



BLISS

Aligning Self-Talk with Higher Self

David Michael Boje

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By David Michael Boje

Dedication: For Renee Daniel Boje

and for all my children and grandchildren – I was stuck in my past story, stuck in my anger and rage. I ask for forgiveness, and I forgive myself, for not being kind and gentle, for putting my career ahead of family, for living in my ego instead of my spirit. This book is the story of finding my way back.

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Introduction: The Man in the Tomb

There is a mountain in India called Mount Palitana. To reach the temples at the top, you climb five thousand steps. Some people ride donkeys. I walked alone.

Thousands of pilgrims had walked those steps before me — over centuries, over millennia. With every step I felt it. Something was lifting. By the time I reached the top, I was, as we say in New Mexico, high as a kite in the spirit. I climbed across the temple rooftops. I sat in a circle of people and hummed Om. I did alternate nostril breathing in the thin mountain air. I was not the angry teenager from Spokane anymore. I was not the Vietnam veteran who threw typewriters. I was not the workaholic professor who missed his children growing up. I was just a man on a mountain, breathing.

That is where I met him.

My wife Grace Ann found me, or I found her — hard to say which — and Gurudev Shree Chitrabhanu introduced us to a man who lived on that mountain. He was a Muslim. He served as caretaker and guardian of the Jain temples. And he lived in a tomb. Not a house near the tombs. A tomb. The size of a coffin, set three feet off the ground in a wall of tombs, with a small door and a door handle. That was his home.

I looked at his face. He was smiling. His face was glowing with happiness, joy, and gratitude. He had his life purpose. He had nothing — no space, no possessions, no career, no status — and he had everything. He was in bliss.

So was I, standing there looking at him.

That man is the answer to every question this book is going to ask. He had found his Higher Self. I had not found mine yet — not fully, not stably — but I had seen what it looked like. And I had a direction.

This book is about that direction. Not about arriving. About walking toward it, one step at a time, even when the four gangsters of your ego — Anger, Pride, Greed, and Deceit — are spinning their stories in your head and trying to turn you around.

4 AM in Vietnam

Let me tell you how far I had to walk to get to that mountain.

It was four in the morning in Vietnam. I was the company clerk for a USAHAC company, and I was typing the morning report. My CO needed it on his desk when he arrived in one hour. I was doing my job.

And then the anger hit me. I did not even know where it came from. One moment I was typing. The next, I picked up that typewriter and threw it into the trash can. They tumbled across the floor together, clanging in the dark.

A voice said: "What is that all about?"

I have thought about that voice many times since. There was a person in the office — or there seemed to be. I never knew his name. I am not entirely sure he was a soldier. I call him Ralph. He may be my guardian angel. Whatever he was, Ralph asked exactly the right question.

"I don't want to be here," I said. "I want to be in New York, where my daughter is being born."

Ralph said: "I get that. But you better get that typewriter out of the trash and fix the dents in it and the can. The CO will be here in an hour. He wants your morning report."

Then he disappeared. I was alone with the mess I had made.

That is always how it is with the gangsters. Anger shows up first, fast and hot. Then Deceit moves in to spin a story — a story where you are guilty, broken, shameful, and convicted forever. I was not there for my daughter's birth. What kind of father does that make me? The story vibrates in your skull, day and night. It is hard to purge. Like the joke about the pink elephant — once you start thinking about it, you cannot stop.

The Hospital and the Body Bags

Word came that my daughter had been born. I should have felt joy. Instead I freaked out and started being angry with everyone around me. My barracks mates had enough. "Come with us," they said. "Beer and pizza. We have the jeep." I hopped in.

They drove me straight to the hospital. Duane said he had to pick something up and it would only take a minute. We went up a couple of floors and entered an office. My bunkmates grabbed me and held me down. A nurse appeared with a needle bigger and longer than anything I had ever seen in my life. She jabbed me with it, and in a few seconds I was out like a light.

Three days later I woke up in a hospital bed. All around me were soldiers. Some had missing arms or legs. Some had patches over where an eye had been. I looked down at my own whole, uninjured body and I felt the guilt hit me like a wall. I had not been shot. I had not been blown up by an IED. What was I doing here among these men?

Anger came back. Then Pride. Then the anxious, greedy need to be somewhere — anywhere — else. And then Deceit, the ringleader, formed the story: if I could just be a perfect patient, behave just right, eat everything on my plate, say yes ma'am and yes sir to everyone, a doctor would come and let me go. I could earn my way out.

There was a nurse who showed me how to fold the top of a paper bag so it would stay open and I could put my Kleenex there. Such a small thing. But I held onto it. I practiced it. It was something I could do right, in a place where everything felt wrong.

I looked out the window one afternoon and saw the helicopters landing. Soldiers were unstrapping body bags from the landing gear. The bags were piled up on the runway, waiting for the transport flight home. I was out of place. I was guilty. I was ashamed.

When the doctor finally came, I told him I felt terrific. He discharged me. I took a rickshaw back to base. And then I got angry again, returned to the hospital, took the shot, and woke up three days later. It happened a third time.

After the third time, the Major called me in. "David," he said, "you have been a good company clerk for six months. Now I need to reassign you. If you could have any job in Special Services for the rest of your tour, what would you want?"

I thought about it. "Golf Pro Shop," I said. "That's for me."

I had never played golf in my life. But I ran the tournaments, ordered the clubs and bags, handed out green fees at 8 AM every morning, and then — after the golfers headed out — I read a book a day for the rest of my tour. Arnold Palmer's guide to golf, yes. But also the history of Mahatma Gandhi. The history of the Beatles.

Philosophy. I did not like novels. I wanted to understand how people found their way.

Before Vietnam: Spokane, Washington

You need to know where the anger came from. It did not start in Vietnam.

I was fourteen years old, standing outside a motel room in Spokane, Washington. I was taking a photograph of my little brothers and sister — Steve, who was seven, and Karen and Kevin, both still in diapers. Inside, my mother was on the phone. My father was calling from Paris. He was not coming to join us as he had promised. He was headed to Brazil on a new assignment, and he was taking his eighteen-year-old secretary, Jan, with him. He would send \$750 a month. The marriage was over.

We had been living in Paris. I had been going to the American School of Paris with the sons and daughters of executives, diplomats, and generals. Now we were applying for welfare and food stamps. My mother did not know how to drive. We took the bus everywhere. We moved from apartment to apartment as the money ran out, each place smaller than the last. Finally we landed at 45 Walnut Avenue, with a landlord who asked for sexual favors in exchange for cheap rent.

I was angry. First at my mother — then I got wise that it was not her fault. She had grown up abused. She turned to tranquilizers after the divorce, and she was mad at all males, especially me, because I looked like my dad. I got a job at Krause Nursery at age fourteen, hoeing in the fields, earning less than a dollar an hour. Every cent went to support the family. I wore torn jeans to school at a time

when torn was not cool. When my father did not send money for a junior prom suit, I moved out.

I got an apartment with a friend. I fixed tires and swept up at Montgomery Ward. I barely went to high school. I spent a few nights in jail for drinking and fighting. Finally, in court, I made a gesture at a judge that he did not appreciate, and he threw away the key. I was locked up on my nineteenth birthday, and at Christmas, and at New Year's, with no sign of release.

There was a man in that jail with no legs. His artificial ones were hollow, and he used them to smuggle in bottles of wine. A preacher came on Sundays and called us sinners and gave us Bull Durham rolling tobacco. Yes, I was mad at God. I had been mad at God for a long time.

My dad and his wife Jan eventually got me a plane ticket to New York. Sheriff's deputies picked me up in handcuffs, took me to my apartment to pack a bag, then to my mother's to say goodbye to my brothers and sisters. I noticed my penny and nickel and dime collections had been emptied by my siblings. Oh well. There was not much to collect anyway. My mother did not hug me when I left. She was Scottish and Welsh, she would have said. Hugging was not something those people did. My dad did not hug either. I have thought about that my whole life — what it does to a child, to grow up without being held.

The Direction

When I got back to the States from Vietnam, I found that I could get out of the Army six months early if I enrolled in community college. I did. I was terrified. No one in my entire family tree had ever been to college. I was the first.

I studied like a man trying to prove something to himself. I graduated first in my class. Got a scholarship to Rider

University. Graduated first again, tied with one other student. Then an MBA at the University of Illinois. My GMAT scores were not good enough for a PhD program — but I talked my way in on probation, got A's in the doctoral seminars, and, as they say, the rest is history.

I turned my pain into teaching. I turned my stuck story of guilt and shame into studying. But for a long time, the gangsters were still running the show underneath. Failed marriage. Years of drinking, smoking, workaholism. I even taught Bible study for men at a Pentecostal Four Square church. I was sitting on the anger, not healing it. There is a difference.

What broke it open was Grace Ann, and Gurudev Shree Chitrabhanu, and a mountain in India with five thousand steps.

Chitrabhanu gave me a Jain name the first time we met: Arihanta. I meditated on it for a year. I thought it meant I was to conquer my inner enemies. I was exhausted by it. When I saw him again, I asked for a new name.

He looked at me. "Why do you want a new name?"

"Because this one is wearing me out," I told him. "I need a break from it."

"What do you think it means?" he asked.

"You told me it meant I was to conquer my inner enemies."

He shook his head. "No. It means you have no enemies. Everyone is your friend." He gave me a coin with Mahavir on one side and Sanskrit on the other. "Go and meditate on that."

Everyone is your friend. I meditated on that for a year. And then I walked five thousand steps up a mountain, and I met the man in the tomb.

On that mountain, I put down my ego. I forgave everybody, including me, for everything. I did not suddenly know how to stop the four gangsters from spinning their stories. I still don't always know how. But I had seen what bliss looked like. I had a direction.

What This Book Is

This book is not about achieving bliss. It is not Joseph Campbell's hero journey to a peak experience. It is not Csikszentmihalyi's flow state, or positive psychology's happy life, or even Patanjali's samadhi. Those are all things you have to earn or perform or chase.

My teacher Chitrabhanu said it simply: "Bliss is balance." The soul's natural state — your Higher Self — is already bliss. It always has been. What covers it up are the four gangsters: Anger, Pride, Greed, and Deceit. Their primary weapon is your self-talk. The story they spin in your head, day and night, that says you are guilty, broken, not enough, too much, unworthy of love.

The man in the tomb on Mount Palitana was not in bliss because he had conquered anything. He was in bliss because he had stopped believing the gangsters' stories were about him.

That is what this book teaches. Not a technique. A direction. Chapter by chapter, through the five letters of BLISS:

B — Balance your Yin and Yang energies across all four bodies: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

L — Love and Listen to every being vibrating in the quantum universe.

I — Internal Divinity, heard when you take the elevator down from your mind to your heart.

S — Self-Talk aligned to your Higher Self: purity, clarity, and true storytelling.

S — Service in gratitude, one being, one act, each day.

I am a Vietnam veteran, a rancher, a Holy Fire Reiki Master, a Jain-Catholic practitioner, a professor of forty-five years, a grandfather. I have been angry and broken and stuck. I have also stood on a mountain in India, next to a man in a coffin-sized tomb, both of us glowing.

If I found my way there, so can you.

Let's walk.

Reader's Journal -Intro

The questions in this book were not invented at a desk. They emerged from a Socratic conversation between the author and a trusted interlocutor — questions designed to move past the polished version of a story and into the real one. These are the kinds of questions that opened each chapter. Now they are yours.

There are no right answers. There is only your story, which is the only story that matters here. Write in full sentences if you can — not bullet points. The act of forming a complete sentence forces the mind to commit to something. That commitment is where the bliss practice begins.

Introduction — The Man in the Tomb Journal Questions

1. Is there a moment in your life — a place, a person, a scene — that you return to again and again as evidence that something larger than your ordinary self exists? Describe it in as much physical detail as you can remember.

2. Who is the equivalent of Ralph in your life — the voice that asked the right question at exactly the right moment? What did they ask, and why did it matter?

3. If you could go back to one moment in your past and simply unplug the typewriter instead of throwing it — what moment would that be?

Chapter 1 — B is for Balance

Balancing Your Yin and Yang Energies Across All Four Bodies: Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual

I am running on the BLM land near our home in Las Cruces, New Mexico. My arms are stretched out like a hawk. I am pulling white light down through my crown from the sun. I am pulling energy up through my feet from the earth. I am extending my awareness out past the arroyo, past the Organ Mountains, past the solar system, into the Milky Way, into the whole spinning, hurtling, entangled universe — and I am feeling the breeze on my face.

I could not do this eight months ago. I could barely walk.

This is what B is for Balance looks like in a body. Not a theory. A body. My body. Sixty-some years of living, one war, one cancer, one Agent Orange, 26 rounds of radiation, a rehab therapist named Jason in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, and one morning when I finally put my arms out like a hawk and ran my old route through the Alameda Arroyo for the first time.

Balance is not something you achieve once and keep. It is something you return to, again and again, after the four gangsters of ego have knocked you sideways. This chapter is about how I learned that — not in a classroom, but in a radiation clinic, a drinking fountain, and a cold lake in the desert.

