poor internally, you will make decisions from insecurity. You may overspend to compensate. Or under-invest because growth feels unsafe.

Wealth requires internal alignment.

It means separating self-worth from net worth. It means tolerating short-term discomfort for long-term freedom. It means discipline over dopamine.

Protection without discipline fails. Investing without emotional control fails. Income without identity alignment leaks.

There is enough wealth in the world. Economic growth expands opportunity. Value creation expands capacity. The idea that someone else's prosperity reduces yours is a scarcity illusion.

One practice that embodies this shift from scarcity to abundance is tithing, the intentional giving of a portion of your income to something beyond yourself. A cause. A community. A person who needs it. A place of worship or spiritual practice. A movement you believe in.

The tradition is ancient and crosses many faiths. But the principle beneath it is not exclusively religious. It is energetic and deeply psychological. When you give consistently from a place of sufficiency, you signal to your own nervous system that there is enough. That belief, repeated through action, quietly rewires the scarcity identity that holds so many people back from building wealth in the first place.

You do not have to start at ten percent. Start where you can. The percentage matters less than the intention and the consistency. Giving consciously, regularly, and deliberately is one of the quietest and most powerful ways to shift your relationship with money from fear to trust.

But the vessel must expand.

Expanding your vessel means expanding financial literacy, earning capacity, emotional resilience, and discipline. Wealth does not arrive merely because it is desired. It arrives because capacity expands to hold it.

Design the architecture before you decorate the house.

Because when built intentionally, wealth does something deeper than grow numbers.

It provides choices. It creates freedom. It expands options. It removes desperation. It allows dignity. And that is the real return.

Gratitude works alongside giving in the same way. Not as positivity performed for an audience, but as a daily internal practice of noticing what is already present before reaching for what is not. Research suggests that regular gratitude practice can influence attention, mood, and psychological wellbeing. Gratitude is not just spiritually meaningful. It can also be psychologically useful.

The practice is simple. Before you begin your day, name three specific things you are grateful for and why. Not generic gratitude. Specific. Not “I am grateful for my health” but “I am grateful that my body carried me up those stairs this morning.” Specificity is what makes gratitude land in the body rather than stay in the head. And it is in the body where identity begins to change.

A small practice I have come to love is saying “Arigato” when money comes in and when it goes out.

Arigato is Japanese for “thank you.” It comes from the older Japanese expression *arigatashi*, associated with the idea of gratitude for something appreciated or received.

When money comes in: **Arigato.**

When money goes out: **Arigato.**

I want to have a relationship with money that is rooted in gratitude rather than fear. Money that comes in supports me. Money that goes out is exchanged for something I value, whether that is food, shelter, experiences, learning, contribution or simply the freedom to choose.

Arigato for coming. Arigato for going.

The Psychological Ceiling of Wealth

Financial growth is not purely mathematical; it is deeply psychological. Many people focus on income, returns, and compounding formulas while overlooking a more subtle constraint: their internal capacity to stabilise at higher levels of prosperity. It is entirely possible to desire wealth consciously while feeling unsafe with it subconsciously.

Our early conditioning often shapes this internal ceiling. If wealth was associated with greed, arrogance, moral compromise, or spiritual corruption, those associations do not disappear simply because income increases. If you heard phrases such as "money changes people," "people like us don't become rich," or "struggle builds character," those narratives may have quietly embedded themselves into your identity. Over time, they form a reference point for what feels acceptable.

The nervous system is designed to preserve coherence. When external circumstances rise beyond the level your identity recognises as "safe," subtle self-regulation begins. A person may increase income yet simultaneously increase lifestyle expenses. They may attract larger opportunities yet hesitate at the point of execution. They may over-give, undercharge, delay investing, or avoid financial conversations altogether. These behaviours are rarely conscious acts of sabotage. They are attempts to restore internal equilibrium.

Psychologically, human beings tend to behave in ways that reinforce their self-image. If your identity does not include the possibility of being financially strong, strategic, and abundant without losing integrity, then growth will feel destabilising. And what feels destabilising will not be sustained for long.

Wealth, therefore, requires more than strategy. It requires identity expansion. It requires examining inherited beliefs, questioning moral distortions around money, and recalibrating the internal model of what is permissible. Until abundance feels congruent with who you believe yourself to be, financial growth will remain fragile.

The mathematics of compounding are powerful. But psychological ceilings, left unexamined, quietly override them.

There is a chapter of this book I could not have written ten years ago. Not because I did not have the words. Because I did not yet have the understanding. That is where we go next.

Chapter 21

Love, Relationships, Intimacy and Soul Partnerships

*There are too many mediocre things in life.
Love should not be one of them.*

Love After Pain

Growing up, I believed devotion meant endurance. That a bit of love required self-sacrifice. That staying proved depth. That leaving meant failure.

Who would want to be with someone who had dated previously? Yes, I judged myself so harshly, to the extent of fasting for a year because I believed I had committed a mortal sin. Kissing a boy before marriage. Pretty twisted, I know. But that was the conditioning I carried.

But here is the truth that Multiple Sclerosis forced me to confront: life is finite. And I began asking different questions. Not 'what will people think?' but 'what do I actually want? What kind of love do I deserve? What kind of life do I want to build?'

Those questions changed everything.

Love, Transformation and Conscious Masculinity

More than thirty years ago, my current husband Daniel and I lived barely four hundred metres apart in Bahrain. We attended the same batch of catechism classes but sat in different divisions at Sacred Heart Church, walked the same Bahraini streets, breathed the same humid Gulf air and yet we were worlds apart. He was the charming boy surrounded by noise and movement. I was the shy girl with round glasses and a coded diary, writing about the kind of love I hoped one day to find.

Decades passed. We both built lives. Then life circled back, as it sometimes does with the things meant to find you.

I once told a friend about this man who had walked back into my world. She asked what made him different. I thought about it for a long time before answering. What made Daniel different was not that he was perfect. It was that he was present and resourceful. He did not flinch at the hard conversations. He did not disappear when things got complicated. He asked, 'May I kiss you?' and waited patiently when I said no, because he understood that real love respects the answer.

There is something about a man who meets his own emotional world honestly that changes everything. Not performance. Not rehearsed tenderness. Genuine willingness to grow, to examine himself, to remain soft enough to feel and grounded enough to act. I did not know that was what I had been looking for until I experienced it.

Conscious masculinity is not about perfection. It is about intention. It is a man who holds space without dominating it. Who protects without suffocating. Who leads without diminishing. Who admits when he is lost. Who does not mistake emotional unavailability for strength.

We have raised our voices. We have walked out of rooms. We have said things in anger that needed to be revisited in the morning. None of that changed the fundamental truth: he comes back. He stays in it. He does not use difficulty as an exit.

The Brown Paper Bag

In our initial days of dating, we were roaming the streets of Fort Cochin in Kerala, with a brown paper bag. What started off as a joke, 'let us write down what we bring to the table for the other,' became the foundation.

Before we made our vows official under the chikoo tree near our home, we wrote them on that brown paper bag. It is framed now. (we, okay, I slap it on his face whenever we do argue, haha, cheap thrills!). They are just behavioural commitments. Here are a few.

Mine to him:

Laugh at your jokes

Tell you when you have things stuck in your teeth

Always be your biggest fan

Make you feel like the most important person in the room

Tell you I love you every day

Always hold your hand

Keep your secrets

Trust you

Be the one you come home to

His to me:

Be the man you deserve

Make you feel safe

Be present

Never stop choosing you

Be your person

We did not know then what we know now. But we knew enough. And that was a beginning worth building on.

The Work That Almost Broke Us

All that being said, let us not romanticise love into something polished or perpetually peaceful. We are human beings, where there is light, there is shadow too. Every relationship eventually confronts the law of duality.

We came into marriage carrying entirely different emotional histories, coping mechanisms, communication styles, and nervous system patterns shaped by our upbringing and experiences. Two people who love each other deeply can still bruise each other badly when unexamined wounds meet.

There were seasons that were genuinely hard. Seasons where the diagnosis made everything heavier. Seasons where the distance between two people who loved each other became uncomfortable to sit inside. Seasons where we had to choose each other on days when choosing anything felt difficult.

What I know now is that the work is not a sign something is wrong. The work is the relationship. The couples I most admire are not the ones who never struggle. They are the ones who keep choosing repair over retreat.

Why People Stay in the Wrong Relationships

One of the most common questions people ask after leaving a painful relationship is: how did I not see it earlier?

From the outside, the answer often seems obvious. Friends may have noticed the warning signs. Family members may have raised concerns. Yet the person inside the relationship often experiences something very different. What looks like clarity from the outside can feel like deep emotional complexity from within.

Human beings rarely choose painful relationships deliberately. They choose them because something in the dynamic feels emotionally familiar, because the connection feels real even when the treatment does not, because leaving carries a weight that staying briefly postpones, because they have been taught that love and endurance are the same thing.

And sometimes they stay because they genuinely believe things will change. That belief is not stupidity. It is hope. The problem is that hope without behavioural evidence from the other person is not a relationship strategy, it is a waiting room.

The Red Flags We Rationalise

Early in relationships, small inconsistencies often appear. A dismissive comment. A pattern of emotional withdrawal. A reluctance to communicate openly. These signals may seem minor at first, especially when balanced by moments of affection or charm.

When people are emotionally invested, they frequently reinterpret discomfort as misunderstanding. They tell themselves the timing was off, the person was stressed, the moment was an exception rather than a pattern. And sometimes that is true.

But there is a difference between giving someone the benefit of the doubt and overriding your own perception repeatedly in order to preserve a connection that consistently makes you feel less than. Red flags are rarely

dramatic initially. They are usually quiet. Gradual. Easy to explain away once. Harder to explain away the fifth time.

Trust the pattern more than the apology.

The Difference Between Intensity and Compatibility

Modern culture often glorifies emotionally intense relationships. Stories, films, and popular narratives portray love as something overwhelming, passionate, and dramatic. While passion can certainly exist in healthy relationships, intensity alone is not a reliable indicator of compatibility.

Intensity is frequently produced by uncertainty. When emotional connection alternates between closeness and distance, the nervous system experiences something closer to anxiety than intimacy. The brain interprets the highs and lows as significance. The body registers the unpredictability as importance. And people often mistake the exhausting cycle for depth.

Compatibility is quieter. It is built through shared values, genuine respect, honest communication, and the ability to remain kind during ordinary life rather than only during romantic gestures. It does not announce itself dramatically. It reveals itself slowly in how two people navigate disagreement, share responsibility, support each other's growth, and choose each other without performing it.

Trauma Bonds and Emotional Conditioning

Some relationships feel impossible to leave even when they are clearly unhealthy. This is often the result of trauma bonding, a psychological dynamic that develops when emotional pain and emotional reward occur in repeated cycles.

In such relationships, periods of tension or conflict are followed by moments of affection, reconciliation, or renewed closeness. The contrast between the two experiences intensifies emotional attachment. When relief finally arrives after sustained stress, the body experiences it as disproportionately powerful. The relationship begins feeling irreplaceable not because it is genuinely fulfilling, but because the nervous system has become organised around its particular rhythm of rupture and repair.

Understanding trauma bonding is not about assigning blame. It is about recognising a mechanism so you can see it clearly enough to make a different choice.

Conscious Love Requires Conscious Individuals

As individuals become more aware of their emotional patterns, their approach to relationships often changes. Instead of searching for someone who completes them or rescues them from loneliness, they begin seeking partnerships built on mutual responsibility and growth.

Conscious relationships are not free of conflict. Two human beings will inevitably trigger each other's insecurities and unresolved wounds. The difference lies in how those moments are handled. In unconscious relationships, triggers become weapons. In conscious ones, they become information.

The conversation gradually shifts from 'you hurt me' to 'what is this moment revealing inside me that I still need to understand?' That shift does not happen overnight. It is practised, imperfect, and worth it.

Conscious partnership also means accepting that love is not a destination arrived at once and maintained effortlessly thereafter. It is a practice chosen repeatedly in ordinary moments when ego, fear, exhaustion, or pride would make withdrawal feel easier.

Partnership is not built through butterflies or emotional highs alone; it is architecture. It is built slowly through structure, honest conversations, shared values, mutual respect, accountability, humour, and the repeated decisions two people make over time when life stops being cinematic and starts becoming real.

Chemistry may introduce two people beautifully. Architecture determines whether they can actually build something sustainable together.

Dowry: When Worth Carries a Price Tag

It did not begin as cruelty. That is actually the part that makes it so hard to dismantle, because you cannot fight something that started with good intentions and was slowly, quietly corrupted into something unrecognisable.

In ancient India, what we now call dowry was known as Stridhan, which translates literally as a woman's wealth. During the Vedic period, parents gave their daughters gifts at the time of marriage — jewellery, land, household items, not as payment to the groom's family, but as the daughter's own private property. Her financial security in a new home. Ancient Hindu scriptures explicitly stated that Stridhan could not be seized by a husband or in-laws. It belonged to her, and that was always the point.

Then the system changed. The change was not an organic or natural evolution but was largely driven by the colonial period...when British policies codified property laws through a patriarchal lens, introduced inheritance by the eldest son, and steadily dismantled women's legal and economic standing. What had once been a daughter's inheritance became, across generations, a payment demanded of her family by the groom's side, so that the gift became a debt and the empowerment became a burden.

Dowry in its exploitative form is not a reflection of ancient Indian tradition but a distortion of it. India outlawed it through the Dowry Prohibition Act enacted on 20 May 1961. Sixty-five years later, the practice continues in drawing rooms, in quiet negotiations, in polished conversations dressed in the language of gifts and expectations, because nobody is calling it dowry anymore.

What the Numbers Actually Say

India recorded 5,737 dowry deaths in 2024, an average of 15 to 16 people losing their lives every single day due to dowry-related violence, harassment, or forced suicide. Beyond those deaths, the NCRB separately reports an average of six dowry-related female suicides every day — women who chose death over continuing to live inside those circumstances. In completed court trials, 60 percent of dowry death cases ended in acquittal in 2023. In Bengaluru specifically, between 2011 and 2024, only 13 out of 610 reported dowry death cases ended in conviction, a conviction rate of 2 percent. Two percent.

The woman who dies becomes the headline. The woman who stays is the silence nobody counts.

Families take loans and sell land that has been in the family for generations and empty savings that were meant for something else entirely, creating cycles of debt that outlast the wedding by decades. Women cannot walk away from abusive marriages when leaving would mean their family sacrificed everything for nothing. This is not circumstance. It is a carefully constructed architecture of entrapment, and it wears the language of love.

The numbers tell the public story. But the private one lives inside every girl who grew up absorbing a different kind of message.

What It Does to a Woman's Identity

Strip away the rituals, the social performance, the polished justifications, and what remains is a psychological message that many girls absorb very early in life, often before they have the language to name what they are internalising.

Who you are may not be enough on its own.

Even in families where genuine love exists, the system quietly goes to work on a girl's sense of self. She grows up hearing conversations about saving for her marriage, about gold and status and arrangements and good matches and family reputation, long before she consciously understands what any of it means emotionally. Something dangerous begins to settle in the nervous system: that acceptance must be earned, that belonging requires performance, that love is conditional on what can be offered.

This is not a philosophical problem. It is a physiological one. When the nervous system is shaped from childhood by the belief that your presence requires financial justification, that belief does not stay as an abstract idea. It lives in the body.

What It Says About Those Who Demand It

Let us say this plainly. What does it say about a man, or a family, if they need to be financially compensated to accept a woman into their home? A person who genuinely believes in their own abilities does not need to profit from marriage. When someone demands dowry, directly or through the pressure of expectation, what they are revealing is not confidence. It is entitlement wearing the costume of tradition.

