

UNBECOMING YOU

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Dedication

To my mum and my daughters, who inspire and believe in me.

*And to **YOU!***

The emboldened and sovereign woman.

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NOTE TO THE READERS

*I shall walk in the humility of my grief,
For the only true freedom in life is healing.
Acceptance of the ruptured part of me,
To love and be loved unconditionally.
The greatest blessing anyone can ever wish for,
One that I am yearning for forevermore.*

Each one of us is constantly longing for love; the urge feels like needing the water to quench our thirst in the dry desert. Love is the emotional wellspring of our existence. We feel despair without love and are prepared to give up almost everything for it. Ironically, we are often willing to trade our self-love for external love. And in the greatest love story of all, like Titanic or Romeo and Juliet, giving up your own life for your beloved is a heroic love. In the digital era where communication is instantly accessible, authentic connection is increasingly invaluable. Living in a clouded world of materialism and egotistical competition, finding unconditional love is like reaching for the stars.

Remember the warm feeling of love which radiates from a newborn baby's smile? It is magnetic and captivating to anyone. It expresses a total acceptance of self and others from an innocent state of mind. Pure love still exists in the deep-

est layer of our hearts and is accessible through a conscious connection between our physicality and souls beingness. The unfortunate truth is, we learn to reject our true self during the process of growing-up. We focus on chasing perfection and opt for control and manipulation to mask our deepest insecurities. We neglect ourselves and abandon our desires as being unworthy, and we end up in an altered ego state of accepting love's juxtaposed nature as pain and pleasure.

I believe we can **have it all**, if only we have a little more courage. Brave enough to dream, ask, follow through, and feel worthy to receive it. For each one of us, we have encountered many opportunities to rewrite our story and to strive toward a greater version of ourselves, but the unfortunate truth is we choose to stay put. The reason? Because transformation requires us to face our fears, through transforming ingrained beliefs, which are authenticated and validated as our truth. It's a fundamental change to our existence, like demolishing our home without knowing if there is a new roof in sight. However, as Albert Einstein once said, "we cannot solve the problems with the same mind that created them." To transform, therefore, we must first deny our current identities and the beliefs about who we are, regardless of our resistance.

So, kudos for taking your first courageous step to follow your heart and soul calling to choose YOU, first and foremost over others. This book is your calling card to rekindle with your soul once again. Through unlearning, uncovering, and unleashing your true self, you shall find the path to living life on your own terms. And NOW is your tipping point, as your current life experience is no longer serving your best and highest interests. I am excited and looking forward to hearing your growth journey and what awaits you on the other side.

You've got this! Be the Alchemist you were born to be!

Yuliana

P.S. This book comes with added resources and bonuses including self-healing meditation which can be found on this link www.yulianafrancie.com/unbecoming-bonus

The Invitation

*It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.
 I want to know what you ache for,
 And if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.
 It doesn't interest me how old you are.
 I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love,
 For your dream, for the adventure of being alive.
 It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.
 I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow,
 If you have been opened by life's betrayals,
 Or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.
 I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,
 Without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it.
 I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own,
 If you can dance with wildness,
 And let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes,
 Without cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic,
 to remember the limitations of being human.
 It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.
 I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself;
 If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul;
 If you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy.
 I want to know if you can see Beauty, even
 when it's not pretty, everyday,
 And if you can source your own life from its presence.
 I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine,
 And still stand on the edge of the lake and shout
 to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"
 It doesn't interest me to know where you live
 or how much money you have.
 I want to know if you can get up, after the night of grief and despair,
 Weary and bruised to the bone and do what
 needs to be done to feed the children.
 It doesn't interest me who you know or how you came to be here.
 I want to know if you will stand in the center of
 the fire with me and not shrink back.*

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.

*I want to know what sustains you, from the
inside, when all else falls away.*

*I want to know if you can be alone with yourself,
And if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.*

*By Oriah "Mountain Dreamer" House from her book, THE
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The Unbecoming You

*Today, I choose to live with an open heart.
When I am afraid, I choose to be courageous.
When I experience oppression, I choose to express my truth.
When I feel threatened, I choose to be vulnerable.
When I hear silence, I choose to speak up.
When I encounter hatred, I choose to love.
My free spirit gives me wings to soar high.
As I embody pure love, I see my greatness.*

THE WAKE-UP CALL

*Behind the shadow of me that is doing chores and taking care of family
There is another me that wants to show my
soul, my fears, insecurities, and vanity
I am into deep conversations about life, love, and loss
I dip and roll and race and dive and hurt and cower and hope
I am the Queen of Shadows
I live comfortably in the darkness showered with my own misery
In the spotlight, I am a happy and bright mother,
spouse, and daughter of an aging mother
No one really knows who is behind the dark shadow
I can be anyone who they expect to see*

Do you ever tell yourself, *'This is not how life should be'*? When you spend most of your life trying to fit in, please everybody, or adhere to rules and norms, you never give yourself a chance to meet the raw version of yourself. Life consists mostly of what everyone else wants or needs, and you are too busy chasing perfection by molding yourself into the society's idealized model. Consequently, you do not know what you truly want out of life. Each day feels mundane with work, family, and life commitments. You feel unfit and apathetic for the life you are leading. All those accomplishments which you've thought

will bring happiness, pride, and love are no longer meaningful to you.

There is a growing eagerness to experience a different version of life. The urge to take a pause on life and seek the answer to a probing question, *‘What am I here for?’*. A strong calling to find a serene space where you can just be you, being loved and accepted just for who you are, no matter what. No more begging for affection, attention, and love. There is no brokenness or imperfection, just the freedom to express your whole psyche out to the world. And unleashing the free spirit living in the limited human body so you can live life on your terms. Because all you’ve ever wanted was not more trophies. Just a warm hug, a shoulder to cry on, a gentle touch to soothe your pain. And the soft whisper saying, *“I am proud of you. You are more than enough. I love you no matter what.”*

That was my experience as I approached my 35th birthday, a milestone in my spiritual enlightenment. *“You are approaching your soul maturity and you will embark on a different version of life journey,”* Jonathan Quintin said during my first astrology reading. And before I digested this statement, Jonathan continued, *“According to your time of birth, your destiny is to inspire a change in this world because your soul’s purpose is to make an impact on humanity. Your past life as a priestess and a healer are your calling in this life journey once again.”* By the end of that reading, something shifted inside me, I suddenly felt myself awoken from a deep slumber.

A week prior, I was sitting in a wealth creation workshop and given a task to write my autobiography by Kelly, my business mentor. I did not know what to expect from writing a short memoir, yet what I later discovered was, it was a life-changing moment. Each of those past life events was a series of self-destructive patterns. I was sobbing as I reflected on my childhood and past life stories. An image came to mind of a scared little girl, lost throughout her life journey. As a Chinese, female, Catholic who grew up in a small village in Indonesia, I ticked the trifecta box of the minority. I had firsthand experiences of what it was like to fit in and

conform to societal expectations for my safety. I developed a life skill as a people pleaser and accepted the normality of less than equal treatment. I was too scared to speak my truth. For the same reason, I experienced workplace bullying and sexual harassment during the early years of my corporate career.

At home, I grew up with a controlling and overly driven mother. She is a smart and savvy businesswoman who lost her dream because of poverty. All she ever wanted in life was to be a medical scientist. But the lack of financial support ended her education before completing high school. She promised herself to never let her children experience poverty in life. To make a radical improvement in her life, she married a wealthy man at nineteen years of age. I was born a year after their wedding. My mum never gave up on her dream; she lived her aspiration to go to the best college by ensuring a successful corporate career for her children. Despite having the best intentions, my mum unconsciously shaped me into an ambitious and impatient person who struggled to accept and appreciate herself. I've never felt accomplished and believed to be good enough.

I never believed in coincidence, and a series of non-coincidental events led me to a thought-provoking moment. The Universe was trying to show me the source of my frustrations, the answer to my questions, and nudging me onto a new life path! It also provoked my deepest wish to liberate my soul, which yearns for authenticity. I wanted to be free and feel liberated from life commitments that were no longer in alignment with my soul's purpose. The answer came to me during my regular Monday meditation circle; a new routine I started since my conversion from Catholicism to Spirituality. During that meditation, I saw Jesus and Mary in the most beautiful meadow; they were sitting on lush green grass. With much love and affection, they gave me a warm hug and handed me a baby lamb. Jesus said, "*Go forth on your new life, you are my shepherd.*"

Six months later, I left my job and marriage just before celebrating our 15th anniversary. All my friends and families were

in utter shock; no one saw this coming. We put on a happy family facade, a long-term relationship with two young, bright girls. The first thought that came to everyone's mind was that I was experiencing a midlife crisis. The truth was, my soul needed to be revived. Even though I had a successful career as a Corporate Accountant, owned a thriving business on the side, three properties, and a beautiful family, my heart was void. I was not living. I was merely existing. I felt disconnected from the excitement life had to unfold. The ambitious energy of 'not good enough' belief drove my achievements. My upbringing shaped me to be a highly competitive achiever with an end goal of attaining success, social status, and a sense of security in life. During primary school, my mum expected me to achieve a 100% mark in every test. Otherwise, I would endure extra study and physical punishment, an Asian way to discipline children. My memory of childhood comprised of eat, study, and sleep.

The baby lamb was exactly what I needed to have; the courage to leave all the success and comfort of my old life behind and start a brand-new chapter in my book of life. I needed to break through those cycles and patterns. And the first breakthrough started with getting a divorce. I married a guy who was just like my father, and I was turning into my mother, despite consciously not wanting to do so. I could see that my marriage was heading into a dysfunctional family, just like my parents. Getting a divorce was my first major step in the 'unbecoming' journey, the road less traveled.

The word divorce does not exist in our community. Couples, including my parents, settle on their toxic marriage in order to maintain their reputation. Women especially will do almost anything to maintain their marriage, including accepting their husband's mistress or tolerating abusive treatment. Society regards divorce as a shameful and embarrassing act. As one with a rebellious spirit, I decided it was the time to choose my happiness first. I chose a different ending for my story. I refused to wake up on my 60th birthday with regret, knowing that I should have followed my heart's calling years ago. My daughters needed to see me as their role model;

a woman who shall choose happiness and desires over society's acceptance. My healing journey would end the ancestral karmic lessons, passed down in the embodiment of the inter-generational wounded feminine.

Our soul has a sacred contract to grow through the lessons which we need to master in this life's journey. For me, manifesting a love relationship is an immense area of growth and learning. This coincides with the dysfunctional family that my soul agreed to be part of. This book is the next level of transformation I have been avoiding. A journey to find a secure place within myself which allows me to give and receive love unconditionally. Without having self-love and self-acceptance, I am not whole and complete; others will reflect my '*self-rejection*' patterns. Hence, I felt I had to choose between love, wealth, or myself. Each time my career and business reached the next level of success, I had major relationship challenges. I struggled for years to find the pathway to have the life I loved.

Our spiritual journey is like the lotus flower's life cycle. The lotus flower is known as the most sacred plant in the world. The Buddhists recognize it as the most beautiful metaphor for our spiritual journey and path to enlightenment. In Ancient Egyptian art, the lotus is a symbol of fertility, a new beginning, and purity. The lotus flower is associated with beauty, prosperity, and fertility in Hinduism. So, what is the deeper meaning of this metaphor? They often call lotus the flower of life as it symbolizes life, death, and rebirth. Lotus grows in a pond or river and must pass through the murky water to blossom. Its roots latch onto the mud and scum, yet it submerges every night into the water and re-blooms the next morning, sparkling clean with striking color. In addition to its daily resurrection, the lotus has a strong willpower to survive. Its seed can withstand thousands of years without water and can germinate over two centuries later.

This is what *Unbecoming You* is about; a step-by-step process to '**unbecome**' from your childhood conditioning and societal programming, so you can become exactly who you were born to be, and live according to your true purpose.

When we surpass the muddy waters, our spirit shall shine out. Each day, as the sun rises, life offers us another opportunity to resurrect and rise above our fears and the lies our egos tell us. And you can do this through unlearning your conditioning, uncovering your truths, and unleashing your true self. Your biggest adversary during this unbecoming will be your ego, which needs lots of love, acceptance, and compassion.

Your spirit is the lotus seed, which holds infinite potential; it can withstand any challenges or adversities. Through unbecoming, you shall shed those unfitting layers. The next 21 days (or 21 weeks—go with your own pace) is your self-exploration journey to realign with your soul. It is also the expansion of your manifesting power alongside a continuum of your soul's growth. There is never a coincidence in life, you are drawn to this book because you are done with hiding and playing small, sick of facing the repeated life lessons, and tired of being disappointed and hurt by love. You know you deserve to have everything in life and are ready to unleash your inner power by creating a life you love to live. Everything is possible if you believe it is possible for you. Imagine, decide, and go for it! The universe will conspire to make it available for you.

I have included a reflection section at the end of each chapter to help you explore and comprehend the implications of your life's journey. You may be inclined to skip the practice section, but transformation is only attainable through self-reflection. Knowledge only becomes wisdom when you apply it to your life. It is normal to expect a certain level of internal and external resistance when applying this exercise to your daily routine. You may also experience some pushback from friends or family. Rest assured, this is a common condition of change, and as you shift your vibration, you will attract different people, experiences, or circumstances into your life.

Always remember that any external changes must first happen internally. This is the essence of manifestation, and the secret of being a powerful creator is to embody who you want to become. This is only attainable by developing your consciousness, awareness, and evolution in alignment with

your desired life experience. Hence, your manifesting power is directly proportionate to your power to shift, evolve, and grow. My clients and I have proven this time after time; from a massive rise in pay, relationship, business venture, to welcoming a baby after several years of a failed pregnancy attempts.

Last, please honor your spiritual growth and transformation journey as your personalized soul blueprint, it is incomparable to others. So, wherever you are in your life journey, never give up on yourself, and have faith that you were born with a special purpose. You have a role to play in this life journey as part of the human and spiritual evolution. And when you feel like giving up, reconnect with your heart through COMPASSION, EMPATHY, ACCEPTANCE, and LOVE. I am hopeful and confident that your audacious undertaking of the quest of unbecoming shall realize all of your desires and reinstate your wholeness once again.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

You are the best person to know how to optimize your learning journey because everyone has different learning styles and pace. And although you may personalize your reading experience to your liking, I would like to suggest what other readers found useful.

You may want to read the entire book once to comprehend the overall framework before taking a profound inner journey through the reflection section. Or you may want to read and complete each chapter before moving on to the next one. Regardless of which way you will undertake, be mindful that each chapter is designed to follow a transformational process built upon the other. I strongly recommend you take as much time as needed to dig deeper within yourself before working on the next chapter's reflection.

Go to the below to access your complimentary daily journaling prompts designed specifically to enhance your learning results www.yulianafrancie.com/unbecoming-bonus.

PART 1

UNLEARN



*“She wasn’t born herself.
She found herself.
Over a long,
And treacherous road.
And the more treacherous.
The road became.
The more of herself,
She found.”
Atticus*

DAY 1

THE INCEPTION

*Your parents are the reason why you are who you are.
What they give you is all they had.
Their love and sacrifice are worthy beyond your comprehension.*

Our earthly experience begins at home with our core family. Apart from providing our material security and nurturing our emotional needs, the core family is our primary spiritual teacher. They are our soul family who agree to help us in resolving our karmic lessons. I acknowledge this to be a contentious statement that may trigger you, especially if you grew up in a toxic, dysfunctional, or abusive family. It is difficult to accept that we sign ourselves up to be abused. However, this is a human's perspective; beyond the flesh, our soul is eternal. The soul has no judgment against earthly lessons.

Our soul has no discernment of right and wrong toward physical suffering like lacking money, feeling heartbroken, or being abused, because our soul comprehends the deeper knowing of our life's purpose. It is more profound than fulfilling our material and emotional needs and desires. The soul

aspires to attain spiritual growth and mastery. From the soul's perspective, the experience on earth is a means to an end. Nevertheless, our soul is our greatest ally in actualizing our greatest potential and attaining our grandest experience. The secret is to align our human needs and desires with our soul's objectives. Otherwise, it feels like trying to move forward while being pulled in two different directions. Like Jesus once said, "*seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

Besides, the source of our suffering does not lie in the occurrences we experience. It is our emotional attachment and lack of acceptance of our greater purpose. We are unconsciously inflicting pain on ourselves through the stories our ego creates and feeds into our minds. Karmic lessons are clues to discover our true identities and superpowers. You need to try a diverse range of experiences to uncover what you genuinely want. Consider telling a toddler not to climb onto the table. She will ignore all kinds of warnings. But once she experiences the pain from falling, she will never climb again if she relies on her fears. Each time she is thinking of climbing, the fear will remind her of the probable pain. But if she takes the courageous option, she will learn how to climb securely. She may even find joy in climbing and develop herself into a professional climber. This is how the becoming process shapes us into who we are in adulthood.

Our becoming development process starts not at birth, but as early as the germinal process when the sperm and egg cells unite. A study by Catherine Monk, Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University, confirmed the fetus can register her mother's stress and fetal reactivity, which correlates to infant temperament from 4 months old. Our relationship with our mother is the primary foundation of our safety, love, and security. It also influences our interconnection with our feminine energy. This is the source of divinity, love, and creativity. If a baby feels loved, secured, and nurtured by her mother, when she reaches adulthood, she will be receptive to receive love, affection, intuitive guidance, and

support from others, especially her life partner. Otherwise, she depends heavily on her masculine energies, like control, plan, order, structure, and logic.

Mary recalled a glimpse of memory from her first moment on earth as I guided her through a soul healing session. Her mum was in the delivery room muttering to herself, “another mouth to feed.” For the next 60 years, she always felt like a burden when asking for her needs or desires. Mary felt unsafe to express herself, perceiving herself as being judged for asking too much. In her relationship, she gave her power away in exchange of maintaining her safety and acceptance. Her husband controlled the finances and dictated how she lived her life. This is a common pattern in women who experience power struggles, disappointments, rejection, or withdrawal of love from their mothers. She became a beggar of love, attention, acceptance, and validation from others, especially her life partner. To overcompensate for her wounded feminine side, she is overly driven to be a high achiever, independent, and self-reliant.

In 1958, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth pioneered the attachment theory in psychology based on their seminal work. Through his work in treating emotionally disturbed children, Bowlby considered the importance of the mother-child relationship as crucial to a child’s social, cognitive, and emotional development. He defines attachment as a psychological connectedness or deep and enduring emotional bond which connects one person to another across time and space. This attachment bond does not diminish as children grow up into the adulthood stage. It simply gets transferred from caregiver to partner, best friend, or other emotional support systems.

Mary Ainsworth, the partner of John Bowlby, conducted experimental observations of human babies based on the **Strange Situations** technique. The researchers observed the mother’s style in responding to her infant around feeding, crying, cuddling, eye contact, and smiling in their home. Once the infant turned one year old, they observed both mother and infant at the Baltimore lab. During that observation

period, the mother was separated from her infant. Ainsworth categorized her findings into three distinct categories, based on their emotional reactions. They are secure, anxious, and avoidant.

1. **Secure** infants happily explored the room while their mother was present. They protested on separation but pleasantly greeted her upon her return, were easy to console and showed physical affection. The mothers of securely attached children were attentive to their needs, i.e. feeding, crying, and readily displayed a warm connection upon return. Secure adults feel confident in their ability to express their needs and desires while being vulnerable to their partners. They are open to giving and receiving love.
2. **Anxious** (insecure) infants showed signs of clingy behavior, were afraid to explore the room, and became agitated and cried upon separation. These babies expressed ambivalent emotions, trying to seek contact but simultaneously arching away when their mothers returned to the room. The mothers of babies with this attachment type were inconsistent, unresponsive, or rejecting. Consequently, infants felt nervous to express their physical and emotional needs, as they developed a fear of rejection or abandonment. Upon reaching adulthood, this type strives for self-acceptance through external validation of their worthiness. When feeling insecure, they can be emotionally needy.
3. The other insecure type is the **avoidant** group; independent infants who did not show the need to attach to their mums as a base. They explored their new environment without hesitation while in the presence of their mother and showed no separation anxiety when their mothers left the room. Avoidant infants experienced a similar parenting style to the anxious

group, but they suppress their need to avoid rejection, disappointment, or abandonment by their mother.

*Bartholomew further extended his study into two types of adult emotional detachment. **Fearful avoidant** adults have a low sense of worthiness with a negative expectation of others, such as rejection or untrustworthy responses, avoiding a close relationship with others to protect themselves against rejection and disappointment. **Dismissive avoidant** types have a high sense of worthiness but maintain a negative expectation of others. They avoid a close relationship with others and maintain a sense of independence and invulnerability by detaching or dismissing emotional attachment.*

An infant's attachment style sets the foundation for our attachment approach within a love relationship. A reciprocal emotional relationship between an infant and her mother or primary caregiver will immensely influence the nature of her adulthood attachment to her romantic partner, however, it is not the only predetermining factor of an adult's attachment style. Our mindset is shaped by many other factors, such as our parent's parenting style, social circle, environment, and our conscious evolution process. This means your attachment can and will change over time. By being conscious of your attachment style, you shall develop into a secure type.

Consider my personal story to help you uncover your karmic lessons with your mum. Being adopted by my grandmother at six months old, made me an anxious type. I felt insecure and constantly needed assurance of love and acceptance. This adoption lesson is intergenerational; my mum was adopted by her uncle, a life event which made her feel rejected and unwanted. In Chinese culture, a male is the preferred gender. Deep down, my mum wished to have been born as a man. This resulted in her unconscious rejection of her daughters. Besides giving me away, she tried to abort her third pregnancy (my sister) because her relationship with my dad had worsened. Yet, she was happy to welcome her next

pregnancy with my youngest brother. Consequently, I held the belief that I am unlovable, which often emerged as a fear of abandonment. I was constantly feeling anxious and needing assurance I was loved. In a love relationship, I gave my power away by pleasing others. I was working hard to gain my partner's love and acceptance. I rescued them to boost my worthiness with respect to love and settled into a relationship, even when I knew very well it was toxic. Because leaving a relationship was a validation of my belief, in which I perceived myself to be unlovable.

Despite our karmic relationship, mum taught me the greatest lesson of being successful and how to thrive out of poverty. Born into a poor family, mum had to find her way out of poverty. Her courage to provide a comfortable lifestyle for her children is what I most admired. Her lack of education, resources, and support has never broken her spirit of achieving financial success. Today, she owns multiple businesses and real estate properties. I would never be who I am today without her support, parenting, and encouragement.

As the primary spiritual teacher, mothers create those conditions which support their offspring to grow and evolve. This is a great sacrifice which we struggle to comprehend until we grasp the wisdom of it. A hero will not be applauded for saving the world unless there is a villain. Your mother is a villain who trains and creates conditions for you to be a superhero. This book was born out of my evolution from a dysfunctional relationship with my mother to one of love and acceptance. It taught me to thrive in life, be loved, feel safe, and be supported by expressing my true self and pursuing my deepest desires and purposes in life. Through this book, I share those wisdoms so you too can create a thriving and loving lifestyle which you're destined to experience.

An experiment by Brian Dias, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Southern California, showed that scents have an intergenerational effect of trauma on mice. The mice inherited a specific memory of their father's smell, even when they had never met their father. The study shows fear in an older

generation leads to heightened sensitivity in their offspring. Researchers released a recent paper which revealed sound evidence that RNA—molecules with similar functions to DNA, play some role in the inheritance of trauma. These epigenetic studies suggest that a mother who experiences trauma because of her body image will cause her daughter to be more conscious about her body image than normal. Thus far, no studies validate the exact mechanism of how trauma is passed down through generations. But knowing that our actions, experiences, and life experiences can affect our children's life experiences is more than enough to make us consider our choices and decisions in life. Remember, our wounds are the opportunity for the evolution of our souls and those of our offspring. Your children are in your life to complete their soul lessons with your guidance.

Reflections:

- How is / was your relationship with your mother? Make a list of factors affecting your appreciation and disappointment toward your mother.
- Take yourself on a trip back down memory lane to your childhood, around seven years old or younger. Did you feel safe, loved, secure, and nurtured by your mum?
- What's your emotional type? And how does this impact your interpersonal relationships? Go to www.yulianafrancie.com/unbecoming-bonus for self-assessment of your attachment type.
- Can you identify a pattern between your relationship with your mother and your interpersonal relationships? Analyze your intergenerational patterns, lessons, and traumas.
- How does your attachment style influence your past or current romantic relationship?

DAY 2

THE SOUL'S COHORTS

*Sovereignty is the liberation from who you are not.
And the recollection of your soul's shards.*

Our environment, which includes our home, school, society, and wider collective consciousness, are contributing factors in our becoming process. At home, the parenting style is the first and primary process of our becoming. Parents are their children's role models, and offspring are the descendants of their parents' belief system and conditioning. In the late 1960s, Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist at the University of California, introduced a pioneering parenting style theory. Baumrind's theory explains the relationship between four different parenting styles and how they influence children's behaviors and outcomes (emotional, social, and cognitive). She categorized them based on dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness.