Agent Orange

I was a Sergeant in the United States Army. Company clerk for six months in Vietnam, then Golf Pro for six months. The war was in the air I breathed, the water I

drank, the earth I walked on. Agent Orange was in all of it. I did not know. Nobody told us.

Decades pass. I build a career. I write books. I teach. I ranch. I find Grace Ann and Jainism and Holy Fire Reiki and the horses. I think I have left Vietnam behind.

Then one New Year's morning, I wake up and go to the bathroom and I am peeing blood.

I stand there staring at it. I know what it means. I do not want it to mean what it means. For weeks, I do not see a doctor. My friends plead with me. Grace Ann pleads with me. Finally I man up and go.

The doctor in Las Cruces is older, close to retirement. He runs the blood tests. My PSA score is 26.8 on a scale of 10. He looks at me across his desk and says: "Time to get your affairs in order. You have advanced Stage IV prostate cancer."

What goes through my mind in the first ten seconds?

I have a few months to live.

I think about my children. I think about Grace Ann. I think about the horses. I think about all the books I have not finished writing. I think about Renee in Canada and the grandson I have not held enough. And underneath all of it, quiet as a stone, is the thought: I am not done yet.

MD Anderson and the World's Best Penis Specialist

Grace Ann and I decide not to stay in Las Cruces. We fly to Houston, to the MD Anderson Cancer Center, which employs doctors who teach at the university, keep up with current research, and are considered the best in the world.

I do not know how they rank these things, but I am about to find out, because the first doctor they send me to is a penis specialist.

He asks if I have ever had a camera placed inside my penis. I say no, never. He ushers me immediately into the next room.

He asks if it is all right if one of his students assists. I say yes — and in walks a young woman, no more than twenty years old, holding what appears to be a Nintendo game controller attached to a cable with a small camera on the end. I swallow my pride. I keep silent. She inserts the camera with great gentleness and considerable lubricant, steers it with the controller — up, down, left, right — and together we travel into my bladder and look around on a TV monitor.

"What is that cave?" the doctor asks.

There is a cave-looking hole on the screen. The young woman steers us toward it. We enter together.

"Looks good," the doctor says.

"What does 'looks good' mean?" I ask.

"We don't see any cancer. Your bladder does not have cancerous cellular activity."

I apologize to my penis. It is embarrassed, shrunken, and not at all in a manly pose. Under the circumstances, I think that is understandable.

After several days of specialists and waiting rooms and rebooked flights and a second week in an Airbnb, we finally get to see the doctor we came for: the medical oncologist. He is brilliant. A teacher of doctors, a

researcher, a man who knows things about prostate cancer that have not yet made it into the textbooks. And he has a spot for me in a Stage 2 clinical trial.

He explains the choice plainly. I can have a longer life, but I will likely never walk properly again. Or I can choose quality of life — 26 rounds of radiation, hormone shots, the new drug in the trial — and have a few good years, mobile and present. It is my choice.

This, I realize, is the most precise definition of Yin and Yang balance I have ever encountered. Yang without Yin: survive but never walk again. Yin without Yang: surrender to the cancer. Balance: choose quality of life, take the radiation, do the work, and trust the body to find its way back.

I choose balance. We go home and start the treatments.

26 Rounds of Radiation and the Drinking Fountain

Here is what nobody tells you about radiation treatment for prostate cancer: you have to arrive with a full bladder. A very full bladder. The protocol requires you to drink a large quantity of water an hour before each session and then hold it while you wait. The waiting room can run long. The bladder does not negotiate.

For 26 rounds, my primary spiritual practice was not meditation. It was: please God, help me hold my pee.

The technicians were always young women. They had embedded small gold chips in my groin to align the laser beam, and branded my skin with tiny dots for the equipment calibration. For the final six treatments, they required a special angle, which involved inserting a rubber balloon into my rectum and inflating it with water to

reposition the prostate and bladder. I held my pee through all of it. I said yes ma'am and yes sir. I was a model patient.

Except for the incident with the drinking fountain.

It was about three weeks into the treatments. I was in the waiting room, full bladder, past the point of no return. I made my move toward the bathrooms. All occupied. Not one person emerging. I stood there. I waited. Nothing.

I will not describe what happened next in clinical detail. I will say only that I found a drinking fountain in the hallway, and that a nurse came through the door at precisely the wrong moment. She stopped. She stared. I was, as they say, mid-stream. There was nothing to be done.

She reported me.

I was called in to see the head of the radiation department. He sat behind his desk with the expression of a man trying very hard not to smile. He informed me gravely that I was to carry an emergency urinal bottle at all times and was never, under any circumstances, to use a drinking fountain in that manner again.

I agreed. I apologized. To him, to the nurse, and to drinking fountains everywhere.

I tell this story not to embarrass myself — though it does — but because it is the truest picture I can give you of what it feels like when all four bodies go out of balance at once. My physical body was in open revolt. My emotional body was in shame. My mental body was spinning stories about what kind of man pees in a drinking fountain. And my spiritual body? Ralph and every animal spirit I knew were nowhere to be found when I needed them most.

Balance, in that radiation clinic, was not a meditation. It was surviving the hour. Getting back on the table. And somewhere around week four, finding that I could sit with other men in that waiting room who were struggling, and say to them: you are in control. You can choose to go to the bathroom, or you can sit and hold. No shame in it either way.

That was a Little Wow Moment. Not heroic. Just human.

Jason in Truth or Consequences

After 26 rounds of radiation, your legs atrophy. Even if you walk every day, even if you exercise, the nerves go quiet and the muscles forget their jobs. For months after my treatments, I could not stand without nerve pain shooting up my left leg, then my right. I could not jog. I could barely walk a few steps without stopping.

Grace Ann found a rehabilitation therapist named Jason in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico — a town about forty minutes north of our Caballo Lake trailers, named, incidentally, after a radio game show, which tells you something about New Mexico. Jason did not give me thirty repetitions of standard exercises. He used his hands and his energy to read my body. He could find a locked ankle joint and release it with a touch so gentle it did not hurt at all. He would loosen a calf muscle, coax the sciatic nerve to relax, free up a hamstring or a thigh. Then he would design one specific movement — walk with knees bent forward, then backward, then side left, then side right — and my body would remember something it had forgotten.

Within a few weeks, I was walking through stores with Grace Ann without the pain. Within a few months, I was running short distances. And one morning on the BLM land in Las Cruces, I put my arms out like a Swainson

Hawk and ran my old pre-cancer route through the Alameda Arroyo. Four or five miles. The red flowers on the cactus were blooming. Small birds called out and I called back.

That run was not a victory lap. It was a return. To my physical body, which had been through a war — two wars, counting Vietnam. To my four bodies coming back into conversation with each other. Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual — all of them moving together through the desert morning.

Sameh in the Arroyo

Partway through that run, I came around a bend and found myself face to face with a man. He was barefoot in the arroyo sand, wearing shorts, with a brownish tan and a short beard. I said hello and noticed the bare feet. He said he had sandals nearby. I said my name was David. He said: "Oh, perfect."

I thought that was an interesting response. I kept running. And then it hit me.

He looked exactly like the Muslim man on Mount Palitana. The same face. The same quality of presence. The Jain mountain guardian who lived in a tomb the size of a coffin and glowed with happiness.

I muscle-tested it as I ran. Was that an angel? Yes. Was his name Sameh? Yes.

I have been asking my guardian angel Ralph to vet any spirits who approach me, to make sure they are for my highest good. It seems Ralph approved Sameh. I ran on through the arroyo, and I was not afraid. That, in itself, felt like progress.

Cold Water at Caballo Lake

A few days later, I was running on the desert trail near our Caballo Lake trailers — 1970s mobile homes on a couple of acres bordering Caballo National Park and the dammed-up Rio Grande. The trailers are over fifty years old. So am I, more or less. We understand each other.

I ran down to the shore of the lake, took off my shoes and socks, and stepped into the water. It was cold. Not Denmark cold — I will tell you about Denmark in a moment — but cold enough. I stood there with the mud between my toes and the sun on my face and let my physical body feel what the earth felt like. The water. The sand. The slight sting of cold.

Years ago, I was in Denmark with my colleague Kenneth Mørens, running a four-day seminar for heads of social service agencies from across Scandinavia. The political climate was shifting — migrants were being turned away at borders, services were being cut — and we were doing True Storytelling work with the women running those agencies. What we found was remarkable: many of the managers and executives had begun quietly sheltering migrants in their own homes. Getting them into English classes. Onto soccer teams. Into colleges. While politicians performed cruelty, these women were performing humanity.

At the end of the seminar, Kenneth took me to the very northern tip of Denmark, where the North Sea and the Baltic Sea collide in a line of churning water. He said: step in. I stepped in. The cold was beyond anything I had experienced — colder than any freezer, colder than any ice I had ever touched. I believe I screamed. I may have cursed Kenneth. It was, he assured me, very good for the nervous system.

He was right. Cold water activates both branches of the body's nervous system at once — the sympathetic, which governs action and response, and the parasympathetic, which governs rest and restoration. The Yin and Yang of your own biology, shocked into simultaneous wakefulness. Balance by immersion.

Standing in Caballo Lake, I thought about that. About how sometimes balance is not a gradual, peaceful process. Sometimes it is a shock. A diagnosis. A stroke. A nurse walking in at the wrong moment. Something that wakes all four bodies up at once and says: pay attention. You are here. This is your life.

Grace Ann's Stroke

I need to tell you about Grace Ann, because her story is woven into mine, and because what happened between us in a rehabilitation center in Las Cruces is the clearest example I know of bliss in the middle of suffering.

We were at the Caballo Lake trailers when it started. She noticed things going slightly wrong — small things, easy to explain away. She wanted to wait it out. We called a doctor friend in another city. He said: get to the hospital. Now.

We did not pack. We just drove. An hour to Las Cruces, Grace Ann in the passenger seat, losing control of the left side of her face bit by bit, her arm going unreliable, her leg following. She kept saying it was probably nothing. I was scared to death. To lose Grace Ann would be something I could not handle, then or now. I pretended to be calm, cool, and collected. She maintained her actual cool, which is the difference between us.

We said the word stroke in the emergency room and they moved. Within twenty minutes she had her own room and

was off to a CT scan. Within a week, we had checked into a rehabilitation center down the block.

This was the kind of stroke that crimps a blood vessel slowly, starving the cells around it until they die. The left side of her body had to relearn everything. Picking up a marble. Stacking coins. Moving an arm across a wire spiral without dropping the grip. Each small movement was a negotiation between her will and a body that had forgotten how to listen.

I was not allowed to help her at first — rehab protocols, liability, professional boundaries. Then they trained me. I learned to strap a belt around her waist and walk the hall with her. I helped her with things I had never helped with before, intimate things, things that required me to set aside every pretense of dignity and just be present for another human being.

And here is what I want to tell you: we experienced bliss in that rehabilitation center.

Not despite the stroke. Not after it. In it. Every day was a new miracle — a finger that could grip, a leg that could kick, a word that came out clearly. We made little videos of her progress. We laughed. We cried. We were more present with each other than we had been in years, because there was nothing left to hide behind. No career, no schedule, no performance of strength. Just two people, four bodies between them, learning balance together.

After four weeks, we walked out of that center together, me with my hand on the strap around her waist, ready to catch her if she listed left. She did not list. She walked.

Nahdion's Songs

I want to tell you about our horse Nahdion — spelled N-A-H-D-I-O-N, an Arabian stallion who was gelded but did not let that stop his healing work. He died at thirty-three, which is a long life for a horse and a full one.

Nahdion was a healer. People knew it and came to the barn to be with him. He did not ask questions. When someone needed healing, Nahdion would show up in whatever way was needed, do the work without fanfare, and move off. A quiet professional.

After he passed, he began sending Grace Ann songs. Fifteen songs, one each day, for fifteen days, each one chosen to meet her exactly where she was in her grief. Some were sorrowful. Some were funny. One was "My Boyfriend's Back." One was "Leader of the Pack."

A departed Arabian stallion, sending a grieving woman "Leader of the Pack." I do not know how to explain this in academic language and I am not going to try. What I know is that Grace Ann heard them. She made a video of all fifteen songs and what each one meant to her. YouTube took it down because she did not have the rights to the music. Nahdion, apparently, did not think to clear the licensing.

The spiritual body does not operate on our schedule or follow our rules. It shows up when it is needed, in whatever form will be received. Sometimes it is an angel barefoot in an arroyo. Sometimes it is a guardian angel in black with enormous wings who does not talk much but gives a great hug. Sometimes it is a departed horse with a sense of humor.

Balance, at the spiritual level, means staying open to all of it.

Back on the Horses

Grace Ann and I are riding again. Her horse is Clyde — a male gelding who still thinks he is a stallion, old-style Mustang stock from the 1960s, bred for the short neck and the powerful rump, smart and opinionated. My horse is Fancy, a mare of similar lineage and considerable personality.

Grace Ann cannot yet stabilize the way she used to. Her body moves differently now, the left side still finding its confidence. The horse feels every shift of her seat bones and responds — lean left, he drifts left, hold too tight, he tightens. Riding is not something you do to a horse. It is a conversation between four bodies: yours and his, physical and spiritual, Yin and Yang.

