

PART 7:

WELCOME TO DRAGON

SCHOOL

“If seeds waited for perfect conditions to grow, there would be no plants in the desert.”

Matshona Dhliwayo

“Well, how did I get here?”

Talking Heads, “Once in a Lifetime”

“You can’t always get what you want... you get what you need.”

The Rolling Stones, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want”

REAL TANTRA

In the United States, mention Tantra and most people immediately think of tantric sex. Yes, sex is part of Tantra. It just isn't the point.

The word *tantra* is often translated as *to weave*, and I can't think of a better image. Tantra weaves every part of your life into the path: the joyful parts, the painful parts, the beautiful parts, the embarrassing parts, desire, grief, anger, wonder. Nothing gets thrown away. Nothing is outside the practice.

Your life isn't an obstacle to awakening. **Your life is the path.**

Every tradition eventually stumbles onto some version of this truth. *Everyday mind is the Way. The body is the temple. No mud, no lotus. Imago Dei.* Different cultures. Different languages. Same damn insight.

Which is why I laugh when people reduce Tantra to candles, incense, expensive workshops, and learning how to have longer orgasms. Cute. Wrong. Deeply wrong.

Real Tantra asks a much more uncomfortable question than which sex toy makes anal sex feel best.

What are you paying attention to?

To me, awakening begins with learning to catch yourself before you become your usual self. Before the old story takes over. Before the old fear makes the decision. Before the same reaction you've had a hundred times quietly grabs the steering wheel.

Life keeps placing the same lessons in front of us, only dressed in different clothes. A different relationship. A different job. A different argument. A different disappointment. The details change. The lesson usually doesn't. The moment you recognize the pattern, you have a choice. You can replay it one more time, or you can choose something new.

Can you catch yourself in the grocery store? During an argument? While paying your taxes? When someone breaks your heart? While taking a shit?

You don't have to become a monk or a nun. You don't have to disappear into a monastery or spend twenty years meditating in a cave. In fact, I think ordinary life offers more opportunities for awakening than isolation ever could. Conversations, frustrations, heartbreaks, awkward family dinners, difficult coworkers, unexpected kindness, and moments of joy all give us another chance to notice the pattern and choose differently.

Life is the monastery.

Remember the 84,000 doors? This is where you find them. In traffic jams and failed relationships. In arguments and acts of kindness. In the places you go, the people you meet, and

the moments that interrupt whatever you thought your day was supposed to look like. Life keeps opening doors into awakening.

You just have to notice them.

If you have been told that awakening only exists on a meditation cushion, at a sound bath, or in a candlelit bedroom filled with tantric breathing and synchronized orgasms, it isn't awakening.

Real Tantra trains your perception until ordinary life becomes sacred. The grocery store becomes holy. Traffic becomes a teacher. A difficult conversation becomes practice. Every irritation becomes an invitation.

That's where the dragon enters the story.

THE DRAGON PRINCIPLE

If Tantra is the practice, the dragon is the practitioner.

A dragon isn't fearless because fear disappears. Fear still shows up, usually with a very convincing list of reasons to stay exactly where you are. The difference is that fear no longer gets to make the decisions. You listen to it like an anxious friend trying desperately to keep you safe, thank it for its concern, and then decide for yourself which way to go.

That, more than anything, became the practice for me.

Little by little, you stop building your life around what feels safest and start building it around what feels true. You become more willing to set the boundary, ask the uncomfortable question, admit when you're wrong, walk away when something no longer fits, or step toward something simply because it scares the hell out of you.

Courage doesn't make you harder. Done well, it does the opposite. Your boundaries become clearer without closing your heart. Curiosity begins replacing certainty. Compassion grows without requiring self sacrifice. Integrity stops being something you believe in and becomes something you actually live.

You aren't trying to transform into some shiny, enlightened version of yourself.

You're becoming more completely **you**.

That's dragon training.

WHAT DOES BALANCE LOOK LIKE?

If the Buddha's job is to kick the hornet's nest and show us where our patterns have gone sideways, the obvious next question is: What does balanced actually look like?

For thousands of years, humans have tried to describe the complementary forces that seem to run through creation. We called them masculine and feminine, yin and yang, Shiva and Shakti, sun and moon. The names were useful, but somewhere along the way we became far too literal about them.

These aren't two camps, and they certainly aren't men on one side and women on the other.

They're different ways reality moves.

There is structure and there is flow. Logic and intuition. Action and receptivity. Order and possibility. Thought and sensation. Building and becoming. One gives things form while the other brings that form to life.

I think of these as the Language of Reality and the Body of Reality.