Responsiveness includes the level of a parent's emotional response, such as warmth, sensitivity, support, and deserving of respect. The other dimension, demandingness, is the extent

to which parents set expectations for their children's maturity of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The four styles are:

1. **Authoritative**—the style most aligned with high levels of responsiveness and demandingness. Authoritative parents promote a warm and healthy relationship, using nurturing and forgiveness, by respecting their children's needs, encouraging positive communication, and accepting individual differences. They take a warm approach and support autonomy and independence, providing moderate and clear expectations and boundaries. Authoritative parents teach their children to take responsibility for their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors based on reasoning and consequence instead of punishment. When children reach adulthood, they own their power to pursue their desires without fear of losing love and acceptance from others. They also disassociate their worthiness and self-esteem with their accomplishments.
2. **Authoritarian**—low on responsiveness and high on demandingness. Parents foster a cold, distant, and unhealthy relationship by being rigid and controlling, and enforce high expectations from their children. A child must do as he or she is told, based on a brief explanation. They discourage open dialogue and a warm approach and opt for verbal or physical punishment to discipline children. Punishment shapes children to be either a rebel or a manipulator, depending upon the strength of their willpower to confront parents. Feelings of shame, resentment, or anger arise as a result, and children either repress or be deceitful to avoid feelings of unworthiness and not being good enough. As an adult, they often feel nervous of rejection and failure by constantly checking if they have done something wrong. They feel insecure and unlovable if they don't conform

or meet others' expectations. This parenting style pressures children to be perfectionist, ambitious, or highly competitive because of the belief, '*I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me*'.

3. **Permissive**—high on responsiveness and low on demandingness. Parents use a similar approach to the authoritative style; however, they incline to overindulge children and are unable to set boundaries and expectations. This warm but unhealthy relationship causes children to become absent from taking responsibility and adhering to rules and guidelines. Parents of this group choose the reward system, a flip side of punishment. Psychologists believe a rewards system can overshadow the child's internal motivation, known as the 'over justification' effect. Studies have proven that, under experimental conditions, children who like to draw when paid to do so, draw less than those who are unpaid. Rewards also teach children to strive for instant gratification, which makes them less creative and stops them from thinking deeply and seeing the possibilities. This promotes a sense of entitlement, an otherwise derogatory term to describe a spoiled brat. These children give up too quickly when feeling challenged or lack the drive to actualize their potential.
4. **Uninvolved**—low in responsiveness and demandingness. A disconnected and emotionally unavailable parent believes their sole role is to provide essential needs. They are not approachable and have no set boundaries or expectations for children to follow. Parents are overwhelming or shut down. This kind of relationship is distant and unhealthy. At adult age, these children avoid intimacy or closeness and are emotionally unavailable in their romantic interpersonal relationships. They also feel disempowered to pursue their goals and are socially distant.

Further to these parenting styles, the use of reward and punishment as a disciplinary action has a major flaw; it fails to acknowledge and respect children as individuals whose personalized desires and needs may differ from those of their parents. Rudolf Dreikurs, a major promoter of the positive parenting field, advises parents to encourage dialogue and allow natural consequences from children's actions, as opposed to demanding children follow expectations and using authority to dictate, control, and shape their development. Children then stop exploring their desired life experiences through curiosity and learning and become demotivated to promote their growth or follow their intuition.

Dreikurs also recommends mutual respect as a foundation for the parent-child relationship; encouragement to pursue goals and accept any setbacks and failures without detaching love and affection. Most parents struggle to do this, as they only know how to control or manipulate. They learned these behaviors from their parents, withdrawing love when children refused to comply or silencing children's expressed emotions like crying or throwing tantrums. Parents fail to comprehend a child's underlying unmet desires, which causes acting out or expressing emotions such as protesting behavior.

When children grow into adults, they transfer this unhealthy parenting into their love relationship. They attempt to control or manipulate their partner rather than openly express and accept each other for who they are as individuals. They also project an idealized model and expectation onto their partner. They use punishment as enforcement action, such as using sex to get what they want, physical and emotional abuse, etc. In the Asian culture, an authoritarian and helicopter parenting style is the preferred and most popular one. Dr. Haim Ginott introduced this helicopter parenting in the 1969 book *Parent & Teenagers* by quoting teens who said that their parents would hover over them like a helicopter. It is a parenting style overly focused on their children and parents take too much responsibility for their child's successes or failures. My mum exercised her authority by demanding

a 100% compliance rate, while my dad was uninvolved. At home, I felt constrained and unable to be myself.

After I turned 13 years old, I became a rebel. I found a sanctuary at my ex-boyfriend's home, where his parent was uninvolved. I protested through refusing to study and spent most of my time out and about. As my relationship with mum worsened, the feeling of rejection strengthened. I adopted an ingrained belief that love is conditional; I must please and meet my mum's expectations to be worthy of love. This progressed into codependency and an anxious attachment type in my love relationship. The fear of being unwanted, unlovable, or abandoned translated into a threat to my safety and emotional security. My dad's silent parenting style supported the toxic relationship I had with mum. He was emotionally unavailable. My choice of men was a great reflection of the dysfunctional patterns of my upbringing. I may have consciously disapproved of my parents' parenting style, but I unconsciously projected my parents' expectations to my daughters. I demanded they achieve a high level of academic excellence and used punishment to enforce it. I couldn't be affectionate with my daughters out of fear of rejection.

Schools, culture, and religious dogmas also influence our becoming process. These force us to conform and fit in with prescribed standards, commandments, or rulings; the conditions which drive us to be "a good girl". These conditions create feelings of unworthiness and fear of challenging the status quo. The internal motivation to be or do something comes from an avoidance of getting punished or fear of not getting a good citizen award. In a world that has been dominated by patriarchal supremacy for past generations, women feel subordinate, like a misfit, or pretend. Masculine energy outweighs feminine energy to live in the physical world; women feel the pressure to suppress or disregard their feminine energy, which forms dark feminine shadows. These shadows opt for over-giving, overdoing, over-analyzing, overindulging, and over-pleasing to compensate for imbalanced energy.

In climbing the corporate ladder, women also adopt a success mentality through goal setting, strategic planning, and calculated action while disregarding intuition, feelings, and passion. Carol, a senior executive, says, "*I felt the need to show up as someone that I am not. Each day, I had to defy my desire to show my authentic version of a kind, emphatic, and nurturing side to be seen as a credible leader.*" To qualify as a corporate leader, women must meet the likeability and credibility criteria, whereas men only need to be credible. Women are also judged by their appearances like their nails and hair length as part of leadership's qualification process.

Susan Douglas coined the pressure that drives girls and women to succeed as the "*bargain girls and women strike*," in her book *Rise of Enlightened Sexism*. She describes the price of success as how the female diminishes the threat against feminism. Susan said, "*We can excel in school, play sports, go to college, aspire to—and get—jobs previously reserved for men, be working mothers, and so forth. But in exchange, we must obsess about our faces, weight, breast size, clothing brands, decorating, perfectly calibrated child-rearing, about pleasing men and being envied by other women.*"

The collective consciousness around skin color, race, and gender are also major influencers on our development of belief systems. Terms like white supremacy, bamboo ceiling, gender equality, or person of color are the reflections of the community's division and preferential treatments. The underlying motive for these concepts is the validation of an individual's belief to be more than enough. We are looking for justifications of our beliefs; of *I am more than enough* and *better than you* through our physicalities, such as having fairer skin or lighter color. Instead of accepting from within that, we are more than enough, period. And, for minority groups, these beliefs limit their potential in life. Following the appointment of Obama as the President of the USA, people with darker complexion grew in confidence and self-belief. They achieved higher success simply because Obama empowered them to believe they have greater opportunities in life.

Reflections:

- What is your parent's parenting style?
- How does your parent's parenting style affect your romantic relationship?
- What beliefs do you hold about yourself because of your parents' parenting style?
- What is your parenting style like? Can you see any similarity?
- How does your parenting style affect your relationship with your children?
- How does your environment influence your beliefs and perception of life?

DAY 3

THE FAIRY TALE

*I saw my perfection and so I love myself.
Then I saw my imperfection, and I loved myself even more.*

“Once upon a time in a faraway land... and they lived happily ever after”. Remember this line? What comes to your mind as you read that line? A prince and a princess hold hand together with radiant smiles as they embark on a new loving chapter of their lives. Disney fairytale stories have been part of the lives of millions for over eighty years; they are the most popular girls’ bedtime stories and inspiration behind many the box office hits. It is a portrait of ultimate happiness and an exhibition of love, yet it is easy to overlook the damaging ideologies of misogynistic characters, degrading plot lines, and racial uniformity. The most popular stories like Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White contain not too dissimilar subliminal messages, indoctrinating girls to compete by being the fairest and prettiest one of all. Only one princess is chosen by the prince charming;; she gets to live happily ever after in the grandest castle and escape from her life of misery, which

entails heightened domesticity or abusive treatment by female villains like a wicked stepmother, stepsisters, or witches.

The attempt to realize the fairy tale's dream speaks to women's life goals. Consider the following Wikipedia data on some teen box office hits and adult versions of fairytales:

- A story of a wealthy and powerful vampire who fell in love with an ordinary girl, Twilight saga movie grossed over \$3.3 billion worldwide and 120 million book copies sold in 38 different languages around the globe.
- Fifty Shade of Grey movie broke many box office records and earned over \$570 million worldwide. A modern fairy tale with an added controversial twist of sexual masochism disorder, the book version was a top bestseller list around the world with over 125 million copies sold and translated into 52 languages.
- Pretty Woman, a romantic story of a wealthy businessman who fell in love with his escort. The movie generated \$464 million worldwide and established Julia Roberts' fame.

And the list goes on and on. The success of those romantic fiction stories highlights women's deepest desire to seek a love relationship as the wellspring of their happiness and financial security. This wish emerges from the subtle conditioning patterns implanted in every little girl's dream. Young girls are taught to rely on their physicalities to attain everlasting love and happiness. It also comes with an added privilege of an extravagant lifestyle. Those subliminal teachings disempower female society and promote the need for salvation from life challenges by chasing image perfection to exalt in life instead of believing in their inner powers.

Statistics show a staggering 50% success in marriage rates and those who choose to stay in an institutionalized marriage, not necessarily living in a happy, loving, and honest relationship. Instead of living the dream, many of us experience a

toxic or abusive relationship where we feel either unappreciated, used, or abused, thanks to our involuntary consent to the beliefs that fitting in and conforming allow us to attain love, acceptance, and validation. That means we need to be selfless, people-pleasers, and chronic givers to qualify for a good citizen award. These patterns of behavior offer opportunities to be used and abused by others.

One evening at my eldest daughter's school, Peggy Orenstein, NY Times best-selling author, presented girls' sexual education based on her book, *Cinderella ate my Daughter*. Peggy discussed in depth how children's movies and toy companies heavily influence children's early development. Toys' marketing and designs are aimed at educating children according to society's stereotypical gender roles; for example, a girl is given a kitchen set, baby, or dress up doll to teach her female domestic duties, whereas a boy is offered building blocks, tools, or cars to promote his future career.

Toys also influence children's mindset and worldview. Barbie, a popular girl's toy, promotes a certain body image, look, and fashion style in order to gain popularity or be more desirable. Just like the Disney princess, Barbie is blonde, slim, with fair skin with perky boobs; the attributes of physical perfection, and achieving vogue status comes with an expected materialistic privilege, the lavish lifestyle. The feminine powers and identities are centralized around physical attributes which include slim, pretty, tall, wrinkle-free skin, and eternal youth. Those acceptable standards are strenuous; every female, regardless of her age, lives in a never-ending battle with body image issues. The fear of being judged as less than chic occupies a considerable portion of the female's ego-mind at any given time.

Camille Rainville eloquently wrote a poem "**Be a lady**" for *Girls Girls Girls* magazine, which was made into a short video performed by Sex and the City star, Cynthia Nixon. The video went viral. It promotes awareness of society's judgment and expectations of women being called to meet unachievable standards of physical appearance, weight, youthfulness, dress

code, and manners. Needless to say, she is also responsible for protecting her body from rape and abuse.

Some time ago, I watched a YouTube interview about a woman who spent around \$100,000 of her inheritance money on cosmetic surgery. The interviewer, a middle-aged guy asked, “*What procedure did you get done in Korea?*”. She said, “*Well, I had a number of them. I had rhinoplasty as I hate the look of my flat nose. My face had a lift and jawbones were reshaped for a more defined and younger look. I also got my boobs done, liposuction, waist-trimming, and butt lift to get a curvier shape like Kim Kardashian.*” I cringed at the thought of how much pain she had to go through to get her ideal look. Sadly, she is not the only one. Cosmetic surgery is trending amongst women regardless of race and age.

Over \$689 billion worldwide, plus 5% annual growth, spent on beauty products and treatments represents how much we value the importance of physical appearance. A further \$1.4 trillion is spent on cosmetic surgery and the clothing and apparel industry. Over 57% of those will end up in landfill as clothing waste due to the ethos of discarding and junking items ‘once out of fashion’. This staggering data confirms the magnitude of society’s need for acceptance and validation of being good enough. We learn to seek external validation of our worthiness through fitting in with society’s idealized models, such as Hollywood celebrities.

I had my fair share of pursuing perfection and appreciation. The combination of body image issues and the customary princess lifestyle from childhood led to a shopaholic addiction. I spent a sizeable chunk of my earnings to keep up with the trends and luxury brands. Regardless of my six-figure salary, plus online business revenue above \$20,000 per week, I was living in debt. The addiction emerged from the fundamental belief of not being good enough. How I felt about myself was heavily reliant on my clothing labels and designer handbags. It gave me a false sense of high self-esteem.

Brene Brown interviewed over 1,300 people from diverse backgrounds as part of her shame study. She then categorized

the group into two categories based on whether a whole-hearted living style is defined by a loving and happy relationship, or not. Her study confirms that having *a firm belief in your worthiness and being deserving of love* is the only factor which segregates the two categories. A belief of *I am* enough defines our sense of worthiness and deserving. She also denotes that the degree of a female's shame is linked to their body image judgment. Women feel most shameful when they are not thin, young, and beautiful enough. This shame comes from the belief of not being good enough, which develops into dissatisfaction with their physicality.

The beauty and fashion industries use marketing campaigns to entice us with a promise of realizing the perfect image so we can eventually be the fairest princess who lives happily ever after in a luxury lifestyle. Hence, advertisements and headlines contain persuasive messages which intend to prey on our insecurities. Consider Vogue's headline "9 fashion trends started by royals that are still popular today," or an ad on Cosmopolitan's website "*These Jennifer Lopez-approved leggings are on sale right now.*" Paradoxically, a few lines below the ads, an article appeared with the title "*Diet companies are banking on you feeling sh*tty about your post isolation body.*" The author, Ashely Oerman says, "*I'm not saying you need to magically fall in love with the way your thighs look in shorts (they do look good tho!). The key to dismantling a system that makes \$ off your insecurities is diet thirst traps and excluding yourself from that narrative. When you're no longer convinced your body is a problem, the problem is solved.*"

We accept society's inherent belief of not enough as normality. Consider how often we reaffirm the belief of not enough? Plenty of times in a day, by saying I don't have time; I don't have money; I don't have enough food; I don't have energy, and so on. You get the idea. Any of these statements are a projection of a fundamental scarcity mindset, the lack of acceptance of our enough-ness and, based on my personal experience, not having a 'good enough' belief is very exhausting. I kept pushing myself to achieve more and be more.

Imagine a donkey that keeps running forward to catch a dangling carrot in front of his eyes; no matter how much he ran toward it, he would never catch it. That is how 'not good enough' belief dictates your life patterns. Each time you convince yourself that you are one step closer to the finish line, you move the goalpost further away.

Criticizing or judging ourselves and others becomes an acceptable norm as our way to project the unconscious belief of **'I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me'**. We become enslaved to our reactive emotions and succumb to the victimhood of other's validation. Hence, we are prepared to sacrifice our power and self-love each time we see the silver lining and glimpse a hope that our dream may become a reality.

Winnie claims to be a serial addict of toxic and abusive relationships. Growing up with a narcissistic mother, she learned abuse as her love language. In her last marriage, she almost died from drowning when her ex-husband knocked her out and left her soaking in the bathtub overnight. Woken up by the crying noises of her baby from the other room, she called a friend for help. She filed a restraining order against her ex-husband, followed by divorce, not long after. When I asked her what helped her to have the courage to leave, Winnie said, *"I would have died if I didn't leave after that morning."* Yet, she kept facing the same pattern in her relationship because her repressed need to rescue is self-defeating. She said, *"It feels good to be needed and be their caretaker. When I rescued others, my self-worthiness was validated."*

What if instead of pressuring yourself to meet others' expectations through shaming, guilt-tripping, or humiliating yourself, you validate your worthiness and accept yourself as who you are? As Albert Einstein famously quoted, *"Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."* Stop measuring yourself against someone else's scale. Find the unconditional love within your heart whenever you feel rejected, disappointed, insecure, or unloved. After all, you are created in

the image of God; you represent divinity and the expression of love. You are not made from the broken pieces of past life disappointments, but those broken pieces complete you and make you whole.

Reflections:

- How do you feel about your body image or appearance? Notice your inner voice as you look at yourself in the mirror.
- What's your spending pattern in beauty and fashion products or services? Do you purchase based on need, trend, or feeling (impulse buying)?
- What is your relationship with food? Do you eat based on feeling, stick to a strict plan, or well-balanced diet? Does your food intake have any reference to your body image?
- Can you identify how much of your spending decisions are being influenced by emotions?
- How do you feel after a shopping spree? Example, I feel great because I am keeping up with trends; I am overjoyed because I have the money to spoil myself; I am delighted because I am feeling good about myself.
- How easily influenced are you by media, trends, or advertising? If you are easily influenced, what belief would you need to let go of? For example, I am embarrassed if I'm not wearing a designer label.
- Raise your awareness of your inner voice, which calls you to maintain your appearance based on *peer pressure*. Example, my best friend wears this season's color, I cannot go to lunch with her in last year's style.

PART 2

UNCOVER



*"I am not the things my family did.
I am not the voices in my head.
I am not the pieces of brokenness inside.
I am not the mistakes that I have made or any
of the things that caused me pain.
I am not the pieces of the dream I left behind.
I am not the color of my eyes.
I am not the skin on the outside.
I am not my age, I am not my race, my soul inside is all light.
I am light.
I am divinity defined.
I am the God on the inside.
I am a star, a piece of it all."*

India Arie (excerpt of I am light lyrics)

DAY 4

THE SACRED JOURNEY

*“Important encounters are planned by the souls,
Long before the bodies see each other.”*

Paulo Coelho

“*What am I here for?*” I have been pondering on this question since I was fourteen years old. I recall the memories of staring at my bedroom ceiling every night while looking for the answer to this question. It became a bedtime ritual for the next twenty years. Deep inside my soul, I always knew there is a bigger purpose in life than accomplishing material goals. Educated in a Catholic school, I considered myself religious, yet I felt distant from God. I called HIM to ask for an answer, and I received silence, regardless of how many times I recited the Our Father prayer.

At home, my grandmother practiced Buddhism. She had a little altar and offering table with god and goddess statues. We practiced Buddhism as part of Chinese culture. I never studied Buddhism in-depth, but I grasped the core dogmas

of reincarnation, dharma, and the law of karma (cause and effect). I had a strong interest in Kuan Yin's life story. I spent my Year 8 term break watching a series about her spiritual journey, from a princess to a goddess of mercy. Her courage to leave her royal life behind and pursue the callings of her soul engrossed me.

The yearning to deepen my relationship with God brought me into spirituality. It also helps me to discern the primary reasons for my religious encounters and the answer to the burning question of '*what am I here for*'. As a spiritual being who is having a human experience, each one of us has a soul's purpose to fulfill. We are the divinity and the expression of life, just like plants, animals, and the earth. Our existence illustrates the wonder, beauty, and greatness of nature. Hence, life doesn't randomly happen **to** us; life happens **for** and **through** us. Inside each one of us, there is a higher consciousness who desires to emerge, but we need to allow it by letting go of our unfit layers. Just like the lotus flower, which can only blossom above the murky water.

We are here as part of the divine's purpose and our soul's evolution. We are one with the spirit; the pathway to God is inside our hearts. This is the notion of oneness. There is no separation in this world, we are part of the ecosystem. Just as there is no division between your air and my air, there is only the air; or her sun and his sun, there is only the sun. Every essential livelihood is abundantly available to all of us, including our energy. Our spirit is part of and makes up the collective consciousness. The belief that I am separate from God deafens our ears from hearing the spirit's voice. It also disconnects us from the infinite source of creation, which gives rise to a sense of powerlessness.

Each time the physical body dies, the soul leaves the body and reincarnates. Before rebirth, the soul and soul's higher self (consider it like a soul's parents) draw up an agreement. This agreement, often known as the soul contract, outlines the upcoming lessons to be mastered. Life (karmic) lessons are the soul's personalized life blueprint which includes

learning to love, surviving poverty, outliving illness, living independently with disabilities, and many more. Our time on earth is the soul's training ground for achieving the next level of mastery.

Do you remember the most popular Nintendo game, Mario World? From the soul's perspective, living on earth is like playing Mario. Mario needs to win each battle before he can upgrade his superpowers to help him conquer greater challenges. Likewise, the soul expands her superpowers and transcends her consciousness through the soul's karmic learning. The soul has the innate abilities necessary to overcome her karmic lessons. Once she completes her lessons, she then reincarnates to attempt different lessons. The term *old soul* is used to define a soul who has reincarnated multiple times. An old soul is, therefore, wiser and possesses a higher level of consciousness than the rest, like spiritual teachers or ascended masters.

Just like in Mario World, the Universe has laws and surprise gifts to be discovered which assist us in winning the game of life. The Universal laws and natural orders are the rules of life's game. Our life cycles comprise various seasons, and there is a certain order which we must follow; birth, infancy, childhood, puberty, adulthood, maturity, and death. We also go through the cycle of planting with our growth, which needs planting and then nurturing before it is ready for harvesting time. Each step taken during the cycle contributes to the quality of fruit at harvesting time. The universal laws manage the order of nature. For example, the law of cause and effect (law of karma) reciprocates our thoughts, actions, and beliefs accordingly. If you want to receive love, send out love to your surroundings and you shall receive love in return. This is how you work with the law of karma.

Another commonly known law is the law of attraction. In spiritual jargon, the book, *The Secret*, teaches basic principles of working with the law of attraction. In essence, you need to ask, believe, and receive. The Universe shall then grant your wish. I am an advocate and teacher of co-creating your life

with this powerful law. However, as I dived deeper into spirituality, I questioned the conflicting notion of manifesting vs soul contracts. Manifesting may disempower us by creating the belief that we can bring everything into our lives by working with the law of attraction, yet there are divine timings which we agreed to as part of our contract with our soul. For example, did I manifest a divorce and near bankruptcy experience? Or was that part of the pre-written lesson to help me gain wisdom?

There is a middle ground wisdom to answer this. During our entirety, we are being called to grow, not once but multiple times throughout our lifetime, so we can fulfill our destiny. We don't have to say yes to those callings, but we will keep facing the lessons until we grow out of them. Manifesting always works, but there is a catch. In the same way as the natural order, you cannot harvest firm, juicy, and crisp-fleshed apples from a diseased, rotting, and bad quality tree. You need to plant a good seed, water, and fertilize the ground to grow a healthy apple tree which produces abundant high-quality fruits. You are the tree; the quality of your harvest depends on your core beingness. If you manifest a relationship out of neediness, you may end up with a challenging relationship, so you receive your desire but evolve simultaneously.

Because the soul's aspiration to strive for a higher consciousness may not always align with the human's desires, it may even contradict at certain times. Think about when you are facing financial problems. Our brain naturally prefers the easiest way with the least effort of action, like winning the lotto. However, our soul seeks for mindset growth like upskilling our financial management and transforming our money mindset. The only viable permanent solution requires meeting both needs. Otherwise, you will keep repeating the same lessons. Hence, statistics show that over 90% of lotto winners eventually end up in a worse financial state. Whenever there is incongruence between our mindset and the outer reality, our consciousness will enforce an alteration to the external

world. There is no other way. Your inner reality will instinctively create the matching outer experience.

Our karmic lessons are also the clues to finding our deeper truths. This book is the sum of my karmic lessons, of pursuing my desires through rebelling against the status quo, so I can live life on my own terms. When I was six years old, I wanted to dance but my mum disallowed it; she preferred I focused on study. I rebelled against long hours of study by pursuing swimming championships and spending most of my waking hours at my ex-boyfriend's house. This caused a major conflict with my mum, which resulted in punishment in the form of silent treatment for three months. Because of this, I honed my negotiation skills and ability to deal with the status quo. Growing up in a dysfunctional family pattern led me to experience multiple toxic relationships; my dad was emotionally unavailable, and my mum had a tendency toward narcissism. Silent treatment and withdrawal of love were used to control and manipulate each other, and I carried these learned behaviors into my marriage. I married a guy who grew up with similar family dysfunctionality. Through the spiritual guidance of Kuan Yin and Mary, I transformed my codependency patterns, people pleaser, and over giver tendencies to embody the energy of unconditional love, compassion, and acceptance, which supported me in my quest to create my own version of my life story. Growing up as a minority, I conformed to subordinate treatments which brought me into situations of bullying and harassment during my corporate careers. This taught me the need to own my sovereignty in actualizing my potential.

As part of our karmic contracts, we inherit our parents' wounds. These intergenerational wounds are our healing opportunities. Spiritual healing is not just about curing illness; it is the path of evolution. In fact, illness is the manifestation of spiritual lessons, therefore, it is part of the evolution process. By healing our wounds, we transform our life paths, including our children's karmic lessons, creating conditions which allow them to grow into higher conscious-

ness. As we transform, those conditions will naturally adjust. Collectively, each generation develops a higher consciousness. My daughters, the Gen Z, are vocal about their support of social justice issues, like LGBT, Black Lives Matter, or gender equality; they are also mindful of environmental effects; they are well informed on companies' CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ethicalities, and base their buying decisions on those factors. In comparison, I had no cognizance of the world's issues during my teenage-hood.