She is having that conversation again. That, to me, is the definition of a balanced life. Not a life without stroke or cancer or Agent Orange or grief. A life where you keep coming back to the conversation. You keep getting back on the horse.

A Practice for You: The Four-Body Check-In

When I run now, I do a simple muscle-testing practice that you can adapt for yourself without the muscle testing if that is not your way. I call it the four-body check-in. I ask four questions, one for each body:

Physical body: Where is the tension or pain, and what does it need right now — more movement, more rest, more cold water, more sun?

Emotional body: What am I feeling that I have not named yet today? Is it one of the four gangsters — anger, pride,

greed, deceit — or is it something cleaner, like grief or love or gratitude?

Mental body: What story am I telling myself right now? Is it a true story, or is it a gangster story dressed up in reasonable clothing?

Spiritual body: Am I listening? Not talking, not asking, not demanding signs. Just listening.

You do not need to be jogging on BLM land or stepping into a cold lake to do this. You can do it in a waiting room, holding your pee, with a rubber balloon in your rectum and a young woman steering a camera through your insides. If I could find moments of clarity in that radiation clinic, I promise you can find them wherever you are.

Balance is not a destination. It is a direction. And the direction is always: all four bodies, awake, in conversation, moving together.

Let's keep running.

Chapter 1 — B is for Balance Journal Questions

1. What has your body been through that you have not yet fully acknowledged? Not medically — what has it survived, endured, or recovered from that deserves to be named out loud?

2. When did someone give you a choice between two difficult things, and you chose the harder one because it was more alive? What did you choose, and what did it cost?

3. Think of a moment when all four of your bodies — physical, emotional, mental, spiritual — were present at

the same time. Where were you? What were you doing?
What did it feel like?

Chapter 2 — L is for Love and Listen

Loving and Listening to Every Being Vibrating in the Quantum Universe

I want to tell you how I became a vegetarian.

It was at a conference in Pennsylvania. I walked into the cafeteria and I saw a woman across the room. I did not know her name. I did not know anything about her. But in that instant — not slowly, not after deliberation — my soul recognized something. Not sensual pleasure. Not the ordinary excitement of man-meets-woman. Something deeper and quieter than that. A radiance. An energy I could feel from across the room. Chitrabhanu calls it ānanda — the permanent bliss of being, the awakened consciousness of the soul recognizing its own truth in another.

I walked across the cafeteria and got in line behind her. She was talking to the woman in front of her, saying: I am only going to date vegetarians from now on. I had to cook meat dishes for my first husband and I am done with that.

I raised my hand.

"Hey," I said. "I'm vegetarian. What's good here?"

I had never eaten a vegetarian meal in my life. I rarely ate a salad. I had never shared a table with a vegetarian, as far as I knew. But in that nanosecond, something in me made a permanent decision. I was going to be whatever this woman needed me to be, starting with herbivorous.

Her name was Grace Ann Rosile. She proceeded to walk past everything I would normally have chosen and select nuts, berries, sesame seeds, and a few other things I could

not identify. I imitated her choices exactly. That was thirty years ago. I have not eaten meat since.

That is what real listening looks like before you even open your mouth. The soul paying attention before the ego can interfere.

The Fire at Midnight

That same evening, Grace Ann offered to drive me and my colleague Bob to a Native American ceremony taking place in the wilderness outside the conference. There had been some diplomatic complexity — Bob and I had a reputation as conference crashers, and the officers of the main conference had asked us not to attend the indigenous gathering happening nearby. But someone from that gathering had heard we were disinvited and sent a personal invitation. They wanted us there.

Grace Ann had a big Buick — one of those old-style American cars with actual chrome bumpers, not the plastic shells they make today. We piled in, the three of us, with a hand-drawn map, and drove for nearly an hour into the darkness. We got lost several times. We arrived close to midnight.

When we found the fire, there were only two people there: an elder, and a young man of maybe sixteen or seventeen. The young man was sitting by the fire playing a flute. The elder welcomed us without reproach for our lateness. He explained that the rocks arranged around the fire — about twenty of them, surrounding the larger blaze — each represented a person at the conference. They kept the fire burning all night for all of them. And the young man, he told us, was preparing to go on his first vision quest.

As he said those words, the young man put away his flute, stood, and walked off alone into the trees.

I stood across that fire from Grace Ann and I looked at her face.

The firelight moved on her. I could see something that I can only describe now, with the language I have learned since, as her aura — the colors and vibrations of her four bodies present and alive. Her physical body in the flickering light. Her emotional body open, receptive, moved by what we had just witnessed. Her mental body quiet for once, not analyzing or explaining. And her spiritual body — I saw it clearly — the radiance of a person who was, in that moment, entirely herself.

She looked like an angel.

I heard the leaves move in the wind above us. I looked up and saw the stars and the moon. And I knew — with the same certainty I had felt when I saw her across the cafeteria, only deeper now, confirmed by a midnight fire and a boy walking into the dark toward his own becoming — that Grace Ann Rosile was my soulmate.

I did not tell her that night. I was not ready. But I knew.

\$800 a Month

I flew home to Los Angeles. This was before cell phones. If you are too young to remember what that means — it means that when you wanted to talk to someone in another state, you picked up a telephone with buttons, dialed a number, and paid by the minute. Long-distance calls were expensive. A month of nightly calls between Los Angeles and Pennsylvania cost Grace Ann and me about \$800 combined. That is roughly \$1,800 in today's money.

We talked every night. We talked all night.

And here is the thing about those conversations that I want you to understand: we were not performing. We were not presenting our best selves. We were not managing impressions or crafting narratives. We told each other the truth, story by story, taking turns, for months.

She told me about her horses. She had seventeen of them on a ranch in Pennsylvania. If you know Grace Ann, you know that twenty minutes will not go by without a horse story. I told her about my Harley Davidson. She told me about her first marriage. I told her about mine, about my children, about the years I was too stuck in my ego to be the father they deserved. She told me about the children in her first husband's family, the ones she helped raise without having any of her own. We talked about faith — she had grown up Catholic, and so had I, and we had both kept the faith and lost it and found it again in different forms. We talked about Jainism, which she was already practicing. I was just beginning to understand it.

We even talked about whether we would be lovers. Two people who recognized each other as soulmates at a midnight fire, calling across a continent, wondering: what if we get together in person and the physical part does not work? Neither of us wanted to enter a relationship without that. So we talked about it, honestly, as two adults who had each been through enough to know that pretending does not serve anyone.

Chitrabhanu talks about this kind of love in his teaching on the twelve facets of reality. He describes ānanda — bliss — as an experience of inward well-being, the realization of truth in communication, a freedom from illusion. That is what those phone calls were. We were removing the karmic particles of ego, one honest story at a time, so that what was left was as close to the pure soul as two imperfect humans can get.

Finally, after two months or more, Grace Ann said: why don't you just fly over here? We'll find out if we're in love at the pleasure level or not. Get an airline ticket and come meet Nahdion.

Nahdion

I flew to Pittsburgh. This was the era when people could still come to the gate to meet a plane, before the TSA changed everything, so Grace Ann was standing there when I walked off the jetway. We drove a long way to her ranch. I put my suitcase down and she took me straight to the barn.

Nahdion was in his stall. He was an Arabian stallion — gelded, but do not let that fool you, his healing gifts were entirely intact. He was one of the most remarkable beings I have ever met in any body, human or otherwise.

He heard us coming. He put his head over the stall door, and the moment I walked up, he licked my face. One long, slow lick from my neck to my forehead. I stood there, his tongue on my face, not knowing if this was good or bad.

Grace Ann said: he has never done that with anyone. Not once. Not even with my first husband.

I understood, in that moment, that I had passed a more important test than any of the phone calls.

We went into the indoor arena. Grace Ann connected Nahdion to a lunge line and had him move in circles at a good pace while I sat in the saddle. I had been on a horse once in my life — briefly, at age fifteen, during some adolescent adventure I barely remember. But I rode a Harley Davidson, and balance is balance. Grace Ann told me to take my feet out of the stirrups. I did. The horse was

probably 1,600 pounds of moving energy beneath me. I stayed on.

"How was that?" Grace Ann asked.

I was too busy grinning to answer properly.

The answer to the other question — the one about pleasure — also turned out well. Thirty years and counting.

The Revelation

This morning, I asked Grace Ann a question.

I said: do you remember the time we stayed up all night on the phone, talking to each other, sharing everything?

She said yes.

I asked: do we still have conversations like that?

There was a pause. And then she said something that stopped me cold.

She said: "We haven't had conversations like that for seven or ten years. Because you always drop into lecture mode. When I ask you something or say something I don't understand and want to explore, you just keep going. So I stopped having conversations with you."

Revelation. I sat with that word. I keep sitting with it.

I have spent forty years studying organizational storytelling. I wrote books on listening. I built a consulting methodology — the PERVIEW process — around the principle that you listen before you tell, that you hold space for the other person's story before offering your own. I teach executives and managers and coaches and

therapists how to stop performing attention and start giving it.

And my own wife stopped having conversations with me seven to ten years ago because I lecture.

There is a Jain teaching that the four gangsters of ego — Anger, Pride, Greed, and Deceit — do not always announce themselves loudly. Sometimes Pride walks in quietly, dressed as expertise, and takes over the room without you noticing. I had become so certain that I knew how to listen, so proud of my knowledge about listening, that I had stopped doing the actual thing.

Grace Ann was not angry when she said this to me. She said it the way someone says something they have known for a long time and have mostly made their peace with. That was the part that hurt most. Not that she was upset. That she had already stopped expecting it to be different.

I thought about Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, the novel by Robert Pirsig published in 1974 after being rejected by 121 publishers. One hundred and twenty-one. It went on to sell five million copies. I studied it in graduate school and it still moves me decades later. The first half of the book is a father and son riding a motorcycle together. The father is describing the mechanics of the bike, but the bike is a metaphor for the mechanics of relationship — the quality of attention you bring to something, the difference between performing maintenance and actually being present with the machine, or the person, you are tending. My mentor Lou Pondy assigned that book and wept when he discussed it. I understand why. There is something fitting about a book on quality being rejected 121 times before the world caught up to it.

I had been performing maintenance on my marriage. Going through the motions of connection — present at breakfast, present at the barn, present in the same house — without being present in conversation. The difference between being in the same room and actually meeting someone there.

Zen and the Art of Listening to a Horse

This morning, after talking with Grace Ann, I went out to ride Fancy.

Fancy is a mare — old-style Mustang stock, bred for the shorter neck and powerful rump, strong and opinionated. She and I have our routines. I know how she likes to be groomed, where she is sensitive, how tight to cinch the girth before she will consider cooperating. But today I tried something different. As I was saddling her, I asked her: can we have a conversation today? Can we go back and forth?

I listened — not with my ears, but with my hands and my body and whatever it is that opens up when you stop filling the silence with your own noise. And I felt her tell me, through the way she held herself, how she wanted the girth. Not too tight, not yet. Give her a moment.

I gave her a moment. She relaxed. I tightened the girth slowly. She accepted it without her usual protest.

We had a good ride. I sat with my back straight, looking at the horizon the way western dressage requires, my body in rhythm with hers. Not directing her so much as conversing with her — suggesting through my seat bones, listening for her response, adjusting, suggesting again. Nahdion would have approved.

Pirsig writes about quality — that elusive thing that is not in the object and not in the subject but in the relationship between them, in the attention brought to the encounter. That is what listening is. Not a technique. A quality of attention. The difference between waiting for your turn and actually being changed by what the other person says.

I came back to the barn thinking about Grace Ann's words. We don't have conversations anymore. And I thought: I am going to change that. Not because I should. Because I want to. Because those phone calls thirty years ago — \$800 a month, all night, every night — were some of the best hours of my life. And I would like some of them back.

What Love Is Not

I want to say something about love and pleasure, because this book is about bliss and people will assume I am talking about happiness and sensation and the good feeling of things going well.

Since the cancer treatments — 26 rounds of radiation, the hormone shots, the clinical trial — I have not been able to have sex. The testosterone is too low. The physical mechanism is not working the way it used to. I am using a pump device to encourage blood flow, and my spirit guide tells me the testosterone is on the rise, and I believe him, and I look forward to that return. I love pleasure. I am not against it.

But here is what the cancer did for me, in addition to everything it took: it separated out the layers of love so I could see what was underneath.

When you cannot have sex, you find out what else you have. For Grace Ann and me, it is this: cuddling. Holding one another. Being genuinely excited to see each other after a few hours apart. Talking — or trying to, now that I

know I have been lecturing. Sitting in the barn together. Watching her work with Clyde and seeing the way she has rebuilt her connection with him since the stroke, her left side still finding its footing, the horse responding to every micro-shift of her weight.

Chitrabhanu describes two kinds of joy. Sukha is the pleasure that comes from favorable conditions — things going your way, the body working, the good meal, the successful outcome. It is real, and it is good, and there is nothing wrong with it. But ānanda is something else. It is the permanent bliss of the soul's own nature, available in conditions that are not favorable, in the rehabilitation center and the radiation waiting room and the conversation where your wife tells you she stopped talking to you years ago. Ānanda does not require the conditions to be right. It is what is there when you stop requiring the conditions to be right.