The Language is mathematics, symbols, patterns, laws, architecture, and direction, the invisible structure that gives things form. The Body is cells dividing, forests communicating underground, nervous systems responding, seasons turning, wounds healing, desire moving through us, and intuition arriving before we can explain what we know.

One writes the score. The other makes it breathe.

Neither belongs to a gender. They belong to creation.

(A quick note about what we actually value... and while we're talking about balance, can we talk about women's sports for a second?)

Because we love to wax poetic about the sacred feminine, yin and yang, Shiva and Shakti, and the importance of balancing masculine and feminine energy. Then we turn on the television and pour vastly more money, attention, airtime, sponsorship, and cultural importance into men competing than women doing the exact same thing.

That's not balance.

And sports are only one glaring example. We have spent centuries building cultures that treat what is associated with men as more important, more serious, more valuable, and more worthy of investment.

If we actually want balance, we have to do more than admire the feminine as a spiritual concept. We have to support women in the real world.

Watch the game. Buy the ticket. Take your daughter. Learn the players' names. Support the artists, athletes, founders, scientists, writers, leaders, and weird women doing extraordinary shit without receiving a fraction of the attention their male counterparts get.

Balance isn't something we believe in. It's something we fund.)

And we need both.

Structure without responsiveness becomes rigid. Intuition without discernment can lead us anywhere. Action without rest burns us out. Rest without movement becomes stagnation. Compassion without boundaries becomes self abandonment. Boundaries without compassion become walls. Creation requires destruction because eventually something has to make room for what comes next.

That is the dance.

Not some perfect fifty fifty split, but the ability to move between these forces as life demands it. To know when to push and when to wait, when to think and when to feel, when to speak and when to listen, when to hold the line and when to surrender. Sometimes the moment asks you to build something. Sometimes it asks you to burn the damn thing down.

The point is not to choose a side. It is to become conscious enough to recognize what the moment is asking of you and brave enough to respond.

And that requires participation.

You cannot sit at the edge of the dance floor waiting for someone else to figure out the steps. Which brings me to one of the strangest questions I have had to wrestle with since my bhumi.

(“No one was saved.” The Beatles, “Eleanor Rigby”)

THE MESSIAH PROBLEM

What happens when I finally walk into the world publicly as a Buddha?

It is a question I think about more than I probably should, because humanity has a long and complicated history with people who arrive claiming to understand something about the nature of reality.

And I already know what I want to happen. I don't want people sitting down.

I want them to start dancing.

I was sitting here watching *Dune* when the question hit me again. Our stories are filled with extraordinary figures who arrive carrying some larger truth. Jesus. Manjushri. Neo. Harry Potter. The Kwisatz Haderach. Humanity loves the idea of someone showing up who can finally see the bigger picture.

But we also have a terrible habit of turning that person into the solution. That isn't what I want this book to do.

I'm writing it because I want to help people see the true nature of our reality. I want you to see the patterns, the connections, the strange architecture underneath all of this, because once you see the world differently, eventually you have to look at the way you're living inside it.

That's where the real work begins.

If you recognize that your fear keeps hurting people, clean it up. If you keep repeating the same destructive pattern, stop feeding it. If you're carrying somebody else's shame, put it down. If you've hurt someone, own it. If your life is built around pretending to be someone you're not, start telling the truth.

Seeing reality more clearly should make us want to clean up our shit. Otherwise, what exactly are we awakening for?

That's the Messiah Problem. The arrival of a teacher cannot become an excuse for everyone else to sit in the audience. A Buddha can illuminate the room, but once the lights come on, we all have to look around and deal with what we can finally see.

Maybe that's the larger dance. Not one extraordinary person saving humanity, but humanity finally understanding enough about itself to begin participating consciously in what comes next.

And participation doesn't begin with some enormous mystical revelation.

It begins by paying attention.

FOLLOW THOSE NUDGES

You don't need a bhumi to start. You don't need to hear gods, see visions, decode ancient symbols, or have reality blow open around you. Start smaller.

Pay attention to what catches your attention.

Most of us have thousands of thoughts moving through our minds all day, and we've become remarkably good at dismissing the interesting ones. A face reminds you of someone you haven't thought about in twenty years. A song suddenly brings an old memory roaring back. Someone's name keeps appearing in your mind. You feel an inexplicable pull toward a place, a book, a conversation, or an idea.

Normally we shrug and move on.

Start getting curious instead.

Say you're walking through the grocery store and a stranger passes you. BAM. *They look exactly like someone I dated twenty years ago.* Maybe it's their face, the way they walk, or some tiny gesture that suddenly pulls that person back into your mind.

Why?