Despite having to face challenges, the soul is not alone. Her higher self is always on standby to assist. The higher self is like our spiritual parent, they are available to guide and assist whenever called upon. We also have our soul family; they are present to teach and help us in resolving those karmic lessons. The soul family reaches beyond our friends and family circle; they can be anyone who affects our lives significantly, like teachers or colleagues. They show up in our life for notable reasons. Any kinds of interpersonal relationship provide the best avenue for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth. As Dr. Sue Johnson, the author of *Love Sense*, says, "*You learn about who you are by looking into the eyes of people you love.*" It implies the qualities of which you are lacking, or aspiring to, are those which you admire or envy in others. This is the reason polar opposites attract; an introvert will admire an extrovert, completing each other's aspirations as well as reflecting their deeper struggles.

Life mastery also requires us to accomplish minor tasks before we can attempt greater ones. Consider it like developing a new skill. You cannot become a professional dancer after a few instructions; it takes years of practice and body conditioning to achieve proficiency. Likewise, to manifest a bigger intention, like becoming a millionaire, you need to get your finances in order and expand your money mindset. If you are in debt now, negotiate a payment plan with your debtors, or create a budget to track your money. As well, be mindful of the life lessons that lie underneath the financial struggles, like overindulgence to overcompensate unworthiness issues,

or lack of forgiveness and letting go of the past. Ultimately, when you strive to transcend your consciousness as the first goal, you will manifest all your desires. By intentionally and consciously co-creating your life experience, you will save yourself from becoming a victim of life.

Reflections:

- Which areas (health, wealth, love, spirit) of your life do you struggle most with?
- Make a concise list of the challenges you face in that area of life.
- Look for recurring patterns within those challenges to uncover your karmic lessons.
- List the members of your soul family and the lessons which they are teaching you.
- Find the potential clues which can lead you to your true purpose in life. Don't get too hung up on finding your purpose at this stage. Like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, you will need to find the pieces first, then put them together.

DAY 5

THE SELF-IMPOSED GLASS CEILING

*“The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are.
Rather, it is about unbecoming who you are not.”*

Albert Schweitzer

Besides our personalized karmic lessons, we all share one universal lesson. It is the limitation of the physical body and mind. The human body which hosts our soul comes with the homo sapiens' brain. A primitive brain with the primary duty of keeping us safe (mammalian instinct of survival), fear is the warning signal. The brain defines safe by identifying with our brain's collected information. Dr. David Hawkins says, *“Fear is an emotion but as a pervasive lifestyle, it is limiting.”* In his book *Transcending the Level of Consciousness*, Hawkins further says, *“Fear limits growth of the personality and leads to inhibition. Because it takes energy to rise above fear, the oppressed are unable to reach a higher level without assistance. Thus, the fearful seek strong leaders who appear to have conquered their fears to lead out of its slavery.”* Our ability to deal with fears, by

transforming our limiting beliefs into realizing our greatest potential, is the primary life lesson which every human being needs to undertake.

Everyone was born with an innocent state of mind, but our thoughts, beliefs, perspectives, and values have been conditioned by subtle programming. This programming plays a major influence on our conscious and subconscious mind; its formation is part of our becoming process, birth through to adulthood. Becoming is the human's process to learn and grow so we can carry out our roles in life, like being an entrepreneur, a professional, or a mother. This conditioning develops our belief system and worldview, and comprises parental influences, religious dogmas, media campaigns, schooling rules, societal norms, ancestral beliefs, unresolved karmic past life lessons, and universal consciousness. Our belief system is the foundation by which we identify ourselves. This covers our profession, race, culture, habits, roles in life, etc. As a young kid, we may experience the rejection of love from our parents, which develops into a self-belief of *I am not lovable*; this belief may show up as the fear of abandonment. As an adult, this belief promotes rejection patterns in a love relationship, like the inability to accept compliments or affection, avoidance of intimacy, or codependency. These limiting beliefs, which we own as the truth, are the foundational cause of our life's miseries and despairs and limit us from actualizing our highest potential. This forges the sense of a self-imposed glass ceiling, a limit to our income potential, quality of our interpersonal relationships, or state of health.

Awakening is the soul's cry for freedom; it can feel like a period of darkness and uncertainty, as we must face changes with little knowledge of where life is taking us. It may also feel like taking a rollercoaster ride because our world is shaken, and our existence is threatened. It is the dying phase of a version of our consciousness. Unfortunately, our brain can't differentiate between spiritual and physical death. It is a normal condition to expect a period of grief as part of the awakening process and, if we allow our life to collapse, it shall offer tre-

mendous opportunities to raise our consciousness, show our light, and unleash our inner strengths. It shall then transform our life into a more meaningful fulfillment of our soul's aspiration for consciousness rebirthing and resetting our belief system. Unless there is a shift in awareness to outgrow our problems, any other attempts will either prolong or perpetuate those patterns and conditioning from which we seek to liberate ourselves. Hence those karmic lessons are opportunities to reclaim our soul's infinite creative power and realign our psyche's needs and desires. Awakening plays an important role in our unbecoming quest; only when we let go of our self-beliefs, shall we unearth our true selves so we can become who we were born to be and fulfill our soul's purposes.

On our first healing session, Shirley shared her deeply rooted belief of not being good enough, which undervalued her service as a programmer. She was fearful of receiving a rejection from clients, so she undercut her rate significantly. Her belief of not being good enough came from her childhood issues of growing up with an emotionally abusive mother. Her mum was judgmental and domineering. She never failed to put her down. Expectedly, she married a guy with a tendency towards narcissism. As a mother, she was a permissive type who overindulged her children and struggled to set boundaries and expectations. She felt burned out and apathetic.

To achieve a profound life-changing alteration, we must first release what is no longer serves us through the liberation of mind, expansion of heart, and embodiment of a new identity. These unbecoming processes shall then transcend our consciousness and make up an imperative period in our soul's evolution. Regard this process as a soul rebirthing to develop a more intimate connection between our physical and beingness aspects to coexist with the attainment of inner peace, joy, the fulfillment of love, and freedom in life. Shirley identified herself as *'I could never be good enough to be accepted.'* Later, she released this label and replaced it with *'I am good enough, just as I am.'* Her life perspectives changed. She found the courage to express her needs and desires and placed her own needs as

a priority. Despite receiving an initial pushback, her husband adjusted his expectations and behaviors toward her and now shows her greater appreciation. When dealing with clients, she is no longer making offers out of fear of rejection. She has learned to value her services and charges accordingly. Thus, she feels a higher level of accomplishment and satisfaction, which is a favorable natural driver to achieve more in business. Her life has become more meaningful, an unwavering result of owning her worth and power.

Awakening is an alteration in our life's foundations. Instead of living in the face of fears, scarcity, or not-enough-ness, we wake up to a new REALITY of life; a life of abundance, joy, and full of possibilities. Living from a powerful place to create our desires and fulfill our purpose, instead of a forceful act, like manipulating or controlling, to achieve a lower level vibration such as greed. Lean into love, faith, and surrender as our spiritual strengths in order to release low vibrating feelings like anger, anxiety, shame, or guilt. Those are simply the by-products of fear. Fear is an illusion of future forecasting based on past occurrences; it shows up in the current moment as our imagination, which we perceive as the reality. Whenever fear arises, the need to control or manipulate our life emerges. It is an avoidance of probable, unpleasant physiological, emotional, and experiential reactions. Hence it creates resistance against transformation, which, at the deeper level, is resistance to transcend fear. By having love, faith, and surrender, we open ourselves to the infinite creative power and allow miracles to do their work.

A deep meditative state or self-hypnosis is the best tool for transcending fears, healing past wounds, and reprogramming beliefs. This method works directly on the subconscious mind and bypasses the ego - the conscious mind. It is also the path of least resistance, especially when the experience was too painful or traumatic, like rape or death. The conscious mind rejects the thought of remembering those incidents. Another consideration is, when past life events are involved, your conscious mind may not have the recollection of memo-

ries, but your subconscious mind and body never forget. A client of mine, Sarah, had a fear of swimming. Her fear of going into a pool seemed unrealistic. Through past life regression, I assisted her in finding the cause of her fear. She died from drowning in one of her past lives, hence the excessive fear of water. Once she is healed from this traumatic event, her life is no longer inhibited by it.

Past life regression through a guided meditative state is a profound form of healing and belief alteration. When I first met Tracy, she was anxious and suicidal. After she got divorced, because of her ex-husband's infidelity, her current life experience replicated her past life; she married for her family's welfare. She sobbed and said, "*I saw myself at the edge of the cliff, feeling worthless with loss of purpose. This feeling lingered in my mind for years and provoked suicidal thoughts.*" Since that past life regression, she has accepted who she is and never once has thought of killing herself. She has also released feelings that she is not good enough for love.

Energetic healing can also activate our inner powers and discover our gifts. I uncovered my gifts as a medium and healer from a past life healing session. Because our programming conditions us to seek answers from the external, we ignore the treasure within, which is covered by lies imposed as part of our programming. Healing helps to discern the truths. In the same way, we cannot see the beauty of a lotus flower when it's inside the muddy water, we are binding ourselves to life's miseries. The answer to our life's miseries has always been there inside us, including how to change our perception of reality. Heartmath's research study has scientifically proven that we have another brain in our heart. This brain can intuitively guide us to our deepest desires and best choices in whatever our life situation calls for. So, would you allow your soul to guide you into living the best experiences, for which you are destined?

Reflections:

- Recall a memory of when something significant happened in your life, like a major illness, relationship breakup, financial struggles, job loss, etc. What lessons did you learn during the period before and after?

Example, getting a divorce taught me to put my needs and desires first. I felt burnt out and miserable from trying to serve and please my family. I also learned to take self-responsibility for my happiness. Only once I fill my cup with love and joy, can I refill someone else's.

- Identify your growth and transformation as a result of the above event, including the changes in your beliefs and shift in awareness.

In my instance, before getting divorced, I measured my worthiness and whether I was good enough based on the family's level of happiness. If my children are well cared for and happy, then I am qualified to be the best mum. This belief propelled me to keep giving until I had nothing left for myself. Post-divorce, I released the need to please my children or be responsible for their happiness. I accepted what I did or didn't do is good enough.

- What do you think your glass ceiling might be?

Following on from the above example, my belief that I am not good enough, as there is something wrong with me, limits me from having the loving relationship and living in alignment with my purposes because I gave my power away and changed

or manipulated myself and others to strive for the actualization of incongruent idealized models.

Take a deep breath and center yourself before answering the following questions.

- If I am not afraid, I would ...
- If I am fully supported, loved, and accepted as who I am, I would ...
- If I am guaranteed to succeed, I would ...
- If I can have everything in life, I would ask for...

When answering the above questions, let your intuition guide you and write the first answer which comes to mind no matter how scary it might be. It is normal to expect that the answer will challenge, shake, or surprise you. Remember that you don't need to take action on this now. Simply reflect on the possibility of those future potentials, which you may never have previously considered, and let the future vision excite you.

DAY 6

THE WOUNDED INNER CHILD

“Adults are just outdated children.”

Dr. Seuss

“All of our myriad forms of unconscious behavior, projection, symbiosis, and minimizing or maximizing are fueled by one state: self-rejection. Every one of us rejects or hates some aspects of ourselves, often without knowing it. Self-rejection is the most universal and least recognized problem in our lives. It is the source of all our difficulties in giving and receiving love.” says Harville Hendrix and Helen Hunt in their book *Receiving Love*. As one of the main self-destructive behaviors, self-rejection signifies the existence of a wounded inner child within.

Self-rejection shows up in forms of maximizing, minimizing, projection, and symbiosis. If a neglectful parent wounded their children, they reacted by exaggerating (maximizing) to gain attention. On the contrary, if the parent was intrusive, children developed withdrawal or avoidance (minimizing) themselves for safety. While projection is a realization pro-

cess of the ideal self, we project either admirable or despicable qualities of ourselves onto others because of the lack of a parent's acceptance. And symbiosis is a connectedness, assuming that both parties think, feel, and act alike. A couple who experiences symbiosis loses their separateness, like boundaries, personal desires, etc. Consequently, they will use manipulation, over-giving, or acting out when feeling their desires remain unfulfilled.

A healthy inner child keeps its innocence, creativity, awe, and curiosity toward life. Connecting to this inner child makes you feel excited, invigorated, and inspired by life. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, argued that most adults keep the inner child as a dark shadow (being kept in the unconsciousness). Whenever adult experiences emotional overwhelm, major life transitions, or complex conflicts, she is inclined to regress and revert to her childhood behaviors, acting out, or protesting behavior out of ID. Can you recall a memory when you acted out of rage? You felt out of control and acted regrettably. That's the moment when your wounded inner child took control over your life.

There is also the golden shadow who represents our potential yet to emerge; it was repressed out of rejection. For example, I wanted to study psychology; however, my mum rejected this idea because she believed accountancy is more respectable and potentially earns more than a psychologist. Psychology was my golden shadow. I revisited this idea since I had my awakening and rediscovered my lost passion; today, my spiritual coaching practice encompasses its aspects.

The wounded inner child is caused by a dysfunctional upbringing because of emotional, psychological, or physical neglect. Like the need for affection, support, or protection during childhood, **emotional neglect** will give rise to low self-worth and ignoring or repressing any emotions.

Psychological neglect creates a childhood experience of not mattering, not being heard, or feeling unsafe being alone. This neglect is the major cause of self-rejection. The inability to love and accept ourselves and others will develop into the struggle to sustain a healthy, loving, and respectful relationship. **Physical neglect** of safety and nourishment is a denial of primary needs. As a newborn baby, you regarded feeding, especially breastfeeding as being cared for, nurtured, and loved; lacking this fundamental fulfillment during childhood could develop into addictions, i.e. sex, drugs, food, alcohol, or any other addictive substances.

The adulthood process, not just growing old, is to acknowledge, accept, and nurture the inner child. However, most adults' inner child was neglected, disparaged, abandoned, and rejected. An emotionally wounded inner child inhabiting an adult boy or girl is the source of most problems in society today. These adults are incapable of having a loving, respectful, open, and honest relationship, or a successful career in harmony with personal and family life. Being unwittingly influenced by the wounded inner child, they are experiencing anxiety, insecurity, loneliness, feeling unlovable, having constant fears, and worries. *"It sounds corny, but I've promised my inner child that never again will I ever abandon myself for anything or anyone else again,"* said Wynonna Judd.

Sharon contacted me soon after her boyfriend dumped her. Between her sobbing, she said, *"I gave him everything I've got; I subsidized him; I looked after him, and this is what I got."* I took a long deep breath with her, trying to calm her down. I said, *"You know this relationship is toxic for you, right?"* Sharon replied, *"Yes, but I am not ready to leave yet. Can you see that he's cheating on me? I know he's a player."* Her wounded inner child is running her life now. At two years old, she got injured while playing and had to be taken to the hospital. During her first traumatic experience when she needed love and assurance from her mum, she was left alone. So, she told herself to be strong and not be dependent on anyone to avoid being disappointed and hurt. She stopped trusting others and

herself since then. She became financially independent to shield herself from the need to depend on others. This was her coping mechanism to avoid being let down. Ironically, her relationship patterns showed a consistent cycle of betrayal, because of her codependency. This was her way of masking her fear of abandonment and avoiding feeling alone. Sharon transformed her life by connecting with the fearful, confused, unloved, and lonely little girl inside her. Whenever she feels insecure, rejected, or losing love, she tells her inner child, “*Don’t be scared. I am here for you. I love you and would never leave you.*”

Your inner child forms a part of your subconscious mind; this wounded child needs your love, acceptance, and compassion. Through this healing work, you will start learning how to set healthy boundaries, love yourself, enjoy physical and emotional pleasure, and nurture others without giving your power away. These are phrases which your inner child needs to hear from you for the healing purpose:

1. **I hear you**

As a child, you were told by your parents to stop expressing your powerful feelings, like crying, having a tantrum, or even screaming out of joy. Those moments taught you to suppress and refuse to acknowledge your adult emotions. This pattern of behavior will get carried to a relationship, where you will choose not to express your feelings. Then one day, when you cannot bottle them up anymore, you will end up in either the drowning stage or having an emotional outburst. What you can do instead is to give your inner child a chance to express those feelings, and acknowledge them by saying, *I hear you, everything will be okay.*

2. **I love you**

Unless you have an affectionate parent, most likely, you didn't receive enough expressions of love during childhood. In fact, most parents believe that showing too much love and tenderness is bad for parenting. Telling yourself I love you while standing in front of the mirror and looking deeply into your own eyes results in powerful self-healing. It assures your inner child of the availability of love and acceptance for which we are yearning.

3. **I am sorry**

Every kid is naturally self-driven to make their parents proud. Remember how happy you were when you got a well-done compliment from your parents. This overachieving pattern is the driver of getting you into a burnout stage because of a self-imposed belief of not being good enough and self-criticizing no matter what you achieved. When you learn to apologize to yourself for shaming, guilt-tripping, or feeling victimized, you will find inner peace and freedom. In a relationship, you will feel more at ease and open to learning and accepting each other as is.

4. **I forgive you**

Learning to forgive yourself helps to rebuild your bonding with the inner child. It releases the judgment on your dark shadows, which feels shameful, regretful, or not to be proud of. This is the core of self-acceptance; you are good enough as you are. Be more mindful when you are being too hard on yourself and offer acceptance, forgiveness, empathy, and compassion instead.

5. **I believe in you**

Having a fear of the unknown is normal and expected, as our subconscious mind is hard-wired for safety and protection. It requires courage to overcome fear and, as a child, you are looking for this assurance from your parents or caretakers. However, most parents failed to acknowledge this as they had the experience and no longer regarded it as engendering fear in the child. A simple phrase, like, I believe in you, can help you neutralize this fear.

6. **You deserve better**

Children do not have the understanding that they do not deserve to be abused, shamed, or abandoned. Before the age of nine, they accept this treatment because of their mistakes. And the adult who gives this kind of treatment only knows this kind of parenting; it's a learned behavior passed down through generation or culture. Telling yourself that you do not deserve disrespectful treatment, abuse, ridicule, or abandonment is important to gain your power in setting healthy boundaries and being assertive if need be.

7. **I am proud of you**

Every child wants to make their parents feel proud of their achievements, as well, she feels ashamed to let her parents down through failures. Yet, no failure is ever final, it opens an opportunity to achieve excellence through regular practice. As an adult, you carry this fear of failure by playing small; you prefer not to try unless you feel certain that you will succeed. Hence, by telling yourself that you are so proud of what you did, you are more likely to practice what you believe you are not good at.

Our emotional wellbeing highly depends on the quality of our relationship with the wounded inner child within. Thich Nhat Hanh once said, *“To take good care of ourselves, we must go back and take care of the wounded inner child every day. You have to embrace him or her tenderly, like a big brother or big sister. You have to talk to him, talk to her. The cry we hear from deep in our hearts, comes from the wounded inner child within. Healing this inner child’s pain is the key to transforming anger, sadness, and fear.”* Without acknowledging and satisfying our inner child’s wounds and needs, we will encounter the same patterns of self-sabotage and self-destructive patterns repeatedly. In the words of Paulo Coelho, *“We have to listen to the child we once were, the child who still exists inside us. That child understands magic moments. We can stifle its cries, but we cannot silence its voice. The child we once were is still there.”*

Reflections:

- Identify your self-rejection pattern, maximizing, minimizing, projection, or symbiosis.
- Write a short autobiography about your childhood, especially when a neglect, abuse, or trauma occurred.
- Try to identify the association between the two.
- As you visualize a younger version of yourself in the autobiography, connect with her and ask, what does she need from you?
- Which healing phrase (s) does your inner child need to hear? I strongly recommend saying this phrase in front of a mirror while looking deeply into your eyes as reflected in the mirror.

DAY 7

LOVE IS THE EXPRESSION OF LIFE

*“If everything around seems dark,
Look again,
You may be the light.”*

Rumi

Deep within our hearts, there is a spirit of love which invigorates our body and infuses our existence with passion, vitality, happiness, and joy. As the vessel of pure love, we were born in the divine image of perfection. Yet, our becoming process, which includes the conditioning, life experiences, karmic lessons, and our physical limitations, indoctrinate us in the self-belief of imperfection, not being good enough, and unworthy of love. We then feel shameful of our true identities and fearful of having an intimate connection with our souls. While we reject our souls, there will always be a void within our hearts. And we can never fill this void with love from outside us, it is unrequited love.

True love is much more than the mere sensation of tingling, warm, and fuzzy feelings. It is an alteration of our current fundamental self-belief. This is where we shall begin. The only path to return to love is by accepting our true-self and allow our spirit to come to light. However, the thought of losing our current identity is too scary, as we've invested our entire life into convincing ourselves it is our truth. Because of this, true self-love is an inception of a new reality and self-identity that feels foreign and outlandish. Hence, the reason we choose to hide, run, and deny instead of facing the truth about who we are.

All of us have been hurt before. We may have experienced rejection, ridicule, control, abandonment, abuse, disappointment, or other circumstances which led us to a heartbroken moment. Our brain, whose duty it is to keep us safe by associating these past stories and patterns into our belief system, rarely fails to collect information into the subconscious mind for future reference. A kid's movie "*Inside Out*", brilliantly educates viewers on the neuropsychological findings of how our emotions affect interpersonal relationships and in turn can be significantly moderated by them. Paul Ekman, a well-known psychologist who focuses on emotional studies, identified our six core emotions. They are anger, fear, sadness, disgust, joy, and surprise. I elaborate on this topic in a later chapter.

We learn the first fact of love as a feeling given by others. As a newborn, we depend on our parents to provide love through care, nourishment, attention, and affection. This also teaches us that love can only be experienced through relationships with others. We consequently believe the quality of our interpersonal relationships define our happiness and emotional fulfillment. There is no question that most parents love their children. However, the following deep-rooted issues and intergenerational misconceptions heavily influence our perceptions and beliefs about love:

- Not every parent truly knows how to give unconditional love and acceptance. In fact, most parents

believe they know what's best for their children. They need to shape children to meet their expectations, which is a projection of the idealized model. They raise their children based on what they believe to be right, instead of taking the role of guardian and allowing children to explore and choose how they wish to experience their life's journey. So, when children reach adulthood, they are lacking knowledge of their authentic self and their life purpose, or they get discouraged to follow their calling.

- Most parents have low awareness; they have not done the inner work around their limiting beliefs, fears, and unhealed wounds from the previous generations. Even though their intentions may be good, their lack of awareness of their patterns of behavior will significantly influence their children's development process. For example, a kid who grows up in an abusive family will have a higher chance of experiencing an abusive relationship at a later stage in life. It is because they learned abuse as their primary love language. Unconditional love can only flourish in fertile soil, which is cultivated with compassion, empathy, patience, forgiveness, trust and surrender. This is only attainable when supported by the continuum of the soul's evolution process.
- Society's preferred method of '*punishment vs. reward*' as a disciplinary process—apparent in the authoritarian and permissive parenting style. This blurs the line between love and control. It also indoctrinates children the belief that '*love is conditional*'; consequently, it creates the need to seek validation from others.
- Parents do not necessarily provide an adequate space for children to express their feelings or to be vulnerable. Consequently, children learn to suppress their needs to avoid being hurt, abandoned, or rejected while disregarding their intuition or heart's desire

as something which does not matter. This happens often in the case of a busy and career-minded mum, like me. Sometimes, I am too caught up with deadlines and commitments, and I will demand rather than discuss options with my children. This is the reason children prefer an emotionally unavailable partner when they reach adulthood.

- Love has a distinct condition of being fully present and living in the 'NOW', which is defined by a level of immersion and acceptance of current reality. Yet, most parents spend significant time either reliving their past or worrying about their future. Parents are also juggling a career, relationship, self, and family commitments. How much time do you think parents dedicate to being fully present and developing their close relationship with their children? Parents, after all, have competing goals to excel at home and work while fulfilling their personal needs.

Those misguidances about love cause children to adopt an incorrect perception of love and lose trust in the availability of love. When you observe children under two years old, they are fully present in the moment and explore life as a fun discovery process. They don't feel shameful or regretful about their past and have no worries or anxieties about their future. Children also openly express their feeling without fear of judgment while freely offering their hearts to give and receive love. They also allow themselves to follow their intuition to just simply be themselves. Those joyful and genuinely humble periods are the hallmarks of true love.

However, as children's exposure to parent's programming and society's conditioning increases, their need for worthiness validation strengthens, and they subject themselves to others' approval. The sense of unrequited love emerges, which makes them feel incomplete when their needs of acceptance and validation by others are unmet. And, in conjunction with a lack of self-love education and practice, children struggle to

love themselves and others unconditionally as they grow to adulthood.

Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt outline the process of how parental rejection leads to self-rejection (inability to receive or give love) in their book *Receiving Love*. The flow starts with a wounded child who unconsciously disassociates or represses her *shameful or unwanted* needs because of the lack of her parent's awareness. Parents neglect or intrude on the child's developmental needs because of their unhealed wounds. Each time the child gets wounded and split, her conscious self becomes smaller and her unconscious self (shadow) grows larger. This process affects her ability to regulate her emotional needs through a healthy behavioral pattern instead of a defensive reaction. The common safety defensive acts (denial of self needs) include controlling, self-absorbed, projection, and symbiotic. This denial is an unconscious avoidance of feeling hurt from childhood wounds and rejection of love.

Hence, our capacity to love, accept, forgive, and empathize with others is directly proportionate to our capacity to love, accept, forgive, and empathize with ourselves. Everything always starts from within. Our relationship with other people is the projection of our inner relationship with ourselves. Therefore, what we see in others is the reflection of our inner struggles, triumphs, strengths, or weaknesses. Mastering self-love is the path to return to love. You cannot pour out from an empty cup; only by filling our cup of love, we can share it with others.

