

# UNMASKING

Mayra Porrata



## UNMASKING

Uncovering the cultural barriers to personal peace

Mayra Porrata

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For my daughters, parents, and beloved family  
For my first friends at Colegio Santa Rita  
For my friends at Holy Family grade school  
For all my teachers

You are only free when you realize you belong no  
place—you belong every place—no place at all. The  
price is high. The reward is great.

Maya Angelou

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## Introduction

As I stepped out of the car and set foot in the beautiful rainforest, I couldn't wait to hike and gain some inspiration and life direction. Discouraged and dismayed by the demands of my corporate career, I was desperately seeking a change and a solid trajectory for a new professional chapter. On November 3, 1997, I returned to my birthplace looking for clues.

Hiking for nearly an hour through rain, my destination was the famous Mount Britton tower. Although I was born on the island, I had never visited El Yunque or seen its vistas from this location and vantage point. As I approached the simple tower I noticed the low cloud cover. Despite this, I was certain I would see something if I climbed up to the top.

Like a child running to meet a dear friend, I hurried up the damp circular stairwell. Winding my way upwards, the air grew slightly thicker and cooler. When the stairs ended, I found myself engulfed by fog. It was so thick I could not

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see my own hand. Seeking to get my bearings, I felt my way to the wall and walked around the perimeter of the tower hoping I could see something-- anything. All I could see was a white cloud. I felt foolish and defeated, as if God was playing a trick on me.

I began crying as I found my way to the cold cement beneath me. What was I supposed to see? How could anyone get any direction or answers in a fog? Angrily, I asked God "*what am I supposed to see here?*"

God answered. I listened. I cried. My new life was set into motion the very next day.

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When I asked God about my next professional chapter and direction, I was dumbfounded by the immediate and concise answer. I cried because the directive sounded too basic— not to mention entirely unappealing.

Maybe God was a little confused and thought I asked a different question? I honestly wondered for a good 24 hours. How could *“go study and learn about people”* be even remotely related to career advice? I did not really want to believe it, less alone honor it.

Growing up I had many passions --- art, design, astronomy, space travel, comparative religion, nature, systems, cultures, and languages. But actual people and their inner-workings? Not so much. Yet, something in me knew there was truth in that answer. Part of me knew that I needed to investigate and apply all my best research skills in the direction of my “people” exploration.

In the fall of 1998, 4 months pregnant with my first daughter, I enrolled in a graduate program in community

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counseling. Many years and two daughters later, I graduated from Kent State University with a master's degree in community health education and promotion.

The 9+ years I spent in graduate school provided me with a smorgasbord of theories and insights about the human condition and about life. I was enthralled and fascinated. I loved every one of my professors. I learned many things and wondered many things (a million or so) about why we diagnose people instead of the culture and why grief awareness, recovery, or spiritual health were never mentioned in any of my classes. To me, it seemed like the proverbial elephant in the room.

So, I worked around it. Focusing my career on the social, emotional, and mental aspects of health, instead of the physical (diet, exercise, sexuality, etc.) I dedicated many more years to studying how these dimensions of our human existence helped our hindered health-- all the while applying this knowledge, walking into and through countless fogs, and always pausing to ask God "*what am I supposed to see here, now?*"

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This book is as much about my own unmasking as it is about uncovering the societal and cultural masks most of us wear. Masking is a term from the fields of psychology and sociology. It means to present oneself in a manner that conforms to cultural expectations or norms, even if those norms contradict one's experience and truth—when we lack the courage to be real, vulnerable, or be disliked.

Masking is also a term in autism circles—descriptive of the socially protective armor many individuals adopt to reduce the intense anxiety of social settings. Being “highly masked” is associated with late detection; the reason many low-needs autistic and neurodivergent individuals, especially women, live unaware of their wiring.

I am by no means an autism expert; however, I am one of those highly masked autistics -- formally diagnosed at age 57. My diagnosis not only catapulted me into a beautiful new dimension of self-awareness and self-understanding, but instantly answered life-long questions

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that had haunted me since our relocation to Ohio when I was 11 years-old. It explained why I was diagnosed with severe anxiety in my teens, why researching was my hobby (among many other highly specialized hobbies!) and incessantly wondered why adults were chronically stressed and sad. Fundamentally, the diagnosis pointed me to the realization of my own masks.

Many among us, including those who are autistic, ADHD, and dyslexic individuals, have unique sensitivities and intelligence. Being highly attuned and sensitive to stimuli, both internal and external requires additional processing time. Although we may lack the verbal skills and confidence to communicate what we are noticing, feeling, or sensing, things are seen, felt, and known, nonetheless.

Because I did not speak English fluently, my social deficits were assumed to be cultural in nature. My severe anxiety and sensory overwhelm were attributed to the relocation and the abrupt change in climate, not to the obvious daily trauma and grief.

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As I learned English, I naturally studied my teachers and fellow students-- how they spoke, how they pronounced words, what they talked about, the way their faces looked when they mentioned certain things, their fear, if they smiled when they spoke, the tone of their voice, the energy they emanated, and the way their voice or words made me feel. From my perspective, I needed to observe and understand so that I could survive.

A mask is **cultural camouflage** not a personality trait.