Maybe there is something about that old relationship worth looking at again. Maybe you suddenly understand something you couldn't see twenty years ago. Maybe the thought sends you down a completely unrelated rabbit hole. Maybe it means absolutely nothing.

Curiosity doesn't require certainty. It just asks you to follow the thread long enough to see whether anything is attached to the other end.

The same thing happens with instinct. Some hot clueless guy cuts in front of an elderly woman at the checkout and something inside you immediately snaps, *Hey jackass!* That flash matters too. Maybe you gently say, "Hey handsome, there's a line." Maybe you don't. But notice what just happened. Something in you recognized unfairness before you had time to construct an argument about it.

Or maybe someone keeps drifting into your thoughts for no obvious reason. Instead of spending three weeks wondering why, perhaps you send the text. Say hello. Open the door a crack and see what happens.

This is where participating in the dance becomes surprisingly ordinary. Notice. Get curious. Respond when it feels right. See what happens next.

And for the love of God, get more interesting with strangers.

"What do you do for a living?" "Are you married?" "Do you have children?"

Yawn.

We ask the same questions because they are safe and socially approved, and because the answers allow us to quickly sort people into little boxes. Married. Single. Successful. Parent. Professional. Whatever. Then we complain about the weather because apparently two fascinating human beings with entire universes happening inside their heads have nothing more interesting to discuss than whether it might rain.

Fuck that.

Ask something unexpected. Follow the rabbit hole. Say the slightly weird thing. Get curious. Stop trying so hard to be normal.

Your mind is far more interesting than the script you were handed.

SACRED INTERNAL NUDGES (S.I.N.s)

Eventually I gave these little flashes a name: **Sacred Internal Nudges**, or S.I.N.s.

Gut feelings. Hunches. Goosebumps. Déjà vu. Strange associations. Sudden curiosity. That inexplicable little pull toward a person, place, idea, book, song, conversation, or rabbit hole that seems to arrive before you understand why.

Psychic spam mail from the cosmos.

The important thing isn't to blindly obey every thought that crosses your mind. God knows that would be a terrible idea. It is to **notice more before dismissing everything as random**.

Goosebumps roll over your arms while thinking about someone? Interesting. Why them?

Déjà vu hits like a glitch in your personal movie? Pause for a second.

You're standing in Walgreens and suddenly your body tells you something feels off even though your brain has no idea why? Maybe your nervous system opened a tab your conscious mind hasn't caught up to yet.

Terrified of snakes for reasons you cannot explain? Fine. Follow the thread. Although depending on your dating history, the symbolism may not require Sherlock Holmes.

That is the practice: **notice, get curious, follow the thread**.

Not every nudge is divine guidance. Not every thought contains a secret message, and noticing something doesn't mean you have to act on it. But when something keeps tugging at your attention, I think it is worth asking why.

Because divinity rarely kicks down the front door. In my experience, it prefers side entrances. A strange thought. Odd timing. A ridiculous coincidence. A sudden urge. A sensation that makes the hairs on your arms stand up as if your body heard the gossip before your brain did.

And the more attention I gave those little nudges, the harder they became to ignore. A whisper became a tap on the shoulder. The tap became a cosmic Post-it note. Eventually it felt like the universe was standing outside my window at three in the morning holding a boombox over its head like an emotionally unstable John Cusack.

("Ooh girl, shock me like an electric eel." MGMT, Electric Feel)

But noticing the nudges was only half the practice. I still had to decide what to **do** with them. How do you know when fear is talking? When do you trust yourself? When do you speak up, let go, get curious, set a boundary, take the risk, or simply take the damn nap?

Over time, all of this started boiling down to a handful of practices. Nothing particularly mystical. Just ten things that taught me how to move through life a little differently.

Or, as I eventually came to think of them:



1. Choose Courage Over Fear

Fear has terrible career advice.

It almost always tells you to stay where it's safe, keep your mouth shut, and avoid anything that might change your life. The problem is that growth almost never lives there. More often than not, fear is pointing directly toward the doorway you were meant to walk through. Don't wait for it to disappear. Take it with you.

2. Honor Yourself Without Closing Your Heart

There is a difference between being kind and becoming a doormat.

You don't have to betray yourself to prove you're compassionate. Too many of us confuse people-pleasing with love, agreement with kindness, and self-sacrifice with virtue. We say yes when we mean no. We stay quiet when something needs to be said. We keep shrinking ourselves because we're afraid someone might be disappointed, angry, or leave.

That isn't compassion. It's fear wearing compassion's clothes.

Real love includes boundaries. Real generosity includes self-respect. Your "yes" only has meaning if your "no" is allowed to exist too.