Each time we feel hurt, our brain re-validates our wounded inner child's belief that love hurts. And while we hold this belief to be the truth, we will manifest the life experience accordingly. A client of mine, Grace, left her marriage after finding out that her husband cheated on her. She is a smart and qualified accountant settled in an underpaid job. Her circumstances are the realization of her belief '*I am not worthy of love and wealth.*' Grace says, "*Why am I attracted to either single but emotionally unavailable men or married men? It feels*

like I am seeking disappointment and betrayal. At work, I missed out on a promotion because my boss devalued my contribution and belittled me. I feel hopeless to break these cycles.”

I opened up a safe space for her to relive her traumatic childhood experience. Her dad was an abusive alcoholic who spent his waking hours on the slot (jackpot) machines. Her mum was the sole income earner who was afraid of putting herself first. She allowed him to treat her like dirt. Each time her mum had some money and paid some gambling debts off, her dad spent it all on his addictive behaviors. In addition to those malicious manners, he betrayed her. As a young girl, Grace established her belief that money brings painful experiences. She avoided love and money to protect herself from reliving her mum's experience.

Our brains are wired for connection, but wounds rewire them for protection. Therefore, unless we heal those wounds first, future relationships will be founded upon avoidance of pain. Deep down, we feel nervous to love and opt for protection from getting hurt and betrayed. Because of our subconscious, our minds register relationships and love as a disappointment, heart pain, and betrayal. We feel insecure to give or receive love yet, what we desire most, is the opposite of fear and, while we lean on fear, we manifest our deepest fear regardless of our conscious intention.

Love is a heart connection. It is a vessel of deep bonding, intimacy, love, and passion. The healing needs to start from self-love. Accepting yourself as being good enough and worthy of love. It can feel challenging at first, but not impossible. It just requires persistence and commitment, as you are confronting your truth and beliefs. Grace needs to believe she deserves to have love and wealth in life; to feel safe to receive money, love, and acceptance without probable pain.

Practicing self-love as part of healing your wounded inner child is necessary to transform the relationship with yourself and others. You cannot ever fully experience love until you learn how to love yourself first. This helps you to feel safe and secure to give and receive love; otherwise, your romantic rela-

tionship is merely based on an emotional attachment which can easily be mistaken as love. This consequently conditions you to accept an emotional addiction to highs and lows as the natural part of love. As Rihanna famously wrote in her song Love on the Brain's lyrics, "*That's got me feeling this way. It beats me black and blue, but it fucks me so good. And I can't get enough. Must be love on the brain. And it keeps cursing my name.*"

There is a growing awareness campaign about the importance of self-love, especially around those who have experienced toxic, abusive, or manipulative relationships as part of healing and a transformative journey. Despite the strong campaign in favor of self-love, there is a lack of education in its depth and application. This causes misinformation, like focusing on loving yourself first to get into the relationship you desire. Another misconception is when you love yourself, you don't need anyone, or you cannot love others unless you love yourself first.

These disempowering beliefs suggest mastering self-love alone and not entering a relationship until you reach a 'satisfactory' level. What lies underneath is a fear of getting hurt, masked from the perspective of a perfectionist. It implies that you have only 'one-shot' to get the perfect relationship, but there are endless shots available in life and, only by trying and persisting, you will learn what went well and upon what you can improve. We are protecting our hearts from getting hurt again, and in avoidance of hurt, we prefer to take the standpoint of '*I am staying single until I master self-love.*' I call this '*I will be happy when*' syndrome, a refusal to live and experience the present moment in the hope of a promising future. Yet, now is the only actual moment which offers an opportunity to heal, transform, and upgrade for a better future; it is the future creation stage. Without accepting the current state of reality, we cannot conceive, envision, and manifest our destiny.

Further, reaching excellence requires practice and feedback, which cannot be attained by learning alone inside a cave on the top of a mountain. Think about building self-confidence in setting and asserting a healthy boundary without

interactions with other people. You can read and learn all the theories about boundaries. Still, nothing will ever prepare you for the real-life application, as it varies depending on the relationship type and the other people involved. For example, you may have good leadership skills at work, setting clear boundaries in your relationship with other colleagues; however, at home, you struggle to have boundaries with family because of the codependency issue.

Esther Perel, a Belgian Psychotherapist, and NY times bestseller says, “*We don’t just learn to love ourselves by ourselves. It’s a classic chicken or the egg scenario: to love another, we must love ourselves. To love ourselves, we must allow ourselves to be loved by others. And we must recognize that negative self-esteem is riddled with societal messages about who is lovable, laudable, or loathsome.*” Her definition of self-love is less about the ability to withstand loneliness or establish independence and more about awareness and acceptance of our incompleteness. It’s about letting others love us even when we feel unlovable because their version of us is often kinder than our own.

Consider this: when you genuinely love someone, you will never regard him as not good enough. Instead, you will only see his perfections and treat him with love, care, tenderness, and respect. So, if you also love yourself, how should you treat yourself? This is the fundamental aspect of self-love. The best way to teach others how to treat you is by being a role model. So, treat yourself with love, acceptance, compassion, and respect. Your value and worthiness have nothing to do with your past actions; you are enough as who you are. Within you, there is a perfect image that has been waiting for your permission to reveal itself to the world. Giving yourself permission to change is merit to attaining desired results.

Reflections:

- What are your consistent struggles in the love relationship?

- How do these reflect your childhood becoming process?
- What do you believe of yourself because of that childhood issue?
- What do you need to let go of in your beliefs about love and acceptance?

DAY 8

THE EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY PARADOX

*Yes, I am strong and independent.
But at times, I also need someone to hold my hand.
And a shoulder to cry on.
Because vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness.*

Cultivating resilience in children is a focus of parenting; it is an essential part of every child's becoming process. Psychologists advocate resilience as the success factor of today's best performers and tomorrow's leaders. It is the measure of our mental health or the extent of our positive mindset. It shows our strength in dealing with adversities, stresses, changes, losses, and setbacks, however, placing too much emphasis on its values may have an adverse impact on our mental health. Most resilience-building instructions focus on stress management and developing a positive outlook. It obliquely puts pressure on us to challenge any negative thoughts and emotions, like stress and anxiety. It disregards our innate emotional dependency needs. Male society suffers most from this unrealistic expectation of being independent, strong, and resilient. Many

men feel weak or a failure if they have to ask for emotional support or are seen crying.

The collective consciousness associates our need for love, comfort, support, and assurance as an emotional dependency and deems it as shame and weakness. Yet even emotionally healthy adults require some level of emotional dependency. It is far from frailty; it signifies a healthy mental state. Consider the mental state of prisoners in solitary confinement; they are suffering from a living death. Those prisoners develop paranoia, depression, severe anxiety, hallucination, and memory loss. Just like Maya Angelou said in her poem – *Alone: Alone, all alone. Nobody, but nobody can make it out here alone. There are some millionaires with money they can't use. Their wives run round like banshees. Their children sing the blues. They've got expensive doctors To cure their hearts of stone.*'

The attachment theory by Bowlby and Ainsworth shows our need of emotional dependency is as crucially important as resilience. The attachment theory argues the foundational factor of a child's ability to thrive emotionally depends upon their parents' emotional availability and responsiveness. Children need their parents to provide a secure base during childhood. When children grow into adulthood, they seek proximity to this secure base from their life partners during stressful periods. Their attachment type shapes their internal working model and the foundation of emotional security which affects their expectations within interpersonal relationships.

Further, people feel needy when their emotional needs are unmet and, once their needs are met, they shift their focus outward. This is otherwise known as the '*dependency paradox*'—attachment jargon. The dependency paradox suggests that, as people raise their level of emotional dependency on another, the more independent and daring they become. Emotional dependency offers a safety net which hinders fears and consequently promotes a higher level of risk appetite which leads to more success opportunities. The higher the risk, the greater

the reward will be. In contrast, when a person feels their partner is not supportive in times of need or believes in their potential, they feel unsafe to explore other aspects of their lives and are less likely to attempt to realize their hopes and dreams. Their fear of rejection and abandonment will emerge, and they feel pressured to choose between their success and love. This is the underlying reason people feel discouraged to have it all in life.

Amir Levine and Rachel Heller state *“Having a partner who fulfills our intrinsic attachment needs and feels comfortable acting as a secure base and heaven can help us remain emotionally and physically healthier and live longer. Having a partner who is inconsistently available or supportive can be a truly demoralizing and debilitating experience that can literally stunt our growth and stymie our health.”* Learning to identify our attachment types can offer an immense opportunity to grow and develop a more secure relationship base. Understanding how each type operates around their emotional needs will lead to better communication and fewer conflicts. Neuroscience highlights that love and connection are more powerful than the survival mechanism through fears. The paradox is that being dependent helps you to be more independent. Love can help us thrive by offering emotional assurance of our strengths and abilities. This bonding and trust are providing a safety net of someone who will have our back should we fail when taking higher risks and facing challenges.

From a biological perspective, our body promotes closeness and attachment through the production of a cascade of oxytocin, otherwise known as the love hormone or cuddle chemical. According to the American Psychological Association, oxytocin receptors are found throughout the body's cells and it is higher during both stressful and socially bonding experiences. This chemical messenger plays an important role in social behaviors, including sexual arousal, recognition, trust, anxiety, and mother-infant bonding. A cocktail of brain chemicals, including oxytocin released during intercourse, can intensify bonding between sexual partners.

Dr. Sue Johnson in her book, *Love Sense* concluded, based on the past 15 years of research, “*That a stable, loving relationship is the absolute cornerstone of human happiness and general wellbeing. A good relationship is better health insurance than a careful diet and a better anti-aging strategy than taking vitamins. A loving relationship also is the key to creating families that teach the skills necessary to maintain a civilized society – trust, empathy, and cooperation. Love is the lifeblood of our species and our world.*” In the absence of love, there is only suffering. No human being can survive a loveless and lonely life as our entire existence, psychologically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually, is hard-wired for love, connection, and belonging. It is essential to sustain human existence as an infinite life source of energy.

Our actual issue of emotional dependency is based on the weak foundation of our emotional safety and security during childhood. Because we feel insecure, we struggle to trust others. In avoidance of getting hurt, betrayed, or disappointed, we decide to solely depend upon ourselves. It is a false sense of security and safety. While we maintain this, we shall beg for love and reject it at the same time. Contemplate Tania’s story below to help you to excavate your deeper truths of emotional dependency.



I grew up without a lot of money. My parents were always struggling, but we didn’t really feel like we did without. When I was a teenager and I earned money from babysitting. I loved to do things, buy things, and have what other children had. Being able to afford little extras made me feel good, and it was important to me. As an adult, I didn’t earn a lot of money at first, but I worked very hard! I was a young, single mother who got into a controlling relationship. I paid rent, day care, food, insurance, but one missed credit card payment subsequently led to debt collection.

My then-husband lorded this bad credit over me. For the entirety of our relationship, he constantly belittled me over the default record of \$300. He said I couldn't be trusted with money. This was his excuse to take over the finances. Although he had no idea of what it was like to be financially responsible. He was living with his parents and never had a job. I allowed him to manage our finances, even though I was the breadwinner. I supported him while he was studying on a student loan.

He gave me an allowance of \$20 each payday for clothes, makeup, haircare, and other personal needs. This made me extremely worried about money. I constantly felt like there was never enough. I would have my mom sell Avon so I could buy makeup. I collected the change at the grocery store to pay her back. When I needed new bras or clothes, I would buy them at the grocery store to hide the spending. Once I raised my income level, he left his job and passed the financial burden on to me, and I was still living on an allowance while my ex-husband spent money on sports betting. Our marriage lasted for 15 years before I decided enough was enough. I refused to be treated like a child and left. My income multiplied significantly after I left my marriage. And I am now in a relationship with a man who supports, loves, and accepts me.



Tania's story showed her identity of not having enough money and striving to be financially independent as the coping mechanism. She also tried to compensate for the lack of financial support from her parents at a young age. She attracted a partner who validated her struggles with money and her need to be independent. Her inner child is fearful of asking too much from her parents in order to maintain their love and acceptance. In her marriage, she didn't feel entitled to have her desires and needs fulfilled. Tania's karmic lesson is allowing herself to be loved and supported. Paradoxically, by allowing herself to be supported, Tania realized her aspiration

to have it all. Remember when you allow your world to end, you open up the space to rebuild a better one.

Reflections:

- What are your beliefs of emotional dependency?
- How does this affect your interpersonal relationship?
- Do you allow yourself to be supported by others?
- If not, what fear arises as you think about being supported by your loved ones?
- When did you first experience this fear?
- What permission do you need to give yourself so you can let go of this fear?

DAY 9

PASSION ENLIVENS LIFE

*“Passion makes the old machine new:
Passion lops off the bough of weariness.
Passion is the elixir that renew:
How can there be weariness when passion is present?
Oh, don't sigh heavily from fatigue:
Seek passion, seek passion, seek passion!”*

Mawlana Jalal-al-Din Rumi (The Illuminated Rumi)

Passion is commonly known as an intense deep romantic loving emotion. It is best understood by recalling the moment when you fell in love and felt infatuated with your beloved. Remember, how you looked into each other's eyes, and you lost yourself. Everything appears to be perfectly how it should be. The warm and fuzzy feelings fill a void in your heart when you wrap your arms around the one you love. A gentle caress and soft whisper that touches your soul tenderly. You feel like there is never enough time in the day to be together and share each other's life stories.

Imagine, what if your beloved is yourself? How would it feel to fall in love with yourself and receive the passionate and moving energy that deeply touches your heart? To begin with, when you look at yourself in the mirror, you shall see only perfection. Your eyes twinkle with much adoration, gazing through every part of your body with gentle acceptance and tender love. Your soul gently whispers, "*I will always love you, no matter what!*". There is a deep sense of pride in the experiences you went through; they shaped you to be who you are today. Those moments of darkness offered you the opportunities to uncover your inner strength and power, to conquer life's adversities that you once believed were beyond limits.

The inner love affair with your soul represents an unshakable bonding that no matter what happens in life, you will always have yourself that readily accepts, forgives, and loves who you are. There is no shame, resentment, or humiliation about your body, actions, thoughts, or emotions. You accept that everything, everyone, every circumstance, or facts in your life as they are represented; they are neither good nor bad, just opportunities for reflection, learning, and growth that are designed to mold you into a greater version of yourself.

We spent most of our growing up stage learning how to please and fulfill others' needs. We forget who the most important person in our lives is. The person who we look at each morning in the mirror gets neglected. Then we wonder why we feel empty and robbed. Learn how to fall in love with yourself and you shall fall in love with your life. By embracing the self-passionate energy, you will get to know yourself on a deeper level and create a powerful bond with your soul and purpose in this lifetime. And it begins by asking "**What do I want, and how do I feel?**" regularly. Each time, before you decide, regardless of how simple it might be, like "What is for dinner?", check in with yourself first. Ask your body what it needs and wants. This helps you to develop a propensity to prioritize yourself while rediscovering your self-identity as it was before the world told you who you should be. By constantly checking in, you also acknowledge the importance of

your current state by being present instead of defaulting to your past stories and conditioning.

Being in a solitude moment of meditation creates the space to acknowledge your feelings. In the silence, you allow your body and heart to communicate their needs and desires through intuition and feelings. Through regular meditation practice, I reignited my childhood passion for dancing. One thing led to another; I joined a Latin dancing class. I had buried this passion because my mum disallowed me. Dancing allows me to embrace my feminine energy while releasing my overthinking patterns. I also learned to surrender and allow my dancing partner to lead. As someone who is always in control, this was not an easy task for me. There are so many resistances showing up because of my lack of trust in others. Dancing also helps me to release stagnating energy from less than favorable events, like disappointments, sadness, etc. I also feel more confident and comfortable with my body. After regular dancing practice, I expand my ability to let go of the need to control my life, allow others to guide and support me, and dance through the cycle of life while enjoying being present in the now.

Do you remember the scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade where Indiana Jones had to save his father by finding the Holy Grail? He followed the map, which led to a doorway with no apparent bridge to cross the abyss. However, the map showed a man traversed the gap by stepping into the void with an inscribed message to take a leap of faith, defying the logic that he might die should there be no invisible bridge, Jones took the leap of faith and found the Holy Grail. Pursuing your dream and vision is like finding the Holy Grail. It requires a leap of faith as you would never see all the paths and directions to go, yet it requires you to courageously take the first step.

Passion is an outburst of powerful emotion, an intense desire, or enthusiasm for something or someone. It is leading the way to a leap of faith. It fuels the fire of action, and its energy moves us forward to the unknown while helping

us endure and conquer the uncertainties during challenging times. Once acted upon, passion can yield great results by empowering us through a self-belief beyond conviction to take quantum and courageous leaps. Such leaps are much needed when pursuing a new life direction because of challenges, uncertainties, and unknown factors which we may encounter along the way. When you follow a passion, the sense of emotional fulfillment overrides any future worries, such as money. Your passion is the breadcrumb which leads to your soul's purpose. When you live according to purpose, the universe will abundantly reward you.

Most successful people accomplished their acclaimed results in life by pursuing their passion. Like Elizabeth Gilbert, who achieved an international bestseller with over 12 million copies of *Eat, Pray, Love* selling worldwide. Gilbert says her secret of success is attributed to her passion for writing. She says, "*I simply vowed to the universe that I would write forever, regardless of the result. I promised that I would try to be brave about it, and grateful, and as uncomplaining as I could possibly be. I also promised that I would never ask writing to take care of me financially.*"

Choosing security over passion is a decision to live based on fear and scarcity. When you worry over financial security or future uncertainties, it is a great indicator of a deeper issue with feeling insecure. It is a projection that you are trying to control the outcome based on your predicted expectations. The truth is that life will always be unpredictable, and you can never control outcomes, events, or other people. You can only control yourself; the choices you make, and how you respond to the outcome.

Yet ironically, uncertainty is the only constant factor in life. And uncertainty offers hope and freedom to experience life through spontaneity. Life is meant to be fun, but when everything is so predictable and within your control, where is the room for the Universe to give you a surprise and miracle in life? Further, when you are tightly attached to being in control, there is no space to explore and create new ideas. This is

a perfectionist's behavior, who only makes calculated actions because of fear of mistakes or failures. However, learning and growth are only attainable by continuously trying and persisting, regardless of the results; meaning, being prepared to make many mistakes, and failing to pursue success.

In one of her Ted Talks, Gilbert explained her passion metaphorically as home, where she rightfully lives safe from the random hurricane of outcomes. She said, *“the only trick is that you’ve got to identify the best, worthiest thing that you love most and then build your house right on top of it and don’t budge from it. And if someday, somehow, get vaulted out of your home by either great failure or success, then your job is to fight your way back to that home. The only way that it has ever been done by putting your head down and performing with diligence and devotion and respect and reverence whatever the task is that love is calling forth from you next”*.

A purposeful life is a byproduct of passion. Pursuing a passionate activity or goal also develops meaning and purpose in your life, as passion makes you live life from an exciting and enthusiastic space. Its energy is expansive and invigorating as opposed to shaming, resentful, guilt-tripping, or humiliation energy that is depleting or burdening. In the book *Aspire*, Kevin Hall explores the origin of eleven words and relates their true meaning to leading a life of significance. Kevin said, *“Even though it has become popular to define passion as deep or romantic love, the real meaning is being willing to suffer for what you love. When we discover what we will pay a price for, we discover our life’s mission and purpose. Passion in the purest sense, the willingness to suffer for what we love, is often the door that leads us to our path.”* As Kevin pointed out, pursuing passion requires a willingness to suffer whereas a hobby or powerful interest is a ‘nice to have or do’ kind of feeling.

The greatest inventors, artists, or humanists in the world achieved their highest potential and self-actualization through passion. Think of Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, and many more. They were pursuing their passion and unshakable self-belief to contribute

to the world. They made a conscious decision to give up their leisure time to focus on what they were passionate about in life. The journey of pursuing passion sets your soul on fire regardless of the outcomes or rewards because passion creates meaning and fulfillment as well as driving you to achieve a purpose. Just like a famous proverb says, falling in love is a chance, but staying in love is a choice. Having a passion for self and life's purpose is a choice and a lifetime commitment that you need to take if you want to stay in love with yourself and your life.

As a child, we are more open to exploring our curiosity, the pointer to passion. We know our interest in life, but we get discouraged to follow it during our becoming process. Hence, you need a self-discovery process to unearth your passion. This is a layer-by-layer process, either through self-reflection or interpersonal interaction. Because some can be easily distinguished, but others will take some healing and interactions to penetrate deeper layers, especially when wounds are involved. Relearning your childhood interests, hobbies, activities, and school subjects can point you toward some clues about your passion. You may also try to take a personality profiling test like Myers Briggs to gain some insight about yourself, or explore and try something new.

Reflection:

- Imagine going on a first date with yourself, what questions would you ask yourself? Write down your findings about yourself. You can also ask three or more friends or family what they love about you.
- If you would spoil yourself like a passionate love does, what would you give, do, or treat yourself to? Practice this at least once a week.
- What did you like or enjoy doing as a child or at a younger age, which you have stopped doing now?
- What were the reasons you stopped doing that activity?

- What books do you enjoy reading? Or what topics do you like to discuss with your best friends?
- What subjects spark your curiosity and inspire you to learn more about them?
- If money was no object, what would you like to do?

DAY 10

LIFE'S NAVIGATION SYSTEM

*“Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts,
And you are the slave to your emotions.”*

Elizabeth Gilbert

Do you ever feel lost in overwhelming thoughts and emotions, even when performing seemingly mundane tasks?

Do you feel that your current life circumstances are too much to manage?

Do you feel so powerless in handling your thoughts and emotions that you become the victim of your thoughts and emotions?

This is what emotional drowning is like.

Drowning is an emotionally overwhelming stage where your mind is full of intense emotions and incapable of processing those emotions. It affects your ability to think, act, or decide. Those emotions are normally negative ones like anger, fear, or guilt, but on rare occasions, some people can experience an overwhelming reaction caused by a euphoric

state. This state of mind can be caused by one big stressor or a series of small continuous stressors.

Emotional drowning is a major cue that you are allowing external factors to rule your emotions. Instead of allowing yourself to process those emotions, you are enslaved within a hopeless state of mind. As a human, it is natural to have an emotional response, while raising awareness about your emotions and how you process them can create a sense of freedom; that is, being present and mindful of diminishing feelings without being consumed by them.

We experience the dynamic of life through emotions, which are descriptors of our feelings. Lisa Feldman Barrett constructed an emotions theory that draws on the latest revolutionary scientific evidence to reveal that emotions are psychological experiences based on factors influencing an individual's historical, physiological, societal, and environmental experiences. Barrett's research confirms, our brain is not a passive receiver of sensory input but an active constructor of emotions. Based on the sensory input and experiences or stories, your brain constructs meaning and prescribes action, otherwise known as concepts. Our brain uses concepts to give simultaneous meaning to internal and external sensations; without them, you are experientially blind. In every waking moment, your brain uses experience, organized as concepts, to guide your actions, and give meaning to your sensations. When the concepts are interlinked, your brain constructs instances of emotion.

Barrett's book *How Emotions Are Made* introduced the theory of constructed emotions. She says, "*We don't recognize emotions or identify emotions: we construct our own emotional experiences, and our perceptions of others' emotions, on the spot, as needed, through a complex interplay of systems. Human beings are not at the mercy of mythical emotion circuits buried deep within animalistic parts of our highly evolved brain: we are architects of our own experience.*" Emotions, therefore, carry significant information to help us survive and navigate our way through life. As what lies beneath the emotions are our past stories,

values, beliefs, and perceptions, which are used by our brains as concepts to give clues about our inner world, and when combined with our empathetic ability to discern them, emotions offer opportunities for growth and healing.

Issues arise when we associate judgment, belief, and perception around emotions, like anger as a negative emotion; showing anger is deemed as an inability to handle our emotions. Consequently, we incline to suppress or hide negative emotions instead of processing them in a healthy way. Emotion is energy in motion, which includes a flow of energy to be released and information to be processed. There are three options, expression (outward), repression (inward), and a healthier option through channeling.

An expression is our way of externally releasing emotions to be deciphered. It communicates our need to seek help, project fears, or relief. For example, when you vent, you are trying to release the emotions trapped inside while seeking acknowledgment and help to process them. An expression makes us dependent on our emotional support person but is sometimes better than repression; however, it can be unhealthy if we use this means of projection to avoid discerning the underlying issues.

The contrasting option of expression is repression, which is an internalized mechanism to either compartmentalize, numb, or shove emotions back into the unconscious mind. Repression is generally the male's way of dealing with their emotions, as society discourages them from expressing feelings, i.e. crying is a sign of weakness. By choosing to repress, you believe somehow the inner world will transform, dilute, or set emotions aside for processing at a better time. However, your unconscious needs will only intensify the emotion, trying to be more vocal about the message sent by your intuitive mind or force the energy to a deeper level which, over time, can transmute to physical or mental illness, addiction, or compulsive behavior.

The healthiest way is by acknowledging and comprehending the hidden message carried by the emotions. Our brain

constructs the emotions through a concept which is built upon past stories and belief systems. Therefore, emotion contains hidden opportunities for healing and growth. All emotions are equally important, and we should not attempt to transform them, i.e., anger into joy. First, because we will lose the valuable information sent by our intuitive mind. Second, it is avoidance to accept and create emotion out of thin air. Keeping in mind our habitual nature, our brain plasticity will adopt our dominant way to process emotions and opt for this means as the first preference in the future. Therefore, making a conscious effort to direct emotional flow to healthier options is necessary to change this habit.

