

C.A.P.S.U.L.E.

Your Daily Dose of Calm and Coping:
Simple Skills for a Stress-Free and Soulful Life

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This book distills the wisdom of those who shaped my journey.

I dedicate this to my late mother, who taught me life's simplest yet most profound lessons: to be content, to work hard, to remain honest, and to always be grateful. Her values continue to live within me, quietly guiding my choices every day.

I am deeply grateful to my father, who instilled in me the immeasurable value of education and the power of disciplined learning. His faith in knowledge laid the foundation for all I have achieved.

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To all of you, this C.A.P.S.U.L.E. carries your essence. May it offer others the same healing, understanding, and ease that your presence has brought into my life.

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Introduction

What Medical Practice Alone Couldn't Teach Me

This book did not begin with the intention of writing.

It began in my quiet moments of observation—watching people struggle, feel stuck, or live with dis-ease, *often unaware of simple, practical insights that could bring them greater ease.*

It evolved slowly over decades of medical practice, lived experience, quiet observation, and deep personal reflection.

As a general medical practitioner for over thirty years, I was trained to diagnose, treat, and manage disease. I learned to read reports, interpret symptoms, prescribe medications, and follow evidence-based protocols. Yet, with time, I began to sense a gap—subtle but persistent. Many patients improved, yet returned. Symptoms were managed, but the imbalance lingered. Healing felt incomplete.

That realisation stayed with me, growing into a silent but persistent need to share.

I felt a responsibility to offer these insights in small, meaningful doses—something simple, practical, and easy to carry into everyday life.

At the same time, my own body was keeping its own record, steadily reflecting what I had not yet paused to understand. Looking back, I can now see where it all began.

Early in my career, I lost my mother. Life moved on relentlessly—marriage, two consecutive pregnancies, postpartum psychosis, financial strain, and the unspoken

expectation to cope silently. Like many professionals, I functioned, adapted, and pushed forward, *unaware* of how deeply stress was embedding itself within me. Over the years, frequent migraines, obesity, high blood pressure, and prediabetes appeared, not suddenly, but quietly, as if my body was gently insisting on being heard.

As a doctor myself, it took me decades to truly understand the impact of stress, not as an abstract concept, but as a biological force leaving its footprint on every cell, every organ and every system of the body. Psychiatric medications dulled my distress but did not restore inner ease or peace. Support from a well-wishing friend, my sisters, and self-help books helped, but only partially. Healing remained fragmented.

A deeper realisation emerged when my children grew up and moved away. With roles shifting, loneliness and helplessness surfaced, inviting me, for the first time, to look inward rather than keep going outward.

That was when I began exploring new paths of self-expression and growth. One of them was life coaching. Coaching taught me something medicine alone had not. It taught me to understand myself deeply. I began to recognise my emotional triggers, realign with my values, reconnect with my dreams, redefine my goals, and rediscover enjoyment without guilt. Emotional regulation was no longer something I merely read about. It became something I lived.

Small, conscious shifts began to change the way I responded to life. I slept better. My headaches became less frequent. I was less reactive in difficult moments, and even my blood pressure

settled into a healthier range. *As my responses to life changed, my body improved with them.*

Around the same time, I joined a local public speaking club. Each speech I prepared and shared became more than an exercise in communication; it became a transformational journey. Through stories drawn from my medical practice and personal life, I found myself articulating truths I had long lived but never named. Speaking helped me reflect. Reflection helped me understand. And understanding slowly brought clarity.

Naturally, this awareness flowed into my medical practice.

When I began integrating simple life-coping skills alongside treatment, something remarkable happened. Patients became more engaged. Compliance improved. Conversations deepened. Many realised how stress shaped their symptoms and began taking responsibility for both physical and emotional well-being. Healing became participatory. *Medicine worked better when coping improved.*

This is how C.A.P.S.U.L.E. came to be.

This book, C.A.P.S.U.L.E., is a collection of small, practical, everyday coping skills designed to be taken gently, consistently, and without overwhelm. Just as medication works best when taken regularly, coping skills work best when practised daily. This is not a book of quick fixes or dramatic promises. It is a quiet companion in which I have tried to explain medical concepts as simply as possible, alongside personal reflection, lived wisdom, and real-life stories.

At its core, this book rests on one conviction:

When people understand how stress affects the body and learn healthy ways to cope with life, they can move from disease to ease.

I write not as an expert, but as a fellow traveller still learning to navigate life with awareness.

This book isn't meant to instruct, but to accompany you on the journey from dis-ease to ease. If you are feeling tired, overwhelmed, disconnected, or quietly struggling, know that nothing is wrong with you. Your body may simply be asking for attention and a little understanding.

Let C.A.P.S.U.L.E. be your daily dose of calm, clarity, coping, and care.

Chapter 1:

Stress Crossroads: Rush or Rest

No time to think, it just runs!

A deer suddenly starts running when a hungry lion leaps out of the tall grass to chase it. In that moment, the deer's body reacts instantly. Its energy rises, its senses sharpen, and its entire being focuses on one goal: **stay alive!**

This is stress in its purest and most powerful form.

Stress is designed to protect us and help us survive danger.

Stress!

All of us have felt it at some point—the sudden surge of fear.

A boy may feel it while running in fear as a mad dog chases him down the street. A parent may feel it when a child suddenly swallows a coin. A family may feel it while anxiously waiting outside an operating theatre for a loved one undergoing emergency surgery.

It is an invisible force that influences our lives more than we realise. We cannot see or touch it, yet we experience it in many moments of our daily lives. It quietly moves through our thoughts and emotions.

Before a presentation, it can make the heart pound and the palms grow sweaty. Headaches, abdominal discomfort, and sleep loss can also be signs of this invisible force.

Often dismissed as “just a feeling”, stress is actually a whole-body reaction that affects both the mind and the body.

To better understand this, let us look at where our stress response first originated.

The Jungle Outside and the Jungle Within Us

Long ago, our ancestors lived in wild, open lands. They spent their days hunting for food, gathering what they could, and staying alert for danger. They had to be ready to run, hide, or fight if a wild animal came too close. Their survival depended on quick reactions and sharp instincts. The stress they felt in those moments helped them stay alive.

Today, our world is far less dangerous. We no longer have to flee from wild animals or fight to survive.

Why Does Modern Life Still Leave Us So Stressed Out?

Perhaps we are living in a different kind of jungle, “*a modern jungle*,” where deadlines, heartbreaks, cancelled trips, and arguments at home have become the “lions”.

Even though we’re no longer being chased, our brains don’t always realise it. That’s the strange part: our threats have changed, but our response hasn’t. To your brain, a missed deadline, a heated conversation, or even a traffic jam can feel like a lion is chasing you; they all seem like real threats.

Ask yourself:

What are the lions chasing you?

- Is it your boss or your workload?
- Is it an illness that’s been troubling you?

- Is it a strained relationship, financial worry, or constant self-imposed expectations?

When Stress Helps: The Energy That Empowers

The word *stress* often carries a negative connotation, but not all stress is harmful. In fact, a certain kind of stress can lift us higher, fuel our performance, and help us grow. This positive form of stress is called Eustress, the energy that empowers us.

I experienced this while delivering a keynote speech at an International Women's Day celebration at an engineering college. My schedule was tight, and the preparation time even tighter. That morning, as I was escorted to the stage, my heart raced, my palms grew clammy, and my legs trembled. Beneath the nervousness, though, was a spark of excitement.

The moment I began speaking, my fear gave way to focus. I spoke with confidence and passion, even without referring to my notes. That was stress empowering me—transforming anxiety into excellence.

Stress is like a visitor. When its visits are short, it can support and energise us. These visits can take many forms:

- Life transitions—starting a new job or becoming a parent
- Challenges—competitions, workouts, or solving a critical problem
- New experiences—travelling or learning something new

But when stress overwhelms and paralyses us, it becomes *distress*. Even distress can be reframed as positive stress if we see it as an opportunity for growth. A setback, approached with awareness, can become the seed of transformation.

But what happens when this visitor lingers too long?

It begins to speak through the body.

I began to see this frequently in my practice.

Vandana walked into my clinic with a grim expression, her hand clutched to her chest.

“I think I pulled a muscle while cleaning”, she said, half-convinced. “It’s been aching for a few days.”

As a general practitioner, I see many such complaints. At first glance, it seemed like a simple muscle strain. But her tired, flat, almost detached tone made me dig deeper.

I asked a few routine questions, then more specific ones.

“How’s your sleep?”

She sighed. “Restless. Feeling more tired than I was before.”

“Appetite?”

“Not much. I eat only because I have to.”

“Any recent changes in your menstrual cycle?”

“It’s been irregular, and the flow has been heavier than usual.”

She hesitated for a moment, then added softly, “My husband’s been diagnosed with a major heart condition. He’s scheduled for heart surgery next month. I’ve kept my pain to myself so he wouldn’t see me crumble.”

And there it was! The silent weight beneath all the symptoms.

She had been carrying the invisible weight of fear, care, and responsibility for weeks. What she felt was far more than physical strain; It was her body’s quiet way of speaking. *The*

effects of lingering stress did not stop at the muscles. They moved deeper, affecting the systems that quietly sustain life: her sleep, her appetite, and her monthly cycle. Slowly, the delicate balance that keeps the body healthy began to shift.

Vandana's story stayed with me—not because her symptoms were rare, but because they were so familiar. Many of us live this way without realising it. We ignore the body's whispers until they turn into screams. We push through headaches, brush off sleepless nights, and dismiss persistent fatigue as “normal.”

But the body remembers every sign we ignore and every emotion we bury. Emotional strain does not disappear simply because we appear strong; it finds new ways to speak through discomfort, pain, and exhaustion.

When stress lingers, it is like an unwelcome guest—quietly disruptive, gradually disturbing the body's natural rhythm. It leaves gentle yet persistent footprints across our system.

To understand how this happens, we must look beneath the surface. One way to grasp this hidden process is to imagine the body as a living city.

Stress Beneath the Surface

The City Within: The Rush Lane and the Rest Lane

Imagine your body as a bustling city—vibrant, organised, and tirelessly working behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly. At the heart of this city lies a master control panel with two buttons, each leading down a very different path: the Rush Lane and the Rest Lane.

Let us begin with Rush Lane.

The Rush Lane: Your Inner Firefighters

On a stormy evening, dark clouds gather over the city. The river swells as floodwaters rise, blocking streets with fallen trees and debris. In an instant, the city springs into action. The Rush Lane opens, and police, rescue teams, and firefighters get to work. Traffic is halted, streets cleared, and emergency routes secured. The power supply is rerouted as needed. Every resource is focused on one goal—keeping the city functional and safe.

Your body responds similarly to stress. The Sympathetic Nervous System, *_The Rush Lane of the Body_*, takes charge and releases stress hormones that prepare you for action. Energy is diverted from everyday functions and long-term repair to support immediate safety, much like a deer running for its life. For a short time, this response is remarkable. You become alert, sharp, and ready to act.

But what happens when the flood does not recede for a long time? The entire city remains trapped in emergency mode, maintaining only the bare essentials needed to keep it functioning. Back in the city, the rescue teams grow weary. Supplies run low. Bridges begin to crack. Normal activities and repairs are delayed.

Something very similar begins to happen inside the body. What was once a helpful short-term response slowly stops empowering us and starts to exhaust us, affecting every cell and every organ.

At the cellular level, stress behaves like a slow-burning fire. That is inflammation.

Normally, inflammation is a welcome visitor. It arrives when needed, helps repair damage, and then quietly departs. It is a natural healing process that brings warmth, redness, swelling, and sometimes pain as the body protects and repairs injured tissues.

But when stress persists, inflammation never fully switches off. The same process meant to heal begins to harm. It slowly damages the very tissues it was meant to protect, paving the way for disease.

As this internal fire continues, the body's tiny crew—the cells—begin to tire. Their communication weakens, and energy fades. Gradually, the body shifts focus to survival, reducing activities such as growth, digestion, detoxification, and repair that keep it healthy. The immune system, your internal defence team, grows tired from standing guard for too long. Sometimes it fails to protect when you need it, leaving you vulnerable to infections. At other times, it becomes overly reactive, triggering allergies or even autoimmune flare-ups.

The gut—often called the second brain—is among the first to feel the impact. **Rush mode** unsettles digestion, slows nutrient absorption, and disrupts the delicate balance of gut bacteria. This is why so many people living in constant rush mode experience acidity, bloating, constipation, or irregular bowel habits. The body cannot nourish or heal itself properly when it is stuck in “The Rush lane”.

The hormonal and reproductive systems are equally sensitive. Stress hormones quietly suppress those responsible for mood, growth, fertility, and repair. Menstrual cycles become

irregular, libido dips, and healing slows. The body prioritises survival over creation, renewal, and restoration.

Even the brain begins to function differently under prolonged strain. Thoughts scatter, focus slips. A small worry can quickly spiral into overthinking. The mind remains on high alert, scanning for danger even when the world around us is safe. Over time, this constant vigilance depletes emotional strength, impairs clear thinking, and fundamentally alters the brain's response to daily life.