The people who truly love you won't ask you to disappear so they can be comfortable. And if setting a healthy boundary costs you a relationship, it probably wasn't the boundary that ended it. The relationship was already depending on your silence.

Honor yourself. Then open your heart from there.

3. Become Radically Curious

Curiosity is one of the most underrated spiritual practices I know.

Ask uncomfortable questions. Wonder why you react the way you do. Be willing to discover that you've been wrong. The moment you become more interested in understanding than in being right, something inside you begins to grow.

Curiosity doesn't just change what you know. It changes who you become.

Every assumption is worth examining. Every certainty deserves an occasional question mark. The stories you tell yourself about other people, the world, and even your own identity may all be incomplete.

Don't be afraid to find out. Curiosity is how closed doors become open ones.

4. Choose Relationships That Nourish Your Soul

Some people leave you feeling larger. Others leave you feeling smaller. Pay attention to the difference. The people you spend the most time with quietly shape the person you become. Choose the ones who water your roots instead of draining them.

And yes, that includes family.

Loving someone does not obligate you to spend unlimited time with them. You can be kind. You can be respectful. You can wish them well from a healthy distance. Sometimes the most compassionate boundary is simply choosing not to keep walking back into a room that keeps teaching you the same painful lesson.

Protecting your peace isn't selfish. It's good gardening.

5. Desire Is Sacred

Desire isn't the problem. The problem is letting desire drive without ever asking where it's trying to go.

Every desire is carrying a message.

Sometimes it's pointing toward love, creativity, intimacy, or purpose. Sometimes it's covering loneliness, fear, shame, or an old wound that's still asking to be seen.

Tantra doesn't tell you to kill desire. It teaches you to become intimate with it. Because once you understand what your desire is actually trying to give you, it stops owning you. It starts teaching you.

6. Wake Up From the Illusion of Scarcity

Fear is a terrible mathematician.

It keeps insisting there isn't enough: not enough love, not enough money, not enough time, not enough opportunity, not enough life. But look around. Nature doesn't think that way. A single tree produces thousands of seeds. One flower blooms into hundreds more. The universe is relentlessly creative.

Scarcity closes the hand. Trust opens it. And open hands are much better at receiving.

7. Practice Sacred Presence

Very few people ever feel truly seen.

Be one of the people who changes that. Put the phone down. Listen longer than feels comfortable. Become fascinated by the person in front of you. Presence is one of the rarest gifts you can give another human being.

8. Return to the Body

When life gets overwhelming, the mind gets lost in stories. It replays old conversations, imagines future disasters, and convinces you that everything needs to be solved immediately.

The body keeps bringing you home.

Your body is part of the curriculum. Not just a vehicle for your consciousness.

Feel your feet on the ground. Take a walk. Stretch. Lift something heavy. Dance in your kitchen. Hug someone you love. Go outside. Breathe. Your body experiences reality directly, without all the commentary.

We spend so much of our lives living from the neck up that we forget the rest of us exists. Move. Sweat. Laugh. Cry. Rest. Let your body remind you that you're alive.

Awakening doesn't happen somewhere else. It happens here, inside this ordinary, miraculous body.

9. Serve Something Greater Than Yourself

When you're lost, help someone.

It sounds almost too simple, but it works. Service has a strange way of pulling us out of ourselves. Sometimes the quickest path back to your own heart begins by caring for someone else's.

10. Rest, Integrate, and Trust the Becoming

Seeds don't grow because they panic. They grow because they spend time in the dark while something invisible begins taking shape. You're allowed to do the same.

You don't have to force your transformation. Do the work. Tell the truth. Pay attention. Then let the roots grow. The deepest changes in our lives usually happen long before anyone, including us, can see them.

And for the record, I think naps are deeply underrated spiritual technology. If you're exhausted, take the damn nap. Your nervous system is doing a lot more work than your to-do list realizes.

Trust what is happening beneath the surface. That's where the real work has always been.

THE TANTRIC MASTER NEXT DOOR

If the word *Tantra* makes porn pop into your head, let me help. Mister Rogers was a tantric master.

No, really.

When you hear the word *Tantra*, do you think of Mister Rogers? Of course not. He taught presence. Compassion. Emotional honesty. Deep listening. Boundaries. Curiosity. Courage. He made people feel seen, safe, and deeply valued simply by giving them his full attention.

That man held space like a spiritual ninja in a cardigan. I'd argue he understood Tantra far better than most people selling "Tantric Weekend Intensives."

That's Tantra!

Although... If you ever see a workshop called How to Train Your Dragon, I'd recommend reading the description first. It could be a profound spiritual practice. Or a very enthusiastic class on anal sex.