Paul Ekman, a psychologist, and a leading researcher on emotions, surveyed over one hundred scientists and used their input to develop five major categories that can help us decipher the meaning of emotions. The five categories are:

1. Anger, despite being commonly viewed as a negative emotion, carries important information and powerful defensive energy out of feeling threatened or experiencing injustice. When someone is in a rage, they are capable of acting beyond their rational mind, like a crime of passion. Anger arises when a boundary has been broken, lines have been crossed and you feel violated.
2. Sadness arises from the loss of a meaningful or significant thing or person in life and often feels like pain or hurt. It covers a varying spectrum from disappointment (lowest) to suicidal urges (highest). It is a brilliant teacher of introspection, resilience, perseverance, and opportunism which also promotes acceptance, compassion, trust, and forgiveness.
3. Fear may be disguised in the form of intuition or instinct. Normally, we are taught to overcome fear as it holds us back from taking high risks, opposing limiting beliefs, or pursuing what we want. The sub-

conscious mind plays the guardian role by validating with past stories or belief systems which are deemed as safe territory. The subconscious mind will alert us to anything falling outside of the safe territory and disguise it as fear. Unsafe factors include uncertainty, loss of control, failure, shame, or vulnerability. Hence, fear is known as a human's basic survival mechanism or inborn fight, flight, or freeze response whenever we feel physically or emotionally threatened.

4. Joy, as the most sought-after emotion, is directly correlated to our state of innocence, safety, love, peace, connectedness, and security. This emotion is a reminder of what we value and desire in life. We may feel enjoyment is eluding us because of other feelings like worry, not being present with the current stage, stress, or anxiety.
5. Disgust is a reactive form of protecting yourself from unpleasant or unwanted situations. It is also a natural response toward something or someone you dislike. Disgust offers an opportunity to practice acceptance and non-judgmental reactions toward those you dislike. Consider digging deeper into the underlying reason or past story which makes you feel this way.

By treating our body and mind as a whole, we are creating a feedback loop. That is, the body listens to the mind, and the mind listens to the body. This intricate connection means that our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes can either positively or negatively affect our physiological stage and physical health. Therefore, we can use this connection to heal. There has been much research and study proving the benefits of the placebo effect. For example, a doctor prescribed a sugar pill as a powerful drug to a patient with an assurance to relieve the patient's symptoms; the patient achieved the promised results.

We can create this feedback loop through feeling and accepting our feelings and emotions without denial while acknowledging and being willing to fulfill our body's needs. We also need to trust the sensation of our bodies and value spontaneity and enjoy what our bodies want to do; rest vs activity, enjoyment of food, and pleasure. This feedback loop can help you gain insight into what is going on inside your subconscious mind. Your sensitivity is a radar that helps you navigate through life, surround yourself with what makes you feel good, and remove yourself from what feels draining. Your body sensation provides clues to who you are at the deepest level, including experiences. These five basic emotions are associated with consistent sensations that are discrete and partially overlapping. They are:

- An increased upper limb sensation denotes anger.
- A decreased limb sensation denotes sadness.
- Chest sensations denote surprise and fear.
- Any enhanced sensation all over the body is a sign of joy.
- Sensation around the throat and digestive system denotes disgust.

The practice of regular meditation can help to strengthen this feedback loop, where your brain will enter alpha and theta wave states. This practice will require you to be compassionate to your body and trust in mental conversation received through intuition. Be patient with yourself as it takes time and learning to trust this process. Pressuring yourself will prevent you from connecting with your inner world as a protective measure against overwhelming sensations and emotions.

Being attentive to the subtle signs of a rising emotion before it emerges intensely creates the space to reflect and assimilate before reacting, it also helps you to feel more grounded and secure in navigating through life guided by an intuitive mind. You can also expect to excel more in life as the

choices you make are directed from a space of consciousness and not influenced by emotions.

Meditation also helps us to practice slowing down to counteract the collective consciousness of instant gratification. This ability to delay gratification helps us to be less reactive and project our emotions. Instead, we are accustomed to checking in and taking responsibility and accountability for every action, thought, and emotion.

Reflections:

- Have you ever experienced emotional drowning? What was it like?
- What is your default way to process emotion? Expression, repression, or processing through reflection?
- Can you identify what or who influences your emotional processing method?
- Pick one significant emotion which you experienced recently and reflect on what may have triggered this on a deeper level by reflecting on the following questions:
 - o When was the first time I was feeling this way?
 - o What happened to me and why was it significant?
 - o What belief did I create because of it?
 - o What story do I often retell myself regarding this?
 - o What do I need to let go of so I can move forward with life?

PART 3

UNLEASH



*As I value my worth,
I unconditionally love myself first.
By expressing my authentic self to the world,
Tomorrow, I will wake up and feel matter,
To myself, not to you or the world.
And my life is matter to me.*

DAY 11

THE SPIRITUAL AROUSAL

*“Have enough courage to trust love one more
time and always one more time.”*

Maya Angelou

Am I living or surviving? This question comes to my mind frequently. As a deep thinker, I spend a considerable amount of time reflecting upon the meaning of my existence in this life journey. Life can offer us different choices at any point in time, yet life itself has no meaning unless we put it in a context that is relevant to us. Choosing a life experience is like selecting your favorite dish from a menu. Unless you order one dish at a time and savor its taste, you shall never know your favorite. It is never about the right or wrong option; it is only a matter of preference. Your senses guide you to determine dishes that best suit your taste buds.

Change always feels scary because it includes unknown uncertainties against our habitual nature. Change can also feel chaotic, as it requires you to alter your fundamental belief sys-

tem. A major life decision, like starting a new career, requires courage. Provided you are courageous enough to ask, follow it through, and receive what you wish for, there is no limitation to what you can get, because courage helps you to face fears associated with your desire, like the fear of rejection if your desire affects someone else. Fear of failure or success may arise when you are pursuing a new career, venture, or change in your life's path. This is the reason why most people end up settling, or playing small. They lean on their fears; they struggle to believe they can manifest their desires. As Marianne Williamson famously quoted, "*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that might frighten us.*"

Fears stop us from manifesting what we genuinely want, and we settle for a lesser goal instead. Yet, once you decide on your desire without allowing your fears, beliefs, or current reality to appraise the likelihood of actualizing it, the universe will conspire to make it happen. The past few years dealing with debts taught me this wisdom. Debt is a sign of the inability to forgive and let go of the past; once we release the blame, guilt, and resentment, we will find simpler and affordable ways to pay it. When I closed my skin clinic business, I had business debt amounting to in excess of over \$50,000. I refused to lean on the fear of dealing with the debt collector; instead, I sought her empathy. By sharing my story on how I had been fraudulently sold a laser machine which had a value of less than 10% of its price, I forgave the guy who sold it to me and swindled me into this debt. The most important part was that I forgave myself for not trusting my intuition and released self-blaming patterns. And the debt collector suggested writing off the debt. Always remember, the universe will always reciprocate our consistent actions and grant our wish by creating miraculous paths. Our commitments to taking actions regardless of the outcome count toward the success of our manifesting process.

Courage comes from the Latin word *Coeur*; it means heart. It means the ability to do something that frightens one. It is

spiritual arousal to follow what your heart is calling you to do. Hence, courage is the tipping point of your role in life, where you are no longer playing a victim, and you let go of the belief that life happens to you, liberating you from a state of hopelessness, regret, anger, shame, and resentment. Courage helps you to overcome fear, as Nelson Mandela once said “*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.*”

Through courage, you become a victor; the creator who believes that life happens for you and through you. Empowering yourself to take action through inner strength, with no attachment to the outcome, is the essence of courage; it implies the willingness to explore alternative possibilities and opportunities in life and approach it with childlike curiosity. Courage also means that you are willing to take a higher risk which enables you to reap a greater reward. It is what makes you feel alive. Otherwise, life feels dull and mundane because you are merely surviving through routines. Do you know what most people regret when dying? They regret not taking risks and following their hearts. Life is never about success or failure; life is about the meaning you assign to it and how you enjoy its experience.

David R Hawkins, a psychiatrist, spiritual teacher, and The Huxley award winner for Inestimable Contribution to the Alleviation of Human Suffering is renowned for his research in spiritual science. His framework, *The Map of Consciousness*, incorporates findings from quantum physics and non-linear dynamics aspects of consciousness. It also outlines each progressive level of the emotional energy's frequency that represents a higher consciousness which strengthens one's true power. Hawkins' study demonstrated the difference between power and force. Power is only attainable through increasing our vibrational level higher than 200; that is courage. This is a distinguishing line between the destructive and constructive expression of power. He also identified where power wins out over force in the longer run in many fields of human endeavor,

because power appeals to what is essentially good, whereas force appeals to what may appear good.

Courage includes an empowering action taken out of deliberate choices with confidence but no attachment to the outcome; it is essentially an inspired action through the guidance of love. Hence, courage reignites your manifesting power, which is the capability to create a purposeful life by taking self-responsibility for your thoughts, actions, and emotions in co-creating life experience with the Universe. There is a level of faith and surrendering involved in the manifesting process. Force, in contrast, is an assertion of power through control and manipulation, as one is trying to change out of fear and scarcity to fulfill an expected outcome; this is the path of destruction, frustration, and misery.

Vivian fell in love with a guy who claimed to be in a rocky marriage with a view of a future divorce. She loaned him \$15,000 to help expand his business. Twelve months later, he hadn't repaid his debt as promised and also stayed in his marriage as his wife had given birth to his son. Vivian acted out of a need to be in a relationship and fear of rejection. The loan was to persuade him to leave his wife and validate her worthiness. Vivian also had an unspoken expectation of him eventually offering her better financial security should he have become more successful. Her manipulation resulted in pain and betrayal instead of a loving, supportive, and honest relationship. A more courageous option for Vivian would have been to stay true to herself and face her fear of rejection by declining the loan request and waiting for him to prove his words through action.

The only path to awaken your manifesting power is to be courageously in alignment with your soul out of love. By emitting an energetic vibration of completeness and love, you shall manifest your desire which fulfills you. Otherwise, manifesting from the space of not being good enough, proving something, scarcity, or trying to escape from an uncomfortable situation will put you into a false situation. Your ego will convince you that peace and happiness come from having

everything in place, but that's not how the universe works. Everything will fall into place after you embody peace and happiness. You are the producer; you are the tree of your life. The quality of your fruits depends on your level of consciousness. You shall only improve the quality of your fruits by transcending into a higher level of consciousness.

Reflection:

- What is your current situation?
- What is the ultimate outcome you want to achieve?
- Write a list of actions which you can start doing now.
- Write down any fears arising from each of those actions.
- Next to each fear, write the worst thing that can happen if you take those actions. Contemplate the idea of taking the least scary action first. Then encourage yourself to act on it in the next few days. Next, go on the second and so on.

DAY 12

VULNERABILITY GRANTS YOU FREEDOM.

*“Daring greatly means the courage to be vulnerable.
It means to show up and be seen.
To ask for what you need.
To talk about how you’re feeling.
To have the hard conversations.”*

Brene Brown

Who loves vulnerability? Not many! It makes us feel exposed to the possibility of being hurt, physically, or emotionally. Vulnerability requires you to show up authentically instead of hiding behind the facade to appease others. It is natural to fear vulnerability, but being in control gives a false sense of safety and security. In fact, the more insecure a person is, the more controlling she may be. It is a misbelief that control over others, circumstances, or facts will guarantee our safety and security. Deep down, control and manipulation are a refusal to let go of childhood wounds and a reliving of those painful moments.

Yet, being vulnerable is the only way to have intimacy, a genuine connection, creativity, and a heart-centered life rela-

tionship. Only through vulnerability can we recognize our emotional needs and take self-responsibility to fulfill them. It also allows us to let go of the control, attachment to outcomes, or expectation of our actions, feelings, or behaviors. Consider loving someone unconditionally without knowing if the other person loves you back. It takes both courage and vulnerability to express your feelings, defying fear of rejection. Brene Brown defines vulnerability as not about winning or losing, but having the courage to show up when you cannot control the outcome.

Trust is a product of vulnerability; it goes beyond faithfulness. This is a classic case of chicken and egg. We need to feel trust to be vulnerable, and yet we need to be vulnerable to trust. When our life partner disengages emotionally, we feel betrayed. It then triggers our deepest fears of abandonment, rejection, the unworthiness of love, unwanted, and unlovable. Whenever we feel our self-worth is in danger, we act out of fear. This is the reason we feel the need to keep giving and pleasing others whenever we are afraid of losing love, even a toxic and abusive one. We will do almost anything to avoid reliving the wounds and bringing our shadows into the light; this threatens our security and existence.

The courage to be vulnerable helps us to end this cycle by expressing how we feel, how we want to be treated, and asserting our boundaries. In simpler terms, we can clearly articulate our truths without being fearful of rejection or disappointment because vulnerability without a healthy boundary is not vulnerability. It is generally misunderstood as to how much we are willing to disclose our private life in public. The true meaning of vulnerability is how courageous we are when we need to show up, be seen, and take necessary actions without controlling the outcome and betray ourselves.

The only way we can live on our own terms is through being courageous to be vulnerable to the truth. Freedom can only be obtained by showing up as our authentic selves, and that is what the courage to be vulnerable allows us to do. It provides a foundation for us to design and build a life experi-

ence suited to our intentions and desires. The most fulfilling life is to have our material and emotional needs in congruence with the fulfillment of our soul's needs. This will naturally activate our manifesting power, and manipulation or control is no longer required. It also conquers the victimhood mentality and transforms us from a giver to a receiver. While we seek validation of our worthiness by others, we shall constantly give and rarely allow ourselves to receive. This opens us to be taken advantage of by others. It is not a question of if it will happen; it is a matter of when it will happen.

The first step in having the courage to be vulnerable is liberating ourselves from societal conditioning as a people pleaser. It is an internally motivated syndrome of a desire for approval and validation, and stems from the insecurity which develops into a habit, or even addiction, to say YES to make others happy and do whatever it takes to make them feel needed. It gives us a false sense of feeling important, which indirectly boosts our worthiness. People pleasers are good people who feel miserable and resentful of their own behavior and is also a sign of a wounded inner child afraid of getting punished and disqualified for a good girl award.

People pleasers live their life each day out of hopelessness; a habit that was developed during childhood. A lack of parental emotional availability is a big cause of this feeling. For example, when the parent was emotionally unavailable, the child felt the need to maintain a connection by initiating an act of caring, nurturing, and protecting. Another motive of a people pleaser is when a child skipped her rebellious phase or had her rebellious behavior crushed by parents. This led to "conforming, abiding or pleasing" behavior to survive or avoid punishment. And this feeling of "*do as you are told*" permeates your fear of disappointment, rejection, or abandonment.

This complacency issue shall grow into codependency in a relationship. Because you are inclined to make excuses for others, set poor boundaries, or be helpful to everyone at the cost of your desires, wants, or needs. You are then unable to express your own feelings, feel empathetic toward others but

lack self-compassion, or become unduly apologetic and emotionally dependent on friendship or your relationship. Some people pleasers have a history of abuse, and the need to gain better treatment from their abuser developed as a way of life. Another rationale is the social conditioning of being kind and/or a good person. So, in striving for society's approval, they allow themselves to be used or abused.

Not everyone can easily recognize their people-pleasing pattern, but if you have found yourself in any of the following situations, you are showing people-pleaser

- Agreeing with others to gain favor, even though it may go against your values
- Taking responsibility for others' feelings, emotional reactions, or happiness.
- Excessively apologetic for your behavior, thoughts, decisions, or simply being yourself.
- Spending too much time helping others or engaging in activities which you believe are expected by others.
- Struggling to express or deny your feelings, to say NO, or to speak up for yourself.
- Imitating others' behavior or engaging in self-destructive behaviors to be socially acceptable.
- Fear of offending others resulting in taking action that compromises your values.
- Measuring your self-worth against others' judgment, compliments, or validation.
- Avoiding conflict or struggling with self-defense even when you confidently believe that you are right.

I grew up in an environment where I felt unsafe to be myself; a minority has no right to say, be, do, or express fundamental human rights. We stay in a tight community circle; it's kind of everybody knows everybody. My mum was very considerate of others' judgments and opinions. She would then enforce her ideal role model through her parenting style. Like every other parent, she had her best intent and acted on what she believed to be the best way of raising children. The lack of awareness of her low self-worthiness affected her offspring's becoming process. Besides, physical punishment is also expected for non-compliance with school rules in Indonesia.

I wore masks to hide shameful aspects of myself to protect against the validation of I am not good enough as there must be something wrong with me, so I fulfilled my need to belong by uncomfortably fitting in and conforming with society's measuring stick. Fears talked me out of asserting a clear boundary for people around me, as I was avoiding the feeling of being rejected. This is a disempowering approach to becoming accepted, worthy, and good enough. I divorced to break away from my relationship patterns, yet the lack of awareness of my codependency brought me into another toxic relationship. I was supporting my then-partner, defying my heart's desire. I accepted his excuses for not getting a job and not doing chores. My children saw the truths and tried their best to inform me.

But I kept coming back after each time I decided to walk out. I was a coward to face the thought of failing two relationships. Living from pretense or shame will never be sustainable in the long run; as our soul will call us forth, she wants to express herself and be entirely in acceptance with who she truly is. This causes an inner conflict which can be uncomfortable, painful, and even appalling to acknowledge. I was frustrated and angry with myself, knowing well I had allowed my weak boundaries to be crossed by others until one day, when the pain became unbearable, I found the courage to be vulnerable with my deeper truths and walked out for good. Months later, I was still trying to recover financially,

emotionally, and spiritually. I felt like a walking dead, but I knew it was the right decision to liberate myself.

Reflections:

- Select one past event when you had a conflict with yourself or others, where you behaved in a people-pleasing manner. As you recall this event, write this story down in your journal.
- What were the unspoken words, thoughts, feelings, or values that you held back?
- How did you feel about defying yourself and opting to please others instead?
- What did you believe would be the consequences if you chose not to people-please?
- What would you do differently if facing a similar future occurrence?
- What boundary do you need to set to prevent future conflicts happening without jeopardizing your self-love?
- What are your fears around vulnerability? And what do you need to let go of so you can be vulnerable with others?
- What is your childhood wound around those fears?

DAY 13

THE PERILS OF PERFECTIONISM

*When we learn how to accept ourselves,
We learn how to embrace the beauty in others.*

Holding a high standard for ourselves can be a double-edged sword, as it propels us to either strive for perfectionism or pursue excellence. The objective of both may appear the same, but there is one fine distinguishing factor, lack of acceptance. A perfectionist has difficulty in recognizing when enough is enough; it is less about high performance and more about the need to be perfect. Underneath is the ego which seeks validation of being right and above others; this comes from a fractured sense of self-worth and twisted personal values.

As a burnout survivor, I used to drive myself to the brink of exhaustion by striving to be the best in all areas of my life. I fell into the trap of *good enough*, which is clearly unattainable. Through self-reflection, I see now that I was like a donkey with a dangling carrot in front of it; I ran towards the carrot that moved further away each time I took a step closer. As a perfectionist, I had a tendency for self-loathing. I suffered

from mood swings, self-sacrifice, over-giving, constant worrying, loneliness, anger, dissatisfaction, and addictive behaviors like overspending and workaholism. I also projected the perfect image to others, I tried to change them through constant criticism and judgment. No matter what he did or did not do, it was never good enough. My ex-partner, Michael, once said, “*You cannot encourage change through judgment and belittling others.*” He was right but, I was not in the right mindset to comprehend it at the time. I refused to take his advice and labeled him as a hypocrite instead; a clear sign of a perfectionist’s trait, the *know it all* attitude.

Because beneath my self-loathing lurked a deep personal deficiency of insecurity and unworthiness. There was also an underlying belief of “*I am not good enough, there is something wrong with me.*” Striving to be perfect is a defensive strategy to shield us against shame, the sense of being flawed. Hence, I was constantly developing myself through reading and learning or working excessive hours to achieve lofty goals, and I demanded the same attitude from my family. When I felt they did not meet my expectations, I criticized their lack of motivation to excel in life.

One day I came across an excellent book which helped me to see the root cause of my perfectionism. This book, *Too Perfect: When Being in Control gets out of Control* by Allan Mallinger and Jeannette DeWyzye, helped me to see that my excessive need for control was feeding innate fears of:

- Being found out that I may not have all the answers or making wrong decisions or moves. Hence, I needed to keep learning and growing to gain ingrained knowledge and skills.
- Trusting others’ motives, honesty, loyalty, commitment, and reliability. Therefore, I would rather lean on emotional guardedness and elevated self-expectations to shield myself from personal, professional, or moral criticism.

- Dependency, as I may sacrifice some autonomy and freedom, which could lead to loss of control over my life.

In 1978, Dr. Don Hamachek first suggested perfectionism could come in two forms; the “neurotic” who is driven by fear of failure to achieve excessively high standards, and the “normal” which is identifiable through having more reasonable standards and a feeling of satisfaction. Scientific research focuses on the detrimental aspects of perfectionism like obsessive-compulsive disorder, mood disorders (like anxiety and depression), eating disorders (such as anorexia and bulimia), body dysmorphic disorder, and interest in cosmetic surgery.

Ironically, being a perfectionist allows us to retreat from achieving success in life because we incline to procrastinate and avoid risks, which leads to an inability to set clear goals or take action. Perfectionism also keeps us preoccupied with planning for the future by constantly evaluating, overthinking, and being overly self-conscious instead of deciding and acting based on our current skills and knowledge, then pivoting and self-correcting along the way. In contrast, “*The pursuit of excellence with unrestrained passion can lead to the accomplishment of wonders with unsurpassed joy*” said Aberjhani in his book *Splendid Literarium*. The pursuit of excellence is a notion of persisting to move toward an ideal image of ourselves with an end goal of realizing our dreams. It is a culmination of actions, habits, decisions, and empowering thoughts that will support you to create a purposeful life.

When we live in the pursuit of excellence, our growth is driven by enthusiasm and energy to expand our boundaries and raise our personal standards, developing new skills, updating our knowledge, and learning from experience through self-reflection. Edwin C Bliss says, “*The pursuit of excellence is gratifying and healthy. The pursuit of perfection is frustrating, neurotic, and a terrible waste of time.*” To live in pursuit of excellence means finding the courage to take intelligent

risks in times of uncertainty, overcome addictive behaviors, face our fears or self-limiting beliefs, make the most out of every opportunity, and letting go of our past and/or unhealthy people. It also means we are open to new perspectives, viewpoints, ideas, and possibilities that life may offer.

Perfectionism reflects our unworthiness issues; it is a self-inflicted pain caused by the self-belief of our inadequacy to be ourselves. To avoid feeling this pain, we behave impulsively. Impulsivity is an action that produces undesirable, rather than desirable outcomes, because it is poorly conceived, prematurely expressed, unnecessarily risky, and inappropriate to situations. This behavior is also a hallmark of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and is commonly described as hot-headed, rash, irrational, unpredictable, or unstable. A higher spectrum of BPD may also turn to self-harm like binge eating, excessive drinking, drug consumption, or sexual addiction. Yet, numbing our pain through impulsivity instead of accepting the truth of who we really are will provoke more significant future pain.

Nevertheless, the fear of facing our pain is so powerful that we elect to sustain our unworthiness through:

- o **Addiction on self-improvement projects**, the most common way to mask our insecurities. It appears to be positive reinforcement behavior at the surface level, yet underneath those projects lie the anxious undercurrents of *not being good enough*. We deny ourselves and strive to become another's ideal image. We work harder, strive to look like society's idealized model, or be smarter through endless learning with the aim of attaining higher social status.
- o **Playing small**, by taking the safest path and risking failure in life. This is a dismissal of opportunities to attain success in life. Most people are acting small because of shame and hypocrisy; this is a fear of losing their false identity. By not showing up fully, we are also staying away from having a deep relation-

- ship and commitment in our interpersonal relationships; we are avoiding love in order to not get hurt.
- o **Withdrawal of living in the now**, through unconsciously opting to live in either the past or future. Yet, unless we are mindfully living in the current moment, we are unable to accept who we are and our current circumstances. When we are not present, we feed our minds with stories that consist of either reliving past pain or worrying about the future.
 - o **Keeping our mind occupied**, to avoid pain through busyness, the most common approach. Consider when we experience grief or a hurtful moment; we keep ourselves busy so we do not have to feel the pain.
 - o **Judgmental and critical toward self and others.** Living through the lens of unworthiness concocts the righteousness mentality; we focus on other's faults and shortcomings because we feel we are right and above others. The more inadequate we feel, the harder it is to admit our faults. Blaming, impressing, or outdoing others offers a false sense of relief from our insecurities.

The path of recovery begins when we stop avoiding pain and attempt to explore, unmask, and understand our deepest wounds. The answer is to accept the ruptured part of us and learn how to let our pain lead to healing. Because the stake is too high! When we refuse our true selves, we also refuse our gifts, inner powers, and untapped potential. Behind a crisis or painful moment, lies a hidden opportunity to transform and grow. It is a paramount moment to take a deep inner look at ourselves, reclaim the disowned part of us which is creating the crisis, and integrate back into wholeness. It is a process to let go of the victim mentality and become empowered.

Reflections:

- Do you have a tendency toward perfectionist behavior?
- What pains are you avoiding feeling?
- What beliefs do you need to change so you can let go the need to be perfect?
- What is your avoidance of pain mechanism?
- What does it cost you to remain in avoidance of pain?