The deeply disturbing irony is this: the very assets being extracted in the name of tradition are the assets that were originally designed to belong to the bride herself. For her security. Her independence. Her future.

Words for Women Who Refuse to Be Negotiated

If you have ever sat in a room where your worth was being calculated, these are for you. You are allowed to say:

I did not realise marriage came with an invoice.

A secure man builds with a woman. He does not bill her family.

My parents raised a daughter, not a payment plan.

A good man asks for the girl. Not the gold.

I was raised to believe dignity cannot be negotiated.

I would rather stay single than subsidise somebody else's self-worth.

I want a marriage built on character, not calculation.

These are not lines to rehearse for a confrontation. They are beliefs to build inside yourself, quietly and firmly, long before any negotiation begins. Because the woman who knows her worth does not need to argue it in a room full of people who have already decided otherwise. She simply leaves. And that is not defeat. That is the clearest possible statement of self-respect.

A society evolves not when it blindly protects tradition, but when it develops the courage to question what tradition has cost people across generations of silence.

Sources: NCRB Crime in India 2024 | NCRB ADSI 2024 | Anderson S, Journal of Economic Perspectives | Oldenburg V.T., Dowry Murder | Deccan Herald, January 2025 | Britannica, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961

When Love Becomes Self-Abandonment

One of the most dangerous misunderstandings about love is the belief that loving someone deeply requires losing yourself in the process.

Many people are raised with quiet messages about devotion that sound noble on the surface but become destructive when taken too far. They are taught that loyalty means enduring everything. That forgiveness means tolerating repeated hurt. That sacrifice proves the depth of one's love.

Over time, these beliefs can slowly blur the boundary between genuine care and self-erasure. People begin organising their entire emotional lives around managing another person's feelings, avoiding another person's anger, or maintaining a version of peace that requires them to become smaller and smaller to sustain it.

And the deeply painful part is that many people do not notice this happening until they look up one day and no longer recognise themselves.

Loving someone well does not require abandoning yourself. In fact, the opposite is true. The more clearly you know who you are and what you need, the more genuinely you can love without resentment, without depletion, and without quietly disappearing in the process.

This is where an important question emerges: Am I choosing this from love, or from fear?

Fear asks, *What if they leave? What if I disappoint them? What if I have to start over? What if I am alone?*

Love asks something different: *What is true? What honours who I am? What allows both of us to remain whole?*

Not every decision can be reduced neatly to love or fear. Human behaviour is more complex than that. But the question creates a pause.

And sometimes that pause is where consciousness begins.

**AM I MOVING TOWARDS SOMETHING
BECAUSE I TRULY WANT IT, OR BECAUSE I AM
AFRAID OF WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT?**

The Power of Intimacy

Every relationship has its so-called basics. When I once asked my mother-in-law, Mama Pledger, what she believed a relationship should contain, she did not hesitate. Patience. Understanding. Trust.

My corporate brain immediately turned it into an acronym. P.U.T. Method. Easier to remember. I quietly added one more: Respect. And she is right. Those are foundational. They are structural beams. Without them, the house collapses.

But I have learnt over time that intimacy is more than the structural beams. It is everything that happens inside the structure once it stands. It is the quality of presence two people bring to ordinary moments. The way someone remembers how you take your tea. The way they notice when you are quiet in a particular way. The way they hold space for your becoming without requiring you to stay the same version of yourself forever.

Real intimacy is not built in grand gestures. It is built in accumulated small ones. Staying in the conversation when it gets difficult. Saying the thing you are afraid to say. Receiving love without deflecting it. Allowing yourself to be seen in moments that are not polished or performative.

That kind of intimacy requires two people willing to be genuinely present, not performing a version of themselves, but actually showing up as they are on an ordinary Tuesday with all their imperfections intact.

My Map Was Blank

Let me tell you how little I knew.

Nobody sat me down with diagrams or biology books or meaningful conversations. Most of what I learnt about being a woman came through whispers, embarrassment, secrecy, and the general feeling that certain topics were not meant to be discussed too loudly.

One of my earliest memories is of a beloved house-help pulling me aside and warning me not to lift my dress a certain way because someone might see the mole near my inner thigh. So naturally, I spent the next several years believing that mole was somehow profoundly shameful and that the entire

lower half of my body required careful management and maximum coverage.

I was raised in a household of love and faith and discipline. But conversations about the body, about pleasure, about desire, about what healthy physical intimacy actually looked like, those conversations simply did not happen. Not because anyone meant harm. But because nobody had those conversations in their own childhoods either.

So I arrived in adulthood carrying a map with enormous blank spaces. And I spent years navigating them through confusion, through shame, through the quiet conviction that my body was either a problem to manage or an instrument to perform with, but rarely simply a home to live inside.

MS changed that too. When your body becomes the central narrative of your life, whether you want it to or not, you are eventually forced to make a different kind of peace with it. Not the performance of acceptance. The actual thing.

The Global Echo

When I finally saw those statistics years later, my private shame did not dissolve. It clicked into place. I was not broken.

Globally, the orgasm gap is a documented phenomenon. The Durex Global Sex Survey reported that nearly 70 percent of Indian women did not orgasm every time they had sex, compared with 80 percent of Indian men.

A 2023 survey conducted by MsChief in collaboration with Unomer found that more than 81 percent of Indian women surveyed were dissatisfied with their sex lives, while 73 percent rarely reached climax. The same survey found a striking gap in perception: only 3 percent of men surveyed believed their partner never or rarely experienced orgasm.

This is not only an Indian conversation. A 2019 study by Herbenick and colleagues published in the Archives of Sexual Behaviour found that 58.8 percent of women in their sample reported having faked orgasm at least once. Women who continued to fake were more likely to report feeling uncomfortable talking about sex with their partner and less likely to feel they could communicate what actually made sex pleasurable for them.

Some women have never experienced orgasm at all.

These are not simply statistics. They are reminders of how little many women have been taught to understand, communicate, and advocate for their own pleasure.

The silence most women grew up inside was not unique. It was cultural, it was generational, and it had a measurable cost. Understanding that does not erase the personal experience of navigating it. But it does remove the isolation.

Tools, Not Rivals

A vibrator is not a replacement for a partner. It is simply another way of exploring what feels good.

This matters especially when either partner starts turning pleasure into a measure of performance.

Her pleasure is not a performance review of your worth.

Different bodies respond to different forms of stimulation. Learning what feels good is not a competition between a partner and a tool. It is an opportunity for greater curiosity, communication, and connection.

The question shifts from:

“Did I make you come?”

to:

“What feels good to you, and how can we explore that together?”

The New Metrics That Matter

Metric	Ask yourself
Presence	Were you here, or in your head?
Safety	Did you feel safe enough to guide, pause or say “softer”?
Curiosity	Were you discovering together?
Communication	Were you noticing and responding to each other's cues?
Afterglow	Did you feel connected afterwards?

A giggly 15-minute connection? **10/10**. A marathon performance with no real presence? **Zero**.

Good sex is not measured only by what happened during it. It is also felt in how safe, connected, and alive you feel afterwards.

The Afterglow: Connection and Care

The moments after sex can be an important part of intimacy too. For some couples, staying close, talking, laughing, or simply lying together helps extend the sense of connection beyond the physical encounter.

There is no prescribed ritual. The point is to notice what helps both people feel comfortable, connected and cared for.

Try this:

Cuddle: Spoon, hold, breathe. Stay close for as long as it feels good for both of you.

Urinate: If you are prone to urinary tract infections, some clinicians suggest urinating after sex.

Gentle vulval care: Warm water is generally sufficient for the external vulval area. Avoid douching or putting soap inside the vagina.

Get comfortable: Change into breathable underwear if that feels better for you.

Your Love, Your Language

Forge your erotic language:

Reintroduce Play: Pillow fights. Silly challenges. Laughter without an agenda.

Non-Sexual Touch: A long hug. Holding hands. A hand on the heart before falling asleep.

Desire Chat: “What if we tried...?” “I wonder...” Exploration, not accusation.

Be brave. Be silly. Be raw. Be honest.

Hygiene, Scent, Mood, and Intimacy: The Unsung Heroes

Nobody talks about this nearly enough, so I will. The practical side of intimacy: hygiene, scent, mood, and the quality of presence two people bring to each other physically, matters more than most relationship advice acknowledges. Not because physical intimacy is the only dimension of love, but because consistently neglecting it sends quiet messages that compound over time.

Oral hygiene, personal cleanliness, and comfortable breathable clothing are not romantic killers. They are the baseline conditions that allow the body to feel at ease rather than distracted. Scent matters subconsciously, pheromones influence attraction in ways the conscious mind rarely tracks, which is why fresh and natural almost always wins over heavily perfumed.

Mood is the environment intimacy lives inside. Dim lighting, unhurried time, music that relaxes rather than stimulates, and the deliberate decision to put the phone somewhere you genuinely cannot reach it, these are not luxuries. They are the conditions under which two people actually arrive in the same room together.

And foreplay begins long before the bedroom. It begins in the quality of attention given during an ordinary day. A message sent just to say something kind. The listening that is actually present rather than waiting for its turn to speak. Intimacy is not an event. It is the accumulated quality of how two people treat each other when nothing significant is happening.

Skin Hunger: The Biology of Touch

Human beings require touch far more deeply than modern culture is comfortable admitting. Not performative touch designed for photographs or public display, but genuine physical affection that allows the nervous system to soften instead of remaining permanently braced against the world. The body does not experience safe touch as indulgence. It experiences it as reassurance, connection, regulation, and belonging.

Researchers sometimes use the term skin hunger to describe the genuine physiological and psychological deficit that develops when human beings are chronically deprived of meaningful touch. The effects are not merely emotional. Research on tactile deprivation suggests that inadequate physical

affection can contribute to increased stress responses, weakened immune function, elevated anxiety, and a deeper sense of disconnection from both one's own body and from other people.

A hand held briefly. A forehead touched. A hug that is not perfunctory but genuinely present. These small gestures communicate things language sometimes cannot. They signal: I see you. You are not alone. You are still here and so am I.

In long-term relationships, physical affection often becomes the first casualty of busyness, stress, exhaustion, or unresolved emotional distance. Yet it is frequently one of the most direct routes back to connection when words have become insufficient or difficult. Touch that is safe, consistent, and non-transactional rebuilds trust in the body before the mind has fully caught up.

Holding hands when vertigo hits. Being the human safety harness underwater. Carrying each other piggyback for no particular reason. None of these are grand gestures. But cumulatively they are the daily language through which love sustains itself beyond the cinematic moments.

The Architecture Behind Our Love

I think what makes it work is that neither of us approaches the relationship as something to win at. We do not compete for power, attention, emotional dominance, or superiority. Over time, sometimes gracefully and sometimes through friction, we learnt that things worked far better when we stopped allowing ego to take the driver's seat every time conflict appeared.

Over time, we practise the art of repair more than the art of being right.

We have learnt that playfulness is not a luxury. A relationship that becomes only stress, responsibilities, emotional unpacking, and survival slowly stops feeling like a home and starts feeling like a management exercise. So we protect lightness deliberately. We make each other laugh on the days laughter requires effort. We treat each other like friends who happen to be in love, which is the combination I believe most consistently sustains the long haul.

Neither of us is the finished version of ourselves. We are both still becoming. And perhaps that is the foundation most worth building on, not

two people who have everything figured out, but two people who have decided to keep figuring it out together.

Love Is a Daily Decision

He promised to quit smoking because he wanted to be with me longer. I promised to laugh at his jokes and tell him when food is stuck in his teeth.

Here are my vows to him, in full.

Although I have known you for almost three decades, a little over a year ago, when you walked into my life and asked if I would be your valentine, I freaked out. You asked, 'May I kiss you?' and all I could think was 'Hell no!' but what came out was a firm 'No.' I remember telling you: the next man to kiss these lips will be my husband. You waited patiently, and I am so glad you did.

The days that followed were filled with deep conversations, laughter, and tons of goofy video screenshots. We did not let physical attraction drive us to where we are today, though that is super important too.

I manifested you in my head. I had daydreamed over the years, carefully stitching together a version of my ideal man. I used to wish you well even when I did not know you. I would look at the sky, the moving clouds, and talk to you. And then there were days I would look at the clouds and say: 'Where are you? I am right here waiting for you.'

I have always had a thing for underdogs, the rugged, the outliers, those who do not conform to norms blindly, those who disrupt the status quo with a growth mindset, a wholesome personality who does not mind being a goofball or a total gentleman with a great heart, mind and soul. I found that in you.

I dreamed of intimate and goofy togetherness, playful and serious moments. The kid in me wanted someone who could dance, sing, be my chef, plumber, carpenter, driver, and more. And I was pleasantly surprised to find that you were all that and more. I am so grateful and thankful we met.

Sometimes I look at you and cannot understand how someone before me did not see what I saw, a whole beautiful universe hidden within you. And then I feel glad they did not. Because if they had, I would not have had the opportunity to grow in love with you years later. My answered prayer. We met right on time.

Aussie Cakes, my Pledger, my everything. I promise to always be your partner in crime, your taste-tester in the kitchen, and your biggest fan in life. I vow to love you more than words can say and to always cherish you. I promise to always laugh with

you, cry with you, and build a life filled with love, laughter, and happy memories. You are the one I want to share all my adventures with. I promise to always cherish, support, and love you, no matter what life brings our way.

Aussie Cakes, I choose you. And I will choose you over and over and over. Without pause, without a doubt, in a heartbeat. I will keep choosing you.

Thank you for thoroughly spoiling me rotten.

Here is to love, laughter, adventure, and happily ever after.

With love, cherished memories, and butterfly kisses, Your Fufu

I made a list once. Unprompted. How to keep Tasha happy. He did not ask for it. I just produced it for easy reference for him. Hopefully, he stumbles upon the same list when he reads this book, haha.

- Carry her around for no reason, she loves being a baby
- Every day is a day to celebrate, wear that fancy watch and perfume
- Cranky? Feed her colourful, delicious food
- Massages = magic
- Music, dancing, gratitude and humour, her sweet spots (Dan adds: kissing, fussing and attention when she wants it too)
- Random adventures, bike rides, and surprise plans, always a win
- Deep conversations about life, dreams, quantum physics, and the universe
- Being her number one hype squad and living your best life every day
- Be respectful, stay kind and yes, make an ass of yourself just to see that grin on her face
- Get her heart-shaped rocks from your life journey
- How to keep Dan happy? Just keep Tasha happy.

A conversation across states, between the two of us, while I was waiting to run again after blood tests and an infusion:

Tash: I am waiting to run again after my blood tests and infusion.

Dan: You mean like running outside, right?

Tash: Yea, you also run.

Dan: Of course.

Tash: We'll meet in the middle.

Dan: We can have a race. What do you say?

Tash: You'll beat me. You'll race me out of sympathy and make me win.

Dan: No chance, I'm too competitive for that. If I am ahead, I will pick you up and run so we both win and then you cover me with kisses. Deal?

Tash: This is the cutest, my lover. You got me teary eyed.

Dan: You are my girl baby, we both win. But the kisses must follow, otherwise no deal.

Tash: Deal. ♥

We promised to: pray together, seek clarity, be in flow, remain companions first. It was not grand. It was grounded.

Marriage is not built in dramatic vows. It is built in small, repeated behaviours. Carrying each other piggyback. Holding hands when vertigo hits. Being the human safety harness underwater. Explaining things patiently. Making space for deep thoughts. Turning the AC on without being asked. Tiny reinforcements. Daily deposits. Compound interest of love.