I am learning, at seventy-something, what it means to love someone without requiring anything in return. Not because I am enlightened — the four gangsters will tell you I am not — but because the cancer and the stroke and the radiation and the rehab have stripped away enough of the ego's requirements that I can sometimes, on a good morning, just be glad she is there.

That is what L is for Love means. Not romance, though romance is good. Not pleasure, though pleasure will return. The permanent bliss of recognizing your soulmate across a cafeteria, across a midnight fire, across thirty years of a shared life, and knowing: this is the person. Whatever form the love takes today, this is the person.

The Dad Who Finally Listened

Let me tell you about the moment I saw someone stop performing listening and actually listen for the first time.

It was my father.

Years after Spokane, after Brazil, after the jail and Vietnam and all the distance between us, my father became an entrepreneur. He had always been a man of schemes and energy and charm, the kind of person who could walk into a room and make things happen. After ITT, after Jan, after the family he left behind in a motel room, he built businesses. Some worked. Some did not.

One of them was failing badly when he came to me for advice. I could see what was wrong. The workers had not been paid. In response, they had put their foot on the accelerator and burned out the motors of his trucks. When he replaced them, they burned out the replacements. They did the same to the tractors, the big mowers, the equipment. There was no money left to pay anyone or repair anything. The business was beyond saving.

I explained this to him. And for the first time in my memory, my father went quiet and listened. Really listened. I watched his face change as the words reached him — not the information, but the reality behind it. The resignation. The acknowledgment that it was over. He had been a man of forward motion his whole life, always the next venture, the next country, the next idea. And here he was, sitting still, listening to his son tell him it was done.

I ran out of things to say. There was nothing left to offer except what was true.

"I love you," I said.

The look on his face — surprise, then something softer, then a kind of peace — told me that those three words, in that moment, were the only useful thing I had said in the entire conversation. All the analysis, all the explanation,

all the accurate diagnosis of what had gone wrong. None of it mattered the way those three words mattered.

He went on. He created another business, found new investors, invented something else. That was who he was. But something had shifted between us in that room. We had, for one conversation, actually been present with each other. He had listened. I had stopped analyzing and just loved him.

I think about that conversation whenever I am tempted to keep explaining when someone needs me to stop.

Listening in Organizations

Grace Ann and I developed a conversational interviewing approach that we use in our consulting and coaching work through GrowthOD. Before we offer any recommendations, before we present any frameworks or findings, we listen. We interview. We ask the True Storytelling questions — what is already working, what stories are already present in this organization's history, what are the bets people are making about the future, what is it like to be inside this system right now, what is it becoming, what are the artifacts that communicate the real culture, and what lies beyond the current story?

But the most important thing we watch for is not what people say. It is whether they are listening to each other.

In most organizations, people are not having conversations. They are taking turns presenting. Someone speaks. The next person waits, planning their response, and then speaks. There is no genuine exchange — no moment where what one person says actually changes what the next person was going to say. The content passes through the room like ships in a harbor, each one on its

own course, occasionally visible to the others but never really meeting.

Real listening is different. When it happens, you can see it in the body. The person leans forward slightly. Their eyes change. They lose the faint expression of preparation — that subtle tension of someone composing their next sentence — and become receptive instead. What the other person is saying is actually landing. And when they respond, their response begins from where the other person left off, not from where they had planned to begin.

In the PERVIEW method — our seven-step conversational coaching process — I ask questions, but the art is in knowing which question to ask next and which ones to leave unasked. Each phase of the process opens a door. The client steps through or they do not. If I am truly listening, I can feel which door they are ready for. If I am lecturing — if I am in my head, running the protocol, proud of my methodology — I miss it.

Ralph helps me. My muscle testing helps me. But the most honest signal is simply this: am I curious about what this person is going to say next, or am I waiting for them to finish so I can say what I already know?

Curiosity is love in its most practical form.

A Practice for You: The Conversation Test

Here is a simple practice for this chapter, one I am doing myself as I write it.

Think of the person you are closest to — your partner, your child, your oldest friend. And ask yourself honestly: when did we last have a real conversation? Not an exchange of information. Not the logistics of a shared life. A conversation where something one of you said actually

surprised the other, where the direction of the talk shifted because of what was discovered in the talking.

If you cannot remember, that is important information. It does not mean the love is gone. It may mean the love has gone quiet, the way Grace Ann went quiet — not in anger, but in accommodation to a pattern that had stopped serving her.

The next time you are with that person, try this: ask them one question you do not already know the answer to. Not a logistical question. A real one. Something you are genuinely curious about. And then — this is the hard part — listen to the answer without planning your response. Let what they say land. Let it change something in you before you speak.

Then ask a second question that begins from where their answer left off.

That is a conversation. Two questions and a genuine response. That is all it takes to begin.

I asked Grace Ann this morning: are we having a conversation yet? She laughed — ha, ha, ha — in her loving way, which is its own kind of answer. We are working on it. Thirty years in, we are starting over at the beginning, which is exactly where the best things start.

Loving the Whole Universe

I want to end this chapter where the chapter heading began: loving and listening to every being vibrating in the quantum universe.

When I run with my arms out like a hawk, extending my consciousness out through the solar system and into the Milky Way and into the entangled whole of everything, I

am not doing something separate from loving Grace Ann or listening to Fancy or sitting with a stranger in a radiation waiting room and telling him he is in control.

It is the same movement. The same opening. The quantum non-local entanglement that connects my 36 trillion living cells to the energy of the universe is the same principle that connected my soul to Grace Ann's across a cafeteria, before I knew her name, before I became a vegetarian, before thirty years of shared life made us who we are together.

Love, at its deepest level, is not a feeling about a particular person. It is a way of being present — to the person in front of you, to the horse under you, to the elder tending a fire in the dark, to the son walking into the woods on his first vision quest, to the angel standing barefoot in an arroyo saying oh, perfect when you tell him your name.

Chitrabhanu says: bliss is balance. Love is what happens when you are balanced enough to be fully present. Listening is how you get there.

I am still learning. The lecture mode is strong in me. But this morning, for a few minutes at the breakfast table, I asked a question and waited for the answer and let it change me.

That was enough. That was bliss.

Chapter 2 – L is for Love and Listen Journal

Questions

1. When did you last cut in line – metaphorically or literally – because something in you recognized a moment you could not afford to miss? What happened?

2. Is there someone in your life who has gone quiet with you – stopped having real conversations – the way Grace Ann went quiet? What do you think they stopped expecting?

3. Who taught you what it actually means to listen — not to wait for your turn, but to be genuinely changed by what someone else said? What did they say that changed you?

Chapter 3 — I is for Internal Divinity

The Elevator from Your Mind Down to Your Heart

When I was six years old, I walked three miles to church by myself to make my confession.

It was a Saturday morning in Spokane, Washington. Saint Charles Parish. The walk felt like ten miles when you are six, but I made it. I went inside, knelt in the pew, and I felt something I did not have a name for yet. A stillness. A connection. The kind of thing the Catholic Church, in its better moments, was trying to point toward when it talked about the presence of God. I was scared of God in those days — the way He was portrayed at Saint Charles, He was not particularly warm. Jesus on the cross was alarming to a six-year-old. Even the Sacred Heart of Mary, which I loved, had that image of a heart outside a body, which takes some getting used to.

But underneath the fear, in the pew, there was something else. A sense of being held. Of being known. Of the boundary between me and everything else becoming momentarily thin.

I was one with God, and God was one with me.

After confession, I said my penance — the Our Fathers and Hail Marys the priest assigned — and then, because I have always been one to go big or go home, I added a personal request. I asked God to make me Superman. Specifically the Clark Kent version, with the glasses and Lois Lane. I liked that comic book story.

I walked home. I did not become Superman. But that morning in the pew was the first time I knew, in my body and not just in my head, that there was something inside

me that was not my thoughts, not my fear, not my parents' arguments, not the confusion of being a small child in a complicated family. Something quiet and steady and clean. Something that has been there my whole life, underneath everything else, waiting for me to remember it.

That is Internal Divinity. Not a concept. A sensation. The soul's own nature, felt in a body, in a pew, at six years old, on a Saturday morning in Spokane.

The Irrigation Ditch

I need to tell you something that happened before the church, because it is part of the same story.

I was four years old, maybe five. My father was building a new house next to his grandfather's farm — he was a man who loved the land and the river and the old ways, the Spokane River running cold and clear nearby, his grandfather's cows and chickens, a life rooted in place. My mother wanted a brick house in the suburbs. They argued about this constantly. I went outside to get away from the arguing.

There was an irrigation ditch nearby. The water was running fast — five feet deep, moving at what seemed to me like a hundred miles an hour. I went into the water. I have wondered, across the years, whether I fell or was pushed. My mother had been through grief before I was born — twins, from a relationship with a married man, who died in infancy. My father knew and married her anyway. There were wounds in that house that I did not understand as a child and am only beginning to understand now.

What I know is that I went under. I was swept away by the current. The neighbors pulled me out and revived me. I do

not remember the experience itself — people who have undergone hypnosis sometimes recover early memories like this, but I have not tried. What I know from muscle testing with Ralph, my guardian angel, is that he was there in that ditch. He lifted me. The neighbors revived the body. But Ralph brought the soul back.

Here is what I believe that near-death experience did to my soul: it opened it. At four years old, before the anger and the abandonment and the jail and the war and all the decades of the gangsters spinning their stories, my consciousness was cracked open to the quantum universe. The boundary between me and everything else became permanently thinner than it is for most people. I was an innocent before that ditch. After it, I was an innocent who had touched something vast.

I did not know this for most of my life. I thought I was just a kid from Spokane with a difficult family. But looking back now, from the shore of Caballo Lake, arms extended into the sun — the irrigation ditch was the first elevator. The first descent below the thinking mind into something deeper. I did not choose it. It chose me.

The Years the Elevator Was Broken

After the ditch, the nail through my knee. My father had strung electric fence around the yard to keep me in after the near-drowning, so I was confined and climbing on the two-by-sixes of the new basement construction nearby. A twelve-penny nail through a two-by-four was lying there and it went through my knee. I was screaming. My father told me to quit being a baby. You're going to live. It's just a nail. You'll get plenty more nail holes as you grow up.

He was not wrong about that last part.

My parents did not have a license for parenting. They had never been properly held themselves. My mother's stepfather had done things to her in a woodshed that I will not name. My father's people were farmers and phone company workers along the Spokane River — good people, but not people who expressed love with their hands or their words. Nobody in that family tree knew how to hug.

Then came my seventh birthday, the used bicycle my father had fixed up with streamers and a horn, my mother's fury at the insult of a used bicycle, my father's 180 and his retreat to the bar, and the long slow unraveling of whatever had been holding that family together.

And then came the divorce, the motel room in Spokane, the welfare and food stamps, the anger at my mother and then at my father and then, finally, at God. Because if God was real and God was good and God had held me in a pew at Saint Charles at age six, how had all of this happened? How had a six-year-old who asked to be Superman ended up at nineteen in a jail cell on Christmas, with a man smuggling wine in his hollow prosthetic legs and a preacher handing out rolling tobacco and calling everyone sinners?

The Internal Divinity did not disappear during those years. But I could not feel it. The elevator was broken. The ego's noise — the four gangsters running their stories, the anger and pride and greed and deceit all talking at once — was too loud for that quiet underneath to be heard.

I suspect this is where many of you are right now. Not six years old in a pew, feeling held. But grown, and tired, and wondering if that feeling was ever real, or just a child's wishful thinking in a scary world.

It was real. I know because I found it again. And I can tell you how.

God on an Aircraft Carrier

My father was in the Pacific when I was born, then sent to Korea as part of General Douglas MacArthur's fleet. He was not there for the irrigation ditch. He was not there for the nail. He was doing what men of his generation did — serving his country, carrying his own wounds in his own silence, not knowing how to come home once the war was over.

I held this against him for decades. The anger at my father and the anger at God became the same anger, because God is supposed to be the Father who does not leave, and mine left, and if even God abandoned you, what was left to trust?

What I understand now, from the other side of that anger, is that my father was also a man who had never been taught to take the elevator down. He lived in his head, in his schemes and ventures and inventions, always the next thing, always forward motion, never still enough to hear what was underneath. He passed that pattern to me. I spent thirty years living in my head — in my career, my publications, my lecturing, my expertise — and calling it a life.

The Internal Divinity was waiting in me the whole time. It waits in everyone. That is what Chitrabhanu means when he says the soul is intrinsically pure, blissful, omniscient — not a potential to be developed but a reality to be uncovered. You do not build Internal Divinity. You remove what is covering it. The karmic particles of ego. The gangsters' stories. The noise of a mind that has been running on fear since a four-year-old went into an irrigation ditch.

Holy Fire Reiki and the Quantum Timeline

The moment the elevator started working again came during my Holy Fire Reiki training, at the Masters Level Three.