DAY 14

THE GENESIS OF A NEW PASSAGE

*“Because one believes in oneself, one doesn’t try to convince others.
Because once one is content with oneself, one
doesn’t need others’ approval.
Because one accepts oneself, the whole world accepts him or her.”*

Lao Tzu

My journey of acceptance started a year after I left my second relationship. The struggle to love and accept myself was much harder. Two failed relationships sank my low self-worthiness to the ground. The open, unhealed childhood wounds bled again. It was a revalidation of my belief in being unlovable. Instead of feeling the pain and healing to grow, I numbed the pain. My ego persisted in avoiding connecting, accepting, and loving the confused and scared little girl inside me. I relieved the pain by taking addictive patterns of seeking love and affection from others, so I took an adventure into the online dating world. The attention and admiration helped to boost my ego instantly and soothe the pain. I connected with so

many men at once and went on dates nearly every night with a different man. I got addicted to these feel-good moments.

Soothing the pain is not healing, it may help to numb it, but it's a band-aid solution. Taking the addictive path can only aggravate pain in the longer term. The pain became unbearable, which left me with no option but to face it. The numerous dating experiences forced me to wake up to the truth. I was needy for acceptance and validation by others. While my vibration was at a low level - control and manipulation, I attracted men who would return exactly what I gave out. They were the avoidant type, who were fearful of commitment. One night, I sobbed for hours, feeling sorry for myself. Then I said FUCK EGO as I realized who was in charge of my life! I refused to please my ego's need for approval, validation, and conserve a false sense of pride. I accepted my codependency pattern and took the recovery path through a small gradual shift. I stopped beating myself down whenever I became emotionally attached and got needy for attention and adoration because, if I were to accept my wholeness, I had to welcome my flaws into my consciousness. I learned how to work with my emotional anxiety rather than living from denial, and I stopped looking at what's wrong with me.

Acceptance is a state of mind where there is no room given to judgment or expectation. It is also an antidote for years of neglecting, demeaning, rejecting, and treating ourselves harshly. As Osho said, "*Attachment is the root cause of all misery. Possessiveness is nourishment for the ego.*" Only through acceptance, shall we liberate our self-inflicted suffering because of a belief *I am not good enough, as there is something wrong with me.* A fearful little girl who would do almost anything for others to avoid punishment was running my life. As part of acceptance, I reframed my wild adventure in online dating from reckless behavior into a healing process. Every experience offers a conjunctive facet; it includes lessons and growth. That's when I realized I was searching for the answer to the question: what qualities do I really want from my partner?

The dating experience allowed me to gain more clarity around my desires in a relationship instead of gauging it by the level of attraction and infatuation. I learned to identify the avoidant men. Their pattern of hot and cold creates insecurities and neediness. I also felt more connected with my body's sensations and expressed how I wanted to be touched and pleased; an enormous challenge against my Catholic upbringing as, according to dogma, sex is solely for procreation. Hence, it was about pleasing my partner and rarely about pleasing myself. I knew nothing about my own ideal relationship; I was simply emulating what I perceived to be a happy relationship. The dutiful wife needs to nurture, give, please, and care for her husband.

Acceptance is the pathway toward inner happiness and peace, especially during our most challenging times when we are battling ourselves. It is the ability to view people, things, circumstances, or facts as to how they are presented without having our emotions influence or cloud our judgment. An inner battle occurs when our expectations or judgment is not being fulfilled. There is a gap between our perceived reality and present reality; simply put, we are delusional. Acceptance is also the pathway to love ourselves and others unconditionally, to feel authentic, and enjoy life freely. To enable self-acceptance, first, we must be aware of our pain avoidance mechanism, then embrace the courage to be imperfect and build a relationship with our shadows. As we get to know our imperfection, shedding shackles that fracture self-worth, we will naturally grow. The greatest freedom comes from allowing ourselves to be human in the most authentic way.

This excerpt from a self-acceptance proverb from *Codependent No More* by Melody Beattie helped me to recognize the important role of acceptance in healing and self-love.

*"If I can accept
That I am who I am
That I feel what I feel*

*That I've done what I've done
 If I can accept it
 Whether I like it all of it or not
 Then I can accept myself
 I can accept my shortcomings
 My self-doubt
 My low self-esteem
 And when I can accept all that
 I put myself on the side of reality
 Rather than attempting to fight my reality
 I am no longer twisting my consciousness in knots to
 maintain delusion about my present condition of reality
 So, I cleared the road of first step of strengthening my self-esteem"*

This lack of acceptance on our part causes feelings of shame to be triggered; we often phrase it as 'pushing my buttons'. There are no buttons; this again is the ego lying because of our denial to look inside and avoid the pain, so the alternative is to blame our external factors. Triggering is the Universe's way of transpiring our shadows into our consciousness level; it's showing us our **TRUTHS**. Therefore, when someone triggers us, they are mirroring what is already inside us. This helps us to raise awareness and accept our shadows so that we can be whole again. The more self-acceptance we have, the less we feel the need to judge ourselves or others. As we accept ourselves, we vindicate our worthiness and belief in being more than enough.

"Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected." - Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst. This darker and disowning side of us, otherwise known as a shadow, makes us feel shameful, sinful, less than, or unworthy. Hence, we prefer to disassociate and conceal it from our consciousness. Shadow

is that part of us which does not conform to social, childhood, or religious conditioning, otherwise known as following rules, fitting in, or behaving in an “acceptable” manner. This conditioning creates a great deal of personal and collective repression, which leads to cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is a psychological term for a disconnection between who we “think” we are and who we “actually” are. Shadow can impede cognitive dissonance by diving into a deeper layer of our subconscious mind. It offers tremendous benefits to grow and develop ourselves by uncovering the hidden part of us, heal past wounds, and strengthen our inner power. It can prevent things like relationship issues, social anxiety, uncontrollable emotions, addiction, neuroticism, and many more. “*We generally seek to punish that which reminds us most uncomfortable about the part of ourselves that we have not come to terms with, and we often ‘see’ these disowned qualities in the world around us,*” says Robert. A. Johnson, psychotherapist.

Disassociation with our shadow induces a judgmental reaction, which stems from personality problems as a byproduct of denial and projection. This is how we ascribe character traits onto others, otherwise known as projection in psychological terminology. Other repercussions of repressing our shadow are rationalization or idealization – a way to justify our behaviors, and social masking—manner to fit in with society’s expectations. This can undermine and sabotage our growth and potential. Thankfully, a shadow can work as an exploration process to uncover the hidden, disowned, and rejected part of us and release the burdens of managing emotions such as anger, guilt, shame, disgust, and grief.

Shadow work can also help you extract hidden gifts and talents. Consider when a little girl was drawing on the wall and scolded by her mum, she took this as rejection and shut down her creative gift. Jung stated that “*the shadow is ninety percent pure gold.*” The golden shadow also presents us with opportunities for tremendous psychological and spiritual growth. The Mirroring Technique through reflection is the simplest form of shadow work, yet it provides a tremendous

healing benefit. Exploring and owning our shadow is important for growth and development, it also makes us complete beings. A shadow is part of your unhealed wound so, by confronting it, you are taking a path of acceptance and releasing any trauma associated with it.

Reflection:

Take 10 minutes to be alone and silent; start with taking a long deep breath to center yourself. Now, recall a recent past event when you had an emotional outburst, i.e. sadness, anger. Observe, with no judgment, how your shadow behaved, any feelings that were suppressed, and unspoken words that you held back. Describe the event from a third-person perspective and write down any findings from your observations. Include some reflections around the following suggestive questions:

- How do I see myself reflected in this shadow?
- What's the hidden message that is communicated by my emotion?
- What do I want or expect from this person with whom I had a conflict and left me unfulfilled?
- What do I most want this person to perceive about me?
- What does this shadow need from me to accept, forgive, and release any associated traumas?
- What affirmation, acknowledgment, or assurance does this shadow need to hear from me? Like, I am worthy of love; it is okay for me to feel angry; I am enough, or I am exactly who I need to be at this moment.

DAY 15

THE VERSATILITY OF LOVE

*“Out beyond all thought of right doing and wrong doing,
There is a field.
I’ll meet you there.”*

Rumi

There is no greater pain in life than betrayal, losing the trust in someone you love. The sharp pain makes your heart bleed. Yes, love hurts when you offer your heart and others fail to value you as much as you value them. Love shall come as a double-edged sword at a certain point in your life; your parents let you down, your children disobey you, your spouse is unsupportive of you, your friend disappoints you. Betrayal comes in many forms, but they all taste the same; a toxic poison to your soul. An interpersonal relationship is complex, and no one rule fits all. Love, the most desirable and valuable thing in our existence, comes with high stakes. It can cut and scar our hearts for life.

Yet, living a loveless life feels empty; life is meaningless. It is not living; it is merely existing, and nothing can substitute for it. Not wealth, success, or fame can replace the joy of being in love. Kate Spade, a famous and successful designer, ended her life to stop suffering from her heart's pain, but is pain a true cost of love? What causes pain to begin? The wrong person to whom we give our heart or our pathological belief system about love? Why do many successful people experience less than fulfilling interpersonal relationships? They master many life skills to attain success in life and earn a top performer's status yet when it comes to love, they feel like an amateur. My experience of finding love felt like a lifelong conundrum.

An interpersonal relationship is an inextricable union which brings with it intertwined issues. It forces us to heal our wounds while empathizing with our partner's wounds. We must learn to recognize our self-destructive patterns and their impact on our relationships. As well, we need to acknowledge our partner's self-rejection patterns but be mindful enough to not fall into rescuing that person from them. The success of any relationship relies upon the willingness of both parties to make it work, and the strength of any relationship is tested when times get hard. How much are we prepared to make space in our lives to love, accept, and forgive others? Love is not just what you say, it is also how you say it. Love is not just about making others happy; it is also how much you can endure the pain of expansion while holding another's hand. Love is unconditional, our frail ego is not. Yet, interpersonal relationships are the best place to grow and experience love.

All emotional pains are self-inflicted. Each time we relive our past, our whole psyche recreates the pain and adds to the residue of past pain within our body. We may not remember the past, but our body stores the pain until we are ready to release it. Once we are conditioned to live in pain, the brain's plasticity creates neural patterns which store memory of pain as a known factor. Once these neural patterns are established, the brain will use them as a reference for future validation.

Unconsciously, we become a pain addict. Remember, how tight do you grip onto your pain? Each time you reject love by reminding yourself of previous painful experiences like betrayal, rejection, or abandonment, those unhealed wounds sow the seeds of self-destructive patterns, give rise to emotional triggers, fabricate fears, and inhibit you from receiving love, your deepest desire in life.

Unless you process and heal those wounds fully, at one stage in your life, those negative emotions will turn into physical pain. I had a few family members who developed throat cancer and died. Withholding their truth caused their throat cancer. A friend of mine, Sarah, had breast cancer from over-nurturing and over-giving to her family. Metaphysical study explains the in-depth relationship between physical and emotional pain, and spiritual healing offers tremendous healing by resolving any past unprocessed wounds. Buddha says, "*Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. The root of suffering is attachment*". Albeit experiences in life which cause emotional pain are inevitable, our attachment to those experiences is the primary source of our continued suffering.

Our ego loves to create stories. The ego feeds our minds with past and future stories. Those stories create emotional pains which include grievances, regrets, resentments, disappointments, bitterness, traumas, and sadness. They are all non-forgiveness patterns caused by experiences. It also creates anxieties, worries, tensions, stresses, or fears from the future's stories of uncertainties; this is another form of past projection. The ego forecasts the future based on what has happened. This mind illusion ceases to exist only when we consciously choose to be present and discern the truth, which lives in the present and will never coexist with the illusion.

Pain can only exist when our mind focuses on either the past or future, because pain is created by our unconsciousness, and only the consciousness can transmute this pain. Being conscious of the present moment will put an end to the attachment to past painful experiences and worries for the future. The path of healing begins when we accept the

truth, forgive ourselves, and take an alternative path in life. The longer we hold those pains in our body, the stronger neural patterns develop in our brains; the harder it becomes to break our addiction to pain and create more resistance to live in the present.

The present moment is the gateway to the spiritual dimension which offers a new beginning in life. We can write a new chapter in our life book by being present. Living in the now is an act of surrendering to what the Universe has to offer. This is the only space for a miracle to work its magic. A miracle can only happen when we let go of the need to control the outcome through force or manipulation of ego-based reactions. Reliving the pain of experiences and worrying about the future reflects deeper issues on our fear of the unknown and, while we lean in on fear, we reject the gift for which we asked at the beginning.

Nelson Mandela once said, *“Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies. Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.”* The wing of forgiveness restores our wholeness and releases our attachment to having someone, something, or a future situation to complete us. This is the internal state of happiness. Forgiveness offers choices in life, instead of re-living past pain and worrying about how it might replicate into the future. Each time we forgive, we close the door of painful past life stories and open a new door in the current moment, with paths laid out to different versions of the future.

Besides, certain people come into our lives to help us complete our karmic lessons. We get opportunities to grow through these painful life lessons. We also get to perceive our strengths. Remember that we can only see our light in the darkness. Shift your perception about life, from right vs wrong, into feedback and opportunities to grow. As Dr. Wayne Dyer famously quoted, *“change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change.”* Instead of feeling hurt, dig deeper within yourself, find what life is teaching you, acknowledge, and accept. Then forgive yourself and oth-

ers who may be involved. Your ability to forgive and let go represents the strength of your perseverance. Pain signifies a lack of acceptance. We feel betrayed, disappointed, or let down because certain people, circumstances, or outcomes fail to meet our expectations.

Hence, the journey of forgiveness shall start from self-forgiveness. Yes, it is not easy and appears outlandish at first, because loving and treating ourselves respectfully is not part of childhood and society's conditionings. Self-forgiveness is the hardest action to take in life. It may feel like admitting our failure and being defeated; it is not. That is the voice of ego trying to make us refrain from letting go of our old identity; a label imposed upon us by others which is no longer serving our best and highest interest. Forgiveness is an acceptance of our ruptured shadows, which were once rejected and dissociated out of shame and guilt. The existence of self-love is heavily reliant upon our ability to forgive ourselves. If love is not about what you say, but how you say it, then there is no stronger expression of love than forgiveness.

As you forgive, you embed the new identity of I am lovable, and I am good enough; you did the best you could with what you knew. Forgiveness is the only way out of self-rejection patterns. Stop rejecting love when you ask for it just because it doesn't fit in with your vision. A denial of your deepest desire is your source of misery in life, and also inhibits you from actualizing a greater version of yourself and unleashing your inner power. India Arie beautifully composed this on her song *Wings of Forgiveness*. The excerpt from the lyric says, "*I'm only human. Let's shake free this gravity of resentment. And fly high, and fly high. You're only human. Let's shake free this gravity of judgment. And fly high on the wings of forgiveness.*"

Those emotional pains weigh you down and restrict you from soaring high. By forgiving, you are reclaiming your power. "*The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong,*" said Mahatma Gandhi. Through forgiveness, we bravely heal our wounds and bring our shadows into the light. Each time we forgive others, we strengthen our power,

because we no longer allow our past to dictate our future outcomes. You co-create your life experience with the Universe through your vibration, thought, and emotion. Hence, forgiveness is telling the Universe you have finally learned that lesson. It will liberate you from the emotional trauma of experiences and prepare you to create a contrasting life experience. Unless you emit the signal that you are ready to receive, the Universe will not deliver your intention.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr quoted, "*Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.*" While you are holding a grudge and resentment towards your past, there is no space for a future creation through miracles. You are giving your power away to those who betray you, and where you focus your attention will grow, so choose carefully. You get back what you send out to the Universe. If you want love, send out love first, be the expression of love. There is no greater power and peace in the Universe than love. In the end, love always conquers everything. Forgiveness is a deep act of self-love. Forgiveness is the key to opening your heart so you can feel the love for yourself once again. It is never about anyone else. Only you can cure the heart's pain through forgiveness. You will also gain inner peace and tranquility by forgiving others.



I looked at the clock on my phone; it was only 3.30am. I had woken up to the reality that my life was a train wreck. This became the new routine since I had closed my skin clinic business. As I lay down on the sofa, I saw Ali in faint shadow in the distance. Ali, a revered spiritual master in Sufi traditions who died in the 6th century, hung around like a best friend with a shoulder to cry on. As a medium, I am accustomed to communicating and socializing with spirits. Ali showed up a week before as I was cooking dinner. Wearing a long white robe with a matching headscarf, he stroked his long beard and said, "*Please don't mind me. I am just hanging out around here.*" I replied, "*What are you here for?*" Ali replied, "*I am just watching*

over you.” He visited me frequently, knowing in advance that I was going to suffer from depression. Each time he showed up, my dog would bark at him as she saw his cheerful smile.

As I stared at the ceiling, my mind filled with guilt, shame, and resentment. I got divorced to have a more fulfilling life. I refused to continue supporting an ex-husband who chose a less materialistically driven life, but found myself in another loveless relationship with a jobless man. I left the corporate world to pursue my entrepreneurial spirit; I ended up in near bankruptcy, and I was left alone. My family resented my life choices and disowned me. I sobbed and felt lost in life. Suicidal thoughts crossed my mind; I couldn’t bear the pain any longer. But Spirit never left me behind, the divine love which I sought was inside me all along. The Universe taught me the most valuable lesson; I shall find treasure when I least expect it. I met the raw version of myself, my purposes in life, and the divinity of oneness during those weeks of sleepless nights. Forgiveness of myself and others was the path to recovery. I have faith in my destiny that everything happens for a reason. The biggest reason is I found my soul’s purpose; I had to survive the darkest moment so I could be a rebellious beacon of light who emboldens women to own their worth and power for living life on their own terms. I shall never be the light for others if I hadn’t been through a period of darkness myself, shall I?

Reflections:

- Reflect on a certain story from the past which you’re holding onto. What pain does it bring up each time you retell yourself this story?
- What benefits do you get from holding onto this pain?
- What does holding onto this pain cost you?
- Who do you need to forgive to alleviate your pain and reclaim your power, so you move forward with life?

- What valuable lesson did you learn from that? And how has it changed you for the better?
- What shadows are showing up on your story?

DAY 16

THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF

*I offer you a space in my heart,
To relive your experience,
To feel your pain,
To see your sorrow,
And to reassure your broken soul
That we are in it together.*

Do you remember the experience of your first day at a new job? You go to the office not knowing what to expect but have a self-expectation to make a favorable impression. Your body language and facial expression present how you view yourself, whether it is friendly, charming, or funny. As you interact with your new colleagues, you “read” their verbal and non-verbal reactions to assess whether their perception of your persona is in line with your expectations. If you feel your *friendliness* is well received, then your self-belief of being friendly is reaffirmed. Otherwise, if you sense that your humorous ice-breaker line causes silent, ill-at-ease reactions, or a hasty retreat, you might reconsider your self-belief

of being friendly, funny, or charming. This entire process is called the looking-glass self.

In 1902 Charles Horton Cooley, an American Sociologist introduced a social psychological concept of the looking-glass self. This term describes a person's development process through which the self uses others like mirrors to reference her self conception as reflected during social interaction. It suggests that self-belief and self-identity are heavily influenced by interpersonal interactions and perceptions of others. Cooley describes the looking-glass self as a three-step process. First, we imagine how we appear to another person. We then translate this impression into a series of probable judgments which may be held against us based on our appearance and presentation. Based on our imagined judgments, we contemplate how that person may feel about us. This process involves our active role in forming our self-image based on our imagination and perception of others' judgments. Therefore, our self-concept is built on an interactive socially based setting, not in solitude.

The notion of looking-glass self confirms our need to align our internal beliefs with external reality. And we always find what we are looking for! Because our inner beliefs determine what we perceive about others, things, experiences, or the world. Transforming our life experience is only achievable through reframing our limiting beliefs and the negative stories with which we feed our minds. This unconscious self-evaluation and validation process determine our self-worth and self-esteem. We relate to this in the form of a critical inner voice.

This voice acts against us and is a negative side of our personality. We can also define it as a well-integrated pattern of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. This inner critic is often experienced as an inner dialogue that constantly comments upon, and evaluates, almost every experience harshly. When I stand in front of the mirror, my inner critic often says, "*you look fat*" or "*look at that bulging belly*" or "*not that dress, you look ugly in that.*" This inner critical voice encourages and strongly

influences self-destructive behavior. As a hostile, judgmental advisor, it also warns us about other people, promotes anger or impulsive behaviors, and shows us a pessimistic view of the world.

At times, we express this self-criticism to others either as a safety behavior to attain acceptance or a defensive act in anticipation against others' judgment. Consider when a woman says, "*I look fat in this dress*" to her partner. The unspoken message underneath is seeking sympathy from her partner regarding her insecurity about her body and outfit. It also implicitly expects responses that will inflate her self-esteem and assure her that she is not as bad as she thinks. This is a defensive act from a deeper desire to not feel rejection, abandonment, or unworthiness.

The inner critical voice can also be an echo like the internalized derogatory parent's commentary which is sometimes passed down and replicated over many generations. As their primary caregiver, young children trust their parents to provide for their basic physical and emotional needs. However, few parents know how to raise their children in an emotionally nourishing and supporting environment instead of controlling, judging, and being critical. When I was 16 years old, my mum once said, "*if only your body looked like this mannequin, I would get you that dress*" as we were shopping for my birthday outfit. What she meant was that the dress did not suit my body shape. However, as a teenager, I internalized her comment as a feeling I was too fat to wear that dress and needed my body to look like a mannequin. For the next 20 years, I struggled to accept my body image even though my dress size is XS. Each time I looked at myself in the mirror, my inner critic found flaws in my body image.

Our wider society places importance on promoting high self-esteem as an ability to value ourselves, having confidence in our opinions and abilities, and receive constructive feedback without feeling defeated. High self-esteem people are generally regarded as attractive and likable hence increase the likelihood of having better interpersonal skills than those with low

self-esteem. Researchers believe that low self-esteem people have the same quality and are equally liked as those with high self-esteem. The difference is that those with high self-esteem imagine higher self-worth through their self-evaluation process as part of the looking-glass self-concept.

Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is often propelled by shame through our inner critic, which tells us we are unworthy, not slim enough, rich enough, smart enough, good looking enough, or simply not enough. Shame maintains our low self-esteem and stops us from being courageous enough to have or be more in life. We commonly associate shame with negative emotion, characterized by the perception of diminishing self-esteem or self-worth. It is triggered by a decrease in personal status in a social context or perceived feelings of rejection. It varies in a spectrum from:

- Inadequacy—feeling useless, inferior, mediocre, worthless, less than, or devalued.
- Humiliation—embarrassment, disgrace, degradation, slap in the face, or put down.
- Guilt—I did something bad and I acknowledge it.
- Shame—I did something bad and others know it.
- Remorse—abashed, regret, contrition, or conscience-stricken.

Having high self-esteem is obviously better than low self-esteem, however, the issue lies in the unhealthy (include self-sacrifice) pursuit of self-esteem and the level of dependency on external factors for self-worth, such as culture or communal beliefs.

As a descendant of Chinese culture, I grew up in an environment where social status is highly valued and determines self-esteem. The Chinese believe their social status, especially in terms of physical and material terms, defines their worthiness and happiness. Chinese parents pressure their children to study hard to maintain their status, and failure to achieve a certain rate of success (above their friends and relatives) is

deemed as a shame. Hence, my parents disowned me for over four years once I announced my divorce. Chinese believe that divorce is unacceptable and a complete failure which degrades the family's social status.

Studies show children with critical parents develop an ingrained belief of '*I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me*'. Critical parents use the reward (or compliments) vs punishment (or criticism) parenting method to mold their children into their ideal image. This parenting method teaches children to strive for perfectionism or otherwise they are unworthy of love. Feeling rejected emerges when realizing their parent's ideal image feels unattainable, and when these children reach adulthood, they struggle to trust and love others. They believe their loved ones will eventually hurt them or withdraw their love. The wounded inner child who yearns for love and acceptance emerges as part of the inner critical voice each time her safety and security are at stake.

Dealing with inner critics can feel challenging at first because we experienced them as our lifelong best friend and listened to and followed their judgment. We are accustomed to believing the inner chatter's judgment as the truth. But remember that you hold the power to relinquish their role as your critical advisor. There is no way of eliminating our inner chatter, but we can diminish its power through acknowledging it and giving ourselves permission to be human. That allows us to make mistakes, be sensitive, get lazy, or have unproductive time. We let our "idealization" or "perfectionist" idea down without lowering our worthiness or dismissing our potential because of those periods.

Our mind has the habit of following rules, norms, etc. as part of growing up. Hence, we are fearful of making mistakes or breaking rules, which then translates to a fear of being punished, of not being good enough, or facing withdrawal of a parent's love. So, when we give ourselves permission to do or be something that is in alignment with our fears, we feel liberated to perform and achieve more through persistent fears

instead of strengthening them by giving energy to them and being compassionate with ourselves. We rarely acknowledge how many expectations we project onto ourselves and how hard we treat ourselves. Remember the emotional dependency paradox theory. When we offer a stronger level of assurance of love and acceptance through self-compassion, we have a higher chance of success. The completion of this book is a result of self-compassionate practice. I gave myself some compassion each time my inner critic started to judge my worth, like who is going to read this, who am I to share this message, your writing would never be good enough, and many other variations of it. My business also thrived when I allowed myself to have more fun time, instead of continuing to push around the clock through shame and guilt.

Self-compassion can feel outside the norm and make one be vulnerable, hence we naturally have a level of resistance to it. Some people may open past wounds related to not receiving compassion from others when needed; others may also feel deeper pain by exercising self-compassion because they are more conscious of it during certain periods of their life when they most needed love and compassion. This is also referred to back draft; a term adopted from firefighting which describes when a door in a burning house is opened and oxygen goes in and flames dash out. Self-compassion can be defined as empathizing beyond acceptance of our experience with tender and loving appreciation when the self is suffering through no fault of one's own. A self-compassionate person acknowledges that being imperfect, failing, experiencing life's difficulties is inevitable, and not taking it personally when their ideal expectations are unfulfilled.