It helps us to fit or blend in **but** also obscures our inner light and capacity for true belonging.

The language and cultural differences in Ohio provided immediate contrast and enabled me to understand much about people, gender differences, language, identity, social exclusion, going along to get along—but also, how my masks of worry/confusion, victimhood, judgement, and anger came to be.

If only the pediatrician could have said to my parents: *“your daughter is grieving,”* this may have spared me

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decades of sadness and confusion. If I can help spare anyone or inform parents that their children may be grieving this may help many more of us to unmask.



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### The masks we live in

In 2015, while teaching community health education at Kent State University, news of a provocative new documentary made its way to me; ***The mask we live in.*** Its aim was to illuminate the ways our narrow definition of masculinity harms not only men but our expectations of them and society-at-large.

Having lost my father a year before and knowing the devastatingly painful impact that societal and cultural expectations placed on him, I understood this would be one of many more “unmaskings” because we all conspire and cocreate our culture.

Culture is an unspoken language—collective agreements that are set into motion and kept alive by everyone who participates. When someone does not go along with the plan, they are often shamed, ridiculed, corrected, or punished. But culture is a living, malleable thing and is subject to logic and wisdom.

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Much like today, my parents grew up during a socially dynamic time-- a time when people began to question the culture as well as the institutional and social structures that formed our society. Fueled by anger and outrage, protests of all kinds emerged in our shared landscape during the 1960's and onward. These were the initial cries of a long and quiet suffering that could no longer be denied-- the waves of which are now crashing on our own shores.

Throughout my own life, I have read and listened to thousands of stories about human suffering; wars in the name of God; outsourcing our time and gifts just to meet economic expectations; and all the distortions and corruptions that emerge when people's logic is hijacked by fear.

We accept culture. We conspire with it. We keep it going. But now it is not just our parents who are questioning this co-created experience, but our children and their children, too.

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How do we collectively “unmask” so that we may return to our essence and essential nature to create supportive and productive cultural norms? I am not sure, but I would like to help. If “unmasking” is about making the invisible visible – coming out from our own shadows and stepping over the cultural guardrails designed to keep us estranged from one another, why are we masking to being with? Aren’t we tired of operating this way?



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## Masks at-a-glance

Masks are socially acceptable ways of operating and belonging. They are personas that are adopted to gain social acceptance (belonging) and/or to avoid the pain of social exclusion. From my observations, masks conspire to uphold the status quo and restrict freedom and joy.



The mask of pessimism



The mask of judgement



The mask of duty



The mask of anger



The mask of intellect



The mask of morality



The mask of victimhood



The mask of privilege



The mask of worry



The mask of power



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### The fear our masks conceal



Until you shine a giant spotlight on it, **fear** is the hidden program, backdrop, and motivator behind our masking. Fear is not something that randomly ‘happens to you’– it is wired in each of us until we override its circuitry.

Fear occurs in the absence of confidence in ourselves and/or trust in the reality of Universe/God. Fear is what happens when we do not see a way to handle a threat. Fear obscures our ability to open our hearts and enslaves us to a punishing existence. Becoming psychologically and emotionally free from fear is deep inner-work each of us must undertake and the only pathway I know to personal peace and true belonging. Living in fear makes us angry. Whenever we live in fear we are not free.

Fear is both a construct (an idea) and self-created. It is a state or experience that can quickly replicate itself while creating a whole chain of chemical, electrical, and

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biological reactions in our bodies. Fear hurts. In my model of grief recovery, fear is experienced early in the process, in pre-grief. But anger, the symptom of our unaddressed needs is the key symptom in the acute phase of grieving—the most dangerous and complicated phase.

To be truly conflict-free and free from fear, we must each understand and dissolve all the ways we are not. Many people are addicted to these chemicals, to the fight, to anger, and to the rush of energy it provides. But just like any addiction, the energy rush is only temporary. It is still you, your benign and divine self beneath the anger and fear.

For those of us who have a troubled history with belonging, fear is the signal that triggers our masking -- that armors us to protect our hearts. What is beneath our anger or fear? It is always an unmet need—and that unmet need, in whatever shade, flavor, or expression is always a resistance to love—to loving ourselves and



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allowing what is *to be* so that we may see it anew—with new eyes.

Conflict or disharmony points us towards what is out of balance- out of harmony with our deepest sense of self. Its purpose is to lead us towards self-awareness and understanding so that we (you) can adapt or dissolve the tension in *you*—not in the other person, in **YOU**.

Conflict awareness and resolution are not just professional skills but personal competencies that shield us from becoming intellectually or emotionally enmeshed in battles that have nothing to do with us.

Anytime you feel your blood rising to your cheeks or your heart silently pounding in anger, ask yourself: “*what am I afraid of?*” Then ask yourself **why** that is. That answer is the magic key that unlocks a new door of self-awareness and brings us back into our body. And if you *really* want to get to the heart of the matter, ask yourself: “*what in this person or situation is asking for my acceptance/my love?*” Again, the answer is *not* about the other person, but about **you**.

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As I work through my own layers of fear and clearly see the limited conditions I created for myself, it is abundantly clear that operating from fear is irrational and illogical. I also see why and how I hurt others-- anytime we are afraid and cannot verbalize our dread we hurt others through our ignorance – our unawareness.