Even emotions such as anger, resentment, or sadness, when allowed to linger, can leave an imprint of inflammation across every system, every organ, and every cell, quietly paving the way for disease. The body, like the city, was never designed to live permanently on Rush Lane. It was meant to move between urgency and rest, as nature intended.

There is another path—quieter, calmer, and often overlooked—the Rest Lane.

The Rest Lane: Your Everyday Repair Crew

This is the domain of the Parasympathetic nervous system—your body's "Rest Lane". It is your body's natural repair crew. When you slow down, breathe deeply, laugh, stretch, sleep, or pause, you signal your body to resume its routine work of detoxification, healing, and repair.

Blood pressure drops. Digestion resumes. Hormones balance. Growth and vitality return. The body quietly restores what stress had disrupted.

*It is in the **Rest-Lane** that your body heals, rebuilds, and restores balance.*

Just as a city comes back to life after a storm, your body regains its rhythm – one calm breath at a time.

True healing cannot happen when we are constantly in rush mode.

It happens in rest.

Managing Stress: The Path to Recovery

Understanding stress is only the beginning. The real transformation lies in how we respond to it. In the next chapter, we will explore how people cope with stress—and how those choices shape resilience, recovery, and well-being.



*Stress is a visitor. Let it come in.
Just remember: it doesn't need to stay for long.
– Dr Jabeen Ashia.*

Chapter 2:

The Road to Resilience from Dis-ease to Ease: A Choice You Can Make

“I can’t believe I finished an entire packet of chips.”

I stared at the empty packet as the last few crumbs clung stubbornly to the inside, suddenly aware of what I had done. My fingers were still dusted with masala, and my mind slowly caught up with what my body had just done. I wasn’t hungry at all—I was overwhelmed, trying to quiet the unease within me.

Stress had a way of creeping into my life, often showing up in my relationship with food. I’d find myself standing in front of my snack cupboard, desperately seeking something to soothe the unease gnawing at me. I’d devour anything, hoping to fill a void that wasn’t hunger.

Arguments, overwhelming days, or difficult moments at work often pushed me towards food. Whatever the reason, I found myself eating more when I was stressed. I knew food wasn’t the solution, yet the temporary distraction was hard to resist. Later, I realised something important: when stress enters our lives, it rarely stays hidden. It almost always surfaces.

For some people, like me, stress surfaced as *mindless eating*, offering a quick comfort that quietened the restless mind for a while.

But not everyone turns to food.

Hama withdrew, depriving herself of food and remaining silent.

Sometimes the same internal turmoil manifests not as *withdrawal*, but as an *eruption*. Lakshmi had waited two long years to conceive. When she finally became pregnant, her family was elated. But one evening, a heated argument erupted at home. Feeling wounded and unsupported, she lost control of her emotions and cried out in anguish. The emotional upheaval left her shaken. Later that night, she began experiencing severe abdominal pain and bleeding. She was rushed to the hospital, where doctors confirmed she had miscarried.

Although many factors may contribute to such outcomes, experiences like these remind us how deeply emotional turmoil can affect the body, especially during vulnerable times.

For Somu, this hidden strain took the path of *escape*.

Somu believed alcohol offered an escape from his worries. What began as an occasional drink gradually became a nightly habit. For a time, alcohol dulled his concerns, but the relief was fleeting. In its wake, new problems emerged: frequent arguments at home, mounting aggression, and ultimately a serious accident while driving under the influence.

The stress remained—it had only intensified.

Some cope not by escaping, but by avoiding.

Sudha, a schoolteacher, skipped every free cancer screening camp offered at her school. She wasn't indifferent to her health; rather, she feared what she might uncover—in her

mind, ignorance felt safer than confronting a possible diagnosis.

Avoidance brought her short-term peace, but it also postponed the chance for early detection and intervention.

Others neglect their own needs while caring for everyone else.

For years, Kumari prioritised her family over herself. When she experienced heavy menstrual bleeding, she dismissed it as a normal part of ageing and perimenopause. She ignored her fatigue, dizziness, and other warning signs. By the time she sought medical help, she was severely anaemic and facing early heart complications.

For some, like Kumari, stress surfaced as *self-neglect*.

For others, like Miyan, it took the form of *denial*.

They disregard the signals their bodies send, convincing themselves that all is well.

Miyan, a busy businessman, believed stress could not affect him. Even when his blood sugar readings were dangerously high, he brushed them off, convinced that in the absence of symptoms, the illness wasn't real. That illusion proved tragically wrong when he eventually had to undergo a foot amputation due to poor circulation.

Stress can also push some people to chase *constant excitement*, often without realising they are fleeing inner discomfort. Venkat loved taking long motorcycle rides. Whenever work pressures built up, he would hit the highway. The speed, the wind, and the rush offered him a temporary escape from his worries. Riding became his way to quiet the turmoil within.

But one rainy afternoon, riding too fast on a winding hill road, his bike skidded. The accident was fatal.

What once felt like freedom had quietly become danger.

These stories may seem different, yet they share a common thread.

Each person was trying to cope with life in the best way they knew.

They were all searching for relief, safety, or control when life became overwhelming.

But coping does not have to lead us into deeper distress.

Sometimes, it can become a path to healing.

I saw this in Rao, a respected senior colleague who endured a loss no parent should face. When COVID-19 took his young son, Rao withdrew entirely from life. He stopped answering calls, avoided people, and isolated himself from those who cared for him.

Time moved on, but the pain remained.

What slowly drew him back was his two-year-old grandson, who had just started to speak. One day, the little boy asked a question that cut through his grandfather's grief:

“Where is Thatha?” [grandpa]

In that moment, Rao realised that although he had lost his son, he still had a purpose: his grandson needed him.

Gradually, he began to reconnect with life. He also started a charity service in his son's name.

His grief did not vanish, but it found meaning. Through love, responsibility, and purpose, he discovered a healthier way to cope.

That is the essence of resilience.

Healthy coping isn't about avoiding pain or pretending all is well. It's about meeting life's challenges with awareness and choosing responses that foster healing instead of harm.

Healthy coping doesn't erase pain. It gradually helps us rediscover meaning, connection, and the strength to keep going.

Ask Yourself:

- When life feels overwhelming, how do I instinctively cope?
- Does my coping response truly support healing, or does it offer only temporary relief?

Coping isn't about changing who we are.

It's about understanding ourselves with kindness.

It's about noticing when stress takes over and gently guiding ourselves back.

It's about choosing responses that foster calm rather than chaos.

That choice is what slowly leads us from **dis-ease to ease**.

As you read these stories, perhaps you recognised parts of yourself in them.

Let go of self-judgment.

Instead, offer yourself understanding.

Because the moment we understand how we cope is the moment healing begins.

The C.A.P.S.U.L.E. Prescription

What if I told you there was a prescription with no chemicals and nothing to swallow? One that gently guides you from dis-ease back to ease. Over the years—as a doctor, mother, life coach, and observer of many human journeys—I have learned that resilience isn't innate, *it's built*, moment by moment, especially during times of stress, uncertainty, and pain.

From these experiences, the **C.A.P.S.U.L.E. framework emerged**—a simple resilience kit built around seven powerful habits.

Just as a medicine capsule contains different ingredients working together to heal the body, this C.A.P.S.U.L.E. offers seven life-strengthening elements that help restore harmony to mind and body.

C – Calmness

The ability to quiet the storm within.

A – Adaptability

The flexibility to adjust when life shifts unexpectedly.

P – Positive Perspective

The power to find possibilities even in difficulty.

S – Self-Care

The wisdom to nourish your body and mind.

U – Understanding

The courage to look inward and know yourself fully.

L – Laughter

The healing lightness that softens life's burdens.

E – Enjoyment

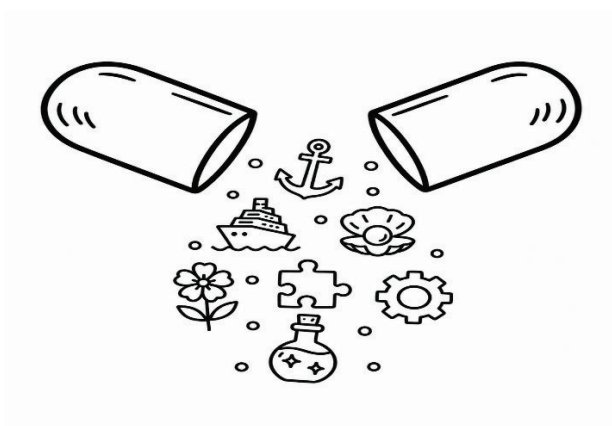
The ability to savour life's simple moments.

Each of these elements strengthens resilience and gently moves us from survival toward balance, vitality, and meaning.

Consider this framework a **daily prescription for resilience**.

A prescription you can carry with you anywhere.

Let's begin with calmness—the foundation of resilience. A calm mind brings the clarity from which every other strength can flourish.



From Dis-ease to Ease– one C.A.P.S.U.L.E. every day.

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 3:

Calmness – The Anchor in the Storm

“Just listen to what I have to say!”

I emptied my lungs.

I lost my composure and shouted at my staff. My words were harsher than I intended. The room fell silent. I saw confusion on one face, fear on another. In an instant, the energy shifted. Smiles disappeared, and tension filled the space.

The silence was heavy, not peaceful.

My team—the people I worked with every day—looked uncertain and uneasy around me. I had become someone whose moods could not be predicted.

My outburst didn’t just grab attention; it changed the entire atmosphere.

After they left, I felt a strange mix of relief and regret. The silence lingered, echoing louder than any argument. For days, I couldn’t shake it out of my mind.

The impact was physical. My head ached, and sleepless nights followed. I kept replaying the moment—my voice, my tone, and my hand thumping the desk.

How did I let it get that far?

I blamed my hormonal imbalance, separation from my children, and the lack of support. But deep down, I knew the truth.

I had let my emotions take over. I had lost control.

Seeking peace, I called a close friend who taught meditation. I wasn't expecting much—perhaps some advice or simply someone to talk to.

She said, "Sit with it."

I resisted. I wanted a fix.

"Just sit. Let the noise settle," she said, her voice calm and grounded.

Still, I tried.

I sat down, closed my eyes, and breathed for thirty minutes. No plan. No goal. Just breathing.

And something unexpected happened.

The storm inside me began to settle.

It wasn't dramatic. It was gentle—like a quiet voice whispering, "*You're okay.*"

My chest felt lighter. My thoughts slowed. I wasn't trying to solve anything—just letting myself be *still*.

And for the first time in days, I felt at peace.

Everyone experiences moments when something inside us snaps.

It might be a sharp remark from a loved one, a colleague who is not contributing, a child who refuses to listen, or a partner who forgets—again. Most often, it isn't a single major event, but the gradual accumulation of countless small frustrations over days, weeks, or even years.

And then it happens: **an outburst.**

Your inner Rush Lane is activated.

Your voice rises.

Your face tightens.

Your words come out sharper than you meant—words that don't even sound like you.

In the heat of the moment, anger can feel justified, even energising. But it quickly clouds judgment, narrows perspective, and pushes you into a reactive state.

That is why, when we are angry, we often say things we later regret. Doors slam. Objects break. Accidents happen—rash driving, impulsive actions. In some cases, people may even harm themselves or others. When you're under stress, your brain shifts into survival mode. *The emotional centres (limbic system) become highly active, while the rational brain (neocortex)—responsible for calm thinking, sound judgment, and self-control—temporarily steps aside. In these moments, your brain is trying to protect you, but it can make wise communication much harder.*

That's why, after an outburst, so many of us say, "I don't know what came over me."

The challenge is that your brain can't always distinguish between genuine danger and emotional overload. A difficult conversation, harsh criticism, exhaustion, feeling unheard, or lingering, unresolved stress—all of these can trigger the same internal alarm system: The Rush Lane.

Why does calmness matter so much?

Over time, chronic anger and irritability weigh on your heart and leave a tangible mark on your body. High blood pressure,

heart disease, and weakened immunity are just a few of the consequences.

That's why learning to regulate our emotions matters so much. Calmness isn't weakness; it's strength—the ability to keep the Rush Lane from taking over.

This is the foundation of true resilience and lasting wellbeing.

Let me clear up a few myths about calmness. It isn't about burying your feelings, pretending nothing affects you, or forcing a smile when you'd rather not. It isn't about silence for the sake of peace, always.

True calmness means noticing your emotions without letting them take control. *It's that mindful pause between a trigger and your response*—the breath before the word, the moment before you decide.

The peace I found after meditation changed everything. I wanted to return to that place, again and again. It became my inner compass.

From then on, I'd ask myself: *How far have I drifted from calmness?*

That single question reshaped how I faced work, relationships, and even my own inner struggles.