The Playfulness That Protects Us

The world is already heavy enough, and somewhere along the way we realised that if a relationship becomes only stress, responsibilities, emotional unpacking, and trying to keep life together, something important slowly starts dying inside it. So we protect playfulness deliberately. We stay children where it counts because adulthood can become unbearably serious if you let it.

Playfulness is not the absence of depth. It is depth's best companion. The couples who last are not always the ones who navigate everything perfectly. They are often the ones who can find something to laugh at in the middle of the difficult stretches. Who remembers that the person next to them is also their friend. Who have not let the weight of adult life squeeze out every last drop of lightness.

We have never entirely grown up together. I do not intend to start now.

The Moment You Realise Peace Is More Attractive Than Chaos

There comes a point in emotional maturity where something shifts very quietly inside a person, and the strange thing is that from the outside almost nothing may appear different at first. You still look the same. You still go to work, answer messages, carry responsibilities, move through ordinary life. Yet internally, your nervous system starts rejecting things it once mistook for love.

What once felt exciting begins feeling exhausting.

The emotional highs and lows that once felt passionate start revealing themselves as instability. The constant unpredictability, the mixed signals, the tension, the emotional guessing games, the intensity followed by withdrawal, all the things once mistaken for chemistry slowly begin feeling less like romance and more like emotional fatigue wearing attractive clothing.

Sometimes what people call spark is actually nervous system activation. It is unpredictable. It is inconsistent. It is emotional uncertainty creating adrenaline, obsession, hyper-focus, longing, and the desperate need for reassurance. The body interprets intensity as importance, especially if chaos was emotionally familiar earlier in life.

But eventually, if a person grows in self-awareness, the body becomes tired of surviving love. That is the real shift.

The nervous system starts craving something entirely different: calm conversations instead of emotional warfare, clarity instead of confusion, consistency instead of unpredictability, mutual respect instead of emotional power struggles.

And contrary to what people sometimes fear, this shift is not the death of passion. It is the evolution of it. Peaceful love is not lifeless. It is stabilising. It creates enough emotional safety for two people to actually build something together instead of constantly recovering from each other. Energy that was once spent analysing mixed messages and repairing repeated damage suddenly becomes available for more meaningful things: growth, creativity, friendship, shared goals, adventure, building a life.

The relationship stops feeling like a battlefield and starts feeling like a foundation.

Peace is not boring. Peace is what allows love to deepen instead of merely intensify.

Love prepares us to lead. And leadership, true leadership, begins with the same place all awakening begins: inside. That is where we go next.

Chapter 22

Leadership, Impact and Higher Calling

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

What It Means to Influence with Integrity

Most people associate leadership with visible authority: titles, seniority, large teams, polished communication, impressive rooms, and positions of power. Leadership is often treated as something formal, something granted externally once a person reaches a certain level of status or recognition.

But influence begins long before titles enter the picture.

Some of the most influential people I have ever met never called themselves leaders at all. They were simply people whose presence made others feel calmer, safer, clearer, more capable, or more willing to believe in themselves again. And some people with extraordinary authority created the opposite effect entirely. They generated fear instead of trust, performance instead of honesty, tension instead of steadiness.

That distinction stayed with me because real leadership has very little to do with hierarchy and everything to do with emotional impact.

The advice I probably give most often, and honestly wish I had received earlier in life, is surprisingly simple: get up, dress up, show up. Treat people well. Invest in yourself. Stay teachable. Learn continuously. Seek out people who challenge your thinking and expand your perspective. The most successful people I know are deeply committed to their own growth, and I no longer think that is coincidence. Growth rarely happens accidentally.

Many of the moments that shaped my understanding of leadership looked incredibly ordinary while they were happening. One of the most formative was the accessibility work I described earlier, which had already shaped

how I understood visibility and invisibility, in the workplace, and in my own body.

But long before that, there was a cemetery.

Some friends introduced me to a world I was not expecting. Entire families lived inside that cemetery. Children ran between the headstones laughing, holding dreams as big as any child anywhere, to become a doctor, a teacher, someone who mattered. I went to teach them. I went back every week for months. I brought my camera. I clicked photographs of them, their faces, their games, their ordinary extraordinary days, and I made an album for them. So they would have something to hold. So they would know that someone had looked at their life and thought: this is worth remembering.

I walked in scared of ghosts. I walked out grateful for people.

With the very little they had, they gave. Tea. Food. Their biggest smiles. They had aquariums. They had dogs. They had a whole world in there that the rest of the world had no idea existed. And I am thankful to the friends who opened that door. Some of the most significant things in my life have arrived through someone simply saying — come, let me show you something.

Leadership is not really about status. It is about whether people feel diminished or expanded in your presence. Whether they feel unseen or genuinely recognised. Whether your actions quietly remind people that they matter too.

Influence without integrity eventually becomes manipulation because the focus shifts from genuinely helping people to managing perception, maintaining control, or saying whatever generates applause fastest.

Integrity asks different questions internally. Would I still say this if nobody applauded it? Am I helping people think more clearly, or simply trying to sound impressive? Am I empowering people, or making them dependent on my approval?

Leadership has very little to do with controlling people and everything to do with creating environments where people feel safe enough to access better parts of themselves.

The Leader You Become After the Hard Years

There is a kind of leadership that textbooks describe reasonably well: vision, strategy, communication, delegation, accountability. These things matter. They help organisations function. They help teams move. But there is another kind of leadership that is far more difficult to teach because it cannot be acquired through a certification, a seminar, or a polished framework. It emerges specifically from having been through something difficult and choosing not to waste what the experience revealed about yourself and other people.

I spent nearly two decades inside corporate environments, leading teams through change, uncertainty, deadlines, restructuring, and periods of extraordinary pressure. Those years taught me an enormous amount, not only about business and leadership, but about people. I learnt discipline, communication, accountability, collaboration, and how much large organisations depend on human beings quietly carrying enormous responsibility every single day.

I was genuinely fortunate in many ways throughout my corporate journey. Some of the most supportive people, meaningful opportunities, and important lessons of my life emerged during those years.

But the leadership I am most proud of developed later, after the diagnosis, after the years of learning how to function inside a body that no longer behaved predictably, and after the humbling experience of having to rebuild parts of myself I once assumed were permanent.

Hardship changes the way a person leads when they allow it to deepen them instead of hardening them.

One of the first things the difficult years taught me was that vulnerability used wisely is not weakness, it is credibility. When I finally told my team that I was managing a health condition affecting my energy and physical capacity at times, the response was not pity or loss of respect the way I had feared. If anything, it created more trust. People are far more exhausted by environments where everyone is pretending to be endlessly fine than most leaders realise. Honesty, when grounded and responsible rather than emotionally uncontrolled, allows other people to exhale too.

The hard years also taught me that consistency of character matters far more than consistency of outcome. There will always be projects that fail, quarters that disappoint, and decisions that look wiser in hindsight than they did in real time. What people remember over the long term is rarely whether you controlled every outcome perfectly. They remember whether your values shifted every time circumstances became uncomfortable. They remember whether your treatment of people changed under pressure.

And perhaps nothing reveals character more clearly than the way someone treats people holding the least visible power in a system. The cleaning staff. The receptionist. The junior analyst. The intern quietly observing everything. The driver who knows your routines better than your own calendar does. Human beings often reveal their true emotional structure in rooms where they believe impressing someone is unnecessary.

Your Nervous System Leads Before Your Words Do

Another thing I came to understand very deeply is that nervous systems are contagious. Human beings continuously regulate and dysregulate one another emotionally, often without realising it consciously.

A leader who enters every room anxious, reactive, defensive, emotionally volatile, or permanently overwhelmed transfers that state into the environment around them whether they intend to or not. The opposite is true as well. Genuine steadiness settles people. Emotional regulation creates clarity. Calm leadership allows other nervous systems to think more effectively under pressure.

Long before people consciously analyse somebody's words, they usually register the emotional state underneath them.

This is why self-awareness matters so deeply in leadership. Someone who has never learnt emotional regulation will often spread chaos unconsciously. Stress becomes tone. Fear becomes control. Insecurity becomes defensiveness. Pressure becomes emotional volatility.

And the opposite is true too.

A regulated person creates safety. A grounded person creates clarity. Someone capable of remaining emotionally steady during uncertainty allows other people to think more clearly too.

This is why the inner work described throughout this book is not separate from leadership. It is the foundation of it.

Secure Leadership Multiplies Others

The leaders I admire most are not the ones obsessed with remaining the smartest or most dominant person in every room. They are the ones secure enough to create space for other people to grow, contribute, challenge ideas, and eventually surpass them in certain areas without experiencing that growth as personal threat.

Insecure leaders often struggle to create space for other people to grow because somebody else's capability feels psychologically threatening to their identity. Secure leaders tend to do the opposite. They understand that helping other people become stronger does not diminish them. It expands what becomes possible around them.

And perhaps that is one of the clearest signs of emotional maturity in leadership: the ability to celebrate growth in others without making their evolution about your own inadequacy.

What Influence Actually Looks Like

I have spoken to large audiences before. I have also had brief conversations that altered somebody's direction far more deeply than any keynote ever could. Over time I realised that real influence rarely announces itself dramatically while it is happening.

More often, it exists in small moments where somebody feels calmer, clearer, more capable, less ashamed, or more honest with themselves after interacting with you.

Human beings rarely remember every word someone said. They remember how they felt around them.

And perhaps that is what higher calling actually is underneath all the grand language people attach to it. Not status. Not visibility. Not applause.

But becoming the kind of person, whose presence leaves people more connected to themselves after crossing paths with you.

Leadership, in the end, is felt before it is heard.

Becoming a Lighthouse

A lighthouse does not chase boats. It does not scream for attention. Nor does it hide its light when storm clouds gather.

It simply stands. Anchored. Consistent. Radiating. And by that eerie presence, it saves lives.

Becoming a lighthouse means:

You cease to do and begin to be. The world needs less performance and more people willing to be who they are unapologetically. The authentic is so magnetic because it is so rare.

You stand in your truth when it is a lonely place to be. There will be days when your truth leaves you alone. When the path less travelled is the aligned one. That is when your light shines brightest.

You maintain your frequency, no matter what is going on around you. Emotional control is not about being happy all the time. It is about naming what you are feeling without shame, normalising your humanity, and moving through it with grace, not guilt. Feelings are not roadblocks, they are data.

You open a path for others to follow. It is not your responsibility to save everyone. It is to shine a light on the path so they can decide to walk it. Tell compelling stories. Use your testimony as evidence. Offer solutions, not just critiques.

You are the legacy you want to be. Legacy is not created after you are gone. It is inhaled every time you opt to live fully awake. Every decision you make, every line in the sand you draw, every word that slips out in integrity, it all adds up to what you leave and how you are living now.

Legacy is not carved in stone. It is encoded in behaviour.

Real-life lighthouse behaviour:

That child you inspired who now knows they can. That friend you held space for who finally told the truth. The stranger you smiled at who was having the most miserable day. The line you drew that showed someone how to respect themselves.

Your legacy resides in your energy footprint. Each time you choose love over fear, clarity over confusion, presence over perfection, you are legacy.

Understanding that is one thing. Building the daily life that reflects it is another. That is where we go next

PART VI

THE WORK

Applied Transformation

**You have understood the architecture. You have walked the path.
What remains now is the daily practice of building it, deliberately,
consistently, in the ordinary moments that no one sees but that shape
everything.**

This section is not theory. It is application.

**It is where awakening stops being a concept and becomes a
commitment.**

Welcome to the work.

Chapter 23

Understanding How You Are Wired

Know thyself. — Socrates

The one thing I wish I had known before I started: just start. Stop second-guessing. The world needs to hear your voice. You matter. Kick those limiting beliefs out of the room. You are enough. I say this with absolute love. You will never feel ready. Ready is a myth that keeps brilliant people sitting quietly at the back of the room. Start before you are ready. Start scared. Start with one sentence, one step, one conversation. The world does not need your perfection. It needs your presence.

The coaching story I carry most is Ashley's. She came to me vibrating at the lowest frequencies, shame and guilt so heavy they had become her identity. Every week I met her; I watched something shift. She moved, week by week, from shame into laughter. From guilt into joy. From contraction into love and peace and light. I did not do that for her. She did it. I just held the space and asked the questions she had been too afraid to ask herself. That is what this work is. Not fixing people. Witnessing them unlearn, learn and grow.

She showed up week on week without fail. Action items delivered. Not occasionally, not when it was convenient, every single time. She did the work with a kind of quiet religious commitment that you cannot manufacture in someone. You can invite it. You can create the conditions for it. But the follow-through? That is entirely them. Ashley had it in abundance.

What I brought to the room was structure and a refusal to let her hide. I guided her through the frameworks, enabled her to see the patterns she had been too close to recognise, coached her through the moments of resistance, and mentored her through the decisions that required someone in her corner who was not going to flinch at the real story. I listened without agenda. I asked without judgement. I gave her space when space was what was needed

and pushed when she was playing small. Sometimes the most powerful thing I did in a session was simply stay in the silence with her while she found her own answer. She always found it.

And she applied everything. Religiously. In every area of her life, health, wealth, relationships, career, spirituality, the simple everyday joy she had forgotten she was allowed to have, she blossomed. Not because the frameworks were magic. Because she genuinely wanted to grow. That wanting is the variable that no coach can manufacture. When it is present and someone does the work to match it, the results are not incremental. They are transformational.

She cannot even see her old life anymore. Not because she has erased it, but because her negative beliefs no longer take the wheel. She has changed her state so completely that the old version of herself feels like a stranger she once knew rather than the person she is. She is thriving, not performing thriving, actually thriving, and there is a difference between those two things that anyone who has experienced both will immediately recognise.

That is the work. And that is why I do it.

Foundation: Understanding How You are Wired

Life, in its essence, is not about achieving specific outcomes or proving your worth to the world. The universe has a singular, universal purpose for each of us: to evolve and to serve. Everything else, your career, wealth, relationships, accomplishments, these are vehicles through which you fulfil this purpose, not the purpose itself.

Most people spend their lives chasing the wrong targets. They chase happiness, validation, recognition, and possessions, believing that accumulating these will bring fulfilment. Instead, they find themselves on a treadmill of endless wanting, never arriving at the destination they seek.

This section is a radical departure from conventional self-help. It is not about finding your passion or discovering your purpose. Those are byproducts. This is about understanding the architecture of human transformation and building a life that naturally evolves while serving others.

Throughout these pages, you will encounter frameworks, practices, and stories from accomplished mentors who have walked this path. You will

learn not just theory, but actionable systems you can implement immediately.

The Six Human Needs That Drive Everything

As introduced earlier in Chapter 12, these needs form the invisible operating system beneath every decision you make. Here, we go deeper, into how they show up in your daily life, your patterns, and your psychology.

Before you can design your life, you must understand what truly drives human behaviour. We are not as rational as we believe. Beneath conscious decision-making lies a deeper architecture: six fundamental human needs that silently guide our choices, relationships, and destiny.

The Four Physical Needs

Certainty: the need for assurance, stability, and security. People with high certainty needs build routines, invest conservatively, and seek predictable outcomes. They are the savers, the planners, the risk-avoiders.

Uncertainty: the craving for novelty, variety, adventure, and excitement. Those driven by this need travel, take risks, change careers, and seek unpredictable experiences. They grow bored easily and are energised by new challenges.

Love and Connection: the desire to belong, to be loved, and to feel connected to others. This manifests as deep friendships, family bonds, community involvement, and the need to be accepted for who you are.