I was still angry at God. Decades of Reiki practice, years of Jain meditation, the name Arihanta, the five thousand steps of Mount Palitana — all of it had helped, but underneath there was still a hard knot of anger at the Father who had not kept me safe. At the God who had let the twins die and let my mother be hurt in a woodshed and let a family fall apart in a motel room and let a nineteen-year-old boy spend Christmas in jail.

In the training, they walked me through a process called the quantum timeline. It is a meditation that allows you to travel back along the thread of your own life to the earliest moment when a particular wound was formed. I went back looking for the first moment I had felt anger at God.

I found it. The specific moment, the specific feeling, the child's version of the betrayal.

And in that moment, something in the training — the Holy Fire energy, the presence of whatever moves through that practice, call it what you will — collapsed the wave. That is the quantum storytelling term for it: collapsing the wave function, bringing the unresolved possibility into resolution. One instant I was inside the old wound. The next instant I was back in the training room, and the anger was gone.

Not suppressed. Not managed. Gone.

My body felt lighter. My mind was clear. My emotions were clean. I was back in my innocent state — the faith of a child, the way it felt in that pew at Saint Charles at age six

before the world had accumulated on top of it. The only word I have for the sensation is the word this whole book is built on.

Bliss.

I sat there and tried to understand it intellectually, the way I always do, and then I stopped trying, because understanding it was not the point. Feeling it was the point. Being it was the point.

I had taken the elevator down.

Faster Than the Speed of Light

Remember the six-year-old who asked God to make him Superman?

I want to tell you what God gave me instead.

I can extend my consciousness, in an instant, to the full reach of the quantum universe. Not traveling — instantaneous. Quantum non-local entanglement does not require time the way physical travel does. When I run on the BLM land in Las Cruces with my arms out like a hawk, I am simultaneously on the shore of that arroyo and inside every cell of the Milky Way and present in the entangled whole of everything that exists. It takes no time. It takes less than a breath.

Superman could fly. I can be everywhere at once.

I am not saying this to impress you. I am saying it because I believe it is available to everyone, and most people do not know it because they have never taken the elevator below the thinking mind to the place where the soul touches the quantum field. The body's thirty-six trillion living cells are not separate from the universe — they are

made of it, entangled with it, vibrating at its frequencies. When you drop from your head to your heart, you do not disconnect from the world. You connect to more of it than the thinking mind can hold.

Ralph is with me on this. I ask him questions now and he answers — not in long speeches, he is not a talker, but in the quiet yes or no of muscle testing, in the brief downloads that come when I am still enough to receive them. I have asked him to vet any spirit that approaches me, to ensure it is for my highest good. He has agreed. In the last weeks, doing the ESP and mediumship practices from my Quantum Sixth Sense work, I have been separating ego from spiritual awareness — learning to tell the difference between the voice of the gangsters and the voice of Internal Divinity. They feel different in the body. The gangsters feel like pressure, like urgency, like the heat of shame or the cold of fear. Internal Divinity feels like that thing in the pew. Quiet. Steady. Clean.

The Elevator: How to Take It

The image I use is simple, and I want you to try it right now if you are willing.

Imagine an elevator inside your body. The top floor is your mind — your thoughts, your to-do lists, your arguments, your expertise, your memories, your plans. Most of us live on the top floor. We wake up there and go to sleep there and barely notice there are other floors.

Now press the button for the ground floor. The heart.

The descent is not dramatic. It is quiet. As the elevator moves down through your chest, you may notice the thoughts getting softer, less insistent. The body becomes more present — the weight of your feet on the floor, the movement of your breath, the temperature of the air. By

the time you arrive at the heart, the mind is still there, but it is upstairs, and you are here, in something older and quieter and more trustworthy than thought.

In Jain teaching, this is the *jiva* — the soul in its natural state, intrinsically pure and blissful, covered over by karmic matter but never corrupted by it. In Catholic mysticism it is the ground of the soul, what Meister Eckhart called the spark of divinity that cannot be extinguished. In Holy Fire Reiki it is the sacred space that the practice opens and clears. Different maps. Same territory.

You do not need to be a Jain or a Catholic or a Reiki practitioner to take this elevator. You need only to be willing to be quiet for sixty seconds. To stop explaining yourself to yourself. To let the thinking mind do what it rarely does — wait.

What you find at the bottom is not nothing. It is everything you were before the world told you what you were supposed to be. It is the innocence before the irrigation ditch. It is the faith of the six-year-old in the pew. It is your Internal Divinity, which has been there all along, patient as God, waiting for you to come home.

Caballo Lake, Arms Extended

I am standing in the cold water of Caballo Lake as I finish this chapter in my mind, the Caballo Mountains rising behind me, the sun coming down white and clean through my crown chakra, the earth energy rising through my bare feet in the sand and mud.

I extend my arms. I extend my awareness — out through the Jornada del Muerto desert, through the atmosphere, past the moon, past the sun, past the solar system moving at 550,000 miles per hour through the Milky Way, past

the galaxy itself hurtling through its small corner of the infinite universe. The thirty-six trillion living cells of my body are entangled with all of it. I am the hawk and the hackberry tree and the cold water and the angle of the afternoon light.

In a few minutes, or hours, or seconds, the thinking mind will come knocking on the door of my head with its agenda, its worries, its four gangsters with their familiar stories. I know this. I am not trying to be rid of it. I am not trying to stay in this state forever. I am just here, in it, for now.

This is what I want to give you in this chapter. Not a permanent altered state. Not samadhi or enlightenment or any destination that requires you to leave your ordinary life behind. Just this: the knowledge, in your body, that there is something in you that is not your thoughts.

Something quiet and steady and clean.

Something that was there before the world got to you and will be there after the world is done with you.

I know what it is to have bliss. It is this. Right here. The elevator at the ground floor, the heart open, the soul recognizing itself.

You can come here too. You already know the way. You have always known.

A Practice: The Sixty-Second Descent

Here is the simplest practice in this book. You can do it anywhere — in a car, in a waiting room, at a kitchen table, on the shore of a lake.

Close your eyes if it is safe to do so, or soften your gaze if it is not. Take one slow breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Feel your feet on the ground beneath you.

Now put your attention on your chest — not your lungs, which are working, but the center of your chest, the heart space. Do not analyze it. Do not explain it. Just rest your attention there, the way you might rest your hand on the shoulder of someone you love.

Stay there for sixty seconds. When the thinking mind offers you a thought — and it will, within about four seconds — notice it without following it and return to the heart space. Not fighting the thought. Not judging it. Just returning.

Sixty seconds. That is one descent on the elevator.

Do this once a day for a week and notice what changes. Not what you think about it. What changes in how you move through your day. Whether the four gangsters seem slightly less convincing. Whether the people around you seem slightly more present to you. Whether there are moments — brief, ordinary, unremarkable moments — that feel, for no particular reason, like enough.

That is Internal Divinity at work. Not Superman. Something better. Something that was already yours.

Chapter 3 – I is for Internal Divinity Journal Questions

1. When did you first feel – not think, feel – that there was something inside you that was not your thoughts? Describe the physical sensation, the place, the moment.

2. What is the thing you asked for as a child – from God, from a parent, from the universe – that you did not get? And looking back now, what did you get instead?

3. Take sixty seconds right now and try the elevator practice. Breathe once, rest your attention on your heart space. Then write: what was there?

Chapter 4 — S is for Self-Talk

Aligning What You Say to Yourself with Your Higher Self

The most persistent lie my self-talk ever told me is that my anger justified violence.

It is the story that ran the longest in my seventy-eight years on this planet. It cost me the most — my relationships with the people I loved, my spirituality, and quite a few strangers. And it turned out to be completely false.

This chapter is about that lie. How it forms. How it runs. How the four gangsters — Anger, Pride, Greed, and Deceit — take turns driving it deeper into your skull until you cannot tell the difference between the gangsters' voice and your own. And how you learn, slowly and imperfectly and usually after considerable damage, to align your self-talk with your Higher Self instead.

I am going to tell you three stories. They are not flattering. I am telling them anyway, because a book about self-talk that does not show you the author's worst self-talk is not an honest book. And this book is nothing if it is not honest.

Coming Home from Vietnam

I landed in Oakland on a Pan Am flight with hundreds of other GIs. We were ushered into the men's room and told to strip off our fatigues and throw them in the trash. If we walked out in uniform, we were told, the peaceniks would attack us, spit on us, call us baby-killers.

I did what I was told. I bought shorts, a t-shirt that said I Love San Francisco, and a pair of sandals. The only thing

that gave me away was my hair, cut as short as the fuzz on a tennis ball.

Years later, I found the research. The spitting story was a myth. Ninety-nine percent of the documented spitting incidents involved veterans spitting on peace protesters, not the other way around. The story we were told to make us afraid and ashamed was constructed. Don't trust the media's storytelling — or the Army's, for that matter.

But I want to back up further, to Oakland, to the processing center, because that is where this chapter really begins.

In the next room after the men's room, a space as large as a gymnasium, we were told to strip naked and get in line. I was not proud of my body. Locker rooms had been my nightmare since high school.

Here is why.

At Shadle Park High School in Spokane, the water polo team was in my PE class. They knew I was afraid of water — I had nearly drowned at age four in an irrigation ditch, and that terror had never fully left me. Go Highlanders, we'd shout, and dive in. But I did not dive. I crept.

One day the polo team surrounded me in the pool. They drove me toward the deep end. Then they took turns standing on my head and shoulders, pushing me under, holding me down until I had expelled all the air from my lungs and was gulping chlorine water. Each time I fought to the surface, gasping, I heard laughter. I was drowning in shame as much as water. Eventually they got bored of it. I floated to the surface, gripped the wall, pulled myself to the ladder, and lay on the concrete while the gym teacher blew his whistle and everyone headed to the showers.

Nobody checked to see if I was alive.

In the shower, the polo team was already there, snickering. And when I came out, the toughest fist-fighter in school was blocking my way. He was not even on the polo team. He was just there.

My mind went to thunder and lightning. No thoughts at all — just the body taking over, arms and legs tensing. I swung at whatever I could reach. He hit back. I did not flinch. I did not feel it. We were fighting naked in the locker room of Shadle Park High School, sophomore year, and I did not stop until it was over.

I got a reputation after that. The naked fighter. Nobody bullied me again. In the juvenile economy of a high school, I had earned status.

Standing in that Oakland processing center years later, naked in a line of veterans, I understood something about myself that I did not yet have the language to name: my body had learned, in a high school pool, that violence worked. That anger plus action equaled survival. That the self-talk which said hit first, hit hard, don't stop was the self-talk that kept you breathing.

It was true, in that pool.

The problem is that the body does not know when the pool is over.

The Dryer

This is the story I most wish I could undo. I am including it here because Renee, my daughter, deserves to have it told honestly, in her father's own words, in a book that is partly a letter to her.

It was a rushed morning. Three children, two adults, one bathroom, everyone needing to be somewhere. Renee had put a few wet clothes from the wash into the dryer. A partial load.

I had a rule: full loads only. I had stated this rule. I had stated it more than once.

I confronted her. She said, I hate you. She said worse than that. She was screaming.

I slapped her with an open hand. Blood trickled from her lips where the braces cut into them. She ran to the bathroom screaming. I chased her. We tumbled into that bathroom together, me still striking, her still screaming, and then we stopped. Both of us just stopped.

The relationship was in ruins. Not from that one morning — from everything that morning represented, every time the anger had been present in that house, every time the children had watched their father be the thing they needed to be safe from. But that morning was the one that broke it past repairing.

I have never stopped wishing I had just unplugged the dryer and walked away.

Here is what the self-talk was doing in those seconds. Anger arrived first, hot and instant, at the broken rule. Then Pride stepped in: I am the father, I set the rules, this is disrespect. Then Greed: I need her to acknowledge my authority, I need to be right. And then Deceit, the ringleader, wrapped it all in a story: she is out of control, I have to stop this, what I am about to do is necessary.

Necessary. That is the word Deceit always uses. The violence is necessary. The rage is justified. You had no choice.

I had a hundred choices. I could have unplugged the dryer. I could have laughed. I could have said we'll talk about this tonight. I could have said I love you and this is a stupid fight about laundry. A partial load of laundry. My daughter's lip bled because of a partial load of laundry, and the forty years of accumulated self-talk that told me anger justified whatever came next.

Renee, if you are reading this: I am sorry. Not the performed apology of a man trying to manage your reaction. The real thing. I was wrong. You were a child and I was supposed to be your safety and I was your danger instead. That is the truth, and it has been the truth, and I have lived with it every day since.

I hope this book is some small evidence that a person can change. Not become perfect. Not stop being capable of anger. But learn, slowly and at great cost, to hear the self-talk before it becomes an action. To recognize Deceit's voice. To choose differently.

The Woman at the DMV

Years after Vietnam, years after the children were grown, I was standing in line at the DMV in Los Angeles. The line stretched for blocks. I had been waiting for what felt like hours. Through the glass partition, I could see several clerks gathered around a table, eating doughnuts, drinking coffee, having a leisurely break while the line outside did not move.