By living from the integrity of our deepest knowing, we not only dissolve our fear, but summon loving energy and creative power to manage any conflict with grace, wisdom, and ease.

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### Masks conceal our divine and cosmic nature

The entire universe is connected. There are countless writings, living researchers, and scientific findings that point to the fact that everything in the universe derives from one Source – the One consciousness, tone, or breath. Some people call this God. You and I come from there—from that same Source, and have taken on this form, a human body, while we are here, now.

You may pray or think about God differently than me—use different words or rituals, but that does not change what God/the Universe is. Anytime we conspire with our fears and limitations we are estranged from our own remembrance --- from our innate divinity, benevolence, and Source.

The ugly or evil we see in the world is simply a denial of God—the unity of the universe--- and therefore a denial of the unity and divinity *in us*. This denial is our greatest

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individual and collective betrayal, and the reason fear, division, war, and conflict exist—it is the fundamental reason why people fight. They have forgotten who and what they truly are.

Without a direct relationship to God/Source, not to dogma, but to *your* own human heart, you are in exile. Our heart chakra or energy center is a powerful and multi-dimensional portal. If you can begin to perceive/think of your own heart as God's heart, the Universal heart, or the heart of God, you will begin to align with universal wisdom. Remember, the kingdom of God, the entire Universe is within and through you—through each of us.

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### Masks conceal our individuality and uniqueness

Most of us do not think about our own diversity or multi-dimensional nature, much less understand it. In society, we are routinely placed into a few boxes based on our gender, marital status, occupation, or the color of our skin. And yet, so many obvious things are neglected or ignored in our collective understanding of others and ourselves.

Without coming into a deeper appreciation of our diversity--all that makes us truly unique individuals, we are indeed relegated to living out of a prescribed “box” — a piece of information or data that undermines our true identity, potential, and capabilities. These “boxes” separate us and often reinforce visible differences when who we really are can hardly be squeezed into a single box.

What makes each of us unique often points to both the gifts and superpowers, as well as the challenges we must

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overcome. All of us have latent talents awaiting our discovery and integration. Beyond our gender, skin color, and race, all of us have preferences, abilities, and areas for awareness or development. If you think about it, each one of us is a unified universe itself.

Consider each of these aspects of “you” and how they inform how you see yourself and the world around you:

- your genetics—DNA (how your body works)
- your neurotype (how your brain works/operates)
- your zip code (how your environment informs you)
- your thoughts/narrative about the physical conditions of where/how you grew up
- your emotional awareness & intelligence – EQ
- your family constellation and your awareness of family dynamics
- parent’s level of self-awareness & EQ
- your sibling’s level of self-awareness
- the energetic nature of each family member
- the general themes of what your family strived to overcome (consciously or unconsciously)

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- general themes of addiction or behavioral patterns
- who or what your parents and family feared
- how sexism, nationalism, colonialism, racism, or any exclusionary mentality informed you
- family religion (if any)
- family rituals of meaning
- your special abilities and/or disabilities
- the languages you know, understand, or speak
- the ways you perceive and see the world
- your elemental nature
- your astrological blueprint (mathematical blueprint)
- your purpose & how you serve
- your dreams and desires
- what you (your authentic self) values



**If you could only identify as “one thing,”  
one identity, what would it be?**





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### Masks are baked into our stories

Stories and history are an inherent aspect of every human culture and life. Embedded in our DNA and expressed in and through our diversity, each of us embodies a theme and general narrative that guides our unique journey through this life.

Your worldview, what you believe to be real and true, as well as the story you tell yourself and others about ‘you’ is the foundation of what you are living and experiencing—what you are reinforcing and co-creating in the world. All of us have stories and all of us live within history—that is until we learn more about history, including the cosmos, and expand our own circle of awareness and concern.

As it stands now, some of our histories and stories are inspiring and helpful and some conspire to keep us stuck, sick, and in the dark. Most of us are familiar with the loops and re-looping of stories, thoughts, and emotions based on historical information, or our own past. **This is where most of our masks are.**

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When we reflect on our lived experience, not the loop we are playing in our minds, we gain new insights and understanding about ourselves -- what you know, may have forgotten, or have simply outgrown. You may also realize you are carrying family or generational grief with you. What will you do with this? Eventually most of us come to realize we are not our story, or grief, but the one living or perpetuating it—and that if we choose to, we can extract the grace from our lifelong hardships and heal these wounds—all of them.

Ask yourself:

- What values and beliefs did I inherit from my family of origin? How did these values or beliefs influence my sense of self?
- How did the place (zip code, town, state, or country) I grew up in shape me and my views of the world around me?
- How did the relationships and roles within my family inform my sense of belonging?
- How do my spiritual or religious views influence my thoughts, beliefs, and emotions?

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- What common human values do I share with people from other countries, faiths, or cultures?

From **52 Weeks: writing to reveal your authentic self** (Solara Publishing, 2024)

Masks often conceal generational grief.

If you think about this rationally, masks are baked into our stories—they are the myths and archetypes that have defined us to this point.

What are *your* recurring loops or stories? Chances are some of them are imbued with elements of fear, victimhood, helplessness, or betrayal. Perhaps your stories are about attaining power, winning, conquering an ‘enemy,’ or about ‘saving’ the world and ending all wars.