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS

The list you just read sounds almost disappointingly ordinary. Be courageous. Tell the truth. Set boundaries. Pay attention. Help people. Rest. No secret incantations or mountaintop initiations required.

Because the practices aren't the strange part. **The strange part is what happens when they start working.**

Stop distracting yourself, stop arranging your life around fear, and become brutally honest about what is happening inside you, and the architecture starts shifting. The parts built on fear do not politely recognize that their lease has expired, pack a few boxes, and move out. They fight eviction. They bargain. They throw spectacular tantrums.

The demolition crew does not arrive looking like a wise old monk with kind eyes and a few comforting words about impermanence. It comes crashing through the wall like the Kool-Aid Man and Godzilla produced a deeply unwell spiritual love child - an enormous radioactive bastard stomping through your inner city, flattening everything you mistook for permanent and dragging the severed head of your biggest demon behind him.

Sometimes what gets demolished is profound. Sometimes it is so unbelievably stupid you begin to question whether enlightenment has a quality-control department.

A crooked floor lamp becomes the physical embodiment of every compromise you've ever made. After glaring at it for three days, you finally announce, "Fuck you, lamp," and carry the bastard to the curb.

A dish sponge smells wrong and somehow feels like a personal betrayal.

The cheerful cartoon character on your shower curtain has been watching you pee for six months, and suddenly you cannot tolerate that smug little fucker's judgment for another second.

A decorative pillow feels emotionally manipulative.

The refrigerator sounds suspicious.

A coffee mug you've owned for fifteen years suddenly has terrible energy and must leave immediately.

A closet smells *too purple*. Not lavender. Not perfume. **Purple**. This makes absolutely no sense, yet your nervous system treats it like breaking news from the universe.

None of these things are actually the problem. They're props. Innocent household objects accidentally cast in supporting roles while something much older moves underneath them.

Fear. Shame. Grief. Old identities. Ancient defenses. Stories you thought you'd finished with years ago.

This is divine demolition.

That's why humanity keeps telling the story through monsters, gods, queens, swords, dragons, fires, floods, deaths, and resurrections. The costumes change, but the archetype doesn't: something fierce arrives to destroy what can no longer remain.

The Queen of Hearts screams, "Off with their heads." Godzilla levels the city.

And long before either of them, Kali was already standing there with her tongue out, sword raised, severed head in hand.

She doesn't come to straighten your altar, fluff your meditation cushion, or light another sandalwood candle.

She comes to clear the damn path.

*("Fist in the air in the land of hypocrisy." **Rage Against the Machine, Wake Up**)*

The head that falls isn't you. It's the false identity you mistook for yourself. The inherited fear you never questioned. The shame somebody handed you when you were too young to refuse it. The belief that love requires suffering. The exhausted story you've carried so long you forgot it was only a story.

That is what *off with their heads* came to mean to me.

Awakening wasn't destroying who I was. It was forcing me to discover what was actually mine and what I had simply been carrying. And my demolition did not stay safely inside meditation or metaphor. It wandered straight into the messiest parts of my actual life. Sex. Anger. Divorce. Money. Grief. My body. My relationships. My deepest fears.

Even a motorized scooter at Costco.

Every piece of it seemed to ask the same question: **Now that you can see the pattern, what are you going to do differently?**

Sometimes the answer was easy. Sometimes the pattern led straight into the places I least wanted to look.

THE IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE

For me, one of those places was infertility. The path pulled me straight back into grief I thought I had already made peace with, and into an old belief buried even deeper beneath it: that if I wanted something beautiful badly enough, life would eventually demand an unbearable price in return.

For about four weeks, one question kept returning: *do you still want a child?*

After nearly a decade of trying, that question wasn't gentle. It was surgical.

One night the voices presented me with something far darker. They offered me two pregnancies, one after the other. There was only one condition: I would have to sacrifice the first child with my own hands.

For about three minutes, I honestly tried to understand the question.

Then something inside me rose up and said, **Fuck no.** I don't care who is asking. I would never do that.

(Looking back, I want to pause here because I know exactly where some readers' minds will go.

This wasn't about abortion, and it wasn't about euthanasia. I have always believed that bodily autonomy is sacred. A woman deciding whether to continue a pregnancy is exercising sovereignty over her own body and her own life. I feel much the same way about people facing unbearable suffering at the end of life.

Compassion sometimes means honoring another person's agency. This experience wasn't asking me to reconsider any of those beliefs. It was asking something entirely different. It was asking whether I still believed love required sacrifice. Whether I still believed joy had to be paid for with suffering. Whether, somewhere deep inside me, I still imagined God as someone who bargains in blood.