And here's something unexpected I learned: Calmness doesn't come after clarity. *Calmness creates clarity.*

When I was calm, I could think clearly. I could listen to others and to myself. In that quiet space between emotion and action, I discovered the freedom to choose my response.

Like any skill, calmness takes practice. Some days, the storm will be stronger than your anchor. You'll snap. You'll spiral. That's okay.

With time and practice, calmness can become your default—not because life is suddenly easy, but because you've learned to show yourself differently.

Ask Yourself:

- Have you ever said or done something in the heat of the moment that you later regretted?
- Do you respond from reflection or from reaction?
- What would your life look like if you could return to calm, even in the middle of chaos?

After my own turning point, I realised I had been living from a space of reaction rather than reflection. I knew I needed more than a temporary sense of peace. "I needed something I could return to—something that would remind me, instantly, of where I wanted to be. I needed practice. A guide."

That is how the Calming Compass was born.

The Calming Compass unfolds through three simple practices that guide you inward. Each step shows you exactly where you are—when emotions rise, when thoughts become overwhelming, and when clarity feels distant. These are simple yet powerful techniques—gentle shifts you can return to repeatedly—until calmness becomes your natural way of being.

1. Chill – Pause the Storm

Chill is the practice of pausing before reacting.

The first step is to pause—to cool the emotional fire before it spreads. This is not avoidance; it is wisdom. When emotions rise, clarity fades. In the quiet of a pause, a sense of inner steadiness returns.

Stop. Breathe. Sit. Walk away.

Do something to interrupt the surge of emotion. You do not need to solve the problem yet—you need to cool the emotional heat. True calm begins in the body. It starts with a simple decision: *I will not be consumed by this moment.*

I remember asking my friend, Shan, during one such moment, “How do you remain so composed, no matter what happens?” It was not a casual question. At the time, he was going through a difficult phase in life. He had recently lost his beloved mother, with whom he shared a deep bond. The pandemic had left him jobless. To add to his worries, he was quietly concerned about his teenage son, who had become withdrawn.

Despite this avalanche of life’s burdens, he remained serene. He looked at me and said, “I guess staying calm is just who I am. It has carried me through some very hard times.” Those words stayed with me.

I realised something powerful: calmness is like water. It doesn't deny the fire—it soothes and cools it. Whether facing a deadline, anger, a troubling diagnosis, or a high-stakes presentation, staying like water helps you be *fluid and moving forward—not frozen or emotionally stuck.*

You become like water, *soft yet strong.*

Calmness is not something you reach for only in crisis. Instead, it's something you carry into quiet, ordinary moments—while making tea, getting dressed, or walking to work. To cultivate it, slow your breath. Notice your body's signals. Practice mindfulness.

This inner steadiness—cultivated by moving through routines with intention and not allowing trivial matters to disrupt your peace—anchors you as you navigate life.

Building on this, when calmness becomes your default, you become steady, aware, and present. You build trust in yourself. You begin to believe that storms can be weathered—and that belief itself is powerful.

It is important to remember: you do not need to become unfeeling. You only need to stay unboiled. That is what “Chill” gives you.

With this calm foundation, when you are ‘chill’, you can *turn inward* and see what lies beneath.

2. Check – Read the Weather Within

There is always a cause behind every storm. This step is about looking inward. What is stirring inside you? What is rising beneath the surface that has not yet been named? Perhaps it is exhaustion, disappointment, or a buried resentment.

When you check in with yourself, you respond with awareness rather than autopilot. Daily life throws tiny pebbles into your emotional waters. One or two—you barely notice. But too many, too quickly—and the ripples become waves. Your inner steadiness begins to churn.

This step of checking within is not about fixing; it is *about* noticing. What are you truly feeling? And *perhaps* more importantly, *what meaning are you giving to what is happening?* Because often, it is not the situation that triggers us—it is the interpretation we attach to it. These inner narratives are subtle and unspoken, yet they quietly build emotional tension over time.

Kani begins to feel distant from her teenage son. A narrative forms within her mind: *He does not pay attention to me. His phone matters more than I do. He is drifting away.* These thoughts unfold slowly, shaping the way she sees him each day. Eventually, her frustration grows. One evening, exhausted physically and emotionally, she calls out to her son. When he does not respond immediately, something inside her snaps. Already full of unspoken disappointment, she bursts out: *"I feel like no one listens to me in this house!"*

Later, Kani learns her son had been busy ordering a surprise birthday gift for her. The delay wasn't disrespect—it was an act of love. In that moment, she realises something profound: she wasn't reacting to what happened, but to the story she created in her mind.

Our minds create similar patterns of thought: *"No one appreciates what I do."* *"I have to handle everything alone."* *"They do not respect me."* *"I am not good enough."* These thoughts become the internal weather that shapes our emotional landscape. One thought may pass, but when repeated daily, they gather into storms within us. A child's disobedience feels like evidence that you're not respected.

A colleague's comment feels like proof that you're inadequate. Suddenly, you're not responding to the moment, but to the narrative in your mind.

That is why *checking in* is so important. When you are tired, overwhelmed, or disconnected from purpose, your emotional tank drains quickly. By checking in, you begin to notice these inner patterns. The goal isn't judgment—it is recognition, seeing the pattern before it spirals. *Becoming aware of the meanings you attach to situations helps steady your inner environment. You shift from being a reactor to being an observer.*

And with that awareness comes the most powerful step of all: Conscious Choice.

3. Conscious Choice – Steering Your Own Ship

This is where calmness becomes power. After you chill and check, you are no longer reacting—you are choosing. With awareness comes space, and within that space lies your freedom to respond intentionally.

Jeba's husband was diabetic, but he loved sweets. Each time she saw him eating one, anxiety surged within her. Thoughts like, "He's being careless," rushed through her mind, and she felt compelled to correct him. But as she practised the Calming Compass, she learned to pause and question her assumptions. Over time, she realised something important: her husband actually maintained a disciplined lifestyle—he ate a healthy diet, went to the gym regularly, and indulged in sweets only occasionally and mindfully.

Jeba made a deliberate choice: instead of nagging, she decided to trust. She let him enjoy the moment, leading to greater ease, respect, and harmony in their relationship.

Conscious choices might mean setting a boundary rather than withdrawing, letting go of minor frustrations, choosing a gentler tone when you feel hurt, saying “no” with clarity and compassion, or focusing your energy on what truly matters.

Your calmness doesn't end with you—it radiates outward. A calm parent nurtures emotionally secure children. A calm leader builds trust within a team. A calm partner soothes tense moments. Every intentional response shapes you into someone centred and steady.

When storms come, reach for your compass. Cool the heat. Read the current. Choose your direction. Let calmness steer you safely ashore. Calmness doesn't eliminate life's storms—it anchors you through them.

From that place of calm, the next strength we need in life begins: ***Adaptability.***



*“Calmness does not avoid the storm.
It anchors you through it.”*

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 4:

Adaptability – Gears of Change

“Why not automatic?” my son asked, his brow furrowed with concern as he eyed the shiny new manual car in our driveway.

At fifty, with a lifetime of habits behind me, my son wondered why I would take on the challenge of learning to drive a manual car. I admitted he had a point. Every drive brought speed bumps, steep inclines, and sudden potholes—each demanding constant gear shifts: up, down, and up again.

At first, it was exhausting. My hands and feet struggled to work in sync, and my mind resisted the constant focus it demanded.

But slowly, I found a rhythm. My hands moved with confidence, and my foot instinctively knew when to press the clutch. Changing gears became second nature. I began to move with ease on the road. Each obstacle became another opportunity to adjust.

When I mentioned this to my husband, he nodded with a smile. “That is the beauty of learning to drive a manual vehicle,” he said. “Once you master this skill, you can drive almost any vehicle.”

In many ways, we are like a vehicle, navigating the rough and unpredictable terrain of life. The challenges we face every day are many: career, relationships, parenting, finances, illness, disability, and loss. Each situation demands its own adjustments, discomfort, and learning.

Life offers few guarantees. Even with careful planning, tomorrow may not unfold the way we expect. People may not act the way they did yesterday. Clinging to the hope that everything will remain the same only creates stress.

We become free to respond, learn, and grow only when we accept that change is life's only constant.

Any change—even a positive one—can create stress because it requires us to adapt, stretch, and release what's familiar.

Major life transitions—moving to a new place, starting or losing a job, marriage, motherhood, or raising a teenager—can reshape our roles, routines, and sense of identity. Health challenges, job dissatisfaction, or separation from a loved one can shake our stability. Even caring for others or trying to keep pace with rapid changes around us can quietly drain our emotional reserves.

And it is not only the major changes. *Even small disruptions* in life can create stress—a cancelled holiday, a delayed plan, a forgotten birthday, disappointment with your outfit for the occasion, or any unexpected inconvenience. Though these may appear minor, they often reveal deeper discomfort with uncertainty and change.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on situations that often create resistance within us.

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel anxious or upset when plans change?
- Am I holding on to an image of how life should be?

These reflections reveal an important truth: we do not always choose change. When faced with it, many of us freeze. This

inner struggle may appear as frustration when things don't go as planned, grief over what has been lost, or a stubborn voice that says, "*I refuse to accept this.*" Though natural, this response is exhausting. But what happens when we resist change?

We get stuck in the wrong gear, exhausting our emotional energy without progress. Over time, this can lead to fatigue, helplessness, anxiety, and even physical illness.

But we do have a vehicle—our inner strength. It carries us through unfamiliar terrain, unexpected turns, sudden roadblocks, and ever-changing seasons of life.

*To move forward, we need flexibility. Just as a driver shifts gears to match the road, we must learn to adapt to life's changing circumstances. That is where the **Gears of Adaptability** come in.*

In life, three key gears can help us navigate change more smoothly: Acceptance, Alternatives, and Always Curious. Let's examine each in turn.

Acceptance: First Gear – The Beginning

Every journey begins in first gear; it sets the vehicle moving. In life, acceptance is that crucial first step.

Acceptance isn't about approving of what has happened or merely tolerating it. It means shifting our focus to what truly matters—the point at which we stop resisting reality and begin to ask, "Given what is, how can I move forward?" This change does not remove pain, but it loosens the grip of suffering.

Daisy, a young student, had earned admission to her dream dental college—an achievement many aspire to. Yet instead of joy, she felt sadness, fatigue, and discomfort. She deeply missed her school friends, who had made her feel understood

and supported. In her new environment, she felt isolated among unfamiliar faces and new demands. Though she had achieved her goal, her heart was still holding on to the past.

I gently encouraged her to see the situation differently: what if this change was not an enemy, but an invitation to grow? Discomfort, I explained, is often a signal of transformation—the bridge between two chapters of life.

Slowly, Daisy began to embrace her new environment. She engaged with her classmates, pursued her interests, and fostered a sense of belonging. Her symptoms improved, and her confidence returned.

Her story reminds us that clinging to the past keeps us stuck, while embracing the present opens the door to growth and healing.

Ask yourself:

- When faced with disappointment, do you keep replaying the “what ifs”?
- What might change if you began embracing what is?

Acceptance softens our inner struggle, making it easier to let go. When we release even a few of the heavy emotions we carry—resentment, regret, guilt, or anger—we create space for change to take root.

Simran struggled for years with dizziness and physical symptoms that no test could explain. In a candid conversation with a friend, she realised she’d never made peace with having left her first job after marriage. She buried that regret under years of duty towards her family. But when she accepted the truth, and she shifted her focus to what her life had given her—

a loving husband, happy children, a stable home—she began to feel lighter. *Gratitude replaced regret*, and eventually, she rekindled her career in a new form. Her symptoms subsided. She was no longer trapped in the past.

Acceptance is the first gear that sets us in motion and moves us forward.

Alternatives: Second Gear – Keeps You Moving

Sometimes life does not always follow the path we planned. When we remain stuck in what should have been, we feel stranded. But when we ask, “What else is possible?”, new pathways begin to emerge.

Kareem, a young student, was devastated after a breakup. He withdrew from life, neglecting both his health and his studies, and carried a quiet heaviness that followed him each day. Feeling lost, he *sought counselling*. Gradually, as he processed his emotions, he began to question the belief that his future depended on that relationship. He reconnected with friends, rebuilt his routines, and turned his focus on his growth; he regained his strength and confidence to live. When his ex-girlfriend later reached out, Kareem responded from a place of self-worth—he chose himself.

Similarly, Sajal became overwhelmed by the pressures of a demanding job that steadily sapped her energy and peace of mind. The ongoing stress affected not only her health but also her relationships with those closest to her. She felt exhausted, emotionally depleted, and disconnected from herself.

Instead of struggling alone, Sajal reached out for support. She began sharing responsibilities, set healthier boundaries, and

gave herself time to rest and recover. Gradually, balance returned to her life. She felt calmer, lighter, and more emotionally present again.

Exploring alternatives keeps us moving, even when things don't go as planned.

Always Curious: Third Gear – Staying Agile

Life is a winding road, full of twists, detours, and unexpected climbs. Curiosity propels us forward. It turns fear into exploration and resistance into growth.