Whether it is a cultural or relational wound it is important to notice that most of us have been educated to perpetuate conflict--both inner and outer. This is why regardless of where we were born, everyone has stories of power-over, victimization, and fear. It is the hidden backdrop for most cultures and systems in society --a backdrop we have historically accepted and conspired

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with, but a backdrop many societies and people have outgrown.











Though many people are reconsidering the fear-ridden scripts and socially-constructed polarities that keep us stressed and continually frazzled, for now, cultural masks are baked into the mainstream culture, and all share a common basis (fear).

In truth, masks provide protection and safeguard us against social exclusion. That being said, understanding what they limit or obscure *in us* and therefore in society may yield insights for behavioral change and transformative personal growth. Unmasking is not a requirement, but understanding its necessity in *your* life can free up energetic (e.g., creative, social, psychological, physical, and emotional) resources for your daily life and living.

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## Identity, protection, and limitation

I offer this as a starting point for reflection and dialogue— not a definitive catalog. Could these masks be hiding other strengths or fears, or limiting more than what I have observed? Absolutely.

<p><b>PESSIMISM</b>  <b>identity:</b> limited  <b>hides:</b> strength  <b>limits:</b> agency</p> 	<p><b>JUDGEMENT</b>  <b>identity:</b> leader  <b>hides:</b> humility  <b>limits:</b> connection</p> 
<p><b>DUTY</b>  <b>identity:</b> obligated  <b>hides:</b> creativity  <b>limits:</b> liberty</p> 	<p><b>ANGER</b>  <b>identity:</b> tough  <b>hides:</b> unmet needs  <b>limits:</b> self-kindness</p> 
<p><b>INTELLECT</b>  <b>identity:</b> expert  <b>hides:</b> intuition  <b>limits:</b> wisdom</p> 	<p><b>MORALITY</b>  <b>identity:</b> superior  <b>hides:</b> awareness  <b>limits:</b> compassion</p> 
<p><b>VICTIMHOOD</b>  <b>identity:</b> helpless  <b>hides:</b> agency  <b>limits:</b> worthiness</p> 	<p><b>PRIVILEGE</b>  <b>identity:</b> powerful  <b>hides:</b> injustice  <b>limits:</b> generosity</p> 
<p><b>WORRY</b>  <b>identity:</b> insecure  <b>hides:</b> self-trust  <b>limits:</b> true power</p> 	<p><b>POWER</b>  <b>identity:</b> superior  <b>hides:</b> insecurity  <b>limits:</b> humanity</p> 



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### What is possible when we unmask

Most of us have experienced or witnessed an event when something catastrophic happens that unites mere strangers-- when our humanity is in full display. When we operate from our intrinsic nature, unmasked, we are capable of near heroic actions. That is because the cultural barriers, including our criticisms and judgements are temporarily dissolved.

As a young immigrant, I was keenly attuned to criticism. I learned early on that the words anyone wielded towards or against me were a *confession*—a word bomb or clue into their own psyche, shadow, or mask—in other words, the fears or insecurities I was bringing up in *them*.

In many ways, criticism is a subtle attempt at control and is typically done to reduce our own anger, fear, or anxiety. If we can catch ourselves and turn our gaze inward, towards our own thoughts, fears, and beliefs, we can often untangle ourselves from that which we are criticizing. We see that it is us reflecting our own shadow

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upon the landscape and blaming others for what is missing or what we do not quite see.

We have all been there, as either the critic or the criticized, or both. It is only through revelation that any of us escape this dynamic. When we can see and bless our own masks and shadows, we bring light to our deeply held human fears and transmute the darkness or separation for our common good.






“As we forgive those who trespass against us” is not just a powerful line from a prayer, but a gentle directive to live wisely—to see beyond the person or system to the mindset that is operating in them, but most importantly *in you*. This is how we ascend to a new level of awareness—to a new level of understanding of and for ourselves.

Living from historic scripts is a type of delusion -- an enslavement. You are re-living history, the past, instead of living the reality of the present moment. This is a painful purgatory each one of us must humbly but bravely step out of. Living in the present moment is the only sanity and refuge—one that naturally directs us to








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trusting our inner-knowing--- the Holy Spirit, Mother Nature, God. Reclaiming and aligning with this Universal wisdom is the only thing that makes us free.

<p><b>identity:</b> limited <b>hides:</b> strength <b>limits:</b> agency</p>	 PESSIMISM	<p><b>From pessimism to purpose</b> overcoming pessimistic tendencies and summoning inner strength helps us realize what we truly desire</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> dutiful <b>hides:</b> creativity <b>limits:</b> opportunities</p>	 DUTY	<p><b>From obligation to opportunity</b> when we are bound by 'shoulds' we ignore life's invitation to opportunities that expand, not contract us</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> expert <b>hides:</b> intuition <b>limits:</b> wisdom</p>	 INTELLECT	<p><b>From facts to wisdom</b> leveraging our intuition and emotional intelligence versus relying on historic information enables wisdom to emerge</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> helpless <b>hides:</b> agency <b>limits:</b> worthiness</p>	 VICTIMHOOD	<p><b>From helpless to self-reliant</b> fighting the old keeps us stuck in the past-- harnessing our power converts our energy into productive action</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> insecure <b>hides:</b> self-trust <b>limits:</b> true power</p>	 WORRY	<p><b>From frozen to fabulous</b> fully trusting ourselves dissolves confusion and enables us to align with our gifts and skills</p>