Significance: the drive to be seen, heard, valued, and to matter in the world. This appears as ambition, the desire to lead, to be recognised for achievements, and to make an impact.

The Two Soul Needs

Learning and Growth: the requirement to evolve as a person. Importantly, growth often comes through pain rather than pleasure. The universe is interested in your evolution, not your comfort.

Serving: the fundamental need to contribute to others' wellbeing, to make a difference, and to give beyond yourself.

Conscious vs. Unconscious Fulfilment

Here is where most people go wrong: when your needs are fulfilled unconsciously, you create problems and suffering. When fulfilled consciously, life flows with ease and balance.

Consider the example of someone with a high need for uncertainty. If they are unconscious of this need, they might unconsciously create financial problems, relationship chaos or career instability, anything to get the variety they crave.

But the moment they become conscious of this need, they can fulfil it constructively: travel, learning new skills, exploring different projects, taking calculated risks.

The transformation: once you consciously fulfil your primary need, your nervous system relaxes. Other areas of life, including money, health, relationships, begin to flow naturally because you are no longer self-sabotaging out of unconscious desperation.

Understanding Your Primary Need: A Self-Assessment

Take a moment to reflect. Which one or two of the four physical needs resonate most strongly with you?

If you plan vacations first when organising your year, crave new experiences, and get restless with routine, your primary need is Uncertainty.

If you wake with anxiety and prefer stability, invest systematically, and find comfort in routines, your primary need is Certainty.

If you feel driven to help others, feel incomplete without close relationships, and prioritise loyalty, your primary need is Love and Connection.

If you want to be recognised for your achievements, lead teams, and feel called to inspire or teach others, your primary need is Significance.

Once you identify your primary need, your entire life strategy changes. Instead of fighting yourself or wondering why you sabotage your own progress, you can intentionally design activities that fulfil this need daily.

The Foundation of All Success: Your Mindset

Mindset is not a nice-to-have or motivational concept. It is the foundation upon which every other strategy in your life is built. Without a clear mindset, no strategy works. Period.

This does not mean positive thinking or blind optimism. It means clarity about where your thoughts originate and the power to redirect them.

The Anxiety-Depression Axis

Your emotional state is largely determined by your temporal focus.

Depression emerges from excessive focus on the past. When you dwell on regrets, guilt, shame, and failures, your nervous system goes into a depressive state. You feel heavy, unmotivated, stuck.

Anxiety emerges from excessive focus on the future. When you worry about what might happen, catastrophise outcomes, and live in hypothetical scenarios, your nervous system goes into a vigilant, anxious state. You feel scattered, hypervigilant, unable to rest.

The solution: bring your attention relentlessly to the present. Not to vague mindfulness, but to a specific question, "What can I do today?"

This single shift, from past rumination and future worry to present action, is the difference between a contaminated mindset and a clear one.

Emotional Management, Not Elimination

Many people believe the goal is to eliminate emotions. This is false and counterproductive. Emotions are valuable data about your needs, boundaries, and values. The goal is emotional management, not elimination.

Unmanaged emotions control your decisions, your relationships, and ultimately your destiny. You react impulsively, say things you regret, make choices that undermine your goals.

Managed emotions are acknowledged, understood, and chosen in response. You can think about a difficult situation without feeling controlled by it.

The Third-Person Perspective

One of the most powerful techniques for managing emotions is shifting to a third-person perspective. Instead of saying "I am angry," say "He or she is feeling angry about this situation." This subtle linguistic shift creates psychological distance and allows you to observe the emotion rather than be consumed by it.

When you observe yourself from outside, you gain the clarity to make better decisions. You are no longer fused with your emotional reaction; you are the witness to it.

The Five Non-Negotiable Life Areas

Life is not a single lane. You cannot achieve success in career and neglect health, relationships, and peace of mind, then expect to maintain what you have built. This creates a critical vulnerability.

Think of your life as a table with five legs. If even one is significantly shorter than the others, the entire table is unstable and prone to collapse.

The five non-negotiable areas are:

Peace of Mind, your inner psychological and spiritual state
Health, your mental and physical vitality and energy
Relationships, your connections with loved ones and community
Career, your professional growth and expression
Money, your financial security and abundance

Most high achievers build three or four of these well but neglect one or two. Then, inevitably, the weak areas create problems that threaten everything else.

The Multidimensional Approach

Success requires managing all five areas simultaneously, not sequentially. You cannot say "I will focus on money for 10 years and then work on relationships." By then, the damage may be irreversible.

The practical approach:

Identify your weakest area, the shortest table leg. For the next 90 days, prioritise that area while maintaining the other four. This prevents the acute problem from becoming a chronic crisis.

Understanding how you are wired is the beginning. But wiring alone does not produce a life. That requires architecture, a deliberate structure for transformation. That is where we go next.

**What if you are one decision away
from a completely different life?**

Chapter 24

The Architecture of Transformation

Design can be rebuilt. Here is how.

The Three-Goal Framework: Beyond Surface Achievement

Most people set goals without understanding what they are actually seeking. This confusion leads to a frustrating cycle: they achieve the goal, and it does not satisfy them. Why? Because they set the wrong type of goal.

There are three distinct types of goals, and understanding the difference is transformational.

Vehicle Goals

These are the tangible, measurable, material outcomes: a specific income, weight loss, a promotion, a house, a relationship status.

Vehicle goals are essential for living in the world. They are not wrong. But they are insufficient.

The trap: when you only set vehicle goals, you experience them as being chased constantly. The goal dangles before you, always out of reach. Even when you achieve it, the satisfaction is hollow because you have not fulfilled the deeper need.

Purpose Goals

Behind every vehicle goal is a deeper meaning. This is your purpose goal.

If your vehicle goal is "earn ₹1 crore," your purpose goal might be "to feel free" or "to experience financial freedom."

If your vehicle goal is "lose 10 kg," your purpose goal might be "to feel healthy and strong" or "to reclaim my vitality."

The purpose goal is never about proving worth or earning approval. It is about experiencing a state of being.

The crucial principle: when you feel the purpose goal first, the vehicle goal becomes easier to achieve. The emotion and energy of the purpose goal act as a magnet, drawing the vehicle goal toward you.

Practise this: before pursuing any goal, ask yourself, "What do I feel when this goal is achieved? What state am I in?" Embody that state now, and watch how the external goal begins to align.

Gap Goals

These are the daily micro-actions and specific activities that bridge your current state and your purpose goal.

If your purpose goal is "to feel free," your gap goals might be: Visiting a different coffee shop each week to experience local culture. Taking one weekend trip per month. Saying "no" to one obligation that does not serve you. Learning something new daily.

Gap goals make your purpose tangible and actionable. They are not about the destination, they are about the daily experience of becoming the person who has achieved your vehicle goal.

Energy Sketching

One of the most powerful practices taught by modern mentors is energy sketching. This is not visualising in the traditional sense. It is a daily practice of sketching the energy and state you want to embody.

Here is how it works:

Identify your vehicle goal, the tangible outcome you want. Identify your purpose goal, the feeling or state you want to experience. Identify your primary human need that must be fulfilled. Create five lists of gap goal activities that fulfil that need. Practise at least two activities daily from these lists. Feel the energy of already being the person who has achieved this goal.

When you do this practice daily, something remarkable happens. Your nervous system becomes familiar with this energy. You are no longer trying to manifest it, you are rehearsing it, making it familiar, telling your subconscious, "This is who I am now."

When practised regularly, energy sketching becomes a meditation, a state of flow where you are connected to deeper frequencies of awareness and, with consistency, directly connected to universal flow.

Your Karmic Lessons: The Hidden Architecture of Your Life

For those resonating with metaphysics beyond science:

Beyond the goals you consciously set lies a deeper pattern: your karmic lesson. This is the recurring theme in your life, the challenge that keeps appearing in different forms, the lesson your soul came to learn.

The Three Major Karmic Lessons

Research and observation show that most people's karmic lessons fall into three broad categories:

Trust and Support - Learning to trust yourself and others, to ask for help, to feel supported.

Self-Worth and Deservingness - Learning that you are inherently valuable, not based on achievements.

Resilience and Strength - Learning to bend without breaking, to rise after falling.

All other karmic lessons are subsets of these three.

Understanding Your Lesson

Your karmic lesson stems primarily from two sources:

Ancestral impact, patterns inherited from your mother and father's lineages.
Personal impact, lessons from your own experiences.

For example, if someone's primary lesson is resilience, they will experience life patterns of being knocked down and needing to get back up, repeatedly. This is not punishment, it is training. The universe is literally building your capacity for resilience.

Their subset lesson might be "not feeling supported," which drives the resilience pattern. Every situation seems to require them to do it alone, to be strong, to not burden others.

Once you recognise this lesson, you see it everywhere. More importantly, you can work with it consciously rather than fighting it unconsciously.

The Healing Transformation

The karmic lesson is not a curse; it is an invitation to evolve. Each time you encounter the lesson and choose a conscious response instead of a reactive one, you are drawing the wisdom from it and completing that chapter of your growth.

Healing is not a straight road from broken to whole. You return to the same themes, but each time with greater awareness, greater tools, and greater capacity to choose differently.

The transformation happens not when the lesson disappears, but when you stop fighting it and start learning from it.

Architecture without foundation collapses. The next chapter is about building the physical and psychological foundation that makes everything else possible.

**What if your success is two failures
away? Would you still stop?**

Chapter 25

Practical Mastery, Building Your Transformation

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. — Aristotle

The Nervous System Reset: Reclaiming Your Body

Your nervous system is the physical substrate through which all transformation occurs. A dysregulated nervous system will sabotage every strategy, no matter how brilliant. Conversely, a regulated nervous system makes everything easier.

Most of us live in sympathetic dominance, fight-or-flight mode, even when there is no actual threat. You are vigilant, tense, reactive, and exhausted. This state was useful when facing physical predators. Today, it is just draining.

The solution is to actively train parasympathetic dominance, rest-and-digest mode, where your body can heal, your mind can think clearly, and your nervous system is available for growth.

The Breathing Practices

Breathing is one of the few functions governed by the Autonomic Nervous System that happens automatically, yet can be consciously directed. That makes it one of the most immediate and accessible ways to influence your internal state.

4-4-8 Breathing

Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 8 counts.

The mechanism: the extended exhale directly stimulates the vagus nerve, signalling to your body, "It's safe now. You can relax."

Research shows that this breathing practice raises parasympathetic markers, lowers blood pressure, and reduces arterial stiffness.

With each long exhale, you are literally letting go of tension. Visualise stress and anxiety flowing out on that extended breath.

Start with 5 to 10 minutes daily. If 4-4-8 feels too challenging, begin with 3-3-6 and gradually build. Do this first thing in the morning or when you notice stress rising.

4-7-8 Breathing

Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, exhale for 8 counts.

The longer retention during the hold develops mental discipline and interrupts the stress-thought cycle. This technique creates a buffer between stimulus and response, fostering equanimity. Clinical studies show significant anxiety reduction, particularly in high-stress situations.

Use this when facing a challenging situation or before an important conversation.

Box Breathing

Equal counts: inhale, hold, exhale, hold, for 4-4-4-4, or 3-3-3-3 to start.

This balances both sides of your nervous system and harmonises your energy. It is used by military personnel and high-performance athletes.

Use this when you need balanced clarity and presence.

The Science Behind the Practices

These are not just relaxation techniques. They are neurophysiological interventions. Extended exhalation activates the vagus nerve, the primary parasympathetic pathway. Breath retention trains CO₂ tolerance and strengthens vagal tone. Rhythmic breathing synchronises multiple nervous system rhythms. Slow breathing literally lowers your heart rate and blood pressure.

When practised consistently, these techniques become as automatic as the stress response was before. Your nervous system learns a new baseline: calm, available, resourceful.

Beyond Breathing: Ritual and Daily Practice

Once you have established a breathing practice, extend nervous system regulation into ritual:

Morning ritual: begin with breathing, follow with gratitude journaling.

Midday reset: 5 minutes of breathing when you notice tension. Evening

wind-down: gentle breathing and reflection before sleep.

The key is consistency. Your nervous system learns through repetition. Make it a non-negotiable daily practice.

The Gut-Body-Mind Connection: Physical Foundation

Modern neuroscience has confirmed what ancient traditions always knew: the gut is your second brain. Your digestive health directly influences your mental clarity, emotional resilience, and nervous system state.

The Gut-Brain Axis

Modern neuroscience has confirmed what ancient traditions always knew: the gut is your second brain. Your digestive health directly influences your mental clarity, emotional resilience, and nervous system state. While gut serotonin does not directly enter the brain, the gut and brain are in constant communication through pathways like the vagus nerve. When your gut health is disrupted, it can influence mood, stress response, and overall mental well-being. The modern diet, processed foods, excess sugar, inflammatory seed oils, chronic stress, destroys healthy gut bacteria and creates a state of chronic inflammation. This inflammation reaches your brain and manifests as brain fog, poor decision-making, emotional instability, and even depression.

The Reset Protocol

Dietary principles:

Eliminate inflammatory foods: processed foods, refined sugars, excess alcohol. Prioritise whole foods: vegetables, fruits, quality proteins, healthy fats. Include fermented foods: yogurt, kombucha, sauerkraut, kimchi. Stay hydrated: water is the foundation of all bodily functions. Fast intermittently: give your digestive system rest periods, even 12 to 14 hours overnight.

Movement practices:

Gentle movement aids digestion and gut motility. Yoga poses specifically target digestive organs. Walking after meals helps regulate blood sugar. Strength training builds resilience and metabolic health.

Mindful eating:

Eating in a calm, relaxed state aids digestion. Rushed eating in stressed states compromises digestion. Chew thoroughly, digestion begins in the mouth. Practise gratitude for your food before eating.

Consider committing to a 21-day reset: eliminate inflammatory foods, focus on whole foods, add breathing practices, move daily, and journal your shifts in clarity and mood. Most people report remarkable improvements in mental clarity, energy, and emotional stability by day 21.

Mental and Emotional Mastery: The Three Lenses Practice

Once your nervous system is regulated and your body is healing, you can access the mental-emotional realm. This is where beliefs change, where limiting patterns dissolve, and where true freedom emerges.

The Three Lenses: Rewriting Your Story

Every self-limiting belief has roots. Usually, it was formed as a protection mechanism. A child might decide "I am not good enough" to protect themselves from disappointment. They unconsciously believe, "If I expect nothing, I won't be hurt."

This belief protected them once. Now, it is sabotaging their life. The Three Lenses practice rewrites this story without denial or forced positivity.

Lens 1: Protection What was this belief trying to protect me from? What fear or pain was it addressing?

When you identify the original protection function, you can acknowledge, "This belief once served me. I was trying to protect my heart."

Lens 2: Origin When did I first learn this belief? What situation taught me this?

Often, you will trace it to a specific incident or pattern from childhood. A parent's words, a peer's rejection, a personal failure. Understanding the origin creates compassion for that younger version of yourself.

Lens 3: Wisdom What would a trusted friend, mentor, or wise person tell me about this belief? Is it actually true? What alternative could I believe instead?

This lens does not deny your experience. It acknowledges multiple possible interpretations and invites a more empowering story.

The Journaling Protocol

Write down a recurring negative thought or self-criticism. Then spend 10 minutes journaling through each lens:

What was this protecting me from? Where did I learn this? What is a wiser perspective?

You are not forcing positive thinking. You are finding nuance, complexity, and compassion. Your nervous system recognises this as genuine truth, not pretence.

Identity Transformation Through Language

The language you use about yourself becomes your identity. Consider:

"I am not good at public speaking" vs. "I am developing my speaking skills"
"I am bad with money" vs. "I am learning financial literacy" "I am not a writer" vs. "I am beginning my writing practice"

The second phrasing does not deny your current reality. It acknowledges a direction and invites growth.