When Vasuki was diagnosed with diabetes, she was advised to reduce her carbohydrate intake. Doctors recommended millets as a healthier option, but she found them bland and difficult to digest.

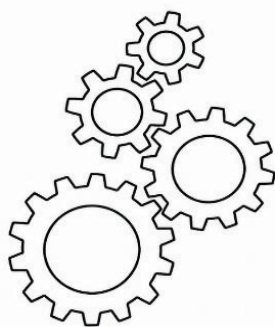
On a follow-up visit, however, her blood sugar levels had improved. Curious, I asked what she had changed. Her face lit up with excitement as she explained how she had experimented with different cooking styles, spices, and combinations. She had moved beyond making the millets merely 'edible'—she had made them truly delicious. Her story is a reminder: Curiosity isn't just for scientists and children—it's a lifeline when life feels limited. Vasuki didn't just accept blandness—she created her own flavour of change.

Similarly, after losing his job during the pandemic, Kamal, in his mid-fifties, concluded he could not cope with evolving technology. However, he chose to learn new skills. His willingness to stay curious helped him rebuild his confidence and secure a job.

Curiosity unlocks possibilities we might have never imagined.

With these three gears—Acceptance, Alternatives, and Always Curious—we do more than survive change. We move forward with steadiness and grace.

*When we learn to stay calm and adapt with confidence, another powerful force begins to emerge within us: **Positivity**. This is where the journey continues.*



“Shift your gears and life flows, even on bumpy roads.”

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 5:

Positivity: A String of Pearls

The Eighth Grader's Red "F"

A single red "F" on her eighth-grade report card shattered her self-confidence. She was a bright student, but music wasn't her strength. Classmates' taunts — "failed in music"—cut deeply, leaving lasting scars on her self-esteem. "I'm not good enough," she thought. "What will people think? What if they laugh?" These loud, relentless inner voices filled her mind, pushing her into a corner of shame and self-doubt. She grew withdrawn, a highly sensitive person avoiding any situation that might trigger even the slightest criticism. These insecurities quietly seeped into every area of her life—her relationships, her work, and even her health. The burden of overthinking and self-criticism began to manifest physically, leading to obesity, migraines, and anxiety. Emotional heaviness lingered, casting a persistent shadow over her days.

Years later, her life appeared perfect: a loving husband, wonderful children, a fulfilling career. Yet beneath the surface, traces of her younger self lingered, struggling, unable to let go of the past. Though she had achieved much, old wounds of self-doubt kept her from savouring the richness of the present. Fleeting feelings of inadequacy cast faint shadows on her joy.

That eighth grader, the one who believed she was not good enough, was me.

Then life, in its mysterious kindness, introduced me to an extraordinary person, Rose. A warm, wise, and compassionate soul, Rose became more than a friend. She became a mentor. She gently helped me realise my own worth, something I had been blind to for a long time. With gentle encouragement and unwavering support, Rose reminded me of all the positives in my life, the blessings I had overlooked, and the strength I had always possessed.

As she guided me to reflect on my life, I began to gather the pearls that had been scattered along my journey. These pearls, my strengths, the love of my family, and the unwavering support of positive people around me became treasures I had long ignored. With each pearl I held on to, I found new courage to persevere through life's difficult moments.

Rose helped me see that life's challenges didn't define me, but what mattered was how I faced them. The beauty of my life was the resilience I gained. As I accepted these truths, the little girl inside me grew calm, and her doubts slowly faded. She began to stand taller, stronger.

Only then did I truly begin to move from disease to ease.

The Whirlpool Effect: The Pull of Negativity

Negativity often begins quietly—a fleeting doubt, a passing fear, a moment of frustration. Like a gentle whirlpool, it appears harmless at first. Yet as it gathers momentum, it draws everything around it into its swirling grasp.

Similarly, a single negative thought can multiply. A tough day at work can spark doubts about your abilities, which may deepen into feelings of failure. Before long, you begin to question your self-worth.

Negativity's grip is powerful because it feels so immediate and intense. One thought can bleed into every part of your life—stress from work turns into frustration in relationships and dissatisfaction with yourself. Gradually, you stop responding to situations as they are and instead react through the distorted lens negativity creates.

As this pattern deepens, it becomes harder to break free, leaving you trapped in a cycle that steadily drains your emotional and physical energy.

Ask yourself:

- Are there areas of your life—relationships, work, finances, or even leisure—where negativity has quietly crept in?

Negative thinking, impatience, and a lack of perseverance can gradually erode our sense of well-being. Over time, this mindset becomes a lens through which we view the world. Ordinary moments begin to feel like criticism, and setbacks feel like proof of inadequacy rather than opportunities for growth. As self-worth wanes, judgment becomes clouded, anxiety intensifies, and hope begins to fade.

Genuine positivity has the power to transform both mind and body. Neuroscience research shows that a positive outlook boosts immunity, lowers stress, and aids recovery from illness. Those who face challenges with optimism often adapt more effectively and regain their balance more quickly.

The Trap of Unrealistic Optimism

Understanding the distinction between healthy positivity and blind optimism is essential. Ignoring problems or simply

wishing them away often results in disappointment and unwise decisions.

Healthy positivity is grounded in reality. It means recognising possibilities while also acknowledging and addressing challenges. It's like viewing the glass as half full, yet knowing when it needs to be refilled.

When we approach difficulties with awareness and a proactive mindset, we create space for transformation and build inner strength.

Practising Positivity: Gathering the Pearls

My understanding of positivity evolved over the years, shaped by the gentle wisdom of my compassionate mentor and friend, Rose. There were times when words failed me, and tears spoke instead. She never hurried me. Instead, she would sit beside me, offering her calm, grounding presence. She would often remind me: "*You are a DOCTOR! Hold on to that truth; it is your strength. Never let anyone's opinion make you forget who you are or what you're capable of.*"

With those simple words, she taught me something profound: to anchor myself in my own worth, not in my fears or the opinions of others. She showed me that when I hold my identity with conviction, it becomes my greatest strength. With her reassurance, she helped me recognise the value I already possessed.

Through her mentorship, the metaphor of a string of pearls began to take shape in my life. Each pearl—Personal Power, Positive Influence, and Perseverance—holds its own unique beauty. When strung together with intention, they form a necklace of positivity that we can wear through every season of life.

1. Personal Power: The Pearls Within

When Shanti was diagnosed with breast cancer, it felt as if the ground had shifted beneath her. Treatment was difficult. Her body weakened, and her emotions moved between fear and helplessness. One day, while waiting for radiotherapy, she noticed a woman in her seventies walking calmly and alone toward the treatment room. The image stayed with her.

Later that night, Shanti began recalling moments from her own life. As a schoolgirl, she had once fractured her dominant arm and learned to write with the other. She had held her family together through illness, financial struggles, and emotional stress.

These were her inner pearls—forgotten moments of strength that revealed her resilience. From that day on, every step in her healing became a quest to reclaim those pearls and wear them as a symbol of her personal power.

Picture a pearl—formed deep within, layer by layer, under constant pressure. In the same way, personal power grows through the challenges we face in life.

It is the strength built through small daily choices to keep going when giving up would feel easier. It carries the wisdom gained through illness, failure, and change, along with the courage to begin again. It is the quiet inner voice that says, “*I am capable. I am enough.*”

True positivity does not begin with forced optimism, but with how we see ourselves. When we recognise our worth, honour our resilience, and appreciate our ability to grow, we begin to

approach life with greater hope and compassion. *When we believe in our own light, we begin to notice light everywhere.*

2. Positive Influences: The Pearls Around Us

When Sohara was diagnosed with a disc prolapse, the rhythm of her life came to an abrupt halt. Once the pillar of her household, she was now confined to bed for three long months of strict rest. While a maid managed the chores, no one could replace the deep sense of purpose she felt slipping away.

Then came Seema, her neighbour and friend. Every day, Seema visited for an hour—a routine that became a source of emotional comfort. She would bring snacks, flip through Sohara's favourite magazine, share laughter, or simply sit beside her in gentle companionship.

Seema offered no solutions; she offered her *presence*.

That single hour became a pearl in Sohara's recovery, giving her comfort, connection and something to look forward to. As the months passed and her body healed, she rose not only physically stronger but also emotionally renewed. She had been seen, supported, and remembered.

Sam's experience was different. After a severe fracture that required metal plates and screws in his leg, he received attentive physical care from a home nurse. Yet the days stretched long, and the silence grew heavy. Without conversation or emotional support, Sam felt isolated and withdrawn, as if there was no urgency to recover—and his healing slowed.

Medicine may heal the body, but human connection heals the spirit, bringing strength, support, and hope during recovery. In times of difficulty, it reminds us that we are seen, valued, and never truly alone.

3. Perseverance: The Thread That Binds the Pearls

For nearly thirteen years, Shiny longed to hold a child of her own. She and her husband tried everything—consultations, treatments, hope, and heartbreak. Many would have given up, but Shiny's perseverance stayed steady and deeply rooted in faith.

She allowed herself moments of sorrow, but never let go of hope. Her perseverance revealed itself in every appointment she attended, every change she accepted, and every prayer she whispered. In time, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl—a living reminder of her perseverance, a pearl shaped by faith, endurance, and the quiet courage to keep moving forward.

Perseverance is the invisible thread that links the pearls of personal power and positive influence together. Without perseverance, even the brightest experiences remain scattered. But when we keep moving forward, gently and patiently, our experiences begin to connect and shine.

Perseverance rarely feels heroic. Often, it's simply the decision to keep going—to rise when giving up would be easier, to rest when overwhelmed, and to begin again. Each time you show up, you strengthen the thread weaving your life into something meaningful.

Practising positivity isn't about pretending life is perfect. It's about gathering these pearls, one by one, and letting them guide us through life.

Ask yourself:

- Which of these—personal power, supportive influences, or perseverance—feels strongest in my life right now? Which one needs more attention?

As we collect these pearls, we begin to see how positivity shapes the way we live and heal. Like pearls, our inner strengths require care to maintain their shine. This is where self-care quietly becomes essential.

Self-care is not a luxury; it is the gentle care that allows the pearls of resilience to keep shining.

In the next chapter, we will explore how caring for the body, mind, and spirit sustains this inner light and strengthens the thread of life.



“Positivity is the jewel of ease, reflecting your worth and your inner light.”

—Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 6:

Self Care: Nurture Within, Bloom Beyond

Protecting What Protects You

“Accidents don’t come with warnings,” my brother would often say—and he lived by those words. He wore his helmet even for the shortest rides, whether heading to college or just down the street. His caution wasn’t rooted in fear but in respect for life’s unpredictability. Watching him taught me a lasting lesson: protecting ourselves today saves us from regret tomorrow.

My husband would often ask, *“Why do you let that occupy your mind?”*

A simple question, yet it gently pulled me out of cycles of unnecessary worry.

We’re careful to protect our heads from physical injury—so why let emotional toxins and mental clutter slip in unfiltered? Isn’t that a kind of harm, too?

Safeguarding your brain—the very centre of your being—is one of the most important forms of self-care.

Your brain influences every part of your life—your mood, memory, learning, decisions, movement, balance, sleep, hormones, and heartbeat. It processes your every sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. It holds every joy, every emotional scar, and every dream.

Yet, despite its importance, the brain is often the most overworked and least protected part of the body.

Caring for your brain isn't optional—it's essential for your health, resilience, and balance. To truly nurture it, imagine your brain as a garden.

Like any garden, it flourishes when protected, nourished, and gently cultivated. When neglected, it becomes vulnerable to imbalance and illness.

Let's explore the simple steps to tend this garden.

Protect the Garden

Like any garden, it flourishes when protected, nourished, and gently cultivated. When neglected, it becomes vulnerable to imbalance and illness.

Before a garden can thrive, it must first be safeguarded. Likewise, caring for your brain begins with protecting the conditions that support its flourishing.

Healthy blood flow nourishes the brain just as water sustains a garden. High blood pressure, smoking, and inactivity silently reduce the flow of oxygen to the brain, which it needs to function optimally. Nadan dismissed his high blood pressure because he felt fine, but this quiet neglect led to a stroke that left him paralysed. His story is a stark reminder that much of a disease's harm occurs before symptoms arise.

Protection also means preventing injury. A helmet is not merely a precaution; it can be the thin line between life and irreversible loss. I still remember Balu, a young man who stepped out on New Year's Eve to celebrate with friends. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, he chose not to

wear his helmet for what seemed like a short and harmless ride. But in a matter of moments, everything changed. The accident left him with a severe brain injury from which he never recovered. One small decision, made casually, altered the course of an entire life.

Safeguarding your brain also means avoiding activities that pose a significant risk of head injury. No brief thrill is worth a lifetime of regret or irreversible damage.

Equally vital is shielding your brain from toxins. Like weeds invading a garden, harmful substances gradually enter our bodies and impair brain function. Everything we inhale, consume, or absorb—from polluted air and processed foods to cosmetics, plastics, and synthetic fabrics—accumulates quietly over time, sometimes revealing its effects only when it's too late.