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**What is possible when we unmask - *continued***

<p><b>identity:</b> leader <b>hides:</b> humility <b>limits:</b> connection</p>	 <p>JUDGEMENT</p>	<p><b>From shadow to light</b> what we judge in another is always our own shadow-- see it and merge that shadow with your light!</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> tough <b>hides:</b> unmet needs <b>limits:</b> self-kindness</p>	 <p>ANGER</p>	<p><b>From angry to advocate</b> anger is a teacher -- it points us towards something unloved or unmet in us.</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> superiority <b>hides:</b> self-awareness <b>limits:</b> compassion</p>	 <p>MORALITY</p>	<p><b>From criticism to compassion</b> we are complex beings and come from the same Source/Creator--no one is above or below anyone.</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> powerful <b>hides:</b> injustice <b>limits:</b> generosity</p>	 <p>PRIVILEGE</p>	<p><b>From privilege to generosity</b> sharing versus hoarding our gifts enables true wealth and prosperity.</p>
<p><b>identity:</b> superior <b>hides:</b> insecurity <b>limits:</b> humanity</p>	 <p>POWER</p>	<p><b>From role to relevance</b> the ability to influence is a huge responsibility -- aligning with our humanity ensures we remind others of <i>their</i> inherent power.</p>

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### Updating our software

All of us go through periods or lifetimes of confusion—I liken it to operating with obsolete software. Confusion remains prevalent in our lives until ***you decide*** you want to stop being confused.

To upgrade your operating software, you must inform *your mind* with new narratives, divine literature, universal knowledge, and the wisdom of *your* heart and higher knowing. Let us consider a few things:

Where do *your* thoughts come from? Do you believe them? These are two important questions to qualify. Your thoughts, the way you think and speak is just like operating software. Your software has been formed by your worldview and its many inputs. Are these inputs still valid and useful?

Consider also that your voice and words are instructions that carry the energy signature of the thoughts and beliefs you hold about yourself and the world around you—words ripple and create. Language is like water you

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swim in everyday-- living consciousness that embodies the living current of your life. Language enables or disables. Is your language disabling or enabling you?

There are many books and resources that support us in attaining new inputs and information, but the quickest way to upgrade *our software* is prayer and meditation. Even if you are agnostic, understanding or accepting that the universe is a mystery naturally orients us inward. For those from monotheistic religions, having a direct relationship with God is essential for our health and wellbeing. And for those from non-monotheistic traditions, meditation is the pathway that enables our connection to living consciousness— to the cosmos, the Holy Spirit.

No matter our spiritual or religious leanings, anytime our mind or heart races this is our queue to breathe and surrender--- not to project ourselves onto a delusional screen.

Being self-aware and self-regulating are God-given gifts. When we become the observer of “our software,” the programs that are running our minds and daily decisions,

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we make space for logical input(s) and information. You realize, naturally, that you are not your mind, but the one in charge of it. You also understand that you are not ‘crazy’ for thinking the worst or feeling scared or panicked at times. Fear *is* wired into our brains and reinforced in our media and society. Fear grows in isolation. If we fight fear, we are only fighting ourselves. Tempering fear with reality, with love, is the only cure for this condition.

This tempering or ‘upgrade’ of sorts occurs when we bring our mind into alignment with our hearts. The living, coherent flow of information and universal wisdom that is channeled through our hearts has been underutilized by most of us. As a health educator and Reiki Master, my sense is that this may be one of the reasons why heart-disease is the number one killer on the planet—because this loving and living flow is blocked. Whose job is it to reverse this leading cause of death and disability in society? It is our job—each of us—all of us. People are marred by fear, stuck in psychological purgatories, and unable to grieve because of this.

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As of this writing, new information, energies, biology, light, and consciousness are conspiring to upgrade all of us-- to help each human being realize their true nature and the reality we have collectively been separated from—embracing this will naturally open more hearts.

When our minds and body are touched by the insights and energies of love, we instantly understand that we are safe—that we belong-- and that our reliance on external cures or fighting is not only futile but perpetuates the exact conditions we wish to mitigate. Love is healing in ways we do not fully understand.

If your awareness of this living energy is blocked or untapped, that is okay, but just know that it is up to you to open or allow it. Even in our resistance to love-- what we perceive as its opposite expression, we are still being led inward towards our center.

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### **A note on media literacy**

Before making a purchase or consuming media, pause and reflect on its origin, intention, its impact on the world, and whether it aligns with your values — ***your heart.***

This practice fosters intentionality and supports a harmonious relationship with what you are ingesting and digesting in your life.





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### The power of logic

As an air sign (Aquarius) and neuro-spicy individual, logic is my default software. Logic is what enables me to make sense of myself and the world around me. But my logic was compromised for many years—that is what unresolved grief does to a person. Fear and confusion tamper with our natural bearings and hinder our logic in multiple ways. As a result, whether it is logical or not, we do what everyone else is doing-- we go with the cultural flow.