I did not think. I did not pause. I leapt out of line, grabbed the glass partition, and began shaking it along its entire length — maybe a hundred feet of glass vibrating under my hands while the people around me stared.

A woman came to her side of the glass. She was calm. She looked at me the way you look at someone you are genuinely trying to help.

She said: Sir, do you realize what you are doing? You are creating a scene. You are no better than anybody else.

I said: We are all waiting and people are taking a break right in front of us.

She said: Yes. And if you worked here, you'd want a damn break too. Now knock it off. I have a police officer behind you who will take you to jail.

I thought, briefly and privately: I have been to jail. You play cards all day. You sleep as long as you want. The only rule is never shower alone. It is not as bad as the DMV.

I kept that thought to myself, which was progress.

I got back in line.

And standing there, breathing, the adrenaline still in my hands, I had the first real crack of doubt about the anger-justifies-everything story. Not a full collapse — that would take years more, and the Holy Fire Reiki quantum timeline, and Mount Palitana, and Chitrabhanu's coin. But a crack. A suspicion.

That woman had taken the time to explain something to one more veteran acting out in a public place. She had not matched my energy. She had not called me crazy or dangerous or a disgrace. She had just told me the truth, calmly, with a complete lack of drama: you are no better than anybody else.

She was right. And the self-talk that had told me I was — that my grievance was righteous, that my anger was

special, that the rules did not apply to a man who had been through what I had been through — that self-talk was the lie. The lie I had been carrying since a polo team held me underwater in a high school pool. Since a father drove away to Brazil. Since a boy in Spokane decided that the only safe thing was to be more dangerous than whatever was coming for him.

Ahimsa. The Jain principle of non-violence to all beings — human, animal, plant, even, in retrospect, glass partitions at the DMV. I had heard the word. I had not yet lived it. But something that woman said planted a seed.

The Classroom

One more story. This one is embarrassing in a different way.

Years later, after considerable therapy, weeks of personal development work, and enough journaling to exhaust the inventory of several Family Dollar stores, I was a department head at a university. I got a call that a class on the ground floor had no instructor. I bounded down the stairs and into the room, ready to help.

A student in the back spoke up immediately. His words were not polite. He did not want a substitute. He suggested I leave.

I watched, from somewhere just behind my own eyes, as the four gangsters assembled themselves in perfect formation. Pride went first: I am the department head. Then Greed: I will be acknowledged. Then Deceit spun the story in about half a second: this young man needs a lesson in who is in charge. And then Anger, taking the handoff from the other three, opened my mouth.

I delivered a tirade. Are you high? If you want to do drugs, go outside. Leave the people who want an education in peace. I pointed. I lectured. I escalated. In front of a room full of students who had done nothing wrong, watching their department head come apart over one mouthy undergraduate he had never met.

The associate dean appeared in the doorway, assessed the situation in approximately four seconds, relieved me of substitute duty, and sent me back to my office.

I sat at my desk in what I can only describe as the aftermath. The self-talk, now that the gangsters had finished their performance, was doing what it always does after the damage is done: cycling through shame, rationalization, shame again. He started it. But you made it worse. He was disrespectful. You were the adult. He deserved — no. Nobody deserves a department head losing his composure over a wisecrack.

I could have used humor. I could have said: how about you come up here and explain the business law of a substitute situation? Barely funny, but human. The kind of response that does not make the newspaper. Instead I had handed every student in that room a story they would tell for years about the unhinged department head.

What that classroom taught me — or rather, what the associate dean's expression taught me — is that Pride does not justify anger. Greed for authority and respect does not justify it. The deceitful story that someone deserves your rage, someone you have never met, know nothing about, encountered for thirty seconds — that story is never a rationalization for acting out. It is always, always the gangsters talking.

How Self-Talk Gets Hijacked

Let me be precise about the mechanism, because understanding it is what gives you a fighting chance against it.

Self-talk is not one voice. It is a conversation — or what passes for a conversation — between several voices that have learned their lines from your history. The voice that sounds like your father. The voice that sounds like the polo team. The voice that sounds like the judge you gave the finger to in open court. They have been with you so long they sound like you. They sound like your honest assessment of the situation. They sound like the truth.

They are not the truth. They are the accumulated story of every time you were not safe, every time anger worked, every time the world confirmed that you had better be harder than whatever was coming. That story served you once. It kept a boy alive in a high school pool. But it does not know how to update itself. It runs the same program on your daughter over a partial load of laundry that it ran on the polo team in the deep end.

The Jain term for this is *dravya karma* — the karmic matter that clings to the soul through thought, word, and action. Every time the self-talk runs the anger-justifies-violence program, it lays down another layer. The soul becomes heavier. The distance between who you are and who you actually are grows wider.

Aligning your self-talk with your Higher Self means learning to hear the handoff. The moment Anger arrives and starts to pass the baton to Pride, to Greed, to Deceit. That handoff takes maybe three seconds. In those three seconds, there is a choice. Not an easy choice — the gangsters are fast and loud and very convincing. But a choice.

The self-talk of the Higher Self sounds different. It is quieter. It does not have an agenda. It does not need to be right or respected or feared. It sounds, when you can hear it, something like: this is a partial load of laundry. It sounds like: this woman is trying to tell you something true. It sounds like: you do not know anything about this young man. It sounds like: I love you.

True Storytelling and the Self

In my True Storytelling work with organizations, I use seven principles to help people and systems examine the stories they are running. The same principles apply to the stories you run on yourself.

What is energetically sustainable? The anger-justifies-violence story was not. It cost more than it gave back, every single time, and the bill compounded across decades.

What stories are already present in the history? The polo team. The irrigation ditch. The father who left. The mother who raged. Those stories were real. They happened. But they are not the only stories in the history. There is also the six-year-old in the pew. The boy who walked three miles to church alone. The soldier who sat with frightened men in a radiation waiting room and told them they were in control. Those stories are equally true.

What are the bets on the future? Every time you run the old self-talk, you are betting that the future will be the same as the past. That the polo team is still out there. That you still need to be more dangerous than whatever is coming. Those bets are losing bets.

What is it like to be inside this story? Ask yourself that, honestly. What does it feel like to live inside the self-talk

that says your anger is justified? Heavy. Exhausting. Lonely. The gangsters are not good company.

What is the story becoming? This is the question that opens the door. Not what has the story been — what is it becoming? Every day you hear the handoff and choose differently, the story becomes something else. Slowly. Imperfectly. But genuinely.

What are the artifacts of the new story? The artifacts are the actions. The apology. The unplugged dryer. The humor instead of the tirade. The moment you get back in line at the DMV. Small things. Evidence, accumulating, that the new self-talk is real.

And what lies beyond? That is the question for the spiritual body. Beyond the anger-justifies-violence story, beyond the gangsters' long run, beyond the decades of damage and repair — what is there? The same thing that was there in the pew at Saint Charles at age six. The same thing that was there on Mount Palitana. The same thing that is there in Caballo Lake with your arms stretched into the sun.

Your Higher Self. Patient. Unchanged. Waiting.

A Practice: Catching the Handoff

Here is the practice for this chapter. It requires nothing except attention, and it will be the hardest practice in this book.

The next time you feel anger arrive — and you will know it, because the body announces it before the mind does: the heat in the chest, the jaw tightening, the hands wanting to do something — do not act. Do not speak. Do not move.

Count to three. Slowly.

In those three seconds, listen for the handoff. Listen for Pride picking up the baton from Anger: I deserve better than this. Listen for Greed: I need to win this. Listen for Deceit spinning the story: this person deserves whatever comes next.

You do not have to stop the anger. You cannot stop the anger — it is older than your conscious mind and faster than your thoughts. But you can stop the handoff. You can let the anger exist without handing it to Pride, who hands it to Greed, who hands it to Deceit, who hands it back to Anger with a story attached.

Three seconds. That is the gap between the self-talk of the gangsters and the self-talk of the Higher Self.

I have been practicing this for years and I still miss the handoff sometimes. The classroom. The DMV. Moments I do not need to recount here because Grace Ann and I both remember them. But I miss it less than I used to. And every time I catch it, every time I let the anger exist without letting the gangsters build their story on top of it, the self-talk gets a little lighter. A little more like the voice underneath — steady, clean, and not trying to win anything.

That voice is yours. It has always been yours.

The gangsters borrowed it for a while. You can have it back.

Chapter 4 – S is for Self-Talk Journal

Questions

1. What is the most persistent lie your self-talk has ever told you – the story that ran longest, cost you the most, and turned out to be completely false?

2. Describe a time when the four gangsters assembled in sequence – Anger arriving first, then Pride, then Greed, then Deceit spinning the story. What was the situation? What did the story say you were justified in doing?

3. What is the one thing you most wish you could undo — not to erase it, but to do differently — and what would you do instead?

Chapter 5 — S is for Service

Service in Gratitude, One Being, One Act, Each Day

I was no longer department head at New Mexico State University when Fatima walked into my office. If you read the last chapter, you have some insight into why.

She arrived with a man named Ernest. Fatima was a social worker for a homeless veterans halfway house, dressed in a salwar kameez with a dupatta scarf — I recognized the fabric from my trips to India with Chitrabhanu and Grace Ann. Ernest was one of the veterans in her program. He was broad-shouldered, deliberate, and quiet in the way of a man who has decided exactly how much of himself he will offer before he decides whether you are worth more.

Fatima said: we hear you know storytelling.

I said: I do. What would be the value in it for the veterans?

She said: you are a veteran. You are a Regents Professor. You know storytelling.

Ernest said: you can help us deal with the VA. They are not giving us our due. You could help us tell our stories so our case gets heard.

I thought about what I was getting myself into. Then I said yes.

That yes was the beginning of the most important service work of my life. Not the most decorated. Not the most published. Not the work that earned me another award. The most important.

The Dayroom

Walking into that dayroom for the first time was like stepping back into kindergarten — the one I got kicked out of for wanting to play instead of learning my ABCs. The nuns sent me home and my mother never recovered from the embarrassment.

Half a dozen veterans sprawled on couches, teasing Fatima with the easy comfort of men who have decided she can handle it. The room was about the size of any living room. Two stories of apartments above us, ten per floor, men trying to reassemble something like a life after the streets. The testosterone in that room was having its heyday.

I tried to introduce myself. I got about three words out before the ruckus swallowed me. Laughter, mayhem, crosstalk. Fatima tried to quiet them. Hopeless.

I sat down on one of the couches and waited.

Ernest said: calm it down. Fatima and I invited him here.

The room settled. Ernest had that kind of authority — not performed, not demanded, just present. The authority of the smartest man in the room who knows it and does not need to announce it.

I said: Ernest, what's your story?

He said: I was a welder. Army machine shops in Vietnam. Got out, got employed as a union welder at forty-seven fifty an hour. Then Ronald Reagan got elected November 4th, 1980, and spent the next decade killing off the unions. I don't do master welding for eight dollars an hour. So I became homeless. I live off VA benefits and some of that welfare slab cheese, some oatmeal, and Wonder Bread.

He paused. He looked at me to see if I was going to flinch.

I did not flinch. I had eaten Army food. I knew what oatmeal and Wonder Bread meant.

Ernest told many stories that first day — homeless camps up and down the panhandle, women he had taken up with and left behind, the internal wounds that don't show up on any imaging scan the VA orders. He was by far the sharpest mind in that room and he knew it, and it made him impatient with lesser intelligences, which included most of the world. What he needed was not a professor explaining things to him. What he needed was someone who would listen without managing him.

I came back the next week. And the week after that. For about a year, I showed up.

The Sandtrays

After about a year of weekly visits, I brought sandtrays — shallow boxes of sand — and a few hundred small toys and figures. Animals, vehicles, soldiers, mythological creatures, everyday objects. I gave each veteran a tray and told them to choose whatever figures had an energy for them, and arrange them as a kind of storyboard from birth until now. They did not have to say a word if they did not want to.

They could not stop talking.

That is what happens when you give people a physical language for things they have never been able to say. The quantum vibrations of the material objects, the hands moving through sand, the figures placed just so — it opens something that words alone keep locked. Suddenly the story is outside the body, visible, touchable, rearrangeable.

And the room can witness it without the weight of direct confession.

One veteran — I will call him the Artist — had grown up in Mexico City, been drafted into the Navy, served briefly in Vietnam, and became a conscientious objector. He received an honorable discharge and spent decades as a freelance artist, living on the border between El Paso and Juarez. He chose a dragon and a roadrunner. The dragon, he said, represented all the battles he had to fight in the world. The roadrunner represented how he had spent most of his life running from relationships and obligations. He said it plainly, without self-pity, as a man describing terrain he had finally mapped.

Another veteran — the one who became known in that room as the Armadillo — described a childhood so harsh it made mine look comfortable. His father had made him eat in the outhouse to toughen him up. He had come to the desert and become an armadillo, he said — a tricky character that can burrow, with a hard shell so that ain't much can bother it. He said the camp had made him feel like a baby again, looking at the world fresh, wanting to help people.

Then there was Sykes.