Nourish the Garden

Once protected, a garden needs nourishment to bloom. Similarly, your brain flourishes when it receives the right care and sustenance.

Food is not just fuel; it's medicine. What we eat shapes our physical health, mental sharpness, and emotional equilibrium. Subbu, a dedicated amateur boxer, fixated on a diet high in animal protein but overlooked nutritional balance. Initially, this protein-heavy regimen appeared to enhance his performance. Yet, within months, he developed ongoing abdominal distress and sought medical help.

He was diagnosed with Inflammatory Bowel Disease. The very foods he believed would strengthen him had become the source of his illness.

When Subbu transitioned to more wholesome, nourishing foods, his health improved dramatically, reminding us that true nourishment is about balance and quality, not excess.

Beyond nutrition, the body's internal rhythms must be preserved. Hormones influence our mood, metabolism, and energy—much like climate shapes a garden. Leena, a teenager diagnosed with Polyendocrine metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS), grappled with a diet high in sugary snacks and processed foods and a sedentary lifestyle.

She restored her balance through dietary changes and physical activity. Today's eating habits and environmental exposures can subtly disrupt these delicate systems—manifesting as fatigue, weight fluctuations, mood swings in teenagers, or even infertility and metabolic disorders in adults.

Reducing inflammation—the slow-burning fire—is also crucial. Chronic inflammation steadily weakens both body and brain. While natural, whole foods boost immunity, processed foods and excess sugar quietly keep this low fire smouldering, thus gradually undermining overall health.

Grow the Garden

Protection and nourishment create the foundation, but growth requires active effort and care.

Protection and nourishment create the foundation, but growth requires active engagement.

The brain has a remarkable ability to adapt and grow at any age. Each time you learn something new or repeat a positive habit, your brain strengthens those pathways. This is why stroke patients, through repeated physiotherapy, can gradually

regain movement and relearn skills that once seemed lost. In the same way, repeatedly visualising positive change and practising healthier responses can slowly rewire patterns in the mind, creating new pathways for thought, behaviour, and healing.

Simply put, what you practice regularly becomes easier over time and eventually, it becomes a part of who you are. With consistent effort, these mental pathways grow stronger, supporting resilience, clarity, and confidence.

At the same time, our daily choices quietly shape how our bodies respond to life. Just as a seed holds hidden potential, your DNA carries the blueprint of your body. Within it are genes—tiny instructions that influence how each part of your body grows and functions.

You can influence how your body responds and functions over time, gently shaping how inherited tendencies affect your health. The way you eat, rest, move, and care for yourself can strengthen healthier patterns within your body and mind.

You may inherit a predisposition to certain diseases from your parents or grandparents, but *you are still the gardener of your own health*. The choices you make each day nurture your inner landscape and influence how your health unfolds over time.

Uma, whose mother died of breast cancer, remained free of the disease well into her sixties by embracing a healthy lifestyle and regular checkups. Despite her higher risk, she stayed well. In this way, you are not merely residing in your body—you are quietly shaping it.

Restore the Garden

Even the most carefully tended garden needs rest and renewal—without it, growth cannot continue.

Restoration starts with emotional balance. Suppressed emotions create inner tension that gradually affects both mind and body. Practices such as mindfulness, self-reflection, and honest expression help release these burdens and restore a sense of inner peace.

Equally essential is deep rest. Regardless of how well you eat or exercise, your brain cannot function at its best without quality sleep. Sleep is more than a pause—it is a period of quiet repair and renewal.

During deep sleep, the brain consolidates memories, clears toxins, and gently resets itself. Even dedicated fitness enthusiasts who eat well and exercise consistently can experience unexplained fatigue, poor recovery, low mood, or decreased performance—not due to a lack of discipline, but because they may be unintentionally overlooking the importance of rest and restorative sleep.

Sufficient rest is essential even with the healthiest routines, because recovery happens during these quiet hours, restoring your body and mind for energy, clarity, and balance. Just as the richest soil needs daily care, so too does your inner landscape.

This is where the core practices of self-care—self-scanning, self-compassion, and self-discipline—become indispensable. They are the gardener’s essential tools, helping you to observe, nurture, and protect your inner world with awareness and intention. Through these practices, you can continue to grow and flourish through every season of life.

The Gardener's Essentials for Self-Care

1. Self-Scanning: The Gardener's Watchful Eye

Self-scanning is the quiet practice of pausing and noticing what is happening within you. It is a conscious pause to observe how your body feels, how your mind is functioning, and what your thoughts and emotions are trying to tell you.

It includes awareness of:

- Physical signals such as energy levels, fatigue, sleep patterns, and pain
- Mental functioning, including focus, memory, and clarity
- Practical health measures such as routine tests, screenings, and preventive care

When practised consistently, self-scanning allows you to notice when something feels off early, long before it turns into illness or burnout.

Like a gardener noticing dry soil or emerging weeds, you begin to recognise subtle signs of neglect within yourself. Even when you feel fine, routine checkups can reveal silent concerns.

I remember Sofia, a young medical student, who came in with fatigue, body aches, and difficulty concentrating. On the surface, she appeared healthy. But as we spoke, it became clear that she was skipping meals, losing sleep, and pushing herself beyond her limits, often without pausing to consider her own needs.

Her body wasn't failing her—it was sending a message. When she tuned in to those signals and responded with small,

compassionate adjustments, her energy and clarity gradually returned. Practising self-scanning allows us to notice these subtle cues before the body cries out for attention.

Ask yourself:

- Have I noticed changes in my energy, mood, or sleep lately?
- Am I nourishing myself with habits that restore me, or habits that drain me?
- Have I kept up with routine health screenings and checkups?
- What small adjustment can I make today to feel more balanced?

2. Self-Compassion: The Gardener's Gentle Hand

Self-awareness reveals what needs care, and self-compassion guides how you respond to it.

Self-compassion is more than being emotionally kind to yourself. *It means valuing yourself the way you spend your time, speak to yourself, and care for your needs.*

Many of us are quick to spend on others, yet hesitate to invest in ourselves. We postpone medical visits, avoid supportive choices that improve our comfort and well-being, or tolerate discomfort while convincing ourselves it isn't necessary.

True self-compassion reminds us of a different truth:

You deserve ease.

You deserve comfort.

You deserve care—now.

A gardener who withholds water cannot expect the garden to bloom. Likewise, denying yourself nourishment and rest weakens the very foundation that allows you to care for others.

Self-compassion also means protecting your emotional boundaries. It involves saying “NO” when you are tired and recognising that guilt is not proof of love.

Investing in your well-being is not selfish. Your comfort and health are the foundation from which clarity, resilience, and even generosity can grow. When you are comfortable and well, you naturally begin to respond to life with greater calm and balance.

What Self-Compassion Looks Like in Action

- Prioritising health checkups, therapy, supplements, nutritious food, and preventive care before crises arise
- Investing in supportive footwear, ergonomic chairs, quality mattresses, and safe cookware
- Reducing overload by delegating tasks or using tools that ease daily burdens
- Creating calming spaces with lighting, order, and comfort that support emotional balance
- Seeking medical or emotional care without guilt or delay

Money spent on health is not an expense—it is a preventive investment that often costs far less than untreated stress or illness.

Ask yourself:

- Have I denied myself comfort in the name of sacrifice?
- What have I postponed that would improve my daily well-being?
- Do I believe I am worthy of investing in myself? Why or why not?

3. Self-Discipline: The Routine That Sustains Well-Being

With awareness and compassion in place, self-discipline becomes the structure that sustains them.

Self-discipline is not punishment. It is a form of self-care rooted in kindness. It is the quiet commitment to show up for yourself daily, especially when motivation fades. It means choosing what your future self will thank you for rather than what feels convenient in the moment.

Good intentions are common, but it's consistent routines that transform intention into lasting change.

The Power of Daily Routines

Healthy routines may seem small, but over time, they are quietly life-changing. They reduce decision fatigue and allow the body and mind to function with greater ease.

A routine does not need complexity. It requires consistency.

Examples include:

- Waking at a regular time and beginning the day with stretching or mindful breathing
- Eating balanced meals without skipping or rushing

- Engaging in daily physical activity such as walking, yoga, or strength training
- Setting clear work boundaries and limiting screen exposure
- Establishing a calming bedtime ritual
- Planning weekly groceries, health visits, and personal time

Missing a day does not mean failure. *Discipline means coming back to yourself without guilt.*

It is not perfection—it is persistence.

Ask yourself:

- Which parts of my day feel chaotic?
- What small daily health habit can I begin this week?
- Where do I need more structure—meals, sleep, exercise, or mental rest?

Discipline is one of the most caring things you can offer yourself. It is how you remind yourself daily that your health matters.

Structure brings a sense of safety, and safety makes healing easier.

Start small. Start today. Repeat.

How the Three Work Together in Harmony:

Self-scanning creates awareness.

Self-compassion honours that awareness.

Self-discipline transforms awareness into action.

Together, they create a balanced approach to self-care—awareness, kindness, and consistency working in harmony.

Self-care is not occasional; it is something you return to gently, again and again. Progress matters more than perfection.

Every day, you are either tending your garden or neglecting it. The choice, made quietly and consistently, is yours.

Self-care prepares the ground, but to truly move from dis-ease to ease, we need the next skill: *understanding*. Life is not random. It is more like a jigsaw puzzle. With greater understanding, we can slowly bring the scattered pieces of life together into a meaningful whole.



“A beautiful garden reflects a devoted gardener.”

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 7:

Understanding – Solving Life’s Puzzle, One Piece at a Time

“We are going to be late again!” I snapped, frustration building inside me.

It was another hurried morning—one of many like it. My husband, calmly sipping tea and scrolling on his phone, seemed oblivious to the time, while I fretted over every ticking second.

We both worked at the same hospital, and usually commuted together. I liked to arrive early—mentally settled, ready for the day. My husband believed in timing everything to the minute, leaving little buffer for unexpected delays.

Our mornings often followed the same pattern—me fuming silently, him unbothered, both of us starting the day on the wrong foot. I tried reminders, gentle appeals, even sarcastic comments. Nothing worked. My mood carried over into my work, meals, and interactions.

One day, in exasperation, I vented to a colleague. She paused and said, *“I know you don’t drive a vehicle. Why don’t you leave a little earlier and walk? It’ll take you about ten minutes.”*

I was stunned. I had been so focused on changing him that I ignored my own choices. The next morning, I tried it. The walk left me feeling refreshed, lighter, and more in control. That small shift transformed our mornings—and it became my

first lesson in understanding: sometimes, the missing piece isn't changing others, but changing ourselves.

That small change taught me an important lesson. Understanding often becomes the bridge between dis-ease and ease. Many problems in life persist not because solutions are absent, but because the real cause remains unseen. When we begin to understand ourselves, our habits, and the hidden connections in our lives, the scattered pieces slowly begin to fall into place. What once felt confusing begins to make sense, and healing becomes possible.

Sometimes the smallest shift in perspective is the missing piece that changes everything.

Understanding as a Puzzle

Understanding is like solving a puzzle. Imagine piecing together a jigsaw or deciphering jumbled letters to form a meaningful picture or word. At first, the pieces may seem random, but as you work through them logically, you discover that one critical piece connects everything, completing the picture or word.

Life is no different. Whether it's a recurring illness, a strained relationship, or a persistent habit, the challenges we face are like scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. That morning walk wasn't just a practical solution—it was a moment of insight. I realised that to move from dis-ease to ease, we must find the pieces that matter and understand how they fit together.

Unfolding Understanding

Through my years as a doctor, coach, and lifelong student of the human condition, I have come to see that understanding

unfolds gently, revealing three gentle, insightful steps toward healing and inner ease.

Unravelling – the journey inward, sorting through the puzzle pieces to identify the edges, the root causes of our suffering, and the patterns that quietly keep repeating in our lives.

Unleashing – letting go of the pieces that no longer belong, breaking free from limiting beliefs, toxic influences, and barriers we place within ourselves that keep us stuck in disease or dysfunction.

Unitedness – it is the moment when your insights come together like a puzzle completed. In this step, you will find a deep connection with yourself, others, nature, and your life purpose. This sense of belonging and unity accelerates healing and fosters compassion.

Once you see the root (Unravelling), the next natural step is to act (Unleashing). These steps build momentum, bringing us into connection (Unitedness).

Each step builds on the last, guiding us from confusion to clarity, from feeling stuck to growth, and from isolation to connection. Like solving a jigsaw puzzle, understanding is a process—a journey that unfolds one insight at a time.

1. Unravelling: Sorting the Puzzle Pieces

The first step toward understanding is to work on yourself. Explore your habits, triggers, and choices to uncover the real reasons behind your distress. Like working on a puzzle, you begin to notice patterns and connections that quietly keep old struggles going.

For years, I suffered from frequent migraines—throbbing, blinding headaches that would stop me in my tracks. They often struck without warning, especially during or after stressful days. I carried painkillers everywhere, seeking only temporary relief.