Consider for a moment how many millions of people are compromised by cultural trauma and grief. Consider the leaders (political, institutional, organizational) who perpetuate and promote division, war, economic fears, and false competition. Are these aspects of our culture *logical* given our knowledge of history and vast intelligence?

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If your own life *feels* illogical, think back to when you were a young child—to the innocence, freedom, and **joy of being alive.**

When we can return to our original factory settings and programs—meaning, the last happy and sweet version you can recall or imagine of yourself, logic is back online. Then, if you choose, you can reweave her/his innate wisdom into your life. It does not matter how old you are today.

Those memories or programs are still there for most of us. If you can recall or connect with the happiest and freest version of yourself, is it logical to abandon this intelligence—to abandon yourself? If for whatever reason you do not have this recall, simply consider what it would feel like to be real (unmasked), joyful, and free.

The last happy and sweet version of me was my eleven-year-old self; the innocent girl before the loss of everything I loved and understood. My language, culture, family, friends, environment, and climate were altered in a

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single plane ride. From day to night. From warm to cold. From sunny to gray. Literally.

Tragic things happen to all of us. All of us are grieving something or a few somethings. Anytime someone behaves in a way that appears illogical or irrational, their internal GPS is down or compromised. As such, they need our compassion and humanity, not our judgement or ridicule. They have simply forgotten who they truly are.



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### Spiritual maturity

Without exception all of us share a spiritual solidarity—we are in this world, but only temporarily. Honoring our interdependence with others and with nature results in choices that uphold this awareness and understanding.

When we revere ourselves, life, and others, we simply cannot diminish, distort, or disarm anyone, for to do so would be illogical and irrational. War is illogical. Moving beyond the inherited scripts that conspire to keep us divided and estranged from our own belonging and from one another is part of our common evolution.

Spiritual maturity is a natural process that results in a keen sensitivity to the subtle and magical aspects of *your* human existence. Your life, just as it is, is leading you towards your fortification, reunification, and revelation—your own spiritual sovereignty.

While it may not always be understood, this call towards spiritual sovereignty is a call to break away from the painful stories and masks of the past. It is a loud call

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urging us to reunite with our deepest knowing and use the sacred energies of love to heal our grief and create a new version of life and beauty. There are many ways to amplify our inner-knowing and wisdom—potent practices that ground and can guide us to the new dawns of our lives. But before new dawns, the most important and pressing question before us is ***will you say ‘yes’ to living in peace?***

## UNMASKING

### Towards personal peace

Peace comes from the inside of our lives and daily living. It is the call to live from your own unique essence and to bring light, God's Light, to what has been hidden and separated from our hearts.

Disguised as heartbreak, confusion, chronic pain, grief, illness, in our repetitive thought patterns or even in our successes and joy, the creative energy of life is continually inviting us to live authentically and to remove our masks.

Although we have been collectively estranged from our inner-knowing, inside each of us there is a seed—the seed of peace. Living peacefully is a choice and something that is birthed and nurtured inside each one of us. Peace is not something to fight for, but something to nurture and protect.

For many, personal peace is deeply connected to spiritual well-being-- a parallel co-existence to something greater than oneself—e.g., God, Mother Earth, the

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universe, benevolence. But cultivating personal peace is beneficial to all aspects of health.

### **Social health**

Creating temporary space between yourself and anything that undermines your inner peace is an important health behavior. This is especially true when we are grieving, integrating, and regenerating. Paradoxically, solitude connects us to everyone and everything. As we grow in our self-understanding, we naturally become more patient, empathetic, and compassionate towards others. We also become keenly sensitive to what is ours, or not, to do.

### **Emotional health**

Living peacefully enhances emotional well-being by helping us manage emotions in productive ways. By embracing practices such as gratitude, self-acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion, you develop the ability to respond to stimuli or situations with logic rather than compulsively and impulsively. Peace teaches us to pause.



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### **Mental health**

Living peacefully supports our mental health by reducing fear and negative thought patterns, including the false belief that we are separate from nature and from our Source/God. Practices like mindfulness and meditation help calm the mind, promote clarity, foster trust in ourselves, and faith in truth. Overtime, these practices can and do prevent burnout and alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety.

### **Physical health**

Personal peace contributes to physical health by reducing the physiological effects of stress on the body. Cultivating peaceful habits helps lower stress levels, which in turn supports better sleep, improved cardiovascular health, digestion, and overall physical vitality.

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By making peaceful living and personal peace a priority, you create a foundation for a healthier and balanced body and life. The words below represent my favorite practices for tempering inner-conflict and connecting with our innate wisdom and essence -- to the heart of God. I call them the 33 living practices of personal peace.

Awareness	Graciousness	Reflection
Acceptance	Gratitude	Respect
Balance	Humility	Self-regulation
Compassion	Inclusion	Self-acceptance
Contentment	Integrity	Serenity
Creativity	Kindness	Solitude
Empathy	Letting go	Surrender
Equanimity	Love	Stillness
Faith	Mindfulness	Tolerance
Forgiveness	Patience	Tranquility
Generosity	Presence	Trust

### **Unpacking the 33 living practices of personal peace**

**Awareness:** Awareness is the practice of being fully present and attentive to your thoughts, emotions, and surroundings. It involves recognizing your inner state and how external events impact you. Cultivating awareness allows you to observe experiences and life without

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judgment, creating space for mindful responses rather than reactive ones, which foster inner peace.