Start paying attention to how you talk about yourself. Consciously shift language from fixed identity to growth-oriented identity. Over weeks and months, your nervous system internalises this new self-image, and your behaviour changes to match.

Gratitude and Forgiveness: Anchoring Transformation

Nervous system reset, physical health, mental clarity, these create the conditions for transformation. Gratitude and forgiveness are the practises that anchor these changes into your identity and allow deep healing.

Gratitude Anchoring

Gratitude is not about positive thinking. It is about neural pathway rewiring. When you practise gratitude, your brain's reward circuits activate, stress hormones decrease, and your nervous system stabilises.

Research shows that people who practise daily gratitude report significantly lower anxiety and depression, better sleep quality, improved relationships, and a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

The practice: identify three specific things you are grateful for today. Not vague things like "my family," but specific moments:

"The warmth of the sun on my face this morning" "My colleague's thoughtful message that made me feel seen" "The perfect ripe mango I had for lunch"

Specificity engages your sensory memory. You re-experience the moment, which reactivates the positive emotion. Your nervous system learns, "Life is full of these moments."

Practise this daily, preferably at the same time. Over weeks, you are literally rewiring your baseline emotional state from scarcity to abundance.

Forgiveness as Self-Liberation

Forgiveness is often misunderstood. It is not about condoning harm. It is not about reconciliation. It is about freeing yourself from the burden of resentment.

Research on forgiveness shows reduced PTSD and trauma symptoms, lower blood pressure and stress biomarkers, and improved mental health and resilience.

When you hold resentment, your nervous system stays vigilant about potential betrayal or harm. It is exhausting and prevents you from moving forward.

The forgiveness ritual:

Identify someone, or yourself, you need to forgive. Write an unsent letter expressing how their actions affected you, what you are releasing, and what you wish for them, even if it is simply "I wish you peace." If it feels right, perform a symbolic act: tear the letter, burn it safely, or bury it.

This is not about emotions changing instantly. It is about a conscious choice to stop carrying the weight. The emotions follow the action.

Self-forgiveness is often the hardest. A simple framing, "I forgive myself for trying, for not knowing better, for the mistakes that shaped me into who I am."

You are not forgiving a failure. You are forgiving yourself for being human, imperfect, learning, doing your best with the awareness you had at the time.

Practical mastery is the daily work of embodying what you now understand. But there is a final level, where becoming transitions into being. That is where we go next.

Chapter 26

Advanced Mastery, from Becoming to Being

I am here to feel it all. The sunshine and the storms. The laughter and the grief. The lessons that broke me open and the ones that quietly built me. I did not come here to cherry-pick the good parts. I came to experience the whole extraordinary, heartbreaking, hilarious, luminous thing we call life.

— Natasha Pinto

Wealth, Influence, and Mastery

Money is one of the five non-negotiable life areas. Yet most people have a complicated relationship with it, inherited from their family system and culture.

I want to be honest with you about my own relationship with money before I share any framework. I was good at saving from a young age, disciplined, careful, responsible. Post office savings and bank deposits, all fetching very low interest that was lower than inflation. I played it safe. I kept my money exactly where I could see it and exactly where it was doing the least possible work for me. I did not touch equities until my thirties and even then, it took a book to shift me.

A colleague gave me the book Rich Dad Poor Dad years before I read it. It sat in my pedestal drawer at work for what felt like forever. I opened it twice and closed it within fifteen minutes each time. Then thirty minutes. Then one day I sat down and told myself: Tasha, just get through three chapters. That is all.

Three chapters.

I got through three chapters and I was hooked. I remember thinking, how did I not know this? I had only one stream of income. Ignorance had been expensive for me, quietly and for years, and I had not even known the cost.

That book was the beginning of an entirely different relationship with money, not just saving it, but making it work.

That is what I hope this section does for you. Not just give you a formula, but open the first page.

Burned the midnight lamp, as they say. I read and read and read. Everything shifted. I started thinking about how to multiply wealth, how to make money while sleeping, and how to build more.

The Foundation of Financial Intelligence

Financial intelligence is not determined by how much money you earn. It is determined by how well you understand, manage, and multiply what you have. Before strategies, investments, or income streams come beliefs. The way you think about money shapes every financial decision you make.

The Money Beliefs to Examine

You inherited financial beliefs from your parents and society: that money is evil, that wealthy people are greedy, that money does not grow on trees, that you do not deserve abundance, that money is too complicated for you, that security comes from employment rather than ownership. These invisible beliefs control your financial destiny more than any conscious strategy. The first step is to identify them, then deliberately choose new ones. Examples of empowering beliefs:

"Money is a neutral tool for creating value and impact" "I deserve abundance because I create value" "I am capable of learning financial principles" "Building wealth is how I secure my family's future"

Wealth Creation Sequence

Most people try to do everything at once and end up doing nothing.

First, build a skill that the market values and is willing to pay well for. Not just any skill, a skill that solves a real problem for real people. Your income will always be a reflection of the problems you can solve and the value you can create. Continue to upskill, be a lifelong learner.

Second, turn that skill into consistent income. This sounds obvious but it is where most people underinvest. Visibility, communication, and positioning determine whether your skill translates into income or just sits in your head as unused potential.

Third, from that income, save deliberately. Not what is left over at the end of the month. A fixed percentage from the top, before lifestyle gets to it. Savings is not a reward for earning well. It is a discipline you build before you feel you can afford it. Build your emergency funds too with 6 months to a year's buffer.

Fourth, protect what you are building. Insurance, emergency funds, legal structures if needed. Most people skip this step and discover they needed it at the worst possible moment. Take it from me, getting health insurance after being diagnosed becomes challenging and expensive. Many insurers do not cover either. Do not be penny wise and pound foolish.

Fifth, invest. Put your savings to work in assets that grow over time. Quality equities, property, debt investments, business, whatever aligns with your risk tolerance and timeline. The goal is to build assets that generate income even when you are not actively working. Make money work for you even while you are sleeping.

Sixth, preserve. As wealth grows, protecting it becomes as important as building it. Tax efficiency, estate planning, diversification. Wealth that is not preserved is eventually redistributed to someone else. Also, create a will irrespective of your age.

Most people get stuck between steps 1 and 2 because they lack visibility or influence. Others stall at step 2 because they have high income but never invest. Few go directly into investments without having their basics in order. That is like trying to build the 5th floor of a building without a strong foundation. Many get stuck and default in home loans too because of not following a structure. Stop following the masses. Your journey can be very different from theirs.

The goal is to reach step 4: where your money works for you, not just your time.

The sequence matters. Trying to invest before you have consistent income is unstable. Trying to protect before you have anything to protect is premature. Each step creates the foundation for the next.

This sequence was shaped in part by the mentors and thinkers who helped me understand that wealth is built in layers, not all once.

The Certified Financial Planner Path

Once you are ready to build true wealth, find a Certified Financial Planner and Advisor with experience, proof they've built and kept personal wealth, strong financial knowledge, excellent communication skills, and clients in the wealth tier you are aspiring to.

Do not choose a cheap advisor. The cost of bad financial advice over 30 years is enormous. A great advisor pays for themselves many times over.

The Investing Principle

Despite government taxation, currency devaluation, and economic uncertainty, markets have historically grown. The Indian market grew from 150 points in 1980 to 85,000+ points today, despite numerous crises.

The point: not investing is the riskiest choice. It guarantees you will never build wealth. Investing, even imperfectly, keeps you in the game.

Start with whatever amount you can. Automate it so it is deducted before you see it. Let time and compound growth do the work. Invest in quality stocks, mutual funds and other investment products.

Influence, Authority, and Impact

Once you have stabilised your foundation, mindset, health, relationships, career, the final frontier is influence: the ability to inspire, lead, and impact others.

The Five Components of Influence

1. Respect, built through high standards and mastery: Do excellent work consistently. Keep your commitments. Develop expertise in your field. Hold yourself to higher standards than you expect of others.

2. *Trust, earned through character and consistency*: Be reliable and truthful. Admit mistakes and take responsibility. Follow through on promises. Let your values guide your decisions.

3. *Visibility, create channels through which you are seen*: Social media presence. Speaking engagements. Writing and publishing. Mentoring and teaching. Participation in your community.

4. *Networks, build genuine relationships*: Connect with people in your field. Help others without expecting return. Attend industry events. Create communities around shared interests.

5. *Competence Combined with Emotional Intelligence*: Technical expertise in your domain. Emotional awareness and regulation. Ability to listen and understand others' perspectives. Capacity to inspire through vision, not just authority.

Advanced Mastery: From Becoming to Being

The Magnetic Manifestor Framework

There is a profound difference between an average person and someone who consistently creates extraordinary results. It is not luck. It is a specific psychological framework.

The Timeline Orientation Difference

Average person: Past leads to Present leads to Future. Their past experiences determine their present identity and limit their future possibilities. They are shaped by what happened.

Magnetic manifestor: Future leads to Present, and the Past is reframed. Their future vision guides their present decisions. They rewrite their past to serve their future. This is not delusion. It is a different relationship with time and possibility.

Example: two people lose their jobs.

Average person, "I got fired. Something must be wrong with me. Maybe I am just not good enough."

Magnetic manifestor, “This teaches me what not to do. This has equipped me with wisdom that will serve my future success. This is preparation for something better.”

Same event. Different relationship to it. The difference compounds over time.

The Power of Blessing

One of the most underestimated practices is blessing what you desire.

When you see others' success and feel envy, you are operating from a frequency of scarcity. When you see their success and genuinely bless it, you are aligning with abundance.

Blessing is not about being nice. It is about internal alignment. What you send out, you draw back. Blessing abundance creates the internal conditions for abundance to feel familiar and what feels familiar, you allow.

The Visualisation Practice

Most people think of visualisation as seeing a mental image. This is surface level.

True visualisation is embodying the feeling, the energy, the state of having already achieved the goal.

Research on visualisation shows that athletes who visualise actually activate the same neural pathways as physical practice. Your subconscious mind cannot distinguish between a vividly imagined experience and a real one.

The practice:

Close your eyes. Feel yourself in the moment of having achieved your goal. What do you see? Hear? Feel in your body? Most importantly, what is the feeling you have? Embody this feeling for 5 minutes daily.

With consistent practice, your subconscious internalises this as your true identity. Your behaviour changes to match. You start making decisions aligned with this version of yourself.

The Self-Sabotage Assessment: What You Really Believe

Despite your conscious goals, you are self-sabotaging in at least one area of life. This is not a character flaw. It is evidence of a belief system that does not align with your goals.

Common self-sabotage patterns:

Health: starting diets repeatedly but not sustaining them. Belief, "I don't deserve to be healthy" or "I am not capable of discipline"

Money: making good income but never saving or investing. Belief, "Money is unsafe" or "People like me don't build wealth"

Relationships: attracting partners who do not serve you, or staying in compromising situations. Belief, "I am not worthy of healthy love" or "I have to accept what I can get"

Career: staying in jobs that do not fulfil you, not pursuing advancement. Belief, "I am not smart enough" or "Success comes at the cost of my values"

Time: procrastinating on important tasks, staying busy with busywork. Belief, "I'll fail anyway" or "I don't deserve the success that would come from focus"

The Self-Sabotage Assessment Exercise

In each life area, rate yourself 1 to 5:

Health: Do you follow through on fitness and nutrition? Do you prioritise sleep? Money: Do you invest consistently? Do you avoid unnecessary debt? Career: Are you growing? Do you pursue opportunities? Relationships: Do your relationships nourish you? Do you feel seen and valued? Time: Do you protect focus time? Do you complete important projects?

If you score low in any area, that is your focus area. Identify the belief underneath the behaviour, work through the Three Lenses practice, and take small consistent actions that prove the new belief true.

Over time, your behaviour catches up to your revised beliefs.

The Daily Disciplines That Create Extraordinary Results

Transformation is not a one-time event. It is a daily commitment to practices that rewire your nervous system, reinforce new beliefs, and build momentum.

Morning Ritual, 20 minutes:

Breathing practice, 5 minutes: 4-4-8 or 4-7-8 breathing. Gratitude journaling, 5 minutes: three specific things you are grateful for and why. Energy sketching or visualisation, 10 minutes: embody the energy of your vision.

This starts your day in parasympathetic calm with your nervous system primed for purpose.

Midday Reset, 5 minutes:

When you notice stress or scattered energy: Pause. Do 5 minutes of box breathing. Return to your primary task.

Evening Wind-Down, 15 minutes:

Reflection: what went well? What is one thing you are proud of?
Forgiveness or release: is there anything to forgive or release from today?
Gentle breathing: close with 5 minutes of gentle breathing, preparing your nervous system for sleep.

Weekly Review, 30 minutes:

Every Sunday: Assess your five life areas: any changes? Review your gap goal activities: did you do them consistently? Any new limiting beliefs that surfaced? Adjust your approach for the coming week.

Monthly Deep Dive, 1 hour:

First Sunday of each month: Revisit your vehicle goal, purpose goal, and primary need. Assess progress. Celebrate wins. Identify obstacles. Adjust your gap goal activities if needed.

Quarterly Recalibration, half day:

Every 90 days: Assess all five life areas thoroughly. Celebrate transformation. Identify the next focus area for the coming quarter. Reset and recommit.

Living the Vision: Creating Your 90-Day Blueprint

Step 1: Identify Your Starting State

Five Life Areas Assessment, rate each 1 to 10: Peace of mind: Health: Relationships: Career: Money:

Your lowest score is your starting focus.

Step 2: Identify Your Goals

Vehicle goal (tangible outcome): Purpose goal (feeling or state): Karmic lesson (recurring theme): Primary human need (Certainty, Uncertainty, Love and Connection, or Significance):

Step 3: Create Your Gap Goal Activities

In your lowest life area and aligned with your primary need, list five categories of activities you could do daily, with three specific activities in each category.

Step 4: Commit to Your Non-Negotiable Daily Practices

☐ 10-minute breathing practice ☐ 5-minute gratitude journaling ☐ 10-minute energy sketching or visualisation ☐ 30-minute movement ☐ 2 to 3 gap goal activities

Step 5: Your 90-Day Milestones

Week 4 goal, nervous system reset and physical foundation: Week 8 goal, mental-emotional work complete: Week 12 goal, integrated new identity, sustained practices:

The 90-Day Transformation Protocol

Weeks 1 to 2: Foundation Assessment and Nervous System Reset

Assess all five life areas and rate each 1 to 10. Identify the lowest area. Establish a daily breathing practice. Begin daily gratitude journaling. Identify your primary human need.

Weeks 3 to 4: Physical Transformation

Audit your diet and eliminate inflammatory foods. Establish a movement routine: 30 minutes daily. Start intermittent fasting if it resonates. Add fermented foods or probiotics.

Weeks 5 to 8: Mental-Emotional Work

Identify three key limiting beliefs holding you back. Work through the Three Lenses practice for each belief. Identify your karmic lesson and how it shows up in your life. Practise the forgiveness ritual. Commit to energy sketching daily.

Weeks 9 to 12: Integration and Momentum

Implement gap goal activities daily. Review your limiting beliefs monthly and continue rewriting as needed. Examine your lowest life area and begin strategic action. Create systems and habits to sustain these practices beyond 90 days.

The Ripple Effect: From Personal Mastery to Service

The final frontier of transformation is understanding that personal mastery is not selfish. It is the foundation for service.

When you have regulated your nervous system, healed your wounds, rewired your beliefs, and built your foundation, you have energy and clarity to give. You become a source rather than a drain.