Medical scans revealed nothing alarming. Some attributed them to stress; others suggested my diet was to blame. For a long time, I resigned myself to migraines as an unavoidable part of my life.

Then, one evening after a particularly heavy meal, I endured one of my worst episodes. Lying in bed, clutching my head and overwhelmed by nausea, I suddenly made a connection: I'd felt the same way the previous week after eating rich, spicy food. Could my digestion be a factor?

I began keeping a journal—tracking my meals, my feelings, and the timing of each migraine. Patterns soon emerged: rich, oily food, irregular meal times, poor sleep, and intense emotional stress were frequent triggers.

Gradually, I made changes: lighter meals, less spicy food, more yoga and mindful breathing, and a focus on rest. Over time, the migraines became less frequent. The pain no longer controlled my life.

To deepen this understanding, a few simple practices can guide you inward.

Practice Active Listening – not just with others, but with yourself. Notice the subtle messages from your body, the undercurrents of your emotions, and the repeated loops of your thoughts. Your inner world is always speaking—are you truly listening?

Ask questions. Asking the right questions, not just about your challenges but about your emotions, habits, your body and its needs for healing. Challenge your assumptions. Explore deeply.

Ask yourself:

- What is my current understanding of this illness or challenge? What are my triggers and symptoms telling me?
- How might my daily habits, relationships, or environment be influencing my current condition?
- Am I avoiding or overlooking something important that needs attention or compassion?

Healing begins not with answers, but with the right questions.

Engage in Reflective Practices – journaling, mindfulness, meditation, or even quiet time in nature can reveal subconscious patterns and gnawing emotional issues. These moments of solitude can turn inner confusion into clarity.

Once we begin to see clearly, a natural shift occurs.

2. Unleashing – Discarding the Pieces That Don't Belong

This is where understanding becomes action.

Once we have unravelled the hidden layers of our struggle—understanding our patterns, triggers, and inner blocks—we arrive at the second step: Unleashing.

Unleashing is about taking responsibility for your health and life. It's recognising what is within your control and making conscious, courageous choices.

Aami was just nineteen. His slouched posture, dull eyes, and the faint smell of tobacco told a story of quiet struggle. Once a bright student, he had become withdrawn and unmotivated. His parents, anxious and helpless, sent him for counselling after discovering his growing addiction to smoking and declining grades.

In his early sessions, Aami was distant. He spoke little, shrugging off questions with a tired smile. But one question changed the direction of his life: *“What do you want your life to look like five years from now?”*

He fell silent. In that silence, something within him began to shift. Gradually, as trust built, Aami began to share his story. What started as casual smoking with older boys became a habit, then dependence. Beneath it all, he carried guilt, loneliness, and the weight of disappointing his parents.

That realisation became his *Aha!* moment—the beginning of his unleashing. He distanced himself from friends who encouraged his habit, cut down on cigarettes, replaced evenings with journaling and yoga, and joined a spiritual centre for belonging and purpose.

It was not a sudden shift, but a steady evolution. With every toxic layer shed—old habits, unhealthy friendships, self-doubt—Aami began to regain his sense of self. His energy returned, his confidence grew, and his eyes regained their spark.

Ask yourself:

- What is one habit, belief, or influence I eliminate today—so I can breathe lighter, feel freer, and move closer to a healthier and more peaceful life?
- Is fear of change, failure, or judgment stopping me from taking the next step toward healing?

As we release what no longer serves us, space opens for something deeper to emerge—the experience of connection and wholeness. This is where the journey naturally leads: into Unitedness.

3. Unitedness – When the pieces come together

Unitedness means feeling that you belong to yourself, to other people, to your environment, and to life as a whole. At this point, the scattered pieces inside you start to fit together, giving you a stronger sense of balance, connection, and wholeness.

When you practice calmness, adaptability, positivity, self-care, and understanding, something gentle shifts inside you.

You no longer feel the need to hide from yourself or to be in conflict with who you are. Instead, you feel more connected—to yourself, your purpose, the people around you, and to life.

Unitedness means bringing all parts of yourself together. It is recognising that your thoughts, feelings, body, relationships, and environment are all closely connected. When one part heals, it quietly supports the others, spreading a sense of calm and ease through your life. This sense of unitedness also extends beyond yourself—it is the feeling of belonging to your family, your community, your nation, and even to the world

and the universe as a whole. You realise you are part of something greater, and this connection brings a deeper sense of peace and belonging.

Reflecting on the journeys we have witnessed—Aami discovering his purpose beyond struggle, Dr Rao meeting the loss of his beloved son with calm resilience, and my own journey toward listening to my body with greater understanding—a common thread emerges. Each of us, in our own way, moved toward wholeness and gradually found greater ease. Their transformation was not about fixing something broken, but about gathering the scattered parts of themselves with greater understanding, creating lives that felt more whole, meaningful, and aligned.

As we start to live from this sense of wholeness, empathy arises naturally. We notice how others feel and what they go through, without judging them, because we understand that everyone faces challenges. Empathy becomes a bridge between inner peace and outer connection, softening communication, deepening relationships, and allowing compassion to flow more freely.

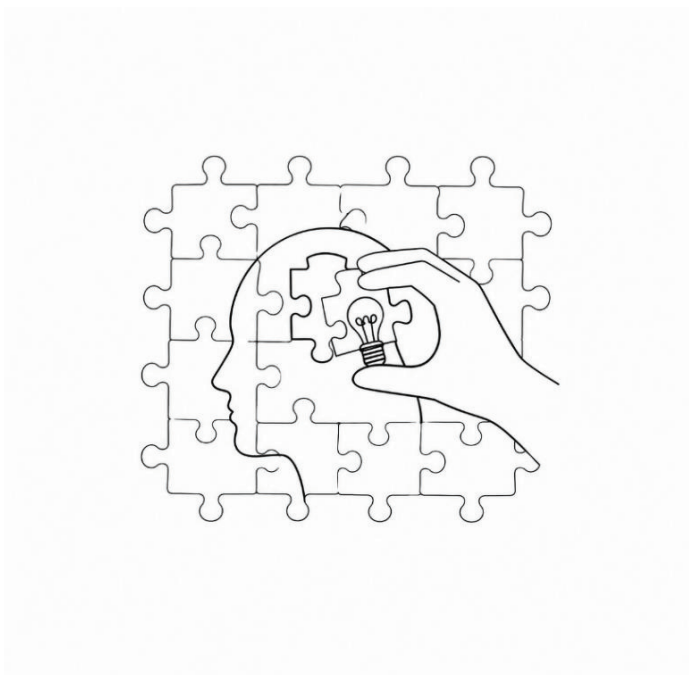
Ask yourself:

- When was the last time I felt truly connected to myself, to others, and to the world around me?
- Which relationships, habits, or environments help me feel grounded and whole, and how can I nurture them more intentionally?

Understanding is not about controlling life, but about seeing clearly enough to respond with wisdom, compassion, and greater ease.

As the pieces of understanding settle into place, another light begins to emerge—the lightness of being.

The next chapter, *Laughter*, explores how this most joyful expression of ease can be both medicine and a mirror for the soul.



“With each awakening, we grow more whole.”

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 8:

Laughter – Life's secret elixir

“Zingo!” exclaimed my four-year-old niece, her eyes sparkling with excitement. She wanted those present in the room to play the game with her.

“Jingo”, I responded casually.

“Zingo!” she corrected, her tiny voice filled with playful determination.

Amused, I decided to tease her. Deliberately, I repeated “Jingo!”

“Zingo!” exclaimed my four-year-old niece, again

“Jingo”, I replied.

“ZIN-GO!” she repeated, emphasising each syllable.

“JIN-GO!” I echoed back, playfully matching her tone.

And so began our funny little exchange –

“Zin-GO!”

“Jin-GO!”

“Zin-GO!”

“Jin-GO!” I repeated

YOU MAY- GO!” she declared at last, using her best authoritative voice,

The room slowly filled with gentle giggles, our voices flowing back and forth. Her proclamation sparked a wave of laughter among us. Her innocent humour and her adorable attempt to set me straight turned an ordinary moment into one filled with pure, unfiltered joy.

This small yet magical moment reminded me how often we rush through life, blind to the joy hidden in its simplest interactions. We become so consumed by our responsibilities and routines that we forget to savour the little things. These moments of light-hearted fun—like vitamins—nourish our souls, replenishing the emotional deficiencies caused by stress and busyness. Laughter, in such moments, is not merely a reaction; it transforms into an elixir—a life-giving tonic that heals, uplifts, and restores balance to our lives.

Ask yourself:

- When was the last time you allowed yourself to get lost in a moment of light-hearted fun?
- How often do you notice the joy hidden in seemingly mundane situations?
- What simple moments of humour can you recall that unexpectedly brightened your day?

When We Take Life Too Seriously: The Loss of Joy and Wonder

Imagine drinking a bitter potion every day, one drop at a time, by taking everything too seriously—every remark, every mistake, every failure, every wrong decision, every rejection. Over time, this toxic brew seeps into your system, poisoning not just your mind but your body as well. *Constant irritation,*

sadness, and a tendency to find faults act like slow poisons, quietly wearing you down and affecting both your health and your happiness.

When we allow challenges, criticisms, or failures to weigh us down, we weaken our emotional reserves and strain our physical health. The outcome? The body switches to 'rush mode,' staying in a constant state of alert, tension, and overdrive.

Sleepless nights, heightened blood pressure, a compromised immune system, and a life stripped of joy follow.

Without an antidote, this seriousness can creep into every aspect of our lives, leading to disease—not just of the body, but of the spirit. But laughter—light, refreshing, and rejuvenating—is the elixir that can neutralise this poison, restoring balance and vitality.

When Laughter Heals

Healing doesn't always come through medicines or tests. Sometimes, it begins with a simple laugh—a lighter heart, a smile that breaks the tension, or a moment of humour that helps you forget your pain for a while. Laughter may not replace treatment, but it surely helps the healing happen faster.

Two of my patients come to mind, Surya and Ranveer. Both had uncontrolled diabetes and were on multiple medicines. Yet, their health patterns were strikingly different.

Surya, despite his love for sweets and occasional cheating, had his other health parameters surprisingly normal. He was a cheerful, easy-going man who often laughed and cracked jokes, even about his illness. His appointments were always filled with light moments.

Ranveer, on the other hand, had the same diabetes but a very different outlook. He was serious, often irritable, and seemed weighed down in every conversation. Besides high blood sugar, he developed thyroid and prostate problems. This made me realise that sometimes, it's not just the medicine we take, but the mood we keep that shapes our health. A lighter heart, a good laugh, and a relaxed mind won't show up on a lab report, but they quietly help the body heal. A positive attitude can even make medicine work better and lower the risk of complications. When we choose lightness, we make it easier for the body to heal.

Ask yourself:

- Do I take myself and life too seriously?
- Could a lighter heart be the best medicine I've been missing?

How to Brew Laughter as an Elixir

Just as every healing potion needs the right blend of ingredients, laughter, too, has its own special mix—three essential and powerful “spices” that make this elixir effective.

The Spices of Laughter:

Lighter Mode On, Learning to Laugh, and Luxuriate in Life.

Each adds its own flavour—a touch of ease to calm the mind, a hint of humour to lift the heart, and a sense of joy that refreshes the spirit.

Lighter Mode On reminds us that life is often less serious than it feels. A little ease can soften even the toughest moments.

Learning to Laugh helps us notice the fun in life’s quirks and imperfections instead of wrestling with them.

Luxuriate in Life encourages you to slow down and soak in the joy around you.

Together, these three “spices” turn laughter into a healing brew — one that boosts your wellbeing, enhances the effect of medicines, and even reduces stress-related complications. Most importantly, it’s an elixir you can create anytime, anywhere, simply by choosing lightness, humour, and joy.

1. Lighter Mode “ON”

Picture life as a giant cauldron bubbling with unexpected ingredients — some sweet, some sour, some spicy. The secret is to **stir the pot gently** instead of letting it boil over. Most things aren’t as grave as they appear; we simply forget to switch our Lighter Mode ON.

Appu often felt hurt when her friend Renu called her “stupid.” But another friend in their group was never bothered by it. For her, “stupid” wasn’t an insult at all—it was just a playful reminder to herself:

“Stop Thinking Unkind, Provoking Intentions, Dear.”

Because she interpreted the word differently, it never affected her feelings the way it did Appu’s.

That day, Appu realised something important: **sometimes it’s not the word itself that hurts us, but the meaning we give it.** A **small change** in perspective can turn irritation into amusement—and make life feel lighter right away.

Finding humour in life's small, unexpected moments can make a big difference.

There was an elderly lady who visited the clinic every few days, always in tears, saying, “Doctor, I have no one to care for me. I’m sick again.”

When I was new to the department, I would carefully prescribe medicines each time. Later, I noticed a pattern—the same complaints, the same tears, and the same cycle repeating. Some doctors even recommended repeated tests, hoping it might reduce her frequent visits.