**Acceptance:** Acceptance is the practice of embracing reality as it is, without resistance or denial. It involves acknowledging your circumstances, emotions, and imperfections, understanding that peace comes from letting go of the need to control. Acceptance helps you find tranquility by releasing the struggle against what you cannot change.

**Balance:** Balance is the practice of maintaining harmony between various aspects of life, such as work and rest, giving and receiving, or solitude and social interaction. It involves making conscious choices to avoid extremes and sustain a sense of equilibrium.

**Compassion:** Compassion is the practice of extending kindness and understanding to yourself and others. It involves recognizing suffering and responding with empathy and a desire to alleviate it. Compassion nurtures peace by nurturing connections and reducing feelings of isolation or resentment.

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**Contentment:** Contentment is the practice of appreciating what you have and finding satisfaction in the present moment. It involves letting go of constant striving and comparison, focusing instead on the simple joys of life. Contentment leads to peace by reducing anxiety and desire for more.

**Creativity:** Creativity is the practice of expressing yourself in ways that bring *you* joy and fulfillment. It involves engaging in activities that allow you to explore innovative ideas, solve problems, and express emotions. Creativity cultivates peace by providing an outlet for self-expression and by connecting you with your inner self.

**Empathy:** Empathy is the capacity to understand the suffering of others. It involves putting yourself in someone else's shoes – to notice how life may feel to them given their circumstances. Empathy enables peace by deepening your connections with others and reducing conflict through understanding.

**Equanimity:** Equanimity is the practice of maintaining calm and composure in the face of life's difficulties. It

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involves cultivating a steady mind that is not easily disturbed by external circumstances. Equanimity contributes to peace by allowing you to remain centered and resilient, regardless of what life throws at you.

**Faith:** Faith is the practice of trusting in something greater than yourself, whether it be a higher power (God), the universe, or the inherent goodness of life. It involves letting go of fear and doubt, trusting that everything happens for a reason. Faith fuels peace by providing a sense of security and purpose.

**Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is the practice of releasing anger, resentment, and the desire for revenge towards yourself or others. It involves letting go of past hurts and choosing to move forward without carrying the burden of grudges. Forgiveness fosters peace by freeing you from negative emotions that disrupt your inner harmony.

**Generosity:** Generosity is the practice of giving freely of your time, energy, or resources to others without expecting anything in return. It involves sharing from a

## Uncovering the cultural barriers to personal peace

place of abundance and love. Generosity grants us peace by reminding us of our inherent wealth and abundance.

**Graciousness:** Graciousness is the practice of showing courtesy, generosity, and tact in your interactions with others. It involves approaching situations with a sense of grace and goodwill.

**Gratitude:** Gratitude is the practice of recognizing and appreciating everything in your life, no matter how small. Gratitude cultivates peace by shifting your mindset towards the recognition of all that *you are* and have.

**Humility:** Humility is the practice of acknowledging your limitations and recognizing that you're part of something larger than yourself. It involves letting go of the need for recognition or superiority, and instead embracing a balanced view of our shared human journey.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is the practice of welcoming and valuing diverse perspectives and people. It involves conscious belonging (inclusion) for oneself and others, recognizing that each person has something unique to contribute to society and the world.

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**Integrity:** Integrity is the practice of living in alignment with your values. Integrity invites inner peace by creating coherence and reducing the conflict that arises when your actions contradict the inner-knowing of your gut and heart.

**Kindness:** Kindness is the practice of being considerate, compassionate, and supportive towards others and yourself.

**Letting Go:** Letting go is the practice of releasing your attachment to things, thoughts, people, or outcomes that you cannot control or that no longer serve you. It involves accepting and honoring grief and freeing yourself from the burden of holding onto grudges, fears, or past events.

**Love:** Love is the consciousness and energy of creation. As a living practice it restores and makes all things new.

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the practice of noticing, with an open and non-judgmental awareness. Mindfulness fortifies wellbeing by helping you stay grounded and connected to what is true.

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**Patience:** Patience is the practice of enduring inconvenient situations, delays, or challenges without frustration or anger. Patience is the epitome of personal peace.

**Presence:** Presence is the practice of fully engaging with the current moment—the *now*-- whether it is with yourself, others, or your environment.

**Reflection:** Reflection is the practice of looking inward to examine your thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences. It involves taking time to understand your history, motivations, learn from your experiences, and gain insight for personal and professional growth.

**Respect:** Respect is the practice of honoring the dignity, rights, and perspectives of yourself and others. Respect cultivates peace by reducing conflict and promoting harmonious relationships.

**Self-Regulation:** Self-regulation is the practice of managing your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a way that aligns with your values and goals. It involves



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recognizing triggers, maintaining self-control, and responding rather than reacting.

**Self-Acceptance:** Self-acceptance is the practice of embracing all aspects of yourself, including your strengths, weaknesses, and imperfections—in other words, your wholeness.

**Serenity:** Serenity is calm curiosity. As a living practice it equips us to remain composed and grounded given the reality we cannot always understand or see.