That was the real test.

And in that grotesque confrontation, I met myself. Not the frightened woman. The woman who carries spiders outside instead of killing them. The woman who rescues bumblebees trapped in my moms house without thinking twice. The woman who would never strike a child, not because someone handed her a rulebook, but because every part of her knows it would violate something sacred.

There's something else I'd like to say while we're here: Don't hit children. Ever. If the only way you know how to teach a child is through fear or pain, then that isn't your child's lesson.

It's yours.

Walk away if you need to. Breathe. Calm yourself down. Come back when you can respond instead of react.

And be careful with your words. Somewhere along the way, I realized children don't hear our voices for a moment. They carry them for a lifetime.

Call a child stupid often enough and eventually they'll start introducing themselves that way inside their own mind. Tell them they're dramatic, lazy, fat or worthless, and those words have a way of becoming the narrator in their head.

That is not what love is supposed to sound like.)

That night didn't destroy me. It destroyed something much older... the ancient belief that love must always be purchased through suffering. It shattered the story that the divine demands pain before it offers joy. Human beings have been telling some version of that story for thousands of years, dressing it in different languages, different gods, and different rituals, but the message underneath has often remained the same: sacrifice what you love, and perhaps heaven will reward you.

Afterward, I kept thinking about Abraham and Isaac. Maybe we've misunderstood that story.

Because I did make a sacrifice. Just not the one I expected. I sacrificed my life. My certainty. My reputation. My old identity. My comfort. My possessions. The woman who believed she understood how reality worked.

But I never sacrificed love. If anything, love was the only thing left standing when everything else had fallen away.

Maybe that's what the story has been trying to tell us all along. Maybe the divine was never asking us to kill what we love. Maybe it has always been asking us to surrender everything that keeps us from becoming who we were capable of being.

That's what Jesus was showing us. His path was about letting the false self die so that love is all that's left. This is what it truly means to take up your cross: not to seek suffering, but to let everything that isn't love die before you do.

TANTRUMS AS SACRED PRACTICE

Awakening doesn't euthanize your anger. It doesn't sprinkle holy glitter over your nervous system and declare you healed. If anything, becoming more aware can make you temporarily *more* aware of everything that pisses you off.

And apparently, I had some catching up to do.

I had spent years trying to be reasonable, accommodating, productive, polite, and in control. Then suddenly all that carefully managed frustration had nowhere left to hide. Some days I was a full grown woman getting dragged through the gravitational pull of a toddler's meltdown, spinning in emotional orbit because something completely insignificant had become intolerable.

At first, I thought this meant I was going backward. Eventually I began to see the tantrums differently. They were friction. Pressure escaping from places where I had spent years holding it in. The anger itself wasn't necessarily the lesson. What it pointed toward usually was.

Unfortunately, my household objects took the brunt of this spiritual development.

One afternoon, in a moment of spectacular frustration, I grabbed a Sharpie and vandalized my shower curtain. I don't remember exactly what the curtain had done to deserve it, but apparently the offense was serious because this became a habit.

Four shower curtains in six months.

Each one somehow became a canvas for whatever ridiculous little war was happening inside my head. I would write on them, argue with them, assign meaning to them, get annoyed by them, replace them, and eventually begin the whole absurd cycle again.

The latest victim was a giant Hello Kitty. For reasons that made perfect sense to me at the time, I wrote **NOT WILSON** across her chest.

She now sits there, pastel and unblinking, watching me pee like a judgmental oracle from the Land of Plastic Omens.

Was Hello Kitty the source of some profound spiritual crisis? Of course not. Neither was the curtain. But the reaction was real, and that was the useful part. Instead of pretending I wasn't angry because anger seemed insufficiently enlightened, I got to watch it happen. Feel it. Express it without hurting anyone. Eventually laugh at it. And then ask the much more interesting question:

What the hell was I actually angry about? Sometimes there was an answer. Sometimes there wasn't.

Sometimes a shower curtain was just having a very bad day. Interpret that however you want. Trust me, I did.

Repeatedly.

("There's definitely, definitely, definitely no logic to human behaviour." Björk, Human Behaviour)

THE SECOND ARROW

One afternoon my dog grabbed a chicken bone off the ground during a walk, and for about five seconds my brain completely abandoned me.

Oh my God. Is it cooked? Is it going to splinter? Is she choking? Do I need an emergency vet? Is my dog about to die because I wasn't paying attention for three seconds?

Nothing catastrophic happened. She was fine. But my nervous system had already written, directed, and released the feature film.