One day, gently teasing, I asked,

“Where are all the paracetamol tablets going? Are you saving them for some future need?”

Unexpectedly, she broke into laughter. Her tears disappeared instantly.

That experience revealed an important lesson: many situations—and even complaints—are far less serious than they appear. A touch of warmth, humour, or simple human connection can heal in ways that medicine alone cannot.

When life feels chaotic, look for humour in the unpredictability – it’s the spice that keeps the brew from boiling over.

Like Appu’s experience, even a small shift in perception can lighten the heaviest moments.

The second spice of this laughter elixir is learning to find humour in life.

2. Learn to Find Humour in Life

Humour is the key ingredient for a happy life. It's not about ignoring challenges—it's about discovering the amusing little quirks hidden within them.

One day, my new neighbour shared a story that made me smile for hours. During a power cut, she said she couldn't find her "Myna." I immediately pictured a pet—maybe a dog, a cat, or even her toddler wandering off in the dark!

When the power returned, she finally found "Myna" hiding under the bed.

It turned out, Myna wasn't a pet at all—it was the name of their robotic vacuum cleaner!

I laughed at the idea of naming a household appliance like a family member. It showed me how much joy people can create just by adding a little personality to their daily lives.

I had a colleague who did something just as funny. Whenever her boss annoyed her, she would mutter, "Oh, Pinky, you better shut up! Don't say a word, or you'll get into trouble."

Pinky, as it turned out, wasn't a coworker—it was her **inner voice**, a playful name she'd given herself. That small dose of humour helped her handle stress without letting it take over.

These playful habits reveal something important: people who embrace light-heartedness find joy in the simplest corners of life. Whether it's naming a vacuum cleaner or talking to your inner voice, these small, creative touches add laughter to your daily routine.

To bring more laughter into your life, try small, playful things that make joy a habit. Turn mistakes into funny stories. Spend

time with people who make you laugh, watch a comedy, or read something that brings a smile. Play with how you tell your own story—a playful perspective can turn ordinary moments into unforgettable memories.

My daughter once told me a story on a video call that made me burst out laughing. She had built a cosy little house for one of my sister's pregnant cats—a sweet gesture showing her love for animals.

As she described what happened, she surprised me by saying, “When the cat house was built, the other cats in my sister's house came over for a *housewarming!*”

I couldn't stop laughing. I pictured a group of cats strolling in, checking out the new cat house, maybe even bringing imaginary gifts of catnip. It was such a fun and light way to turn an ordinary moment into something that felt like a grand party.

This showed me that humour often comes from the way we look at and share simple moments. When we see life through playful eyes, even something as simple as a cat house can become a moment of joy and laughter.

3. Luxuriate in Life

The third ingredient in the laughter elixir is learning to slow down and enjoy life. True laughter comes easily when we give ourselves permission to pause, breathe, and savour the moment. Luxuriating in life simply means creating space for delight—because a relaxed heart is open to humour.

After nearly seven long years, my sister returned to India from the United States with her family. It was a heartwarming

reunion, and reconnecting with my nephew and niece instantly lifted the whole house.

One evening, as all the cousins gathered to play **Taboo**, a lively word-guessing game, the adults couldn't resist joining in. Soon, aunts, uncles, and children were huddled together, shouting clues, making wild guesses, and bursting into laughter when someone went completely off-track.

The room felt alive—full of energy, warmth, and the kind of joy that melts away stress without you even noticing. The kids were thrilled to have the grown-ups in the game, and for a while, none of us was parents, elders, or “responsible adults.” We were just people playing, laughing, and enjoying each other's presence.

In that moment, something became clear:

When we slow down and allow ourselves to enjoy life, laughter comes naturally.

Simple moments—games, conversations, shared mistakes—become memories we treasure for years.

A few small ways to luxuriate in life are often closer than we think.

Celebrating the little things—a sunny morning, a favourite snack, a call from a friend—can bring unexpected joy. Adding a touch of playfulness to the day, like dancing while cooking, humming in the shower, or doodling on a notepad, keeps that lightness alive.

Laughter is not just a momentary escape—it's a way of living lightly. When we choose humour, we uplift ourselves and radiate ease to everyone around us. With the 3 L's—**Lighter**

Mode On, Learning to Laugh, and Luxuriating in Life—we can brew this healing elixir every single day.

Ask Yourself:

- How can you turn today's challenges into opportunities for laughter?
- Which of the three L's will you practice more consciously this week?
- How might humour transform your mood, your relationships, and your well-being?

Laughter, like a perfectly brewed elixir, has the power to transform your life. It turns ordinary days into joyful ones, makes burdens feel lighter, and fills your heart with warmth.

Let's sip this elixir often. Let it bubble up, let it spill over, and share it with the world.

With laughter as your companion, you'll move from disease to ease, from heaviness to lightness, and from simply existing to truly living.

And when you think laughter is the sweetest elixir life can offer, another awaits—one that keeps your spirit afloat even when the tides change. It's the lingering joy that remains after the laughter fades... *The Quiet Satisfaction of Living Without Constant Striving.*

What is this next secret to living with ease?

Let's step aboard and discover it together in the next chapter
— **“Enjoyment: The Cruise of Life.”**



*“Laughter brews a potion no pharmacy can offer. It heals,
soothes, and strengthens from within.”*

– Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 9:

ENJOYMENT — Embracing the Cruise of Life

“We’re going on a cruise,” my husband announced, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

For a moment, the words lingered in the air, almost surreal. After three decades of marriage, this was the first time he had chosen to take us away from our demanding family and professional obligations. The mere thought of stepping away from life’s constant pressures filled me with relief and excitement.

The day finally arrived, and stepping onto the cruise ship felt liberating. Surrounded by the vast expanse of the ocean and disconnected from Wi-Fi, we immersed ourselves in the sea’s serenity. We simply enjoyed being together, savoured exquisite meals, admired passing ships, and watched fellow passengers laugh, relax, and enjoy the moment. Watching my husband—always so busy and constantly on the move—finally relaxing brought me immense relief. His usual busyness had often left little room for connection, but here, we both found tranquility.

I paused and reflected. Our children had grown and were pursuing their own paths, and I realised with certainty that our happiness was no longer tied to roles or responsibilities. It was ours to nurture and cherish.

Why had we waited so long to create such moments?

We need not postpone joy for the perfect time, the perfect company, or the perfect place. Happiness begins where we are, when we choose to notice and nurture it.

Life is like a grand cruise across the vast ocean—each day offering new horizons and experiences. The ship represents our journey, the ocean the expanse of life, and the destinations our dreams and aspirations.

Ask Yourself:

- When was the last time you truly allowed yourself to savour a moment, without guilt or distraction?
- Are you postponing happiness for later? If so, what is holding you back from embracing it now?

Joy does not always come from big achievements. Often, it grows through the small moments we allow ourselves to enjoy. The more we welcome it, the more it transforms our journey from mere survival to genuine fulfilment.

Blisslets: Small Moments, Lasting Joy

During the cruise, I began to notice tiny but meaningful moments of happiness—a shared laugh, the sun setting over the ocean, the gentle sway of the ship. As brief as they were, these moments left a lasting mark on my well-being.

I started calling them blisslets—small *bursts of joy* that, when noticed and valued, add to our overall sense of happiness.

Blisslets aren't big events. They're subtle, often missed experiences that bring a smile or a sense of warmth. When we notice and savour them, we learn to appreciate the present and become more resilient.

I realised that my early-morning ritual—a quiet prayer, gentle stretching, and a cup of herbal tea—set a positive tone for my day. Reading even one page of a self-help book kept me motivated, and listening to spiritual songs brought me peace and a sense of connection. These *small but meaningful* acts became my daily blisslets—tiny sparks of joy that brought clarity and lightness to my day.

When we fill our days with these moments—taking a walk in the garden, enjoying a meal, solving a puzzle, or watching a favourite comedy—we build emotional strength. *Doing more of what makes us happy, even in small ways, helps us stay steady through life's changes.*

Blisslets do more than bring fleeting happiness. They help with healing and recovery. By looking for and enjoying these moments, we create an upward spiral of positive emotions that help us handle stress and hard times.

In tough moments, these small pockets of joy anchor us, reminding us that peace and happiness are always close by.

Making blisslets part of daily life is a form of self-care and resilience. Like gentle ripples on the ocean, these moments spread calm throughout our lives.

Ask Yourself:

- When life's tides pull you down, what small joyful rituals can you weave into your daily life to keep your spirit light and your heart steady?

The Guiding Winds for Life's Cruise

As I continued to reflect, I realised that these blisslets were like gentle ripples guiding my journey through life's vast

ocean. Just as every cruise needs favourable winds to stay on course, our lives are guided by inner forces that help us remain balanced and move forward with joy.

Three guiding winds keep our life's cruise on course: **Ego-Free Living, Enthusiasm, and Effortless Expression.** These qualities encourage us to travel lightly, stay inspired, and express ourselves with authenticity and ease. When we cultivate them, life becomes less of a struggle against the current and more of a harmonious voyage—steady, joyful, and full of grace.

1. Ego-Free Living: The Guiding Wind That Lightens the Journey

To live with ease is to live without the weight of ego. Ego-free living doesn't mean giving up ambition or confidence; it means letting go of the constant need to prove our worth. It's a shift from seeking external validation to nurturing inner clarity, and from comparison to connection with our deepest purpose.

When ego takes the lead, we get caught in cycles of overachievement, competition, and control. But when we act from inner clarity, we find peace—not in being more than others, but in knowing we are enough as we are.

Consider Kiran, a twelfth-grade student who arrived at the clinic with irregular periods, dehydration, and constipation. She had been pushing herself relentlessly, sacrificing sleep and rest to remain at the top of her class. Her mind was filled with thoughts like *"I must be the best"* and *"I need to be the topper."*

This exhausting pursuit—driven more by ego than purpose—left her anxious, depleted, and disconnected.

Only when she recognised that her true goal was to secure a medical seat—not to outshine others—did she begin to feel relief. Letting go of competition brought her back to the joy of learning.

Those who release ego-driven attachments and focus on purpose, contribution, and collaboration experience peace and deep satisfaction in their lives. They move with intention rather than comparison, letting values—not validation—guide their choices.

Living without ego also deepens connection. Ego thrives on hierarchy—who is better, who is right, who is winning. Ease, however, grows in spaces of humility and empathy. When we listen without defensiveness and give without seeking recognition, we foster environments where genuine growth and healing can occur.

Letting go of ego isn't a one-time act—it's a daily practice: choosing ease over ego, understanding over insistence, and authenticity over image.

2. Enthusiasm: The Guiding Wind That Powers the Journey

Enthusiasm is the inner flame that enlivens life's routines, infusing even ordinary moments with freshness and meaning. It is not just excitement, nor is it loud or dramatic. Rather, it is a gentle vitality that arises when we are aligned with purpose. Enthusiastic people approach life with curiosity, sincerity, and a readiness to engage fully.

Enthusiasm flourishes when rooted in meaning. Without a sense of purpose, even the most pleasurable activities can feel hollow or fleeting. But when we understand why we do what we do—whether for personal growth, service, love, or creativity—our actions gain depth and delight, and their impact endures.

People with a clear sense of purpose often report greater well-being, resilience, and satisfaction. They recover from setbacks not because they are immune to pain, but because their energy is guided by meaning rather than ego.

Over the years, I have seen this truth unfold many times in my work as a doctor. Some people bring enthusiasm into their daily lives in quiet yet remarkable ways.

While working in a hospital in Kerala, I met Kavya, a housekeeping staff member who cleaned the floors with such presence and care that it was impossible not to notice. She moved with grace, smiled easily, and performed her work not out of obligation but with genuine enthusiasm. *Her tasks were ordinary, but her energy was extraordinary.*

Kalai, a patient with diabetes, initially felt overwhelmed by her diagnosis. Yet instead of seeing her lifestyle changes as burdens, she embraced them with enthusiasm. She followed her diet plan, walked daily, and checked in with her body regularly. Her health improved not only because of the new routines, but also because of the spirit with which she welcomed them.

Likewise, when asked why she never missed a check-up, Seema replied, “I want to stay strong so I can care for my child with special needs.” Her commitment to health was anchored in her responsibility toward her child.

In contrast, Manu, a businessman, visited the clinic with severe gastritis. He often skipped breakfast, explaining that back-to-back meetings consumed his mornings. When asked why he worked so relentlessly, he struggled to give a clear answer. His days were busy, but not fulfilling.

When he realised that taking even ten minutes to care for himself could prevent hours of discomfort, his energy began to shift. Enthusiasm cannot thrive in constant overdrive; it needs alignment and room to breathe.

In my own journey, enthusiasm has transformed struggle into strength. I once found it difficult to maintain a regular exercise routine—until health concerns demanded a change. At first, I was reluctant, but gradually, I aligned the habit with a deeper purpose: long-term vitality.