**Solitude:** Solitude is the practice of spending time alone, away from others and the noise of the outside world. Solitude enables you to experience peace by allowing you to reconnect with yourself, gain clarity, and restore your energy.

**Surrender:** Surrender is the practice of letting go of the need to control and to allow the natural flow of life. Surrender is the trust and knowing that, despite appearances, we are always safely held in the heart of God.

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**Stillness:** Stillness is the practice of tuning into the silence—the vast space where true wisdom and peace dwell.

**Tolerance:** Tolerance is the practice of accepting and respecting differences in others. Tolerance advances peace by reminding us of our innate complexity and coexistence in the universe.

**Tranquility:** Tranquility is the practice of maintaining an environment, both internally and externally, that enables and supports a harmonious and coherent state of mind.

**Trust:** Trust fosters peace by transferring our locus of control from self, ourselves, to God/life. This allowance enables us to operate with a sense of confidence, security, and assurance that we will be okay no matter what.

## UNMASKING

### Towards true belonging

My daughter's death in 2018 marked the exact moment my masks were ripped off —when God breathed a delicate and concise whisper into my broken-open heart: *“it's time to stop pretending you're not in agony.”* In that moment I knew that every single tear my daughters and I shed during the last 24 months of her life would be honored— their grief would be honored, and I would finally honor my own. But most importantly, that life would be honored and that our fears would be fully embraced and blessed.

We must each own and accept everything that has brought us to this moment. Belonging starts with the full and radical acceptance of yourself—with all your 'sins' -- all the decisions you have made from fear or anytime you forgot or denied your divine nature. Until you belong to yourself it is impossible to feel connected to your community, your job, your friends, your life.

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When we unmask, we face our own shadow—the part of us we can never outrun. *Stop. Look. Shine a light on it. Bless it.* Bless everything that has ever caused you to fear, fight, or run. Running in darkness, fearful of life is illogical.

Until you fall to the ground beneath you and ask God “*what am I supposed to see here?*” you are living and operating with one headlight—your own—and this can be a dark and frightening journey. The freedom to “*belong no place, to every place, or to no place at all*” is true sovereignty and your birthright. True belonging begins the moment we ask for divine guidance and then listen.

You, me, we are never alone. We come from the same stardust and enter life through the same Breath that birthed every single one of us – 117\* billion expressions of life longing for itself.

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\*Reference: How many human beings have ever lived on the planet?  
via Google Search.

## UNMASKING

### Revelation

On a beautiful summer day, when my daughter Serena was six-years-old, she asked a provocative question: *“mom, do you believe in heaven?”*

Having been a lifelong student of comparative religion while living within the backdrop of Catholicism, I had a complicated relationship with heaven. Heaven was something mysterious and promised. Heaven is where you go *if* you are a good person-- if you are deemed worthy *after* you die.

Not being quite sure how to best answer, I decided to turn the question around and asked her. Without pause or hesitation, her answer was like one of those truth bombs—the kind that permanently opens your mind and changes your perception of everything. In her sweet and deep voice, she answered simply: ***“Mom, heaven is real and it’s all around us.”***

In that moment, a heavenly download of information permeated my being—my every cell. It was not as much

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a revelation as a remembrance; a reminder of something I already knew but had long forgotten; a reminder of the ways we have twisted and confused ourselves; and a reminder of our estrangement from the reality of our own existence. In that moment, I knew my daughter was there, here, to teach *me*.

If we are not at peace with ourselves, it is because we are still masked, armored, and holding up weapons—on the defensive and ready to attack. When we put down our weapons and shed our masks, there is indeed a death that occurs-- the death of all the ways we have separated ourselves *from the heaven that is real and all around us*.

All of us are here to experience all the things that God/Source enables. For thousands of years, human beings have struggled, suffered, and fought in darkness. Have we had enough of this? Have you?

In closing, I am going to leave you with the same question my beautiful daughter asked: *do you believe in heaven?*

## Glossary

**allowing (v)** – the practice of observing without taking physical action.

**becoming (v)** – the process of revealing who you are.

**being (v)**- the embodiment of your authentic self.

**belonging (n)** – the invisible ground of our individual and collective wellbeing.

**culture (n)** – the agreed upon rules of groups and society.

**emerging (v)** – the invisible and visible coming into existence to become a person, place, or thing.

**evolving (v)** – the natural process of change and re-birth.

**grace (n)** – a non-physical blessing.

**knowing (n)** – awareness or understanding beyond words.

**inspiration (n)** – the invisible mechanics and force of creation.

**realize (v)** – to make something real; to manifest.

**revelation (n)** – truth making itself visible.

**wisdom (n)** – integrated awareness and understanding.





## Gratitude

Every book is infused with magic and grace— by the hearts and talents of individuals who simply ***make it better***. As such, I am especially grateful to these generous souls:

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## Other works by Mayra

Honoring your grief

Have you ever been here?

60 ways to know love (English & Spanish)

Until it happens to you (poetry collection)

All my mistakes

52 weeks

Gratitude Yearbooks  
(2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023)

My true feelings

The Workbook of Human Superpowers

GRATEFUL | 30-day self-care journal

People are like flowers

Emotional Intelligence: making sense of your  
emotional data

A Nighttime Trip to Planet NUF

Soul Friends

Wake Up Be

Lilly's Life

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