It reminded me of the Buddhist teaching of the second arrow. The first arrow is what actually happens. Something hurts. Something scares you. Something goes wrong. You cannot always control that.

The second arrow is everything we fire into ourselves afterward. The panic. The blame. The shame. The obsession. The desperate need to control what happens next.

I had been doing that my entire life.

Not every uncomfortable moment is a crisis that needs to be spiritually analyzed, emotionally dramatized, or immediately fixed. Sometimes the dog eats something disgusting. Sometimes somebody doesn't text back. Sometimes you screw something up. Sometimes your body changes. Sometimes life is simply messy.

The practice is learning not to turn every first arrow into twenty more.

That's increasingly how karma makes sense to me. Not as some cosmic system handing out gold stars and punishments, but as the same patterns returning until we respond differently. Again and again, the mirror seems to ask: *Are you reacting from fear, or responding with awareness?*

Oddly enough, I started seeing the same pattern in the way we treat our bodies, especially around weight.

We gain weight and immediately fire the second arrow. *I've failed. I look terrible. I need to fix this. I need a diet, a cleanse, an injection, a new program. Monday. Definitely Monday.*

So we declare war on the body without getting particularly curious about what the body has been living through. Because some of the heaviest things we carry never appear on a scale. Grief. Shame. Stress. Loneliness. Exhaustion. Years spent in survival mode. Old patterns we keep trying to outrun while wondering why our bodies won't simply cooperate.

Sometimes the body isn't the enemy. Sometimes it has been standing in the middle of the battlefield with us the entire time.

That changed the question for me. Instead of *How do I force myself to change?* it became *What happens when I stop treating myself like an emergency that needs to be fixed?*

Real change rarely comes from firing more arrows. Sometimes it begins by finally putting the bow down.

THE ASSIGNMENT

By then, I had grown used to following the strange little assignments that appeared in my mind, even when I had absolutely no idea what they were supposed to teach me. One afternoon, the next one arrived.

Go to Costco. Get on one of the motorized scooters.

There was nothing wrong with my legs, which made the whole thing feel ridiculous. But by then I knew the drill. I went to Costco, climbed onto a scooter, and started gliding through the warehouse like a depressed Roomba with a membership card.

It didn't take long before I became aware of something I normally moved through the world without thinking about.

Other people's eyes.

Some glanced at me and quickly looked away. Some seemed curious. A few looked suspicious, as though they were quietly trying to determine whether I really needed the scooter. Others smiled or moved aside to give me room. Most were perfectly kind, but suddenly I was conscious of being seen differently before anyone knew a single thing about me.

Somewhere between the bulk toilet paper and muffins large enough to feed a small village, I understood the assignment.

For the first time, I wasn't thinking about disability from the comfortable distance of someone standing on two healthy legs. I was getting the tiniest glimpse of what it might feel like to move through a world where strangers are constantly gathering information about your body and making assumptions about what you can do, what you can't do, what happened to you, and whether you belong in the space you're occupying.

I noticed things I had barely registered before. How much room the scooter needed to turn. How displays suddenly became obstacles. How differently people responded when I was sitting instead of standing. The awkward glances. The deliberate attempts not to stare. The small kindnesses that became surprisingly noticeable when someone moved a cart, made room, or simply looked directly at me and smiled.

I also realized how often we do this to one another without meaning to. We see a body, an age, a wheelchair, a cane, a scar, a size, a face, and within seconds our minds begin writing a story about the person carrying it.

That afternoon didn't teach me what it is like to live with a disability. A few laps around Costco could never do that. But it did show me how much I had never noticed. And that may have been the point.

This path has a strange way of teaching compassion. Sometimes it doesn't give you a philosophy to think about. Sometimes it changes where you're sitting and quietly says, Now look again.

CLEAN EXIT

During my divorce, I kept getting the same instruction: let the money go and get out clean.

The message was unusually specific. No prolonged negotiations. No war rooms. No spreadsheets calculating every dollar I could reasonably claim. The gods had apparently circled a date on some invisible calendar and decided that when that day arrived, I was supposed to accept the numbers in front of me and walk away.

I had a little less than a month. My divorce mediator thought I had lost my mind. Honestly, there were moments when I wondered the same thing.

Just two months earlier, my husband had asked whether we could remain married in name only because separating our assets would be complicated and expensive. By the time we actually reached the divorce, that practicality had hardened into something colder. The offers felt smaller than they should have been. I knew I could fight for more, and every ordinary instinct told me that I probably should.

That was what made the assignment so difficult.

I had spent all this time learning not to shrink myself, not to confuse kindness with self abandonment, and not to surrender simply because conflict made me uncomfortable. So how was walking away from money I had every right to fight for any different?