Self-compassion encompasses self-kindness, mindfulness, and commonality with society in general.

- Self-kindness
Having a caring and understanding attitude toward oneself rather than being judgmental or critical. Think about how you treat your best friend when

she is experiencing a difficult time accepting herself. It's an inward approach to soothe ourselves, rather than criticize, taking a stoic approach through kind and gentle words, or actively nurturing.

- **Commonality**
An acknowledgment that suffering and imperfection as a universal experience can lessen or eliminate self-pity. Self-pity is defined as self-absorbed unhappiness over our own troubles or unfulfilled expectations. It makes you think everything should be in your favor and nothing should go against you. When you recognize your experience is just part of the human experience, it will help to ease the suffering.
- **Mindfulness**
A practice of observing our thoughts and feelings with no judgment or emotional attachment is the essence of mindfulness. Through this practice, we raise our awareness of our emotional state so we can be compassionate about it. Mindfulness also requires us to be present within the current reality at the current moment, which prevents us from either stressing out about the future or reliving the pain of past life experiences.

When you master self-compassion, you will ease the feeling of being alone, as you can call for support as needed. You become your own best friend. It also lessens self-criticism which undermines your motivation to grow or achieve success in life. You also develop the confidence to change life because you believe more in yourself. Nurturing or comforting gestures or affection toward ourselves can release oxytocin, a feel-good hormone, which will lift our vibration instantly. It also has a remarkable impact on making us feel cared for and supported. Kristin Neff, Ph.D. suggests kind words, caring tones of voice,

soothing gestures, or self-appreciation, as a means to initiate self-compassion in her book *Self-Compassion*.

We can be our own worst enemy by beating ourselves down and blaming ourselves when we cannot achieve our expectations. However, those darker times, like being heart-broken, failing, or major life challenges, are designed to test our strengths, inner powers, and truths. By taking a moment to appreciate our excellence, wonder at our life experiences, or just appreciate the little things that make us feel alive, will create inner happiness and contentment. They are wellness springs of good feelings and give meaning to our existence. Simultaneously, self-compassion stops us from looking at what's wrong with me and what I need to fix within myself. Always remember, you will find what you are looking for, so what are you looking for today?

Reflections:

- Remind yourself of one thing that your inner chatter said and write it down.
- What kind of story do you tell yourself repeatedly in relation to this inner chatter?
- What was the past event that might associate with this story?
- What do you believe about yourself based on this story?
- Write a forgiveness note to yourself and others that are involved.
- Write a gratitude outcome for a lesson you learned from it.
- What if your belief of I am...(insert the answer from the earlier question) is no longer true?
- Write yourself a permission slip that allows you to do or be what you may deem as a mistake or failure. This helps to teach your brain to get comfortable with the idea that making mistakes is a common trait of all people while also acknowledging your fears.

DAY17

THE EVOLUTION OF SHAME

*There is a sweet spot in my tormented heart for,
I did the best I could and I deserve better,
That is called self-compassion.*

Shame, guilt, and anxiety are often used interchangeably, however, Freud believes anxiety comes first, then guilt arises, and finally, shame follows. Shame is a reaction formation; a product of neurotic anxiety which leads to repression as a defensive mechanism of the ego. It arises in the form of fear of external disapproval or rejection of who we are at the core. Shame is the validation of our belief that *I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me*, whereas guilt is about doing something wrong. We developed shame at an early point in our lives; we held the belief that we are unlovable, unwanted, or unworthy because we failed to meet others' expectations (especially our primary caregivers). Shame imprisons us either through control, by other's feelings and behaviors, or control over your authentic feelings.

Joseph Burgo, author of *Shame: Free Yourself, Find Joy, and Build True Self-Esteem*, defines basic shame as the unconscious awareness of internal damage, felt at the deepest level of our being. The development of basic shame occurs when our parents fail to provide our needs for love, safety, and joy. The child then adopts the belief ‘*I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me*’. The basis of shame is intensified as the deficiency of good enough parenting increases, according to Winnicott, who coined the term good enough parenting. It encompasses the basic active adaptation to meet an infant’s need for empathy while being physically and emotionally available. When a child grows up in a less than *good enough* environment, she will be more likely to feel an attraction toward an emotionally unavailable life partner. As her brain’s neuroplasticity is wired for safety rather than intimacy; an emulation of her child-parent relationship.

Narcissism is a primary defense against shame, craving external admiration to compensate and deny internal flaws. It is a shame negating personality, with the essential feature of narcissistic personality disorder, to include “*a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, the need for admiration, and lack of empathy*” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, para.301.81). “*To me, narcissism is the flip side of shame,*” Burgo said. “*When things go wrong, like if your childhood varies dramatically from what we all expect a childhood to be like, it leaves you with this feeling of core shame. As you get older, it can become so unbearably painful that you feel driven to construct this false personality to cover it over.*” The narcissist has no awareness of their issues with shame, they rarely realize that they have issues. Because of their lack of empathy, compassion, and sense of responsibility, they habitually blame others. By projecting their emotional pain over shame issues onto others, they validate the righteousness of their actions, control, and manipulation.

“*The function of shame is to prevent us from damaging our social relationships, or motivate us to repair them,*” says Danie Sznycer in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. However, toxic shame is a paralyzing global assess-

ment of oneself as a person; it includes feeling insecure, worthless, stupid, inadequate, or a waste of space. Narcissists plant shame in others to manipulate and punish those they try to control. They have no remorse for hurting others or abusing their powers over others; in fact, they justify their actions and behaviors. To overcome toxic shame, you need to tune into your inner critic and develop empathy (shame resilience mechanism) toward yourself, an acknowledgment that you deserve understanding, compassion, kindness, and forgiveness.

Brene Brown defines shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed, therefore unworthy of acceptance, love, and belonging. Shame creates feelings of fear, blame, and disconnection. Brown states “*shame includes three components, secrecy, silence, and judgment.*” And with that “*shame cannot survive with empathy—it speaks out the secrecy and breaks the belief that I am alone.*”

There is one common question that every abusive relationship survivor has, that is “*Why me?*”. A toxic or abusive relationship is a dreadful experience, yet for inexperienced ones would struggle to comprehend it. There is a stigma around the victim as being insecure or needy, hence opportunities for abuse occur. This may hold the truth to a degree, but there are many instances where the so-called victims appear to be independent, smart, and strong people.

Reflecting upon my own experience, no one would struggle to grasp my story and, when they do, they will ask “*Why didn't you just walk away?*” or “*How did you get yourself into it?*”. And you know what, I still asked myself the same questions after each time I talked to clients who are healing and rebuilding their lives after being destroyed by a narcissist. And the victim, commonly characterized as the empathetic one, will take a self-blaming approach. She wonders what she did wrong or what else she could have done differently.

Just like what I had to face in my relationship with Michael. Divorce did not resolve my unworthiness issues or my codependency issue; in fact, it worsened it. Albeit, I showed up as

the one who wore the pants in my marriage, but I was doing it to feel secure, loved, and safe. The lack of awareness of my codependency issue and childhood beliefs of 'I am not good enough' brought me into a relationship with a narcissist. Michael is the reflection of my darkest shadow and the catalyst for my spiritual growth.

There are two opposite spectrums of a narcissist; the commonly known one of being a jerk or douche, and there is one who is charming and master of the art of manipulation to give you exactly your deepest desire. Michael is the latter one. Regardless of which end of the spectrum, narcissists can see right through you and know your deepest desire. This is how they win your heart; a love bombing period, like amazing sex, affection, or romantic gestures through flowers, cards, etc. Michael was everything that my soul was yearning for, a validation of my self-worth and lovability. A relationship with a narcissist is exciting, adventurous, and passionate. But it lacks intimacy and heart-to-heart bonding. Michael came to my life with perfect timing when I felt apathy. He brought a breath of fresh air, which I needed to feel alive once again.

A narcissist is a common term for a self-absorbed person who is charming, charismatic, overly confident, with inflated self-esteem who thinks they are above everybody. Narcissists dedicate their energy and effort to fulfill their need for self-admiration to be acknowledged by others. On *The Narcissism Epidemic*, Jean M Twenge and W Keith Campbell say "*Narcissists do not value warm or caring relationships, they can do all this with little concern for others, often manipulating and exploiting people and viewing others as tools to make themselves look and feel good.*" Michael knew how to frame a "trophy partner" bragging as a compliment that was directed to me to fill others with envy. Outsiders applauded his treatment as putting me on a pedestal, yet in reality, I was his tool.

I served his purpose as a partner who can make him proud and take care of him at the same time. I supported him financially and physically while he was busy chasing his humanitarian life mission to pump up his ego-boosted need. A

reflection of my upbringing shame issue, a codependent has a deep shame of failure in actualizing their parent's ideal image. I made an unwarranted effort to give everything I had for his dream out of fear of losing his love and affection.

According to Sigmund Freud, every child was born with a primary narcissism instinct, every toddler thinks they are the center of the universe. I recall a memory of when my eldest daughter was around two years old. She would sing and dance around whenever she heard music, and if we clapped, she would try harder to impress her little audience. This showed the aspects of the narcissist within us who is self-absorbed and basking in the glory of others' attention. Attention seekers do not merit the clinical diagnosis of borderline personality disorder but destroy other people of the opposing type.

Jean M Twenge and W Keith Campbell conclude that we are facing a narcissism epidemic era (not borderline personality disorder type). This inflated sense of self, self-absorption, and self-centered type of behavior causes interpersonal relationship failure. A crusading narcissist believes they are above others, are delusional about their self-esteem, and display a low level of commitment. In short, they lack empathy, an essential trait in relationship bonding. A narcissist focuses on showcasing their materialism, image, and social status to the public. We can easily accomplish this through social media, such as the number of likes on my Facebook post. We also strive to appear like celebrities, from lifestyle choices, appearance, and many more examples. To afford this choice, we sign ourselves up for a high level of debt.

Any interpersonal relationship creates room for the soul to grow. Michael showed a reflection of my narcissism traits who need control to feel secure, the shopaholic and workaholic addiction in pursuit of the validation of worthiness from others, and the failure to acknowledge boundaries (upbringing of a narcissistic parent). The best way to deal with a narcissist is to know yourself on a deeper level. Ask yourself, what are your personality characteristics that attract a narcissist and how can you grow from this relationship experience? Alongside

this, I encourage you to develop a healthy level of shame resilience and self-empathy to strengthen your self-love so you refuse to be treated less than your worth.

Freud's theory proposes that a child's primary narcissism level declines as she develops empathy; it is not about being right, in control, or winning, all of which are the key characteristics of a narcissist. Empathy is the ability to share someone else's feelings by imagining yourself in the position of someone else's shoes—a vicarious experience. It is a communication method that connects one heart to another and leads to a deep bonding. Through empathy, in an interpersonal relationship, we share all aspects of ourselves with the other party, opening us up to being vulnerable. On the flip side, shame keeps part of us unknown to others which prevents us from showing up authentically.

Empathy also invalidates the existence of anxiety, guilt, and shame as it requires complete acceptance and non-judgmental acts to resonate with another's feelings. "*Being empathetic is a complex, demanding, strong, yet subtle and gentle way of being*" quoted by Carl Rogers. It is a virtue which many people deem as a curse. An empath has a high likelihood to develop a relationship with a narcissist; this typically occurs to a disempowered empath who has the **need** to save or help others, a hunt to validate her worthiness. She fulfills this emotional need by rescuing narcissists who play victimhood and seek empathy for their sorrows. Remember that a relationship can only survive when both parties' needs and desires are served. Imagine it like a magnet that can only attract opposite poles while similar poles will repel.

As long as the empath has concerns for the narcissist's pain or hopeless state of mind, she will never find the courage to leave this toxic relationship. Only the courageous one can open the exit door, paving the pathway to vulnerability and honesty within herself by acknowledging her need and sanity over that of others. That was the biggest lesson from my experience with Michael. Each time my survival instinct kicked in, an urge to leave and prioritize myself, I felt despair

from the thought that he would be alone and homeless. I talked myself out of it and made excuses for his negligence in our relationship. He knew this well enough, and through blaming and shaming, he gained control and fulfillment of his expectations.

The codependent lives inside an unevolved empath, therefore the answer to an empath's misery lies in reframing the codependent's pattern of behaviors which is derived from the belief of '*I am not good enough as there is something wrong with me*'. This can be achieved through developing self-empathy, which is getting to know ourselves very well (acknowledge but disengage from our shame) so we can express ourselves authentically to the world. Unless we can accept ourselves (without others' validation) as a whole, including the shameful part of us, we give our power away. This creates an opportunity for others to control you and your emotional state. Self-empathy starts by calling your shame to the surface.

Reflections:

- Think of a past situation when you felt shameful and write a brief autobiography about it.
- What caused you to feel shameful and what is the belief which may drive it?
- List patterns of behaviors which show signs of narcissistic traits.
- How can you apply self-empathy to transform those behaviors?

*I am the expression of love,
I am the voice of spirit,
I am the divinity,
Who am I to question my truth?*

DAY18

EXPRESSION GIVES VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

*There is a sweet spot in my tormented heart for,
I did the best I could and I deserve better,
That is called self-compassion.*

“Sit and be a good girl!”, I yelled at Scarlett, my five-year-old poodle. Scarlett sat down; her eyes gazed at mine intently, giving me the puppy dog eyes. She acknowledged her mischievous act and apologized for it. Scarlett only wanted my attention and love after feeling neglected for the past few days as she missed her daily walk. I understood how Scarlett felt, even though she did not express it through human verbal expression. Studies show that nine out of ten dog owners can understand what their pets want through their eyes and body language as an expression of their needs, desires, thoughts, and feelings.

An expression is an individual act that precedes the social act of communication. Both expression and communication

are basic linguistic functions that are universal and complementary to each other. However, expressions are the fundamental prerequisites of communication; thought must be expressed before it can be verbally communicated. Self-expression is about giving and sharing a piece of ourselves with the world. It is also our way to show our authentic inner self, values, beliefs, thoughts, truths, and feelings through words, physicality, persona, choice of outfit, and material possessions. An expression is how we embrace who we are, from the positive traits and acts contained in the conscious level to our shadows suppressed within the unconsciousness. It is fundamental to achieving the fulfillment of our self-actualization needs.

“Neuroscience is teaching us that ‘self-expression’ might be one—if not the most important way for people to connect, navigate, and grow with each other” said Judith Glaser, an American actor, and anthropologist. According to Glaser, authentic self-expression encourages us to grow while transitioning from a self-preservation state into partnering with others. As we open up and express ourselves in alignment with our authenticity, we activate our prefrontal cortex. This allows greater access to higher potential, the genius part of us, embodied in problem-solving, innovative thinking, creativity, and intuition.

To express the authentic part of us, first, we must get to know the “**truth**” about who we are. Finding the truth is obtainable through deep listening. This act needs us to let go of the projection of our thoughts about the outside world and notice what is inside our hearts by being present. So instead of focusing outward, like using expressions to manipulate and control outcomes by trying to persuade or compare, we need to turn our focus inward. The inward approach requires us to let go of our preconceived beliefs, perceptions, and expectations about self and others. It means our approach is free of judgment along with complete acceptance from the humility, vulnerability, and unconditional love space.

Most people encounter their fears of judgment and non-acceptance when trying to express themselves in the most authentic ways. Being courageous to receive rejection or resistance and giving ourselves permission to express and be ourselves, without an attachment to others' approval, can overcome this. The objective of self-expression is getting to know ourselves deeply and how we want to present to the world through self-exploration of beliefs, interests, values, and for what we stand.

Self-expression is also an outlet to express our creative energy and learn to express ourselves in more creative ways. It also helps us find a new interest or hobby which can be further developed into a passion. There are many ways to practice self-expression, for example, speaking or writing prose, dance, photography, arts, creating music pieces, wearing outfits and accessories that represent your inner self, or being more vocal in social media about your values or beliefs.

The primary key to authentic self-expression is to embody our truths. And by doing so, we own our worth and deservingness to receive our desires and be treated in a loving and respectful way. The fact is, most people are fearful to express their truths. Consider how often you lie to yourself. Whenever you choose to please or give in to others, you deny your own truth. We deviate from our hearts and become delusional about our truth due to the influences of our worldview, perception, and beliefs. Do you know the game of Chinese Whispers? It is a children's game where all players form a line. The first player comes up with a message and whispers it to the second player in the line, the second player repeats it to the next player, and so on. The last person in the line validates the accuracy of the message with the first player. This game proves the metaphor of cumulative errors and inaccuracies of rumors or gossip because our five senses are influenced by our minds. Our senses are selective and more sensitive toward certain things to which we are emotionally attached and our emotions amplify the senses. A coffee lover can smell freshly

brewed coffee from distance and activate their thirst, but those who dislike coffee will sense it as a repulsive smell.

Knowing the truth is vital to creating a life which suits our terms, and the best way to know the truth is by calling the Law of Truth. This is my daily invocation to call and know the truth, **I am calling upon the law of truth to show me the truth. More than wanting to fix, heal, change, manipulate, or control myself and others, I allow myself to know, accept, express, and embody the truth.** We may not always like the truth, but it liberates us and guides us to create a purposeful life. It also stops us from repeating certain lessons, as the truths will show the exit location.

Learn how to communicate effectively. Communication as the primary form of self-expression is a primal way of connecting one person to another. It creates a heart-to-heart to bond which brings us closer to others. However, there are moments when communication can negatively affect our closeness with others, pushing us apart instead of bringing us together. This communication breakdown occurs because of a lack of effective or ineffective communication. Most relationship failure is caused by communication breakdown, regardless of what kind of relationship it is. The best way to communicate is to take a more direct approach and express any emotions verbally in an explicit manner, because gender, culture, and social conditioning influence our communication style.

For example, males and females are psychologically wired differently. Males are inclined to be more rational and females to be more emotional. This difference can be bridged through more direct and explicit ways of communicating which helps us rise above the stereotyping mindset and the pre-assumption of what others know about you. Consider the following situation; a man and woman are walking down the street and they pass a florist. The woman says, "*Aren't those flowers lovely? A man should buy flowers for his partner to show his appreciation*". Later that evening, she gets really upset and says, "*You never appreciate my work at home.*" The man is confused and says, "*I always appreciate you, what makes you say that?*". She replies,

“Well, you would have bought me a bunch of flowers earlier today if you do.”

Can you see how this rather small and inconsequential communication breakdown can lead to a bigger conflict? And, over time, it could develop into relationship failure. How different the situation would have been if the woman had said in a more direct and honest way, *“I would love you to buy me a bunch of flowers as that would make me feel appreciated.”*

Communication comprises outflow (speaking) and inflow (listening) of information. Therefore, to achieve effective communication, developing your listening skills is equally important as developing your speaking skills. Most people center their attention on listening to respond or forming a counter-argument when another person is talking, otherwise known as critical listening. This is one of the major reasons for communication breakdown because your personal filters, assumptions, judgments, emotional triggers, and beliefs can distort your understanding of the key message.

Instead, try exercising the active listening method, just like a therapist listening to a client, to improve your listening skills. The objective is to comprehend the message conveyed alongside acknowledging the speaker’s need to be heard. Active listening requires us to make a conscious effort to hear the unspoken words, like facial expression or tone, to uncover the speaker’s thoughts, emotions, and true intentions—what the soul wants to experience. It also involves paraphrasing what has been said to validate our understanding of the message and ask questions to clarify, if necessary. Showing signs that we are actively engaged, like nodding, eye contact, or small verbal comments (uh-huh or yes), can often be more than enough to fulfill the speaker’s communication objective of being heard and acknowledged.

Further, accustom yourself to refraining from responding or offering suggestions before checking in and managing any emotions or feelings that may be triggered. As our subconscious mind, by default, will validate any incoming information through association with past stories, beliefs, or percep-

tions, this often leads to the usage of communication as a medium for emotional projection or manipulation to achieve hidden expectations. This practice requires us to stop taking ourselves too seriously, making everything personal and appreciating others' perspectives.

Hence, rephrasing by active listening is an important way to recognize your distorted understanding; this exercise requires our willingness to admit we may incorrectly comprehend the intended message. Reforming an expectation into an invitation is also an important part of communication. Any interpersonal relationship issues are mainly caused by a lack of acceptance of another party. Instead of accepting who they really are and allowing them to experience their chosen life experience, we believe in our own expectations. We believe what they might be capable of or suggest a better choice for their life path. This belief encourages us to make them change, adjust, or grow by either force, manipulation, or rescuing others. It may also be a deflection tactic from focusing on our core worthiness issues toward boosting our worthiness by helping others to overcome their problems.

This behavior signifies our conditional love and rejection patterns. Indirectly we are telling them you are not good enough as you are, and I can help you improve by adapting to who I believe you should be. This learned behavior was developed during childhood because of the parenting style that is based on a belief that the parent knows what is best for their child; we then project this perfect model onto our partner. Unfortunately, there is no single way to eliminate expectations, it is in our nature to have expectations or perceptions toward others, however, the best approach is to reform an expectation into an invitation. That is, to offer a suggestion, support, or idea with no attachment to the outcome. A simple phrase like, *how can I support you* or *this is what I would do if I were you*, is an effective way to show them you are a supportive partner yet are allowing them to make their own decision. Asking for what they want or making the best-suited decision

can be a struggle for most people but can empower them to acknowledge their needs.

Every relationship has its own inherent challenges and struggles, which can be improved and overcome through understanding each other on a deeper level instead of defaulting to a pre-assumption based on observation, stereotyping, and association to past stories or beliefs. For example, women often underestimate the depth of men's capability to process emotion and be empathic or vulnerable. By getting to know each other's deeper fears, beliefs, worries, wishes, desires, and future aspirations, you shall strengthen the relationship bond. Most relationship failure is contributed to by a lack of alignment between each party's chosen life path. As a dynamic being who constantly evolves, your emphasis on your and your partner's need for physical, emotional, and psychological needs is crucial for the success of creating a fulfilling, supportive, loving, and honest relationship.

Reflections:

- Think about a past situation when you experienced conflict because of a communication breakdown. What do you think was the underlying cause of it?
- Did you speak and express your truths clearly and effectively?
- What could you have done differently?
- If you held back your truths, why did you do so? What were you afraid of?
- Do you feel safe expressing your truths to others?
- Do you give enough safe space to another party to express his or her truth?
- If not, what are you afraid of? And how can you create an environment which promotes this safe space to be honest with each other?
- If yes, are there ways to improve it?

DAY 19

INTIMACY IS A RELATIONSHIP GLUE

*“Love rests on two pillars: surrender and autonomy.
Our need for togetherness exists alongside our need for separateness.”*

Esther Perel

“Do you need the light on?” Bob asked. Before I could answer, he turned the light off and killed my mood as the room turned dark. It was our first intimate experience, yet I felt rejected and drowning in the darkness. My inner child emerged and expressed her unlovable wound. I felt completely lost but couldn’t bring myself to object to it. Everything happened so fast; his question was a matter of politeness. I tried to reason and compromise with myself to the best of my ability, reassuring my mind of reasons for his excuses, but nothing could console my soul, and my inner voice exacerbated the pain. Deep inside, I tormented my heart into betraying my soul, which was longing for love. As a sensitive soul, I need to feel emotionally connected to my sexual partner. It is an appreciation of my vulnerability to be seen and desired for who I am.

But clearly, we had different objectives, Bob wanted physical pleasure, and I wished for intimacy.

Most women have issues expressing themselves and their needs in the bedroom, especially those who grew up in Asian culture. Sex is taboo in open discussion, and religion prescribes it as solely for procreation purposes. Added to that, a woman is not encouraged to explore her sexuality; there is an inherent belief that only men are entitled to sexual pleasure. Sex researchers found at least 27% of women have never experienced an orgasm. The reasons stem from physical, psychological, and relationship issues. The stereotypical view of women needing intimacy as a prerequisite for sexual desire, gender, or culture has no direct influence on this.

Sex, desire, or eroticism are often substituted for intimacy, used interchangeably yet vastly different. Sex includes intercourse and physical pleasure whereas intimacy covers more than the bedroom. Sex certainly plays a role in building intimacy with your romantic partner, but not all sexual experiences will lead to an intimate relationship. Likewise, not all intimate relationships involve sex. The level of emotional attachment is the defining factor of intimacy in an interpersonal relationship. Eroticism involves a low level of emotional investment from both parties. Paradoxically, as the intimacy deepens, desire declines.

As social creatures, we crave intimacy to foster closeness and trust in an interpersonal relationship with others. According to Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker, intimacy requires a knowledge of each other at a deeper level, total acceptance of who we are, safety, feeling confident to be vulnerable, appreciate our differences, and form an emotional connection through love and compassion. Hence, developing intimacy requires time, patience, communication, and commitment. Most importantly, it starts with inner work, which is being intimate with ourselves.

Our childhood upbringing plays an important part in our intimacy approach in adulthood, including our choice of an intimate partner selection. Intimate partners can comprise a

best friend, romantic partner, or family member. Any interpersonal relationship carries the inherent risk of getting hurt or disappointed. Intimacy is the glue that bonds a relationship, and requires vulnerability, exposing yourself to possibilities of getting hurt, disappointed, or betrayed. Therefore, resistance to intimacy reflects the fear of being vulnerable.

The first time I met my best friend, Luiza, we felt an instant attraction to develop a deep friendship. We met at a healing class; through this mutual interest, we became close friends. Not surprisingly, we share many similar life experiences; we married, and bore children at a young age, and got divorced around our mid-thirties. As we got to know each other intimately, we revealed our shared fear of commitment in a romantic relationship. The mutual appreciation of our fears and experiences bonded us to support and have each other's back whenever we had to face challenges or disappointment in romantic relationships or life in general.