The truth of universal purpose becomes clear: as you evolve, you naturally serve. Your evolution becomes the gift you give others.

Service as Practice

Daily service does not require grand gestures. Simple practices:

Smiling genuinely at strangers. Listening fully when someone speaks. Offering help without expecting return. Donating a percentage of your income. Mentoring someone in your field. Creating content that genuinely helps people.

Each act of service strengthens your parasympathetic nervous system, aligns you with the soul need of serving, creates genuine connection, and sends abundance into the world.

Conclusion: The Beginning

This book has presented a comprehensive architecture for transformation: understanding your wiring, recalibrating your nervous system, healing your beliefs, clarifying your purpose, and building mastery across all life areas.

But the book ends where your real work begins.

You now have the framework. You have the practices. You have the understanding of how transformation actually works, not through massive willpower, but through daily, small, consistent choices that rewire your nervous system and reinforce new beliefs.

The question is not whether transformation is possible. It is. The question is: will you commit to the 90 days? Will you do the daily practices even when you do not feel like it? Will you revisit the frameworks when you get stuck?

Transformation is not some mystical experience. It is you, doing these practices, building these habits, until one day, maybe week 6, maybe week 12, you realise you have fundamentally shifted. You are making different choices. You are attracting different people and opportunities. You are living from a different operating system.

That is the point. That is the work.

The universal purpose of life is to evolve and to serve. Everything else is the vehicle. But the vehicles are important. They are how you live in the world, create impact, and express your unique gifts.

Begin today.

Choose your vehicle goal. Identify your purpose goal. Find your primary need. Create your gap goals. Commit to your practices.

Then, for 90 days, do not deviate. Do not negotiate with yourself. The practices are non-negotiable, like brushing your teeth. Everything else flows from this commitment.

At day 91, you will look back and barely recognise who you were. That is not success. That is just the beginning of who you are becoming.

You have done the work. You have walked the path. What remains is not more content, it is the daily choice to live what you now know. The Integration Protocol that follows is your bridge from understanding into practice. Use it.

Chapter 27

The Legacy You Leave Behind

Fill your life with problems that inspire you. Not problems inherited from fear, from scarcity, from what your parents worried about and their parents before them. Every generation has a choice: to recycle the same problems or to choose bigger ones. The people who live significant lives are not people without problems.

The Emotional Residue We Leave Behind

Many people think legacy is something that appears after death, as though a human life can only be measured once it is over. They imagine it as something large and visible: a name on a building, a successful company, a body of work, a photograph framed at a memorial while people speak about impact in past tense.

But legacy begins much earlier than that.

It is already unfolding in the way a person moves through the lives of others. In the emotional atmosphere they create inside a home. In the way they respond to pressure, disappointment, conflict, uncertainty, ageing, success, failure, and pain. In the way children watch adults closely and quietly learn what love looks like, what safety feels like, how anger is expressed, how affection is withheld, how truth is spoken, how stress is carried in the body.

Human beings imprint each other constantly, often without realising the depth of what is being transferred.

The Invisible Inheritance

A calm person can regulate an entire room without saying very much. A chronically fearful person can spread tension through a family system for generations. Someone who has never examined their wounds may unintentionally organise their entire life around protecting them, and

eventually the people closest to them begin adapting around those wounds too.

This is why healing matters far beyond the individual.

Pain rarely remains private for long. It leaks into conversations, marriages, parenting, friendships, leadership, silence, and the emotional inheritance passed unconsciously from one generation to the next.

But the opposite is true as well.

One person becoming more conscious changes things. A person who learns emotional regulation interrupts chaos. A person who becomes honest interrupts denial. A person who develops self-respect changes the standard inside every relationship they enter. Sometimes the most powerful transformations happen quietly, through tone, steadiness, consistency, and the subtle relief people feel when they no longer have to brace themselves in someone's presence.

Why Significance Matters

Most people underestimate how deeply they affect others because they are waiting for impact to look dramatic. But the experiences that shape human beings most profoundly are often ordinary and repetitive. The parent who listened properly. The teacher who saw potential before the student did. The friend who stayed during a difficult season. The partner who made honesty feel safer than pretending. The person whose presence made somebody else feel less alone in their humanity.

This is why significance matters.

Not because human beings need to become important in the eyes of the world, but because unconsciousness has consequences. Entire lives are built from inherited shame, emotional suppression, unresolved fear, survival conditioning, and identities people never consciously questioned. Many people spend years functioning successfully while remaining deeply disconnected from themselves internally.

Then something happens that interrupts the structure they built: illness, heartbreak, burnout, grief, betrayal, failure, sometimes even success itself. And suddenly the life that once looked stable no longer feels true.

That moment, painful as it often is, becomes an invitation.

The Return to Self

Awakening is rarely about becoming somebody entirely new. More often, it is the gradual and sometimes uncomfortable process of recognising how much of life was lived automatically, how many choices were made from fear rather than truth, and how exhausting it becomes to continuously abandon yourself in order to maintain an identity that no longer fits.

The nervous system feels this long before the mind explains it. The body knows when a life has become fragmented. Chronic internal conflict eventually expresses itself somewhere: through anxiety, numbness, resentment, exhaustion, disconnection, overachievement, people-pleasing, emotional volatility, or the quiet grief of living too far away from oneself for too long.

And when people begin returning to themselves honestly, everything begins changing from there. Relationships shift because tolerance shifts. Work changes because meaning changes. Conversations deepen because truth becomes more important than image. The body itself often softens when it no longer has to carry the strain of constant contradiction.

Legacy as Lived Coherence

This is why significance is not fame, status, visibility, or applause. It is coherence.

It is the moment a human being stops living mechanically and begins living consciously. It is the decision to become internally aligned enough that the way you live, speak, love, work, lead, and move through the world no longer fractures you from within.

And perhaps legacy, in the end, is much simpler than people imagine.

Perhaps it is not measured by how many people knew your name, but by who people became because you existed.

My life is my truest message. Let it echo in hearts long after I am gone.

Chapter 28

This Is Your Chapter to Write

The past has shaped you, but it does not have to define you. The pen is now in your hands. May some of your best chapters still lie ahead.

With love and gratitude,

Natasha Pinto

Epilogue: The Choice

When I was four years old, I had three recurring dreams.

The first was of flying.

The second was of being in a large black pot over a fire while tiny figures danced and celebrated around me. I never felt afraid. I only remember the feeling of celebration.

The third was the simplest: I was teaching people who had been left behind by the world.

I did not know then that I was being shown my life.

I know now.

There is a photograph I keep returning to.

I am on a mountain. Legs tired, nervous system doing what it does on bad days, sending pins and needles up my calves like a reminder that it has not forgotten how to cause trouble. The altitude is doing something to my breath. The path ahead is not clear yet.

And I am grinning.

Not performing. Not pushing through for the camera. Genuinely, ridiculously happy to be exactly where I am, which is uncomfortable, uncertain, and completely, unapologetically alive.

I did not know, when I started writing this book in 2019, what it would become by the time it reached your hands. I did not know all the things that would still happen between the first page and the last, the days my body went quiet on me, the moments my faith flinched, the unexpected love, the losses, the rewriting and the rebuilding. I only knew that something inside me refused to stay silent any longer.

This book is the result of everything I refused to leave unspoken.

You have just walked through collapse, conditioning, regulation, identity, love, wealth, leadership, and design. You have read about airport runways and brain lesions and dark streets and board exams and mountains and the particular silence of a hospital infusion chair when no one knows you are there. You have met the girl who studied for her 10th boards like her life depended on it, because in some ways it did. You have met the woman who learnt, slowly and sometimes painfully, that the life she was building could not be built on a foundation she never chose.

None of those pages were meant to impress you.

They were meant to find you.

Because I know what it is to look completely fine on the outside while something inside is quietly, persistently asking: Is this it? Is this really all there is?

And I know what it costs to answer that question honestly.

Here is what I want you to carry away from this book. Not the frameworks, not the 27 days, not the neuroscience, though I hope those serve you well. What I want you to carry is this:

You are not who happened to you. You are not the diagnosis, the divorce, the dismissal, the decade of being told it was all in your head. You are not the teacher who called you stupid, the person who left you on a dark street, the voice that told you to sit down and be reasonable.

You are what you choose to build and be once you stop mistaking those things for the truth about yourself.

That choice, quiet, private, non-dramatic, is the most important one you will ever make. It does not announce itself. It does not arrive with certainty or a clean plan. It arrives as a question: what if I decided to be the author of this instead?

Most people feel that question and wait.

They wait for the right conditions. The right time. The right amount of courage. They wait until the fear passes, not understanding that the fear does not pass; it simply becomes less interesting than the life waiting on the other side of it.

The awakened path is not a destination you arrive at and finally rest in. I want to be honest with you about that. There are still mornings when I wake up and negotiate with my body. Still moments when old patterns knock at the door like they own the place. Still days when significance feels far away and survival is the whole agenda.

But there is a difference between the person I was before I understood what I was working with, and the person I am now.

I see the patterns. I know what is happening in my nervous system when I want to disappear. I know the difference between a choice made from fear and a choice made from design. I know how to come back to myself.

That knowing is not a cure. It is a compass. And a compass is enough.

You have one too. You have always had one. This book was never about giving you a map; it was about helping you trust the instrument you were born with.

So here is where I leave you.

Not at the end of something, but at the beginning of the only conversation that has ever mattered: the one you have with yourself about who you are choosing to become next.

I believe in your capacity to rebuild. Not because I am your coach or because I wrote this book. But because you are still here. You finished these pages. Something in you said yes to this, and that something is the most important evidence you have.

Go build something true.

On the days when the map feels too heavy to carry, there is a smaller companion, my book *Bold, Beautiful & Blunt*, written for the moments between the big work. Keep it close. Trust the line that finds you.

With love, stubbornness, and absolute faith in you.

Natasha Pinto

My life is my truest message. Let it echo in hearts long after I am gone.

The Integration Protocol

Installing the Awakened Human Operating System

27-Day Applied Programme

Everything you have read, the collapse, the nervous system work, the identity spiral, the architecture of power and design, becomes useful here. This is where "awakening" stops being a revelation and starts becoming a routine.

If the earlier chapters showed why the throughline matters, this chapter answers how you start tomorrow at 7:00 AM and keep going the day after that, until the system itself begins to change you.

Each cluster of days trains one dimension of the Awakened Human: Conditioning (attention), Regulation, Identity, Values, Design, and Expression.

What This Is

This is a practical 27-day map to shift you from Conditioned Human to Consciously Designed Human. It is short enough to start immediately and deep enough to begin changing neural habit. Each day has one focused micro-practice that trains:

Attention and cognitive sovereignty
Regulation and nervous system stability
Identity and self-image
Values and decision filters
Design and structural choices
Expression and impact

There are examples you can adapt whether you are a leader, a parent, managing chronic illness, or simply tired of breaking the same New Year promises by February. No fluff. No platitudes. Mechanisms you understand, actions you can take in under 30 minutes, and short scripts you can use in real life.

How to Use This 27-Day Programme

Treat the 27 days as a single protocol, not 27 separate experiments. Each day primes the next. You do not need to complete every optional reflection or ritual to continue, but do the core micro-practice each day.

Record three short notes daily: One observation about your state. One tiny action you took. One thing you will repeat tomorrow.

That small diary is your data. Repetition is the mechanism; measurement is the feedback. If you miss a day, resume. The system is patient; your nervous system is not. It will drift back toward familiar architecture and patterns unless you keep giving it new code.

The Principles Behind the Practices

Keep these principles in mind as you move through the protocol:

Neuroplasticity: Neurons that fire together wire together. Repetition creates identity (Hebbian learning).

Regulation before reinvention: Clear decision-making requires a calm nervous system; breath, sleep, and structure are not optional add-ons.

Identity precedes performance: Behaviour eventually returns to self-image. Change your self-description and then prove it with micro-acts.

Values as filters: when values are clear, choice becomes simpler. Ambivalence drops because you are no longer negotiating with every request.

Micro-consistency: Small, non-sexy acts performed daily reconfigure the system faster than heroic, unsustainable bursts.

The 27-Day Integration Protocol

Before you begin, you need three things. A notebook or notes app you will actually open daily. Honesty about where you are right now, not where you wish you were. And the understanding that this protocol will not work if you treat it as something to complete. It only works if you treat it as something to practice.

Days 1–3: Attention and Cognitive Sovereignty (Dimension: Conditioning, Attention)

Day 1: Breaking News Detox

Practice: Decide on a single 20 to 30-minute window for news and social media. Remove auto-notifications on your phone and laptop. Morning input must be curated. No doomscrolling before your brain is fully online.

Why: Chronic low-grade alarm narrows prefrontal bandwidth and keeps you in survival mode.

Practical moves: Put your devices on Do Not Disturb until a set time. Schedule one check at, for example, 6:30 PM. Office script, “I am offline for deep work until 4 PM, I’ll reply then.”

Day 2: One 15-Minute Intentional Reading

Practice: Choose a non-algorithmic source, a physical book or a long-form article that requires calm attention and read for 15 uninterrupted minutes.

Why: Rebuilds focus, deepens cognition, and starts breaking the addictive micro-hit loop trained by short-form content.

Day 3: A Single 10-Minute Reflection Sheet

Practice: Answer three questions on paper: What did I notice about my attention today? One recurrent distraction? One sign of clarity or deeper focus?

Why: Metacognition, thinking about how you think, begins to loosen old cognitive patterns.

Days 4–6: Regulation (Body, System) (Dimension: Regulation, Stability)

Day 4: Box Breathing Before Stress

Practice: Before any stressful call, meeting, or conversation, do box breathing: inhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts, exhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts. Complete at least 5 cycles.

Why: Rhythmic breath stimulates vagal tone and supports prefrontal access so you respond from design, not reflex.

Day 5: Sleep Hygiene Audit

Practice: Move screens out of the bedroom if possible. Fix a wind-down ritual: no caffeine after 2 PM, 30 minutes of low-stimulation reading, dimmer lights.

Why: Executive function collapses under cumulative sleep debt. Without sleep, higher-order identity work and design collapse under pressure.

MS taught me that sleep is not a luxury. For people with neurological conditions, it is medicine. I stopped negotiating with this.

Day 6: Movement Reset: 20 Minutes

Practice: Engage in 20 minutes of intentional movement: brisk walking, dancing, gentle yoga, or a simple bodyweight circuit.

Why: Movement shifts biochemistry, dopamine, endorphins, serotonin and clears rumination, strengthening emotional resilience.

My version of this, dance in front of the mirror, even the goofy kind counts. Post-diagnosis, 40 minutes of walking when the body allowed it. On good days it was long walks. On bad days it was walking inside the house. All of it counted.

Days 7–9: Identity (Installing a New Self) (Dimension: Identity, Core Interface)

Day 7: Identity Sentence

Practice: Write one identity statement in the present tense. Examples: "I am a deliberate leader who chooses clarity over urgency." "I am a wise custodian of my body, not its enemy." Repeat it morning and night while standing in a grounded posture for 60 seconds: feet planted, spine tall, slow breathing.

Why: What you repeatedly tell yourself and practise begins to shape what feels possible.

Mine, during the hardest years, was: I am someone who shows up even when showing up looks different every day. Get up, Dress up, Show up.

Day 8: Micro-Behaviour Match

Practice: Design one 2 to 5-minute behaviour that proves the identity you wrote yesterday and do it twice today.

Leader: 10 minutes of calendar protection for deep work. Parent: 15 minutes of undistracted, phone-free time with a child. Health: 1 restorative breathing or stretching session.