Sykes was the naturally gifted storyteller of the group — just enough detail to keep it moving, enormous energy in every gesture, and a quality of comic timing that a professional comedian would envy. He had ended up homeless after the Army, acquired a dog and a girlfriend at a camp, lost the girlfriend, kept the dog's memory. His plan for the future involved a Power Tower exercise machine, considerable muscle development, and the capture of a wealthy woman.

Sykes: *so now my plan I've got a Power Tower and I'm going to build some muscle and I'm going to marry a beautiful rich woman*

Fatima: *what's the Power Tower what*

Sykes: *uh there's no representation but there's the muscle — we see the result of the Power Tower so I'm going to get really muscled up and so all you rich women be ready here pretty soon I'm going to be on the market*

He also gave Fatima a pink horse figure and explained, with the gravity of a man arriving at a profound insight, that it was because she was pretty but also magical — she popped in and out. Fatima pointed out that the horse was quite floofy. Sykes conceded this was possible.

I filmed all of it. I still have the tape.

Marathon Man

The one who silenced the room was the veteran I think of as Marathon Man.

He had not said a single word in six months of meetings. Not to me. Not to Fatima. Not to any of the other veterans. He was present each week, occupying his corner of a couch, watching everything, giving nothing. I had stopped trying to draw him out. Some people are not ready, and pushing is not service — it is the ego wanting a result.

The day of the sandtrays, he arrived late. All the trays were taken. I gave him the lid of a tray — no sand, just a flat surface. He said nothing about it. He arranged his figures.

And then he spoke.

He spoke for twenty minutes. His voice was halting — lots of you know and I I I — the speech of a man for whom words have been dangerous things, to be approached carefully. He told us he had been forgotten at a circus as a small child. He had wandered alone through the night, fascinated by a gorilla in a cage. He had talked to the gorilla. The gorilla had not talked back, but something in the encounter had mattered to him, and he had carried it his whole life.

He told us about gangs at twelve, about a coma at Providence Memorial Hospital in El Paso that lasted six months, about drifting to the Northwest, about joining the Army because poverty had run out of other options. And then — this is the moment the room went quiet — he placed the cheetah figure on his tray.

Marathon Man: *this is a cheetah cat and I guess you're aware of how fast that cat can run — well running became a very integral part of my life — in 1984 I ran the Boston Marathon*

Room: *wow — oh wow*

Marathon Man: *the reason why I'm using running is because this running was like a therapy — an alternative to what could have been — like suicide*

He had run seven marathons. Tucson, Eugene, Portland, Phoenix, Scottsdale, El Paso, Albuquerque. He had placed first in his age group. He had come back from a six-month coma and run the Boston Marathon.

He sat there with his figures on a tray lid with no sand, in a dayroom the size of a living room, in a veterans shelter in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and he told this story for the first time in his life.

I thought of Forrest Gump — not dismissively, but because the comparison captures something true. A man who ran because the alternative was not surviving. A man whose extraordinary physical accomplishment had never been witnessed by anyone who could receive it properly. We received it that day. The room was full of men who understood what it meant to need an alternative to suicide. Every one of them had had one, or had failed to find one in time.

When he finished, nobody said anything clever. The room just held it.

That is what service looks like when it is working.

Veterans Theater

Ernest and Sykes became my lieutenants. After the sandtray session, I proposed that the stories they had told could become the basis for a small business. We could form a Veterans Theater company. Audiences would pay to hear these stories.

Ernest looked at me the way a man looks at someone who has just said something either brilliant or insane, and has not yet decided which.

We started small. Our first performance was in a bar on University Avenue, across from the NMSU campus — outdoor seating, maybe thirty people, a hat passed at the end. We raised fifty-five dollars. The veterans played themselves. They modeled their interactions with the El Paso Veterans Administration office, which at that time was rated the worst VA office in the United States. They were not subtle about this.

The audience laughed. The audience winced. A few of them cried.

We rented the NMSU theater's rehearsal hall for five hundred dollars. We rehearsed the same play, added two new acts, packed the house. Raised nine hundred dollars. After expenses, about four hundred remained.

We performed in the basement of a senior citizens home off Telshor — free hall, packed with elderly people and a reporter. Raised eleven hundred and fifty dollars.

That was enough to rent the Rio Grande Theater, the biggest performance space in Las Cruces.

The Bureaucracy of Compassion

Getting into the Rio Grande Theater turned out to be harder than raising the money for it.

We had to appear before the Arts Council. Several dedicated people ran it who did not, in practice, care much about veterans. The theater manager did not want homeless people using the good equipment. He did not want homeless people in the building at all, if I am being honest about what his face said when we met.

I had been recruiting more veterans through the Tuesday morning open meeting at City of Hope, a social service agency. You would think a nonprofit serving the homeless would want to help a veterans theater get a stage. What the director saw instead was a threat to her funding lines. She wanted the available money for veterans causes to flow through her organization, not ours. She had us removed from the premises.

I joined the American Legion. I could not join the other veterans groups because they required consumption of mass quantities of beer and whiskey, and I had already done that chapter of my life and closed it. The American Legion had a Vietnam Veterans subgroup and I joined

that, and eventually they sent me to Phoenix for the national meeting, where I found veterans like me — men who had served and come home and concluded that all wars were wrong and wanted to spend whatever time remained doing something about it.

I brought a former Navy Admiral on crutches and an Army Chaplain from the Legion to a second meeting with the City of Hope director. She had us removed again.

We got the theater anyway.

Opening night, one of our veterans — a formerly homeless man now enrolled as a doctoral student in psychology at NMSU — dressed himself in the most convincingly mangy homeless attire he could assemble and sat out front of the Rio Grande Theater panhandling while the audience arrived. Every single person walked past him. Some crossed the street. Not one person stopped.

After the play, he and the other veterans sat on the edge of the stage, and he looked out at the audience and asked:

Did you see me out front of the theater? You all walked right by me, as if I was a turd on the sidewalk.

The room went silent in a way that was different from the Marathon Man silence. That had been the silence of witnessing. This was the silence of being caught.

That is also what service looks like. Not just giving. Holding up a mirror.

Ernest and Sykes

I want to tell you how this story ends, because service does not always end with a triumph.

Ernest and Sykes have both passed away.

I stopped going to the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans meetings when Agent Orange began its serious work on my body — the cancer, the treatments, the months of radiation and rehab that you read about in Chapter 1. I had my own body to fight for. The community I had built around Veterans Theater dispersed. The momentum slowed and then stopped.

I think about Ernest. The master welder who would not work for eight dollars an hour. The smartest man in that room. He deserved a different ending — a country that honored the union wages he earned through his skill, a VA that treated him as someone worth treating, a bed that was his by right and not by charity. He got oatmeal and Wonder Bread and a dayroom the size of a living room and a professor who showed up once a week for a few years and then did not.

I think about Sykes, who wanted a Power Tower and a rich woman and to expose the evil Monsanto and his mythical lying creatures in the House and Senate. Who gave Fatima a pink horse because she was pretty and magical and popped in and out. He was the best natural storyteller I have encountered in forty years of studying the subject. He should have had an audience for decades.

I think about Marathon Man, who had never said a word for six months and then told us everything — the circus, the gorilla, the coma, the seven marathons, the thing that running saved him from. Who placed first in his age group and had no one to tell.

Service is not a transaction. You do not give and receive and close the account. These men are part of me now in the way that Nahdion is part of Grace Ann — present,

communicating, asking questions I am still trying to answer. Ernest walks into my office and sits down across from me when I am writing and reminds me that the self-talk that matters most is not the academic argument but the human one. Sykes makes me laugh when I am taking myself too seriously. Marathon Man reminds me that coming back from a six-month coma and running the Boston Marathon is what the human body does when it decides it has something to live for.

Enthinkment and What Remains

I run Zoom meetings now called the Enthinkment Circle. Some veterans have contributed about eight hundred and forty dollars to date. The circle is small. The audience is nothing like what it was when Fatima and Ernest walked into my office on that afternoon that changed everything.

I will not pretend otherwise. The Veterans Theater filled the Rio Grande Theater. The Enthinkment Circle meets on Zoom. Ernest and Sykes are gone. The cancer is dormant but present, two hundred billion cells well-behaved for now. My testosterone is barely rising from zero and I am cautiously optimistic about what that means for the future.

But here is what I have learned about service, across all of it:

Service is not about the size of the audience. The man in the tomb on Mount Palitana was serving the Jain temples on that mountain in complete bliss, with one visitor at a time, or none. Chitrabhanu taught thousands, and he also sat with one student at a time and gave them a coin with Sanskrit on one side and a teaching they would spend a year meditating on.

Service is not about recognition. The Arts Council did not want us. The City of Hope wanted us gone. The theater

manager did not want our veterans touching the good equipment. We performed anyway. We passed the hat. We held up the mirror.

Service is not about outcome. I do not know what happened to Marathon Man after our last meeting. I do not know if any of those veterans' stories reached the VA and changed a single policy. I know that in a dayroom the size of a living room, six men arranged figures in sand and told their stories for the first time, and something in each of them shifted.

That shift is the service. Not what comes after it. The moment itself.

Chitrabhanu teaches that the liberated soul's virya — its energy — flows outward naturally as service. You do not decide to serve the way you decide to run an errand. You serve because the soul, when the karmic weight is lifted enough, cannot do otherwise. It radiates. Bliss, when it is real, does not stay private.

I did not go to that dayroom to give something. I went because Ernest and Fatima walked into my office and asked, and something in me recognized the ask as mine to answer. I went every week for a year because those men were teaching me things I could not learn in forty years of academic research — about the cost of being invisible, about the dignity of a story told in sand, about what a man who ran seven marathons needs from another human being.

He needs to be witnessed.

That is all any of us need. To be witnessed. To have someone sit down on a couch in a dayroom the size of a living room and not flinch and not manage us and not run

the protocol but just be there, genuinely curious about what comes next.

Ernest, Sykes, Marathon Man — I witness you still. That is the only service I have left to give you now. And it turns out to be enough.

A Practice: One Being, One Act

The final practice of this book is the simplest one.

Today — not next week, not when things slow down, today — find one being and do one act of service for them. Not a grand gesture. Not a project. One act.

It might be a veteran you pass on the street who is carrying everything he owns in a bag. It might be a colleague who mentioned something difficult in passing and you let it pass. It might be Grace Ann, and the act is putting down your phone and asking her a question you do not already know the answer to.

It might be yourself. Service to the self counts. The sixty-second elevator descent to the heart. The three-second pause before the handoff. The decision to take the arms out like a hawk and run one more time.

One being. One act. That is the fifth letter of BLISS, and it is the one that closes the circuit. Balance, Love and Listen, Internal Divinity, Self-Talk — all of that remains internal until Service sends it outward. Until the bliss you have been building in your own four bodies becomes a gift you offer to the world.

Not because you have to. Not because you are obligated. Not because someone is keeping score.

Because the soul, when it is clean enough to feel its own nature, cannot help but give.

That is bliss. The whole of it. Right here.

Go and be it.

Chapter 5 — S is for Service Journal Questions

1. Who is the Ernest in your life — the person who walked into your space and asked something of you that you almost said no to, and didn't? What did they ask? What happened?

2. Think of a time you witnessed someone tell their story for the first time — the way Marathon Man placed the cheetah on the tray. What did their face do when the room received it?

3. What is one act of service you have been postponing — not a project, one act, for one being — that you could do today? Write it here and then go do it.

Conclusion: Coming Home

A Letter to Renee, and to Everyone Who Has Walked This Far

If the man in the tomb on Mount Palitana could read this book — every word of it, the typewriter at 4 AM, the drinking fountain, the dryer, Renee, Ernest, all of it — I believe he would look at me with that same glowing face I saw thirty years ago and say two things.

He would say: there is a tomb here on this mountain just for you, if you want it.

And he would say: or stay in your wonderful marriage, with your three children and five grandchildren, and devote your life to ahimsa — nonviolence in thought, word, and deed. It is time to forgive yourself. Do the storytelling work. That is your life purpose. Bring bliss to others, just like you.

I am choosing the second path. Not because the mountain does not call me — it does, and always will. But because Grace Ann is here. Renee is in Canada with my grandson. There are grandchildren who deserve a grandfather who has finally put down the gangsters' loudest stories. There is work left to do. There are Zoom circles on Tuesday mornings and horses in the barn and a BLM trail in Las Cruces where a Swainson Hawk still waits for me to put my arms out and run.

This conclusion is a letter. To Renee first, because this book has been a letter to her from the first sentence. And then to you, whoever you are, wherever you picked this up, whatever brought you here.

To Renee

Renee Daniel Boje. My daughter. Born in New York while I was in Vietnam at 4 AM, throwing a typewriter into a trash can because I did not know how to be in two places at once, or how to love what I could not reach.

You grew up with a father who was brilliant at teaching other people's children and clumsy with his own. A father who could hold a room of executives spellbound with a story about listening and then come home and lecture everyone at the dinner table. A father whose anger had roots going back before you were born — back to an irrigation ditch in Spokane, a polo team in a high school pool, a motel room where a boy stood outside with a camera while his world ended.