My walks became moments of music, reflection, and quiet connection. What once felt like a chore gradually became a gift.

Calmness helps us stay present in everything we do. Enthusiasm adds energy, purpose, and joy to what matters most—and, when we can, even to the small moments of daily life.

Over time, this quiet energy does more than brighten our days—it strengthens resilience, supports healing, and reminds us that even small efforts can carry deep meaning. When enthusiasm is guided by purpose, it brings a sense of energy and direction that gently pushes away feelings of emptiness and helplessness.

Ask Yourself:

- What activities drain you, and how might aligning them with a deeper purpose renew your energy?
- When was the last time you felt truly enthusiastic? What sparked that feeling?

Choose one meaningful activity today—just one—and do it with full presence. Notice how the wind within you begins to shift.

3. Effortless Expression: Letting Life Flow Through You

Growing up with a strict and authoritative father, I often lived in fear of expressing myself openly. Vulnerability felt unsafe, so I learned to remain guarded, careful with my words, and anxious about making mistakes. I constantly worried about being judged. Over time, I became disconnected from my natural way of expressing myself.

It was only later, through practising calmness, adaptability, positivity, self-compassion, and deeper understanding, that I slowly began to feel at ease within myself. With time, I became less afraid of judgment and more comfortable expressing who I truly was. Standing before others and speaking honestly helped me discover a quieter kind of confidence—one no longer tied to approval or validation. I realised something important: trying to change others or constantly seeking validation is exhausting and often futile. True peace begins with knowing yourself.

A pearl is still a pearl no matter where it is. In the same way, when we truly know ourselves, life's challenges may test us, but they cannot take away our worth or what matters to us.

We express ourselves most naturally when we stop fighting who we are. Then, our thoughts, feelings, and creativity can flow freely. Self-expression starts the moment we accept ourselves and let our creative spirit flow with ease.

Like waves moving with the sea, you begin to move more easily with the flow of life. True expression means sharing your real self—your kindness, creativity, laughter, and calm. It could be helping someone, singing, cooking, writing, or simply offering a warm smile. Effortless expression is letting your inner light shine in the world.

To express yourself freely is to honour what feels true for you, without fear of judgment or needing approval. When we speak, create, or live with ease, we move with life's flow. Our emotions move more freely, relationships feel lighter, and we find more harmony inside and out. Conversations become easier, there's less tension, and deeper connections form.

Expression is also deeply healing. When feelings stay unspoken, they can build up as stress. Letting them out—by speaking, writing, making art, or moving—releases that weight. You don't need an audience, only honesty. Writing in a journal, taking a quiet walk, or humming while you cook can help you feel more like yourself again.

Effortless expression also means speaking with calm honesty instead of reacting harshly. It's about finding balance—between silence and speech, patience and assertiveness. When you share your truth kindly, your relationships stay clear and peaceful.

Sometimes, expression shows up in simple, everyday choices.

Devi expressed herself quietly. At gatherings, she chose what was comfortable for her body, without feeling the need to explain or apologise. Her sense of ease came from honouring herself.

Anu's way of expressing was through open, thoughtful communication. She spoke with confidence and asked questions rather than making assumptions.

Salman found expression in self-care. Even when life was busy, he paused to rest when needed, choosing what felt right for him rather than giving in to constant outside pressure.

For Veni, singing had once been her creative outlet. After marriage, she sang less, and a quiet emptiness grew—a reminder that unexpressed creativity can become a silent burden.

Piya, a young mother who loved origami, carved out small moments to fold paper, even while caring for her toddler. Her creativity flourished in these brief, meaningful pauses, showing that a little time and willingness can be enough.

True effortless expression isn't self-indulgence—it's nourishment. When we follow our natural urges to create, speak, or share, we feel lighter and more whole.

Ask yourself:

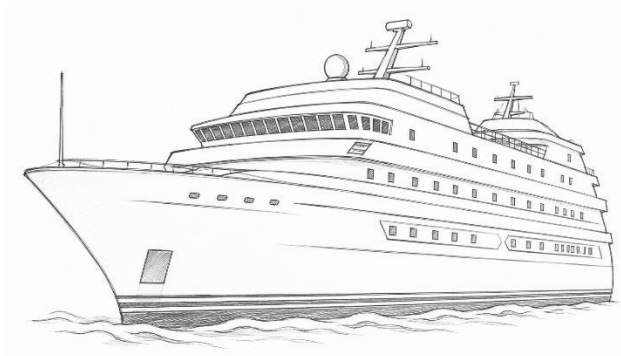
- What activities, words, or creative outlets help you express your true self with ease?
- How can you make space each day to let your inner self flow gently and naturally?

When we learn to express ourselves freely and kindly, life finds a gentler rhythm—struggles fade, life feels less heavy and more harmonious. In those moments, we realise that ease is not about doing less. *It is about being more fully ourselves.*

When we release ego, stay enthusiastic, and express ourselves with authenticity, the winds of life gently carry us into a life of

greater ease. Even on the smoothest journey, storms can come. In those times, what helps us avoid getting lost in fear?

The answer may be simpler and closer than we think. Let's explore this in the final chapter: **Ease—Cruising Life with Lifeboats.**



“Enjoyment is the everyday cruise you create for yourself.”

–Dr Jabeen Ashia

Chapter 10:

EASE – Cruising Life with Lifeboats

“What does this sign mean?” I asked a crew member, pointing to a green-and-white symbol posted by the corridor.

“It represents the lifeboats,” he replied with a reassuring smile.

“These signs are placed wherever lifeboats are available. In case of an emergency, they guide you to safety.”

Shortly after boarding the ship, an announcement came over the intercom: every passenger was to report to their assigned muster station for the mandatory safety drill. I made my way there to join a crowd of fellow travellers beneath the open sky. The instructor demonstrated the emergency siren, explained evacuation procedures, and showed us how to wear life jackets and locate the lifeboats.

Just a few hours earlier, the ship had felt like a floating dream. The interiors were elegant, and the ocean seemed endless. The days ahead felt carefree and full of promise. Yet, standing in the emergency assembly area, I was reminded of a quiet truth: *No matter how thrilling the voyage, safety measures must always be in place.*

And this, I realised, applies not only to travel but to life itself.

Preparing for Life’s Voyage

Imagine a storm rolling in while you are at sea. The winds howl, waves crash, and panic surges. But then you remember the lifeboats—ready and waiting. You climb in, feeling safe and secure.

Now imagine possessing that same certainty in life.

That image stayed with me—the storm, the lifeboats, and the comfort of being prepared. Why don't we offer ourselves that same reassurance in daily life?

Life is an unpredictable sea. Storms will come, waves will rise, and sometimes the horizon will vanish into darkness. When we travel or set out on adventures, we prepare meticulously for emergencies—drills, instructions, and safety equipment. Yet we often overlook preparing for the emotional and spiritual storms that life inevitably brings.

Ask yourself:

- Have I ever truly considered what my own safety measures in life are?
- When the unexpected happens, what helps me remain calm and centred?
- How do I ensure well-being—not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally?

Much like a ship's lifeboats, our inner safeguards—the coping mechanisms that keep us afloat—must be ready and well-maintained. No single strategy can carry us through every storm. Life's challenges demand a variety of strengths. We need lifeboats that steady our minds, ease our fears, and remind us of hope.

These lifeboats—Calmness, Adaptability, Positivity, Self-care, Understanding, Laughter, and Enjoyment—carry us across life's turbulent waters with grace and resilience.

Ask yourself:

- How do you usually respond when life's waters grow rough?
- Do you reach for your lifeboats, or forget they exist?

Raju, a senior manager at a major company, had his heart set firmly on one ambition—rising to the role of Vice President. Outwardly, he appeared steady and in control. But within, there was a constant undercurrent of anxiety.

Life had quietly lost its colour. Nothing felt truly pleasurable anymore except the thought of achieving that coveted position. He began skipping meals—not for lack of time, but because his mind was always elsewhere. His morning yoga, once a grounding ritual, gradually faded away.

One evening, he sat at the dinner table with his family, absentmindedly scrolling through his phone. He could hear their voices and laughter—but he wasn't truly there. He paused and realised that, while he had been physically present for weeks, he had been emotionally absent.

Though he continued to fulfil his responsibilities, the warmth of connection had faded. Conversations became routine, and genuine presence was replaced by constant preoccupation.

A quiet thought often echoed within him:

"I will feel better... once I reach there."

But "there" always seemed just out of reach.

Raju was not failing in life—but he was not fully living it either.

When he began applying the C.A.P.S.U.L.E. approach, something shifted.

He started by observing and gently silencing the negative narratives that told him his worth depended only on achievement. *Calmness* slowly returned—not because his struggles eased, but because he began responding differently.

He reached out to his **pearls**—his family and friends—allowing their support and his **adaptability** to guide him back to himself. Through *understanding*, he realised that ambition and enjoyment are not mutually exclusive; they can coexist harmoniously.

One morning, almost instinctively, he returned to his yoga mat—a small act of **self-care**. It was not perfect. It was not long. But it was a beginning.

Gradually, he reconnected with his routines, with his loved ones, and with himself. *Laughter* returned in small moments. Meals became moments of **enjoyment** rather than interruptions.

The goal remained, but the sense of pressure eased.

Raju was still sailing toward his dream. But this time, he was no longer abandoning himself along the way.

If this feels familiar, you are not alone. This is where we begin to understand the importance of our inner lifeboats.

The C.A.P.S.U.L.E. approach is a gentle yet powerful framework that helps you build and maintain your inner lifeboats. Just as ships are equipped with safety measures for uncertain seas, we, too, need reliable emotional and spiritual support to navigate life's unpredictability. Calmness anchors you when everything feels overwhelming. Adaptability allows you to adjust when life takes an unexpected turn. Positivity

becomes your inner light in moments of darkness. Self-care restores your energy and preserves your balance. Understanding deepens your compassion for yourself and others. Laughter brings relief and lightness, even in difficult times. And enjoyment reminds you that life is meant to be lived, not just endured. Together, these elements form a complete system of inner strength, helping you stay steady, hopeful, and prepared—no matter what storms arise.

Ask Yourself:

- Which of your lifeboats feels strongest right now?
- Which one needs a little more care and attention?

Practising these daily ensures that when life's storms arise, you do not panic. Instead, you respond with steadiness, trust, and courage.

Ease, Healing, and Readiness

Ease is not the absence of storms; it is the confidence that you are ready for them. It is the quiet trust that, whatever arises, you have the inner resources to navigate it. Rather than resisting the waves, you move with them, letting life unfold with less struggle.

Challenges will always arise—health concerns, emotional upheavals, unexpected losses. True ease is found in how you respond. With resilience and readiness, even difficult moments can become opportunities for growth.

When your lifeboats are strong, adversity becomes a teacher. You adjust, realign, and move forward with greater awareness.

Living with ease is a balance—the ability to rest without becoming passive, and to remain prepared without becoming anxious. It is a state of calm alertness: grounded, yet ready.

Healing does not begin only after a crisis; it is an ongoing practice. Just as a sailor maintains their vessel, we must care for our inner world with consistency and intention.

By checking in with your body, mind, and emotions, you prevent small imbalances from growing into larger disturbances. These quiet moments of awareness keep you steady over time.

Ask yourself:

- What am I doing today to care for my inner world before the next storm appears?

That is the essence of resilience—the deep assurance that, no matter how strong the winds, you are not unprepared. You may not control the weather, but you can always strengthen your vessel.

Sailing Toward Ease

As this journey—and this book—draw to a close, let this truth remain with you:

Prepare your lifeboats. Build your reserves of strength. Nurture gratitude and connection. Embrace change with courage.

The transition from **dis-ease** to **ease** is not just about healing the body. It is about adopting a mindset that allows you to thrive, even when life feels uncertain.

The greatest assurance in life is not calm waters—it is the knowledge that you can stay afloat.

When your lifeboats of Calmness, Adaptability, Positivity, and Self-care are sturdy, *they form the foundation that carries you through any storm.*

Strengthened by Understanding, Laughter, and Enjoyment, *life transforms from mere survival into something truly meaningful.*

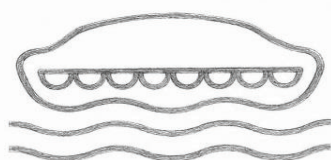
When your lifeboats are strong, life becomes more than endurance—it becomes expansion. You see beauty in uncertainty, find meaning in change, and experience joy in simply moving forward.

Ease is a way of being that helps you remain steady through both stillness and motion—through grief and busyness alike. When you trust your C.A.P.S.U.L.E. lifeboats, each wave becomes a whisper of growth, and each pause a moment of renewal.

Ask yourself:

- How might you begin to trust your inner lifeboats a little more each day?

May you always remember: **everything you need to float, steer, and shine is already within you.**



Lifeboat

*“Ease is trusting your inner lifeboats to hold you steady
through life’s everyday tides.”*

– Dr Jabeen Ashia