Why: You do not become confident by thinking new thoughts. You become confident by acting in ways that give your brain new evidence.

Day 9: Evidence Log

Practice: Note three tiny actions from the last 72 hours that aligned with your chosen identity.

Why: Identity is evidence-based. Writing micro-evidence teaches your brain, "This is what we do," and raises your self-image ceiling.

Days 10–12: Values (Clarify What Filters Choices) (Dimension: Values, Decision Filters)

Day 10: Top Three Values

Practice: Identify your top three values (for example: dignity, discipline, truth, growth, excellence, ownership, contribution, compassion). For each value, write why it matters and one decision that changes when that value is truly prioritised.

Why: Values reduce internal negotiation. Without clear values, you chase goals that do not reflect what you stand for and end up fragmented.

Day 11: Apply the Values Test

Practice: Take one real decision today, work, money, relationship, time and run it through this question, "Does this serve value X?" If not, adjust or decline. Then record the friction you felt.

Why: Values become usable only when they begin to cost you something, familiar approval, speed, or short-term comfort.

Day 12: Boundary Experiment

Practice: Use a short script to say no once today. For example, "I can't take that on right now. I appreciate you asking."

Why: Boundaries train the nervous system to tolerate others' reactions and protect the bandwidth you need for conscious design.

Days 13–15: Design (Systematise) (Dimension: Design, Intentional Architecture)

Day 13: Design a Weekly Structure

Practice: Create three non-negotiable blocks for next week: Deep Work, Rest / Recovery, People / Relationships. Put them on your calendar now and protect them like external appointments.

Day 14: Decision Minimisation

Practice: Reduce low-value choices by creating two defaults, such as a standard weekday lunch or a fixed evening wind-down sequence.

Why: Conserves willpower for structural decisions, hiring, strategy, boundaries, creative work.

Day 15: Delegate One Task

Practice: Identify one task that repeatedly drains your attention and either outsource it, automate it, or delegate it.

Why: Design is not doing more. It is creating leverage so your time and energy sit where they matter most.

Days 16–18: Expression (High-Value Output) (Dimension: Expression, System Output)

Day 16: Prototype a Small Public Expression

Practice: Share one small expression of your ideas or truth: a short LinkedIn or Instagram post, a three-minute story in a meeting, a conversation you have been postponing.

Why: Expression refines identity. You discover who you are as you speak and create, not only as you think.

Day 17: Review Income / Energy Streams

Practice: Map where your time and energy are currently going versus where your impact and income come from.

For creatives and coaches: sketch one simple "next offer" or value-ladder step. For corporate leaders: identify one decision you can safely delegate to grow others and free yourself for strategy.

Day 18: Reflection on Impact

Practice: Complete this sentence, "If I had to measure significance in one metric, it would be _____. " Use that metric as a lens for at least one choice today.

Days 19–21: Resilience and Fear Conditioning (Cross-dimension: Identity, Regulation, Expression)

Day 19: Controlled Exposure

Practice: Identify one small, uncomfortable action and do it today: a call, a cold email, a two-minute share in a meeting, a price you have been afraid to quote.

Why: Exposure weakens avoidance circuits; your confidence rises when your nervous system discovers, "I can survive this."

Day 20: Failure-Flip Note

Practice: Choose a recent stumble, missed opportunity, conflict, relapse, or rejection. Write a one-page postmortem: What was data (facts)? What was the story (interpretation)? What will I do differently next time?

Why: This turns failure from identity-evidence ("I am not capable") into design-evidence ("Here is what needs refinement").

Day 21: Community Check

Practice: Share one honest thing with a trusted person: a fear, a goal, a boundary, or a recent win you would usually minimise.

Why: Healthy connection regulates the nervous system, increases oxytocin, and anchors reality beyond your own echo chamber.

Days 22–24: Biochemistry and Ritual Integration (Cross-dimension: Regulation, Identity, Values)

Day 22: Scientific Gratitude

Practice: Write three specific events from the last 48 hours and why they mattered to you.

Why: Gratitude can train your attention towards what is present, rather than only what is missing.

I did this from a hospital chair. I do it now from my desk, in the shower, while walking, while talking, you name it! The location changes. The practice does not.

Day 23: Movement as a 40-Minute Reset

Practice: Choose 40 minutes of movement that feels joyful rather than punishing: dancing, long walk, swim, a class.

Why: Extended movement synchronises internal rhythms, supports endorphin release, and reinforces your identity as someone who honours the body.

Day 24: Micro-Celebration

Practice: Mark a small win from the last week with a non-consumption reward: a walk in a place you love, a call with someone who sees you, or five minutes of eyes-closed stillness, acknowledging yourself.

Why: When you consciously acknowledge progress, effort can begin to feel rewarding rather than purely effortful.

Days 25–27: Consolidation and Next-Level Design (All dimensions together)

Day 25: 30-Minute Systems Audit

Practice: Review the last three weeks. Ask: What routines or micro-practices clearly worked? What drained me repeatedly? What patterns kept repeating despite my intentions? Fix one friction point, simplify, remove, or redesign it.

Day 26: Design Your Next 90 Days

Practice: Using your three weekly blocks (Deep Work / Rest / People), map three measurable outcomes for the next quarter: one inner, one outer, one resources-related. Plug in the first concrete steps for each into your calendar for the next 2 to 3 weeks.

Day 27: Commitment Ritual

Practice: Write a one-page covenant to yourself that includes your chosen identity sentence, your top three values, 3 to 5 non-negotiable practices you will keep, and one accountability method (person, journal, calendar review). Sign it. Optionally, share it with someone you trust or place it somewhere you see daily.

I have written this covenant to myself more than once. Each time it meant something different. Each time it was true.

Quick Scripts and Tools You Can Reuse

Grounding before a tense conversation: 5 breaths (4 in, 4 hold, 6 out). Name the emotion aloud, "I am feeling anxious/frustrated." Ask, "Is my current plan strategy or survival?" Then choose your response.

Saying no, three variations: Direct, "I can't right now." Curious, "What's the timeframe for this?" Redirect, "I am not available, but have you considered X?"

Two-minute evidence ritual (daily): Name one small action you did that proves the new identity. Speak it aloud. Write one line, "Evidence: today I _____."

Short movement reset: 2 to 3 minutes of jumping jacks, brisk walking, or dancing to one song when you feel stuck.

Micro-gratitude script for the evening, "Today I noticed... I am grateful because... Tomorrow I will act by..."

Diagnostics: Which Dimension Is Breaking?

Use this quick self-check any time you feel stuck:

If you cannot make clear choices, start at Dimension 2, Regulation (breath, sleep, movement). Your system may be too dysregulated to design effectively.

If your calendar is full but you feel stagnant, start at Dimension 4, Values and Dimension 5, Design. You might be busy with misaligned work.

If you repeatedly break promises to yourself, start at Dimension 3, Identity. Your self-image may still be The Conditioned Human.

Run this diagnostic at the start of Day 1 and again around Day 14.

Why This Works

Breathwork and vagal nerve stimulation improve heart rate variability and executive function.

Gratitude interventions shift attentional bias toward resources and increase wellbeing (Emmons and McCullough and others).

Repetition rewires synaptic pathways (Hebbian plasticity); exposure reduces fear-circuit sensitivity; evidence-based identity shifts behaviour.

None of this is willpower theatre. It is architecture.

The Last Practical Edge

You will not be changed by thinking harder or by sentimentalising your pain. You will be changed by becoming more conscious of the invisible patterns that shape how you think, choose, and act. For years, the world taught you to fight outcomes. This work offers you a different way forward: a human operating system you can learn to read, question, and redesign.

The work is not spectacular; it is steady. The result is not louder; it is truer. Do the small, sometimes uncomfortable, repeating things, day after day. Let them become practice rather than another thing to complete. Over these 27 days, you may begin to notice something shifting: not because you became someone new, but because you started choosing differently from the person you had been.

That is the last thing to remember, and the first thing to live.

Appendices

Appendix A: MS, What I Know from the Inside

A note before you read this

I am not a doctor. I am a woman who spent nearly ten years being told her body was lying to her. What follows is not medical advice. It is the lived knowledge of someone who collected symptoms, got dismissed, did her own research, asked better questions, and eventually got the answers she needed. Use this to have better conversations with the professionals who can actually help you. Not as a diagnosis. Not as a verdict. As a starting point.

Your body is not lying. Your questions deserve answers.

What I wish I had known earlier

Multiple Sclerosis affects more than 2.8 million people worldwide, a number that has grown by 30 percent since 2013 according to the MS International Federation. It whispers for years before it shouts. Mine whispered for a decade. I ignored it, not because I was careless, but because every time I raised my hand and said something is wrong, someone with a medical degree told me I was overthinking it.

If I could go back, I would tell myself this: the fact that someone does not believe your symptoms does not mean your symptoms are not real. Keep the list. Keep the records. Ask again.

What MS can feel like: the full picture

This is the list I wish had existed when I was trying to make sense of my own body. These are real symptoms, documented in medical literature, and many of them are the ones that get missed, minimised, or misattributed for years. This is not a checklist for self-diagnosis. It is a map, so that if any of

this sounds familiar, you know you are not imagining it and you know what questions to ask.

Vision and sensory

Vision that blurs or doubles, sometimes in one eye only. Optic neuritis is frequently one of the earliest signs and one of the most commonly missed. Lhermitte's Sign, an electric shock sensation that travels down the spine when you bend your neck forward. I did not know this had a name for years. Numbness or tingling in the hands, feet, arms, or legs. A feeling that a limb has gone to sleep and will not wake up. Burning, stabbing, or aching pain that has no obvious physical cause. Hypersensitivity to touch, where even light pressure feels painful. Altered sensation, where things feel different from how they should.

Fatigue

MS fatigue is categorically different from being tired. It is a neurological fatigue that can arrive without warning, does not respond to rest, and can make even small tasks feel impossible. It is one of the most disabling symptoms of MS and one of the most dismissed. If someone with MS tells you they are tired, they are not talking about what you experienced after a long day.

Heat sensitivity

Heat makes MS symptoms significantly worse for most people. A hot shower, a warm day, or physical exertion can temporarily intensify any symptom. This is not psychological. It is neurological. The myelin that protects your nerve fibres conducts less efficiently as body temperature rises. Cooling down genuinely helps. This is why you will find me with my head in the freezer.

Movement and coordination

Muscle weakness, particularly in the legs. Spasticity, where muscles are stiff, tight, or prone to involuntary spasms. Tremors. Balance problems and dizziness. Difficulty walking, or a gait that changes noticeably. Drop foot,

where the foot does not lift properly when walking. Coordination issues, clumsiness, dropping things, difficulty with fine motor tasks.

Bladder and bowel

Bladder urgency, frequency, and incontinence. Difficulty fully emptying the bladder. Constipation or bowel urgency. These symptoms affect the majority of people with MS at some point and are discussed the least. I wore a pad to work every day for years. It is part of the invisible logistics of this condition that nobody talks about until someone does.

Cognitive

Cognitive fog, difficulty concentrating, processing information, or thinking clearly. Word-finding difficulties, knowing what you want to say but not being able to locate the word. Memory gaps. Slowed processing speed. Difficulty multitasking. These are sometimes called the invisible symptoms because they do not appear in a basic neurological examination. They are real. They are documented. And they can affect your ability to work, communicate, and function long before anyone around you notices.

Speech and swallowing

Slurred or slow speech. Difficulty swallowing. Voice changes. These are less common in early MS but worth knowing.

The MS Hug

A sensation of pressure, tightness, or squeezing around the torso, like a band being tightened around your chest or ribs. It is caused by spasms in the small muscles between the ribs. It is frequently mistaken for a cardiac event or anxiety. It is neither.

Pain

Both acute pain (sudden and intense) and chronic pain (persistent background pain) are common in MS. MS pain is neurological, not musculoskeletal, which is why standard pain management often does not work the way you expect.

Emotional and psychological

Depression and anxiety are significantly more common in people with MS than in the general population. This is neurological, not simply a response to having a difficult diagnosis. The brain itself is affected.

Pseudobulbar affect, involuntary episodes of laughing or crying that do not match your actual emotional state, also occurs in some people with MS. Neither of these is weakness. Both are symptoms.

Sleep

Insomnia, restless legs, spasms that interrupt sleep, and the general difficulty of sleeping in a body that is in pain or discomfort. Sleep deprivation compounds every other symptom. It is not a secondary issue.

What nobody tells you about the mind games

For me, the hardest part was not the physical symptoms. It was not trusting my own experience after years of being told I was wrong. There was a period where I had to be watched over, at work and at home, because the neurological effects of MS can make your mind an unreliable narrator of your own life. Your vision blurs. Your thoughts slip. You second-guess every sensation. You stop trusting your own body.

What helped: keeping records obsessively, numbering backwards through letters when the brain fog rolled in (1A through 26Z, just to prove to myself the machinery was still running), front door unlocked on hard days, emergency contacts visible. Small systems for a body that was no longer entirely predictable.

The stress connection

Stress does not cause MS. But stress is one of the most consistently documented relapse triggers, and most neurologists underemphasise it because they cannot prescribe for it.

Here is what happens. Stress activates the immune system. In MS, the immune system is already misfiring, attacking the myelin that protects your nerve fibres. Additional immune activation from chronic stress can worsen inflammation and increase the likelihood of a relapse.

The relationship also works in reverse. MS increases stress, the uncertainty, the unpredictability, the financial and professional implications, the relationships affected. And stress worsens MS. This is not a cycle you can reason your way out of. It requires structural changes to how you live, not just relaxation techniques.

What I found genuinely helped: removing chronic stressors where possible rather than simply managing the stress response to them. Gratitude practice as a neurological reset, not as a wellness exercise. Sleep is non-negotiable rather than the first thing to sacrifice. Movement within what the body allows on a given day, not against it. And the particular discipline of accepting that some days the win is simply not making things worse.

The mind-body connection: what the research shows

When I use the word psychosomatic, I am not using it to mean imaginary. I am using it to mean integrated. Psyche and soma, mind and body. MS is a real autoimmune neurological disease. Its lesions are measurable. Its damage is physiological. But how we live inside a body, matters to how that body responds.

I learnt this through a second, quieter chapter of my health story. Years after the MS diagnosis, I underwent surgery to remove endometriotic cysts. The surgeon was surprised I had lived with so many for so long. I remember waking up afterwards and experiencing something I had almost forgotten was possible: relief. A quiet body. A softness where there had once been constant pressure. I had genuinely believed that this level of pain was simply what women endured, that we were all functioning through discomfort and calling it normal. The contrast after surgery was humbling. Freedom is often recognised only in its absence.

Endometriosis and adenomyosis are influenced by hormonal patterns, inflammation, immune behaviour, and internal regulation. That realisation forced me to widen my lens. My body was not randomly betraying me. It was responding to an ecosystem.

Increasingly, research in psychoneuroimmunology demonstrates that chronic stress affects immune response, inflammatory markers, and nervous system regulation. The mind and body are not separate systems operating in

isolation, they are in constant dialogue. Chronic sympathetic activation. Suppressed boundaries. Emotional overextension. Years of normalising pain and stress. These shape internal terrain in ways that matter.

I am not a victim of my body. I take full responsibility for how I lived inside it, for the years I minimised exhaustion, for the times I overrode pain, for the patterns of people-pleasing and silent endurance I once wore as strength. The diagnoses gave me relief. Awareness gave me agency. Regulation gave me power.

I share this for one reason: you are not crazy. Your pain is not weakness. If something feels off, investigate it. Seek help. Ask better questions. The body does not fabricate suffering. It communicates. Listen.