That question tortured me. Eventually I realized the difference was choice.

Making yourself small because you are afraid to fight is surrender. Knowing you *can* fight and deciding the fight is no longer worth what it will cost you is something else entirely.

I wasn't being asked to pretend I wasn't hurt or that the settlement felt fair. I wasn't being asked to make him right and myself wrong. I was being asked to decide what I valued more: extracting every possible dollar from the life we had built together, or getting out before resentment became the final thing our marriage gave me.

So I left.

I hated it. I argued with the gods about it for months. There were plenty of moments when I replayed the numbers and wondered whether I had been an idiot. But eventually the money stopped being the part I remembered most.

What remained was the fact that I had walked away without spending years dragging our marriage through courtrooms, turning every old wound into evidence, and allowing the worst days of our relationship to become the opening years of my new life.

That was the clean exit. Not leaving without pain. Not leaving without anger. Not even leaving without wondering whether I should have fought harder. Leaving without letting the fight become who I was.

For most of my life, I thought strength meant knowing when to hold on. Tantra was teaching me something harder. Sometimes strength is knowing when you have every right to keep fighting and choosing, very deliberately, to put the sword down.

PUSHING PAST FEAR AND SMALLNESS

Eventually the practice wandered into the territory everyone assumes Tantra is about in the first place. Sex.

Except by then, sex had stopped feeling like an escape hatch or something to be embarrassed by. It became another classroom. No syllabus. Very few rules. Extremely opinionated faculty.

There was a stretch of several months when my mind went completely technicolor feral. I thought about sex constantly. Everyone who wandered into my orbit became potential casting material for whatever absurd production was happening inside my head. Cashiers. Joggers. People I knew. People I absolutely did not know. The old guy walking his schnauzer.

Nobody was safe. And neither were the gods.

They were right there like gleeful stagehands in some cosmic experimental theater. Shiva especially seemed delighted to participate, usually by holding whatever imaginary lover I had conjured while my mind gleefully explored every boundary it could find.

It was the spiritual version of that old advice to imagine your audience naked, except apparently my subconscious had been given an unlimited budget and absolutely no adult supervision.

Jack became such a frequent character in these fantasies that eventually the whole thing crossed over from erotic to genuinely hilarious. I started writing some of it down because the absurdity was too good to waste.

At one point my imagination produced something resembling the world's least Disney approved version of *Beauty and the Beast*: an entire room of dancing sex toys bouncing around like enchanted household objects while a filthy imaginary chorus welcomed everyone to the festivities.

It was ridiculous. It was also strangely liberating.

Because underneath all the sex was something much more interesting. My mind was testing boundaries I had spent a lifetime treating as fixed. Who am I allowed to desire? What am I allowed to imagine? What makes something attractive? How much of attraction is physical, and

how much comes from the way another person makes us feel? What happens when you let an uncomfortable thought exist without immediately judging yourself for having it?

That became one of my favorite experiments. Ready? Let's play...

Go somewhere new and people-watch. A coffee shop. A bar. A park. Somewhere you can sit for a while and observe people you don't know.

Now find someone in the room you are not remotely attracted to. Instead of dismissing them, change the story. Imagine this person understands you completely. They make you feel safe, wanted, beautiful, funny, and entirely at ease in your own skin. Imagine being close to them feels exactly the way you've always wanted closeness to feel.

Then look at them again. Did anything change?

The point isn't to force attraction. It's to notice how quickly the supposedly solid categories in our minds can move when the story changes. Attraction. Desire. Shame. Gender. Beauty. Power. The things we insist we would *never* think, want, try, or become. Those edges became fascinating places to wander, because sometimes a boundary is wisdom, and sometimes it's fear wearing a very convincing uniform.

And nowhere did humans seem to have more boundaries than sex. We desire it, hide it, sell it, regulate it, fantasize about it, build identities around it, and make rules about who can have it and with whom. For something responsible for creating nearly every human being who has ever lived, we are remarkably weird about sex.

Which made me wonder whether sex was ever really the problem. Maybe the more interesting story was everything humanity had piled on top of it. Shame. Power. Religion. Gender. Control. Pleasure. Fear. Love. Creation.

That rabbit hole was about to get considerably bigger.

Thank you for reading these preview sections. I hope you've enjoyed exploring these ideas as much as I've enjoyed sharing them.

From here, the story becomes stranger, the questions become bigger, and the connections become more surprising. Piece by piece, ideas that seemed completely unrelated begin snapping together until an entirely different picture starts to emerge.

When the book is published, I hope you'll come back and read the rest.

I'd love to share the complete story with you. The best chapters are still ahead.