The yearning for intimacy starts from infancy, the emotional bonding between a baby and the mother defines what we seek in intimacy at the adulthood stage. Feelings of comfort and closeness arise from being nurtured and loved by our mothers, and remain in our psyche as our first lesson of love language and intimacy. Hence, we are inclined to fall in love with a man who emotionally resembles our parent or primary caregiver. A child who grows up in an abusive and dysfunctional family will learn abuse as an expression of love. Similarly, when a child whose parent is emotionally unavailable reaches adulthood, she feels the natural attraction for an emotionally unavailable man as her life partner. I can see this pattern in my marriage, I was like my mum and Joe was like my dad. Likewise, Joe was behaving like his dad and I was like his mum. Our marriage was an arena for power, struggle, and control. Our relationship was built upon mutual compassion toward the lack of childhood love. Our brain, by default, prioritizes safety over anything else, and safety is defined as knowledge through identification with past events.

A romantic relationship usually starts with an infatuation period. This is the most exciting, loving, and wonderful period of any romantic relationship. It feels ecstatic, like the world only belongs to the two of you. It feels as if there is never enough time to be together, getting to know each other, and exploring each other's feelings, thoughts, emotions, stories, dreams, and possibilities. As Esther Perel eloquently writes *"Beginnings are always ripe with possibilities, for they hold the promise of completion. Through love, we imagine a new way of being. You see me as I've never seen myself. You airbrush my imperfections, and I like what you see. With you, and through you, I will become that which I long to be. I will become whole. Being chosen by the one you chose is one of the glories of falling in love. It generates a feeling of intense personal importance. I matter. You confirm my significance."*

Then intimacy follows. Intimacy emerges as love engages closeness, familiarity, and routine, as well as a sense of security. The feeling of being protected in our beloved arms reminds us of our mother's love and nurturing during infancy. This is also what our brain's neuroplasticity is wired to constantly long for; safety through validation of the known. Intimacy also breeds trust through vulnerability and heartfelt connection. As a relationship matures and flourishes through the strengthening of intimacy, a byproduct of spending time together, it impedes our alone time. That is why, having a period of separation is as vital as having togetherness; without it, you deprive yourself of opportunities to miss and long for a reunion with your partner. Along with togetherness, we build a closeness by learning more about each other, which unavoidably lessens our desire. Desire requires a level of curiosity, exploring the unknown; it embodies an innate excitement and anticipation of what is coming. Think back to your eagerness to watch an upcoming movie after previewing its cliff-hanging trailer. Moreover, an intense eroticism entails a space to express our true selves freely and safely, free from the fear of losing our partner's respect, love, or perception.

Hence why, despite its merit, intimacy perils our sexuality, intimacy extinguishes the flame of desire. This is palpably shown in a long-term relationship, as both partners heavily invest in the success of their relationship, the fear of losing is intensified which elicits a decline in desire. Also, the presumption made about the partner's erotic interest discourages the other partner from expressing their fantasies or peculiarities; they are fearful of being judged negatively or rejected. As Esther Perel writes in her book *Mating with Captivity*, “*desire emerged from a paradox: mutually recognizing the limitations of married life created a bond between them; acknowledging otherness inspired closedness.*”

Interestingly, there is a riveting connection between sexuality and intimacy. It goes without saying that “*if you want to get to know someone better, have sex with him*” could not be further from the truth. Sexuality begets intimacy because sex is more than giving and receiving physical pleasure; it is an opportunity to express who we truly are, which is often the opposite of our behaviors outside the bedroom. A shy and timid guy may seek his expression of power through kinky sexual experience, including being a dominatrix, and a powerful and controlling type at work may choose to be submissive in the bedroom as a way of letting go of the pressure of constantly being in charge. A sexual experience includes an exchange of power. This is clearly visible in the dominatrix and submissive kind, which may not be obtainable as easily as in daily life. It also demonstrates our inner beliefs; a religious person who believes that sex, unless for procreation purpose is sinful, will be less likely to have a high sex drive, or express her / his fantasy.

Reflections:

This exercise is an excerpt from Esther Perel's book, *Mating in Captivity*. She uses this exercise in couple's therapy to reveal how the couple intertwines their relationship together,

including any gaps in what they are seeking in desire and love. I altered it for your intimacy self-exploration.

Take the time to be alone and uninterrupted. I strongly recommend that you do these journaling prompts after a short meditation and allow yourself to be raw and honest when answering these questions.

1. When I think of love, I think of ...
2. When I love, I feel ...
3. When I am loved, I feel ...
4. In love, I look for ...
5. When I think of intimacy, I think of ...
6. I feel intimate when I feel ...
7. When I am intimate, I feel ...
8. In intimacy, I look for ...
9. When I think of sex, I think ...
10. When I desire, I feel ...
11. When I am desired, I feel ...
12. In sex, I look for ...

Now, take a moment in silence to reflect upon your answers. Look for the hidden message that you may need to address.

For example, if **security** is what you look for then

- Why do you feel the void of.... (security—based on the example) in your life?
- When was the first time you did not feel ... (secure)?
- What past story signifies that period?
- What new story do you need to tell yourself now?

DAY 20

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

*Intimacy is a safe harbor inside my heart,
Where I allow your soul to commune with mine,
In a raw yet loving way.*

Happily ever after, a cliché phrase of fairytale and romantic movies pronounces marriage as society's milestone in attaining love and happiness. Marriage implies a major adulthood achievement in starting a new foundation of the family unit and future with our beloved life partner. These fairytale and romantic stories portray the ultimate euphoric moment when we finally find the love of our life with whom we will spend the rest of our lives. Yet it doesn't acknowledge the beginning of a long unification journey for two individuals who grew up with a unique background, mindset, beliefs, needs, desires, and worldview. Within that togetherness, there is an eternity of separateness. An institutionalized marriage presumes that, by tying the knots of love, love shall bridge all differences and accept each other's shortcomings by default. This presumption is the primary cause of relationship failure. Albeit, love is

the wellspring of intimacy, love alone is inadequate to concoct a successful marriage.

The essence of love is unconditional and pure, but our frail ego and limiting beliefs inhibit us from loving others unconditionally. Our love's conditions determine our capacity to love and accept others as they are because our awareness of self-rejection patterns control our focus and attention on what we see and expect from our partner, such as only seeing their highest potential and envisioning their best future version during the honeymoon period. As this period dwindles, we slowly feel disappointed by the revelation of our partner's true self. Yet all those writings were on the wall all along, we just refused to see and listen to what our intuition had been trying to tell us. As we realize our desires and expectations are unmet or unacknowledged, we then initiate controlling acts through manipulating or changing our partner with the sole aim of realizing the "prototype" model envisaged during courtship. Our beloved partner, the chosen one, after weeding out other potential suitors, who we once regarded as being good enough, attractive enough, worthy enough, and most importantly to whom we entrust our psyche's longevity, disheartens us. Now, he no longer appears to be the perfect guy as his true self deviates from our idealized model.

The concept of institutionalized marriage is facing a crisis; it is a system designed to fail. Unlike the olden days, we are no longer committed to a lifelong relationship simply because we sign a piece of paper and declare our wedding vows before God. In line with the growth of our consciousness, having a loving and respectful relationship takes a higher priority than following our pledge to stay together till death do us apart. Statistics show the increasing divorce rate and hook-up culture in the younger generation, representing a higher appreciation to fulfill our desire, compounded by easier access in finding a mating partner through online dating. This heralds a revolution in collective consciousness regarding relationships and commitment.

Conscious coupling emerges from the need to revolutionize the failure of an institutionalized marriage. That is, a love relationship where both parties are consciously committed to the following three defining areas:

1. **Support and inspire each other to grow**

In a conscious relationship, each person owns the responsibility for their growth by owning their journey toward wholeness without trying to change the others. Paradoxically, the best way to influence others is by “*being the change you want to see in the world*”, according to the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi. This notion suggests that, when you show your growth to others and they see what you can achieve, they will feel inspired to follow. In contrast to current practice, where a married couple tries to change or enforce one’s belief, expectations, and perception onto the other, a conscious coupling offers fertile soil for a seed of change to grow. This can only be done by giving our partner a safe space to explore their chosen journey.

Let them experience their desired life experience and take any life lessons necessary to take. When each partner focuses on their growth, they will be less judgmental, replace complaints and projection with self-reflection, and be a compassionate support partner for the other instead. To summarize, it is a mindset shift, as we can only change ourselves and meet others as deeply as our willingness to meet ourselves by enjoying each other’s company along the journey rather than focusing on achieving a destination.

2. **Focus on self-love mastery**

A conscious relationship is a safe space for two emotionally mature adults, not just in age terms, to authentically deepen their intimate relationship. It is a relationship founded upon a commitment to treat each other from the space of love and acceptance of reality. We are dynamic beings who are constantly growing, and life is not always rosy and sunshine, but

comprises different seasons. Hence, there is a lesser focus on euphoric feeling as a measure of relationship success rate, and greater importance on:

- Being responsible to own and manage our own emotional state
- Raise awareness of our flaws, shadows, and wounds, utilizing them as opportunities for growth to achieve wholeness.
- Accept each other as who we are without trying to change the others into our idealized model.
- Readily offer compassion and forgiveness when our partner is in a vulnerable stage through empathy and acceptance.
- Hold space in relationships for healing by courageously facing our deepest fears, insecurities, and wounds.
- Release the attachment to specific outcomes or expectations, and communicate effectively and openly to acknowledge each other needs and desires.
- Respect each other's healthy boundaries while tuning in to our soul, mind, and body's needs.
- By owning our self-worth, we are more open to express our desire and explore each other's erotic needs. As Esther Perel said, "*a healthy sense of entitlement is a prerequisite for erotic intimacy.*"

3. Interdependency

At some stage in our lives, we experienced a breakup or disheartenment which gave rise to fear of commitment, especially when combined with fear of losing our independence and freedom. Yet we cannot build a deeply intimate relationship with others when we block ourselves from having an emotional dependency. As mentioned in the earlier chapter about attachment theory, our whole biological and ecological system is wired for connection with others since birth; like a baby needs his/her mum to provide emotional support, as

an adult we simply redirect our emotional dependency to our partner.

Interdependence is a state of being whereby we acknowledge our emotional attachment to provide emotional support and assurance to create emotional intimacy with ourselves and others without compromising our partner's and our need to be independent. Paradoxically, when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and entrust our safety to our partner, our willingness to take risks is greater, resulting in a higher potential to achieve success in other areas of our life. A healthy emotional dependency offers a safety net—our partner will always have our back. This emotional assurance negates our fear of failure and motivates us to explore the unknown.

Imagine a dependence scale where codependence locates at the lowest scale and independence is its polar opposite - at the highest point of the scale. Interdependency is a healthy balance which sits in the midpoint of the dependency scale. A codependent is a needy person who heavily relies on her partner for emotional and psychological fulfillment; this kind of person does not understand herself, including her wants, needs, or desires. She is malleable according to others' projection of an ideal self in pursuit of seeking validation of her worthiness as she hangs her happiness stage upon other's approval. In contrast, the self-proclaimed independent person refuses to depend on others; this reflects a control issue, wanting to be in control and fear being controlled by others.

Interdependence offers a healthy middle ground with the defining characteristic of understanding our own emotional attachment need, i.e., anxious type, who needs external assurance through intimacy to feel safe vs avoidant, a detachment type who prefers to disengage from deeper intimacy to protect her safety. A relationship between anxiety and avoidant is a pull and push dysfunctional pattern. The anxious will pull the avoidant closer to be more intimate, and the avoidant will push the anxious away to avoid being too intimate; both parties are acting out of safety and avoidance of getting hurt. By knowing our attachment type, we know how to proactively

satisfy our safety needs and effectively communicate our fears and desires without acting out, like anger, giving the silent treatment, or protesting to our partner.

Though intimacy is a constituent of an interpersonal relationship, it entails introspection to get to know yourself first. Suzanne Degges-White, Ph.D., a professor at Northern Illinois University says, “*personal intimacy is about being willing to let someone see you as you truly are while being willing to let yourself see that person as he or she truly is.*” You can only attain this level of acceptance and vulnerability when you take the time to reflect through a process of healthy solitude. A solitude moment creates a space for evaluating your self-worth issues, reflecting any projection of the ideal image or emotional baggage onto others, and the ability to be on your own. At its core, intimacy leans on trust and surrender, and this is only attainable when you take the time to be and get to know yourself on a deeper level, offering yourself time and a safe space to be present with yourself in your body.

A mindful exercise like breathwork—taking a long deep breath until you fill your lungs and hold it as long as you can, or regular meditation, can help to foster self-intimacy as it silences your mind from the busyness and inner chatter. Self-intimacy offers the following benefits:

- Sharpens your feeling of the body’s sensation to increase sexual experience or orgasm.
- Digs deep into intimacy and desire issues such as a religious or cultural belief that sex is sinful and taboo. This belief turns into repressed desire or intimacy avoidance.
- Reveals any patterns of behavior, like self-sacrifice, which results in low sex drive.
- Invokes curiosity to discover your desire, sexual drive, erotic fantasies, or emotional needs.
- Acknowledges any self-worth issues that may prevent you from being vulnerable mentally, emotionally, and physically with your partner.

- Processes any emotions or feelings that arise by practicing the emotional fluidity technique discussed in the earlier chapter.
- Learn to enjoy your own companionship; it helps you to release the neediness of being in a relationship with a wrong person.

This conscious coupling is a rejuvenation process for any relationship stage which you are currently in. If you are currently married, it will strengthen your bonding; if you are at the courtship stage, this will set a firm foundation for when you decide to progress to the next level. Remember, the golden rule of a successful relationship is not about knowing your partner but getting to know thyself.

Reflections:

- List your current or past relationship struggles.
- How can you adopt the concept of conscious coupling to help you improve the quality of your relationship? If you are not currently in a relationship, how would you apply this concept to a future relationship?
- What is your level of intimacy like, consider it from the perspectives of openness, closeness, separateness, and togetherness?
- What is your self-intimacy like?
- What are your struggles with self-intimacy and how do these translate into your relationship struggles?
- How can you use self-intimacy to overcome those struggles?

DAY 21

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

*I lived inside the cocoon for so long.
I shrunk myself to fit into a tiny confinement.
I forgot what it feels like to be free.
Then one day when I thought my life is over.
And I realize I have wings.
I am now ready to emerge with beauty and grace.
To spread my wings and fly.*

What do I truly desire? What does my body need? What are my feelings trying to tell me? How is my soul seeking to emerge? We rarely ask ourselves these questions. Putting ourselves first is considered a selfish act. We were never taught the vital survival skill of putting the oxygen mask on ourselves first before helping anyone else. Paradoxically, when you are putting yourself first, you have a greater allowance to assist others, yet, you cannot give others what you don't have. It's quite logical, isn't it?

But how often do we prioritize others' needs or desires over our own? Many times, especially mothers are the top

experts on this. A mother instinctively puts her needs and desires as the least priority, then, at a later stage in life, she is awakened to the reality that she is not living according to what she envisioned at a younger age. This is what the midlife crisis is mostly about. We wake up to the reality that life goes on regardless of our presence. We are unconsciously creating life experiences through habits, fears, or conforming to others' needs. Everything appears to happen on its own course, and we then realize we neglected the most important person in our lives. The **I AM**. We forgot to stop and smell the roses, admire their beauty, and allow their fragrance to uplift our moods.

The joy of life resides in the experience of its journey, otherwise, we fall into the *happiness when* syndrome. We convince ourselves we are going to be happy when we get to our destination, but where is our destination in life? Bronnie Ware, an Australian nurse of palliative care, a special care unit for dying patients with 12 weeks left to live, wrote a book called *The Top Five Regrets of Dying*. Ware witnessed that dying patients find the clarity of life vision as their time is ending. According to Ware, the top dying regret is '*I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me*'.

Living life on our terms is life in alignment with the truth which can be found inside our heart. The truth shall bring us in alignment with our soul's purpose and, from that inner knowing, we consciously create our desired life experience. This is the only way because if we don't live based on our truths, we are living someone else's life. Hence, we spent the past 20 days unlearning and uncovering those layers which were not part of our destiny. Beyond surviving physically and emotionally, we have our spiritual needs, our karmic contracts, but how often do we refuse to listen to what our souls genuinely want? We choose to lean in on fears, limit ourselves from actualizing our full potential, succumb to another's validation, and hide our true selves away. We maintain our survival through coping and defensive mechanisms like working

endlessly in an unfulfilling job, indulging in foods, shopping, and alcohol, neglect of our bodies, or deluding ourselves to the reality of life.

Creating a life based on your terms is not an impossible task, it's very simple. Start living each day by consciously finding your truth and stay true to yourself. Don't say YES when you want to say NO. Stop taking actions based on guilt, shame, or judgment. Drop the word SHOULD from your vocabulary. You always have better choices in life which align more closely with your heart. No one can make you feel or do anything unless you allow it. Accept yourself and others as we are, don't project expectations onto yourself and others. Always question and find out the truth, not your perceived reality. Follow your heart and do what makes your heart sing. Release any regrets, judgments, and resentments. Forgive easily; we are just humans who will never be perfect. Commit and show up fully to your life, and love others unconditionally.

We were born with creative powers and innate powers to turn any dream into a reality. Breathe in and take in the life energy, acknowledge to yourself that you are worthy and deserve everything that you can think is in your mind. You are the abundance generator, and the entire universe is ready to orchestrate people, places, events, and things to co-create your dreams into reality. You can receive any desires if you choose to hold a powerful and unshaken belief in your highest potential. The only limitations you have are those which you impose upon yourself through fears. There is no hidden secret or magic formula in manifesting. I manifested Australian citizenship and two properties without even knowing the word manifesting. The power is always within you, just allow yourself to receive it. Remember, you are a lotus who can only blossom above the murky water, so rise above lies, fears, conditioning, and false beliefs. A lotus doesn't need any validation of its worthiness before blossoming every morning; it simply follows its natural course and never allows the mud to stain its striking color. And a lotus flower doesn't try to change itself into an apple tree, likewise don't persist in devi-

ating from your karmic contract. This is the source of your life's struggles, not aligning with your soul.

Your scared soul contract outlines divine timing. This is your calling, so show up as a sovereign being and commit fully to whatever life is offering you. When you learn to let go of the expectation of outcome and bestow your best effort, life will never fail to reward you. Learn to acknowledge the fear, not resist or follow it. Just acknowledge and give some love. Say thank you for being there for me and protecting me. But I am okay and accept whatever the outcome might be. I want to be present with life and answer to the calling. As you practice this more often, you'll learn to discern your desire is on the opposite side of your fear. That's it. You spend more time and energy trying to fight yourself instead of following your intuition. Most importantly affirm and accept yourself as enough, take the words '*not enough*' from your dictionary. Whenever you catch yourself saying or thinking of not enough, convert it into a question of how I can get enough, or be enough. Practicing this one habit alone will change your life. Remember, you are the tree, your inner quality will determine the quality of your fruits at harvesting time. Invest your time and energy wisely to nurture your inner beingness.

A butterfly is a delicate and beautiful creature which we all love and adore. Its metamorphosis story feels like a cliché to inspire us in embracing our consciousness evolution process. It's been retold many times as the best the metaphorical truth of our life's journey. A butterfly goes through four major life cycles, starting with the egg; the egg hatches into a caterpillar. This stage is our childhood and becoming journey. A caterpillar sheds its skin up to five times because its skin gets too tight and splits open as it grows 100 times larger. During our becoming journey, we focus most of our attention on learning, growing, and developing. We become larger in physical size as well as progress in emotional and intellectual intelligence.

The caterpillar forms itself into a pupa once fully grown. A pupa or chrysalis lives inside a hardened case which forms a protective vessel against predators or extreme weather during

its transformation period. As we reach adulthood, we create our safety cocoon to protect us from getting hurt and rejected. We play small and fit into a small invisible box. Our box-sizing is measured by our limiting beliefs, society's norms, childhood conditionings, and others' validation of our worthiness. Until one day, the caterpillar awakens to a new reality; its organ tissue and limbs transform into a wonderful winged butterfly. The case will only split open when the butterfly is ready to emerge. Yet, a butterfly will not instantly fly, it waits for its wings to dry and pumps liquid to make it big and strong. Then it flies and exhibits its beauty to the world. This is the stage where you are at today. You broke through your conditioning and are ready to emerge as the beautiful butterfly; you are still waiting for others to give you permission to fly.

My dearest one, you are the caterpillar who awakens to the new reality of life. As you unlearn and uncover your conditioning and pattern of behaviors, you are now ready to unleash your true self and show your inner beauty, love, grace, and divinity to the world. Remember, the caterpillar never questions its worthiness to transform into a butterfly. And a butterfly never feels the need for validation of its beauty from others. So, also, must you do! You are loved, accepted, and perfect to be a butterfly. You don't need to wait for permission to spread your beautiful wings and fly. Give yourself permission and allow the world to admire your strength, beauty, and grace. You are more than enough just as you are. Salma Hayek says, "*People often say that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', and I say that the most liberating thing about beauty is that realizing that you are the beholder. This empowers us to find beauty in places where others have not dared to look, including inside ourselves.*"

I am grateful and honored for your investment of precious time in reading this book. My clients and I have experienced a major life transformation from applying the principles in this book. We may not have become millionaires overnight, but we are living in a blissful state. Our lives have become purposeful and fulfilling. It is my deepest wish that you also

shall live a life of abundant love, wealth, health, and spirituality. The greatest experience in life is when you can have it all. Start believing it can happen, stay true to your heart, and it shall then happen. Life is that simple!

Reflections:

- What are your major self-discoveries?
- How do these changes influence your daily life?
- What has been your growth over the past 21 days?
- How does this impact your pattern of behavior moving forward?

Do not live half a life by Khalil Gibran

*Do not love half lovers
 Do not entertain half friends
 Do not indulge in works of the half talented
 Do not live half a life
 and do not die a half death
 If you choose silence, then be silent
 When you speak, do so until you are finished
 Do not silence yourself to say something
 And do not speak to be silent
 If you accept, then express it bluntly
 Do not mask it
 If you refuse then be clear about it
 for an ambiguous refusal is but a weak acceptance
 Do not accept half a solution
 Do not believe half-truths
 Do not dream half a dream
 Do not fantasize about half hopes
 Half a drink will not quench your thirst
 Half a meal will not satiate your hunger
 Half the way will get you nowhere
 Half an idea will bear you no results
 Your other half is not the one you love*

It is you in another time yet in the same space
It is you when you are not
Half a life is a life you didn't live,
A word you have not said
A smile you postponed
A love you have not had
A friendship you did not know
To reach and not arrive
Work and not work
Attend only to be absent
What makes you a stranger to them closest to you
and they strangers to you
The half is a mere moment of inability
but you are able for you are not half a being
You are a whole that exists to live a life
not half a life"

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and growing up Chinese in a small village in Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country in the 70s, Yuliana Francie ticked all the boxes to win the minority trifecta, Chinese, Catholic, and Female. At 18yrs of age, Yuliana flew on her own to Australia on a student visa, working two jobs to graduate with a Bachelor degree and CPA. At 27 years of age, she managed a \$450M business. Yuliana then left her corporate job with a deep wish to start her entrepreneurship journey, resulting in earning \$20,000 a week revenue on eBay within 3 months of launching. Following her spiritual awakening, she discovered her life purposes which led to years of development to be a healer, psychic, medium, and spiritual mentor.

Yuliana made it her life's mission to embolden women in owning their worth and power to discover and accept their truths so that they can live a life true to themselves. After six years of spiritual development and research, she created **UNBECOMING YOU**, a concoction of spiritual and psychological methods, to help women fall in love with their life again, so their life has real meaning, purpose, and self-contentment. Most importantly, a life designed on their own terms, needs, wishes, and intentions.

Yuliana is passionate about changing the world to be kinder and fairer for everyone. She launched 'Share The Love' event, the first Australian fashion show to include disabled models. Yuliana resides in Sydney with her two daughters.

A grayscale illustration of a hand breaking through chains. The hand is positioned at the top, with fingers curled as if grasping or tearing at the metal links. The chains are draped across the middle of the image, with some links appearing broken or being pulled apart. The background is a dark, textured gray with a subtle geometric pattern of triangles.

FINALLY! Break free from self-destructive patterns that have chained you for life, so you can stop...

- Lying to yourself, saying **YES** when your heart says **NO**.
- Fabricating excuses for tolerating others' unacceptable behaviors.
- Denying your own needs and desires to please others.
- Giving your power away to earn love and acceptance.
- Chasing perfection and succumbing to others' validation.
- Judging yourself as not being good enough.
- Finding yourself in an unsupported, toxic, and abusive relationship.

Deep inside you, there is a growing eagerness to live a more meaningful life, to be loved and accepted as who you are, and to deepen your spirituality. Because you are done with playing small, pleasing and prioritizing others, and self-sabotaging yourself from living a life on your own terms.

Your action today will prevent you from having regrets on your deathbed. Remember, the top regret of the dying is not living a life true to themselves. Learn more about Unbecoming You, 21 days journey to living life on your terms. By the end of this program, you shall...

- Learn your programming and conditioning, including their impacts on your life so you can put an end to self-rejection, self-destructive, and self-sabotage patterns.
- Reveal your wounded inner child and shadows and heal those wounds so you can restore your wholeness through self-acceptance and self-love. This will improve the quality of your intimate relationships with yourself and others.
- Be courageous in discerning your truths and pursue your desires, so you can have it all in life and living life on your own terms.

————— Visit YulianaFrancie.com/Unbecoming to learn more —————