Advocating for yourself: what worked for me

Track everything for at least two weeks. Date, symptom, duration, what made it better or worse. Heat, stress, and fatigue are the three most common triggers. This is not hypochondria. This is data. Doctors respect data far more than verbal descriptions from memory.

Ask specifically. Not just what is wrong with me, but: can we rule out a demyelinating condition? Can we consider a referral to a neurologist? Can we document these patterns so there is a record if they persist?

If you are dismissed, say this: my symptoms are continuing. I would like this documented in my file. A doctor who cannot help you should at least be willing to create a paper trail.

If you are in India, a private 3T MRI with contrast was available for under twenty thousand rupees as of 2026. Ask your doctor whether this is appropriate for your situation.

The dismissal patterns I encountered

You are just stressed. Anxiety can cause all of this. It is probably a B12 deficiency. You are overthinking it.

Some of these things are true for some people. But they are also used, routinely, to close a conversation that should stay open. If you have been

told all of these things at different times and the symptoms keep returning, the conversation should continue.

Women between thirty and fifty are at peak onset risk for MS and also at the highest risk of misdiagnosis. This is not a coincidence. It is a pattern worth knowing.

There is no cure yet

As of the time of writing, there is no known cure for MS medically. Though disease-modifying therapies are available that can significantly slow progression. The cause is not fully understood and is likely multifactorial. What there is: disease-modifying therapies that can slow progression, symptom management strategies that genuinely improve quality of life, and an enormous amount of research underway.

What there also is: a community of people living full, extraordinary, undiminished lives with this diagnosis. Running half-marathons. Writing books. Bungee jumping in the Himalayas. Dancing the Macarena before surgery. Living loudly.

Use this wisely

Print it if it helps. Share it with someone who needs it. But please, always put it in conversation with a doctor who can actually examine you. This knowledge took me ten years. I am sharing it, so you do not have to take that long to start asking the right questions.

Appendix B: Breathing Practices Quick Guide

The breath is the only part of the autonomic nervous system you can consciously control. Every other function, your heartbeat, your digestion, your stress response, runs on its own schedule. But the breath responds to your instruction. And because the breath is directly connected to the nervous system, changing your breathing pattern changes your physiological state within minutes. Not hours. Minutes.

I came to these practices not through a wellness trend but through necessity. When the MS symptoms were at their worst, when the anxiety of not knowing what my body would do next was loudest, breath was the one tool that was always available. No equipment. No appointment. No good day required.

These are the three I return to most.

4-4-8 Breathing: The Daily Reset

Inhale for four counts. Hold for four counts. Exhale for eight counts. Repeat for five to ten minutes.

The extended exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system, the rest-and-digest response that counteracts the stress response. Use this every morning before you pick up your phone. It sets the tone for the entire day.

4-7-8 Breathing: The Anxiety Interrupt

Inhale for four counts. Hold for seven counts. Exhale for eight counts. Repeat for five to ten minutes.

The longer hold builds carbon dioxide tolerance and slows the heart rate significantly. Use this before anything that makes you anxious. An important meeting. A difficult conversation. A medical appointment. It works.

Box Breathing: The Clarity Tool

Inhale for four counts. Hold for four counts. Exhale for four counts. Hold for four counts. Repeat for five to ten minutes.

Equal intervals on all four sides create balanced, coherent breathing that improves focus and decision-making. This is what Navy SEALs use before high-stakes situations. Equal parts power and calm.

A note: if you feel lightheaded when you start these practices, you are breathing too fast or too deeply. Slow down. These techniques work best when done gently, not forcefully.

Appendix C: The Three Lenses Journal Prompts

A limiting belief is a thought that has been repeated so many times it stopped feeling like a thought and started feeling like a fact. The Three Lenses practice is a way of examining that belief from three different angles, not to argue yourself out of it, but to understand it. Beliefs formed for a reason. They were protecting you from something at the time. Dismantling them without understanding their origin is like removing a load-bearing wall without knowing what it supports.

Sit with one belief at a time. Do not rush through this. The insight usually arrives in the pause, not in the writing.

When you identify a limiting belief, write it at the top of a page. Then work through the three lenses below.

Lens 1: Protection

What was this belief trying to protect me from? What fear or hurt was it addressing? How did this belief serve me when I first formed it?

Lens 2: Origin

When did I first learn this belief? Who taught me this, directly or indirectly? What situation made this belief feel true?

Lens 3: Wisdom

What would a trusted mentor tell me about this belief? Is this actually true, or is it one possible interpretation? What more empowering belief could I choose instead?

Appendix D: Daily Practices Checklist

These are not aspirational suggestions. They are the practices I built my stability on during the hardest years of my life and that I continue to use now. Some days I do all of them. Some days I do two. The goal is not perfection. The goal is consistency over time, the same way compound interest works. Small deposits, made regularly, that accumulate into something unrecognisable a year later.

Start with what you can. Add as it becomes habit. The morning practices matter most. They set the frequency for everything that follows.

Each Morning:

☐ 5-minute breathing practice ☐ 5-minute gratitude journaling ☐ 10-minute energy sketching ☐ Healthy breakfast ☐ Movement (walk, yoga, exercise)

Each Evening:

☐ 5-minute reflection ☐ 5-minute gentle breathing ☐ 30 minutes before sleep (no screens)

Each Week:

☐ Sunday review (30 minutes) ☐ 2 to 3 gap goal activities daily ☐ One act of service

Each Month:

☐ Deep dive review (1 hour) ☐ One new practice or adjustment

Each Quarter:

☐ Full recalibration (half day) ☐ Celebrate progress ☐ Reset for next 90 days

There is a creed I return to often, written by Christian D. Larson in 1912, that I first encountered years ago and which has stayed with me ever since:

Promise Yourself

To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet. To make all your friends feel that there is something in them. To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true. To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best. To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own. To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile. To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticise others. To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

— Christian D. Larson, 1912. Some wisdom has no expiry date.

Appendix E: Understanding Consent: When It Feels Confusing

This appendix exists because confusion about consent is not weakness. It is what happens when something happens to you that your mind cannot fully process at the time, and that the world around you does not always have honest language for.

I included this because Chapter 7 of this book touches on experiences that many women have had and that very few books discuss with clarity. If anything in that chapter resonated personally, the questions below are ones I have heard asked by real people trying to understand their own experience. The answers are not legal advice. They are honest ones.

You do not have to have an answer right now. You just have to know that your confusion makes sense.

Q. If someone forces himself onto you without consent, is it rape?

Yes. If a person forces themselves on someone without consent, that is rape. Consent means:

Freely given. Clear and enthusiastic. Not forced, pressured, manipulated, or taken when someone is unable to agree.

If someone forces, coerces, threatens, or continues despite a no, lack of response, fear, intoxication, or inability to resist, it is considered rape or sexual assault under the law in most places.

Q. But what if I had to give in to avoid getting hurt, and that person is a good friend, and if you enjoyed it later, is it still rape?

Yes. It can still be rape or sexual assault.

Consent must be freely given. If someone feels they have to give in to avoid getting hurt, that is not free consent. That is coercion or force.

A few important points that often confuse people:

Giving in to protect yourself is a survival response. Psychologists call this a "freeze" or "fawn" response, the brain tries to reduce danger.

Knowing the person does not change the definition. A friend, partner, colleague, or date can still commit sexual assault if they ignore or override consent.

Feeling physical pleasure later does not change what happened. The body can respond automatically to stimulation even when the mind does not choose it. Physical arousal is a biological reflex, not proof of consent.

Mixed feelings afterward are extremely common. None of that erases whether consent was missing at the start.

What matters most is this: Were you free to say no without fear? Did you actually want it, or did you feel pressured or unsafe?

If this question is connected to something you personally experienced, the confusion you are describing is very common. Talking it through with a trusted person, counsellor, or support service can help you sort through the feelings without judgement. You do not have to figure it out alone.

Q. What if I am still friends with the person?

You can still be friends with someone and what happened can still have been non-consensual.

The brain often tries to preserve the relationship. People compartmentalise. Someone can have qualities you like and still cross a serious boundary at some point. Staying friends does not rewrite the past.

What matters is the moment it happened: Did you feel you could freely say no? Or did you feel you had to go along to stay safe?

Q. What if I did not say no clearly or strongly enough?

Consent is not the responsibility of the person trying to resist. It is the responsibility of the person proceeding to ensure there is clear, willing participation.

Hesitation, silence, discomfort, or lack of enthusiasm are not signals to continue. They are signals to stop. The absence of a strong "no" does not create a "yes."

Q. What if I froze and did not react at all?

Freezing is a natural survival response. When the brain perceives threat, it can shut down movement and speech to reduce danger.

Not reacting is not the same as agreeing. It often means the body chose safety over confrontation in that moment.

Q. What if I am only realising later that it was not okay?

This is more common than people realise. Understanding can take time, especially when the situation involves confusion, familiarity, or emotional complexity.

Realisation does not have a deadline. Clarity can come months or years later, and that does not make it less valid.

Q. What if I do not feel traumatised, does that mean it was not serious?

People respond differently to experiences. Some feel immediate distress. Others feel neutral, confused, or detached.

The absence of visible trauma does not determine whether consent was present. What matters is whether there was freedom and willingness in that moment.

Q. What if I am still not sure what I felt about it?

Uncertainty is not uncommon in complex situations. You do not need to rush to label your experience. But you can ask yourself:

Did I feel free? Did I want this? Or was I managing the situation?

Clarity often comes from gently revisiting the experience, not forcing an answer.

Intellectual Influences and Grounding

This work is the result of lived experience, deep observation, and the integration of established thinking across psychology, neuroscience, behavioural science, philosophy, and coaching. The ideas here do not emerge in isolation. They sit within a broader lineage of thinkers whose work shaped the frameworks, language, and understanding across these pages.

Psychology of Self-Image and Behaviour The role of self-image as a regulating force in behaviour draws from Maxwell Maltz's *Psycho-Cybernetics* (1960), which proposed that a person's behaviour rarely exceeds the ceiling set by their internal self-concept. This idea runs through the identity and authority chapters directly.

Human Needs and Motivation Understanding behaviour through underlying needs is informed by Abraham Maslow's *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943) and Tony Robbins' articulation of the Six Human Needs framework, which extends Maslow's model into a dynamic motivational structure widely applied in coaching and behavioural work.

Neuroscience and Brain Plasticity The brain's capacity for change across a lifetime draws from neuroscientist Michael Merzenich's research on neuroplasticity, documented in *Soft-Wired* (2013), and Norman Doidge's *The Brain That Changes Itself* (2007), which brought this science into accessible public conversation.

Consciousness and Thought The principle that thought shapes reality echoes James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh* (1903) and the broader philosophical lineage running through William James, whose *The*

Principles of Psychology (1890) laid foundational groundwork for understanding how belief systems drive human behaviour.

Nervous System and Trauma Insights into stress responses, nervous system regulation, and behavioural adaptation are informed by Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), Peter Levine's work on somatic experiencing in *Waking the Tiger* (1997), and Gabor Maté's research on the connection between emotional suppression and chronic illness in *When the Body Says No* (2003).

The Be-Do-Have framework is a widely circulated paradigm in the personal development space, frequently adapted by various coaches, philosophers, and authors, including Tony Robbins and Neale Donald Walsch.

Identity and Conditioning The exploration of how identity is installed and maintained draws from Carl Jung's work on the unconscious, particularly *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959), and from Bruce Lipton's *The Biology of Belief* (2005), which examines how subconscious programming shapes biology and behaviour. Lipton's ideas are offered here as a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between mind and body rather than as mainstream biological science

Energy and Consciousness Mapping References to consciousness levels and emotional frequency draw from David R. Hawkins' *Power vs. Force* (1995), which maps human emotional states on a calibrated scale and has been widely referenced in personal development and coaching contexts. This model is a philosophical and contemplative framework rather than an empirically validated scientific scale, and is offered here as a lens for self-reflection.

Multiple Sclerosis Research and Statistics MS prevalence data and neurological references are informed by the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, published in *The Lancet Neurology*, and by resources from the Multiple Sclerosis International Federation's Atlas of MS (2020 edition).

Personal Acknowledgement A particular acknowledgement to Ron Malhotra, whose work in executive leadership and human performance contributed meaningfully to the thinking developed in this book.

While these influences form part of the intellectual foundation of this work, the integration, interpretation, and application of these ideas is entirely the author's own, shaped by two decades of lived experience, coaching practice, and personal transformation.

Invitation

For those who are ready to go deeper, to not just see, but rebuild:

‘Chaos to Significance’ within The Awakened Path programme is my transformational identity mentorship, where this work becomes structured. Where awareness is turned into action. Where patterns are not just understood, but rewired. Where identity is consciously redesigned.

This is not surface level coaching. This is identity-level work.

This is not for everyone. It is for those who are ready to take full ownership of their life. To do the work consistently. To choose differently, even when it is uncomfortable.

If that is you, you will feel it.

And when you feel it, you will not need convincing, only a decision.

www.thenatashapinto.com

I am here to feel it all. The sunshine and the storms. The laughter and the grief. The lessons that broke me open and the ones that quietly built me. I did not come here to cherry-pick the good parts. I came to experience the whole extraordinary, heartbreaking, hilarious, luminous thing we call life.

Natasha Pinto

My life is the loudest love letter I'll ever write to the truth of who I really am.

— Reflection #555, *Bold, Beautiful & Blunt*

www.thenatashapinto.com

About the Book

This is not a book about surviving illness. It is not a book about resilience in the motivational-poster sense. It is the honest account of a decade that should have broken someone and did not, and the framework that emerged from the middle of it.

The Awakened Path: From Chaos to Significance is part memoir, part transformation framework, part field guide for anyone who has ever looked at their own life and felt the gap between what they are living and what they know is possible. Natasha Pinto was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at 34, after nearly a decade of being dismissed by doctors. She left corporate at 40. She published this book at 41. The timeline she thought she had missed was the wrong timeline. Hers was still being written.

Across 28 chapters, she maps the journey from collapse to consciousness, from inherited identity to chosen life, from silence to significance. The book integrates neuroscience, personal narrative, psycho-cybernetics, and a 27-day applied protocol into a framework anyone can use. But at its core it is simply one woman's refusal to let the hardest thing in her life be the final word.

It is not simply a book. It is a life, documented.

About the Author

Natasha Pinto is a storyteller, author, transformational identity mentor, and speaker whose work centres on identity, self-leadership, and the architecture of a significant life. After nearly two decades in corporate life, she stepped away from conventional success to rebuild her life from the inside out, shaped by a decade of invisible illness, misdiagnosis, and an MS diagnosis that arrived after years of being dismissed.

She is the recipient of the NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Award, India's most prestigious recognition for disability inclusion, and a HERoes Role Model by INvolve People, a prestigious global recognition celebrating leaders who champion inclusion and gender diversity worldwide.

She has run a half-marathon with ice packs strapped to her body, bungee jumped in the Himalayas, scuba dived and skydived, not because she was trying to prove something, but because she refused to let her body write the limits of her life. She shows up for it fully, every single day.

She now runs a mentoring practice that helps high-achieving, deeply unfulfilled women find their way back to themselves.

The Awakened Path: From Chaos to Significance is her second book. She is also the author of *Bold, Beautiful & Blunt: 555 Reflections for Identity, Healing, Boundaries and Becoming*.

If these pages have landed and you want to do this work with support, the Chaos to Significance programme is where that happens.

Learn more at www.thenatashapinto.com

Continue the conversation: [@thenatashapinto](https://www.instagram.com/thenatashapinto)