You did not cause any of that. You never did. The morning with the dryer — I have carried that morning every day since. Not as punishment, though the guilt has felt that way sometimes. As a reminder of what I was capable of, and what I chose to change from.

I am not writing this to ask for anything from you. Not forgiveness, not a response, not a phone call. I am writing it because you deserve to know the whole story of your father, not just the ego side, not just the tough love. You deserve to know about Ralph, and the hospital in Vietnam, and the golf pro shop where I read Gandhi and the Beatles and Arnold Palmer and tried to prove to myself I was not completely batshit crazy. You deserve to know about Mount Palitana, and Chitrabhanu giving me your grandfather's spiritual name — Arihanta — and what it really means.

You have no enemies. Everyone is your friend.

I am still learning to live inside that name. But I am learning.

This book is my bliss. Not the bliss of a man who has conquered his inner enemies — I have not, fully, and I will not pretend otherwise. But the bliss of a man who has seen what bliss looks like, on a mountain in India and in a radiation waiting room and in a rehab center where Grace Ann and I found each other again in a way we had not been found in years. A man who knows the direction, even when the gangsters are loud.

I love you. I have always loved you. The failure was never the love — it was my inability, for too long, to let the love be bigger than the ego.

This book is for you. For your children. For theirs.

What BLISS Is — One More Time, Simply

I have spent five chapters and a lifetime circling this word, and I want to say it plainly one last time before I let you go.

Bliss is not happiness. Happiness depends on conditions — the right circumstances, the body working, the relationships intact, the cancer dormant, the testosterone rising. Happiness is real and it is good and I am not against it. But it comes and goes.

Bliss is what is there when the conditions are wrong and you find yourself okay anyway.

It is what I felt standing next to a Muslim man living in a coffin-sized tomb on top of a Jain mountain, both of us glowing for no particular reason except that we were alive and present and the soul was doing what souls do when the weight of ego is briefly lifted.

It is what Grace Ann and I found in a rehabilitation center, helping each other with intimate things we had never helped each other with before, watching her left hand learn to grip a marble again and calling it a miracle because it was.

It is what Marathon Man gave that room when he placed the cheetah on his sandtray and said the running was an alternative to what could have been — like suicide.

It is the six-year-old in the pew at Saint Charles who asked God to make him Superman and got something better.

It is Ralph, in whatever form Ralph takes — guardian angel, fellow soldier, the quiet voice that says: get the typewriter out of the trash. The CO will be here in an hour.

Bliss is your soul's natural state. Not a destination. Not a reward. Not something you earn by suffering enough or meditating enough or reading enough books, including this one. It is what is already there, underneath everything the gangsters have built on top of it. Balance and Love and Internal Divinity and true Self-Talk and Service — these are not the path to bliss. They are the practice of removing what covers it.

You already have it. You have always had it.

This book is just a set of directions back.

The Morning Run

I want to end where every chapter begins — in a body, in motion, in New Mexico.

It is early morning. The Organ Mountains are turning pink to the east. I am on the BLM land near the Alameda

Arroyo, and my arms are out like a Swainson Hawk, and I am running.

My physical body — the one that went into an irrigation ditch at four years old and came back out, that carried a rifle in Vietnam and oatmeal in a shelter and thirty-six trillion living cells through 26 rounds of radiation and out the other side — this body is running. It is not fast. It does not need to be. It is running.

My emotional body is quiet this morning. The four gangsters are present — they are always present, they do not retire — but they are not in charge. Anger is sitting in the back seat. Pride has its seatbelt on. Greed is looking out the window. Deceit is, for the moment, not spinning anything. This is not a permanent condition. But it is the condition right now, and right now is what I have.

My mental body is doing something it rarely does: nothing in particular. Not planning a lecture. Not drafting an argument. Not composing a response to something that was said three days ago. It is watching the cactus flowers — red this time of year, and some white ones on the other kind — and thinking, briefly, that they are beautiful, and then thinking nothing else.

My spiritual body is, as always, already everywhere. Out through the desert and the atmosphere and the solar system and the Milky Way moving at 1.3 million miles per hour through its corner of the infinite, entangled quantum universe. Ralph is here. Nahdion is here, in the way he is always here — not loudly, just present, the way a good healer is present. The hackberry grandmother tree is somewhere in the arroyo ahead, and she will have things to say when I get there, and I will listen.

I pass a man in the sand. Barefoot. Brownish tan, short beard, shorts.

He looks up when he hears me coming.

I say: hi. My name is David.

He says: oh, perfect.

I keep running. I put my arms out a little wider. I dip into the wind and rise with it and dip again, and for a moment — just a moment, just long enough — I am the hawk and the arroyo and the morning light and the thirty-six trillion cells and the man who threw a typewriter in Vietnam and the man who walked five thousand steps up a mountain and the grandfather his grandchildren are still getting to know.

I know what it is to have bliss.

Go and be it.

Conclusion — Coming Home Journal Questions

1. If the person you most want to forgive — including yourself — could read this book, what is the one thing you most want them to understand about who you actually were, underneath the ego and the stuck story?

2. What is your direction? Not your destination — your direction. Where are you pointed, right now, in each of your four bodies?

3. ~~Finish this sentence in your own words, as many times as you need to, until it is true: I know what it is to have bliss. It is—~~

Appendix A: The Five BLISS Practices

A Daily Reference Guide

Each chapter of this book ends with a practice. Here they are gathered in one place, stripped down to their essentials, so you can return to them without having to find them again in the text. These are not techniques to master. They are habits of attention — things to try once, and then again, and then again, until they become the way you move through a day.

B — The Four-Body Check-In

From Chapter 1: Balance

At any point in your day — on a run, in a waiting room, at a desk, in a difficult conversation — pause and ask yourself four questions, one for each body:

Physical body: Where is the tension or pain right now, and what does it need? More movement, more rest, more cold water, more sun?

Emotional body: What am I feeling that I have not named yet today? Is it one of the four gangsters — anger, pride, greed, deceit — or something cleaner, like grief, love, or gratitude?

Mental body: What story am I telling myself right now? Is it a true story, or is it a gangster story dressed in reasonable clothing?

Spiritual body: Am I listening? Not talking, not asking, not demanding signs. Just — am I listening?

You do not need to answer these questions perfectly. You need only to ask them. The asking is the practice.

L — The Conversation Test

From Chapter 2: Love and Listen

Think of the person you are closest to. Ask yourself honestly: when did we last have a real conversation? Not an exchange of logistics or information — a conversation where something one of you said actually surprised the other.

If you cannot remember, here is the practice. The next time you are with that person, ask them one question you do not already know the answer to. A real question, something you are genuinely curious about. Then listen to the answer without planning your response. Let what they say land before you speak.

Then ask a second question that begins from where their answer left off.

Two questions. One genuine response. That is the whole practice. That is a conversation.

I — The Sixty-Second Descent

From Chapter 3: Internal Divinity

Close your eyes if it is safe. Soften your gaze if it is not. Take one slow breath in through the nose and out through the mouth. Feel your feet on whatever is beneath them.

Put your attention on the center of your chest — not the lungs, which are working, but the heart space. Rest your attention there the way you would rest a hand on the shoulder of someone you love.

Stay for sixty seconds. When the thinking mind offers a thought — and it will, within about four seconds — notice it without following it and return to the heart space. Not fighting the thought. Just returning.

One descent. Once a day, for a week. Notice what changes — not what you think about it, but what changes in how you move through your hours.

S — Catching the Handoff

From Chapter 4: Self-Talk

The next time you feel anger arrive — you will know it by the heat in the chest, the jaw tightening, the hands wanting to act — do not speak. Do not move. Count to three, slowly.

In those three seconds, listen for the handoff. Listen for Pride picking up from Anger: I deserve better than this. Listen for Greed: I need to win. Listen for Deceit spinning the story: this person deserves whatever comes next.

You cannot stop the anger. But you can stop the handoff. Let the anger exist without passing it to Pride, who passes it to Greed, who passes it to Deceit, who returns it to Anger with a story attached.

Three seconds. That is the gap. That is everything.

S — One Being, One Act

From Chapter 5: Service

Today — not next week, today — find one being and do one act of service for them. Not a project. One act.

It might be a stranger. It might be someone you love. It might be yourself — the sixty-second descent, the three-second pause, the decision to run one more time.

One being. One act. Close the circuit. Let the bliss you have been building in your four bodies become something you give away.

That is the whole practice. That is the whole book.

Appendix B: Chitrabhanu's Twelve Bhavanas

Contemplative Practices for Clearing the Soul

Gurudev Shree Chitrabhanu, in his book *Twelve Facets of Reality: The Jain Path to Freedom* (1980), describes twelve bhavanas — contemplations or meditations — that the Jain tradition uses to clear karmic weight from the soul. These are not affirmations. They are not positive thinking. They are honest inquiries into the nature of reality, designed to loosen the grip of the ego and let the soul's natural bliss emerge.

I offer them here in plain language, in my own words, as I have understood and practiced them. Chitrabhanu's original text goes much deeper. I recommend it.

1. Anitya — Impermanence

Everything in the material world is temporary. The body, the career, the relationship, the grudge, the triumph — all of it passes. When you feel attached to something or terrified of losing it, sit with anitya. What is this, in the light of impermanence? Often the answer is: smaller than I thought.

2. Asharana — No External Refuge

No person, no institution, no achievement can ultimately protect you. This sounds frightening until you realize its other face: you are not required to find your safety in things that cannot provide it. The refuge is internal. The soul is its own shelter.

3. Samsara – The Cycle

We have been through countless lifetimes of the same patterns — the same anger, the same grasping, the same forgetting. This bhavana cultivates compassion, because everyone you meet is also cycling through their patterns. The man who pushes you under in the pool is also drowning in something.

4. Ekatva – Aloneness

You came in alone and you will go out alone. Not loneliness — aloneness. The soul's essential singularity. When you stop requiring other people to complete you, you become better company.

5. Anyatva – Separateness

The body is not you. The thoughts are not you. The reputation, the degree, the diagnosis — not you. The soul is distinct from everything that happens to it. This is the hardest bhavana and the most liberating.

6. Ashuchi – Impurity of the Body

The body is a temporary vessel doing extraordinary things and requiring considerable maintenance. When you are overly attached to its appearance or performance, this bhavana restores proportion. The body is not the point. It is the vehicle.

7. Asrava – Influx of Karma

Every thought, word, and action draws karmic particles toward the soul. The gangsters — anger, pride, greed, deceit — are the heaviest attractors. This bhavana makes you a watcher of your own influx. What am I drawing toward myself right now?

8. Samvara — Stopping the Influx

The practices of this book — the four-body check-in, the three-second pause, the sixty-second descent — are samvara in action. Stopping the flow of karmic weight before it accumulates. Not perfect. Not permanent. Just — stopping, when you can.

9. Nirjara — Shedding Karma

Old karmic weight can be shed through practice, service, and honest reckoning with your own history. The stories in this book — Vietnam, Spokane, the dryer, the DMV — are nirjara. Telling them honestly, without excuse, is how the soul becomes lighter.

10. Loka — The Nature of the Universe

The universe is vast, entangled, alive with energy at every level. Your 36 trillion cells are in conversation with all of it. This bhavana is what I practice on the BLM trail with my arms out like a hawk — expanding consciousness to the full quantum non-local reach of everything, and feeling, briefly, that I am part of it.

11. Bodhi Durlabha — The Rarity of Enlightenment

True awakening is rare and precious. Do not take this life, this body, this moment of spiritual seeking for granted. You may not get another one arranged quite like this. Use it.

12. Dharma — The Path

There is a path. It has been walked by many before you and will be walked by many after. You are not inventing it. You are finding your place on it. The path includes service,

non-violence, honesty, and the quiet daily practice of removing what covers the soul's natural bliss.

That is what this book has tried to be. One person's account of finding his place on the path. Imperfect. Ongoing. Grateful.

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About the Author

David Michael Boje is a Regents Professor Emeritus at New Mexico State University and an Invited Visiting Professor at Fisk University. He is the originator of the storytelling organization concept (1991), antenarrative theory (2001), and quantum storytelling methodology — frameworks developed across four decades of research and practice. He is the author of more than forty-five books on organizational storytelling, including *The Quantum Sixth Sense* (2025).

He is co-founder of GrowthOD and the True Storytelling Institute, co-founder of PerView Inc. (a 501(c)(3) nonprofit providing free coaching to veterans and first responders), and founder of the Tuesday Enthinkment Circle. He received the ODC Lifetime Achievement Award in 2025.

David is a Vietnam veteran, a Holy Fire® Reiki Master at Level Three, and a Jain practitioner who received the spiritual name Arihanta from Gurudev Shree Chitrabhanu. He is a Catholic by formation, a Jain by practice, and a quantum storyteller by vocation. He lives with his wife and partner Dr. Grace Ann Rosile on a ranch in Caballo, New Mexico, where they practice Western Dressage with their horses Fancy and Clyde. He is the father of three children and grandfather of five.

He can be found running on the BLM land near the Alameda Arroyo in Las Cruces, arms out like a hawk, extending his consciousness into the quantum non-local entanglement of the universe, and occasionally picking up trash near the pond.

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