



WHAT WILL YOU SEE?

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(2024)

*To my Parents,
You have given me more than you know.
Thank you.
I love you.*

Introduction

New Eyes

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust

The following pages contain experiences that shaped me.

Each one revealed an idea that has helped me see myself and the world in a new way.

Please understand that each insight you read here is only the tip of an iceberg.

And each of these icebergs acted as a revelation to me.

Each one has profoundly impacted me.

Each one deserves its own book.

But that wouldn't be practical.

So instead, I have tried to capture only the essence of each insight on a few pages.

When I failed to do that, I did my best to capture a facet of the diamond.

Interestingly, most of these ideas were not totally new to me.

Some I had a small and vague grasp of, like the faint memory of an old dream.

Others I understood quite well - or so I thought.

And it's likely that as you read on, you will be familiar with some of them too.

But one thing is certain: these experiences acted as clear defining moments, with a before and an after with regards to my understanding.

In other words, I didn't really *see* what was possible.

Until I did.

And it's highly likely that I'm still not fully seeing all that these ideas can be.

Throughout my journey, I found that the wisdom we can access by reading sacred texts, learning from spiritual guides, or engaging in our own holy practices, is rarely 'ground-breaking'.

In many ways, inspiring teachers - like the Buddha, Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad and many others - knew and spoke of the very same things that we know and speak of in our everyday lives.

We already know all the great tenets about living and loving well.

The distinction is in the level of seeing and understanding the possibility they point to.

I say that these people stood out in history because they *saw* those ideas, they *got* those ideas, on a much deeper level than the rest of us.

They embodied these ideas with unparalleled depth.

Such a degree of possibility tastes like truth.

And that's what we often miss.

The true possibility.

The experiences I describe in the pages below helped me grasp That.

I saw things I already knew, except I experienced them with much greater clarity.

It's hard to convey in words, because it's an internal experience and words fail us to describe feelings.

But I'll do my best to evoke this kind of *possibility* in you.

My request, as you read on, is that you don't look for new information.

Look for what you haven't seen in what you think you already know.

Look hard for what is truly possible.

I invite you to read with an open mind.

If you read to agree or disagree with what I'm saying, you'll miss it.

Read only for what will be valuable to you.

Don't read for agreement.

Read for insight.

Over the years, many experiences and people embodied a portal of sorts for me.

All the insights and revelations I got helped me see myself and the world with new eyes.

My hope in writing this is that these words will act as a portal of sorts for you.

I hope these pages give you access to seeing with new eyes.

Chapter 1

So Much Time

Thought creates the world and then says: "I didn't do it".

David Bohm

Gong.

4am.

Gong.

Day 1.

Gong.

So it begins.

Gong.

Someone is walking past the bedroom door.

Gong.

I get up.

Gong.

My roommates are also emerging from their slumber.

Gong.

We all get dressed in silence.

Gong.

Still groggy, I open the door and make my way to the meditation hall.

I'm not alone.

There is something somewhat reassuring and also a little strange in seeing so many people head over to the same place in silence.

At 4:20 am no less.

I arrive and in the hallway take my shoes and coat off.

Then I enter the hall.

Like all the other silhouettes, still drowsy and sleepy, I make my way slowly to the area of floor space that I was allocated the day prior.

I make myself as comfortable as I can with the few cushions that are available.

And we begin.

I sit there for what seems like an eternity.

All I know is that I've never sat for so long in meditation in my life.

I'm excited.

Curious.

I don't really know what I'm doing.

The chanting surprises me at first.

I almost start laughing, acutely aware that this would be highly inappropriate at this time.

But then like all things, I get used to it.

Little do I know that after a few days, I will even be looking forward to it.

I don't find it easy to meditate for so long, but that's to be expected.

When the session ends, I head over to the cafeteria and enjoy a wonderful breakfast prepared for us.

All the participants are there.

We all eat in silence.

For half an hour, all I hear is the sound of the coffee- and tea-pouring machines, the scraping and clinking of cutlery on bowls and plates, and the human noises of chewing, coughing, and pulling chairs.

After breakfast, I go for a walk in the woods nearby.

I still don't really grasp what's happening, how I'm feeling or what to expect.

My mind hasn't slowed down yet.

But the surroundings are beautiful.

The sun is rising and shining through the still, somewhat leafless trees of early Spring in the UK.

The sound of birds chirping and branches swaying in the morning is all there is.

Gong.

It's time, again.

I head back to the meditation hall.

The ritual repeats itself, and we begin.

As we do, new challenges arise.

I'm starting to learn.

I don't know what, yet.

I go deeper.

After a short break, and some more meditating, I have the opportunity to continue my practice in my room.

I choose to go, to switch it up.

I meditate some more.

I have no idea how long I've been here.

I emerge from this half-state between sleep and consciousness and think to myself, "Wow this has been a solid morning of meditation! It must be lunchtime soon."

I'm calmly pumped with myself.

I feel like I've done well for this first morning.

I'm even starting to feel like a bad-ass meditator and sense the enlightenment isn't far.

I look at my watch.

9:23am.

...

First thought: "F@*k!"

Quickly followed by: "This is going to be a long 10 days..."

And it was.

And it wasn't.

The greatest insight I had on this very first of my 10-day Vipassana retreat, is that *there is so much time*.

We *have* so much time.

The only reason we don't see it, the only reason we feel like we're short of it, the only reason we're ever running out of it, is because of our own doing.

We mis-use the time we have.

We fill up our lives with too much.

Too many musts.

Too many wants.

Too many shoulds.

Too many commitments.

We don't discern thoughtfully.

We don't select well.

We don't filter for what's truly meaningful, joyful, or valuable.

Instead of complicated time management systems and numerous productivity hacks, we would be well served to reflect on this simple fact.

And this fact is deceptively simple.

There *is* so much time.

All that matters is what I choose to do with it.

How I choose to allocate it.

How I choose to give it.

Every. Single. Moment.

Everything else I might tell myself is really nothing more than a fabrication of my mind which I have bought into and given power to.

A self-imposed illusion which I created and then forgot that I did.

I choose what to do with my time, every moment of every day.

And then pretend to myself I didn't choose it.

Like David Bohm said.

If only there was more time so I wouldn't have to choose!

But this is all a creation.

And I am the creator.

It is simple.

Not easy, but simple.

There is so much time.

It's about choosing well.

Look at your life.

Look at your time.

What do you choose to do with it?

Chapter 2

Welcome, Brother

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched.

They must be felt with the heart.

Helen Keller

The path is wet and muddy.

I am looking down, being careful with where I put my feet.

Falling down now wouldn't be too much fun, in the cold and rain and mud.

We are slowly making our way down the hill, around the open field.

No one is speaking.

They asked us to go in silence.

Like everything that has happened so far in the past few days, I have no idea what is about to unfold.

But I'm excited.

I've come down here to Devon to participate in a 5-day journey.

There is a piece of land where individuals can go to reconnect with themselves, nature and the bigger story we are all a part of.

A journey my wonderful wife did 18 months earlier and loved.

So it was only a matter of time before I found myself here.

It's one of the delights of our relationship.

When she recommends I jump, I simply ask : "Where and how high?"

It took a bit of time to sort out logistics.

But now I'm here, and I'm enjoying the experience.

Well, enjoying is an interesting word.

I've wept every day so far.

Mostly out of reverence and humility.

It's a strange thing, to be humbled to the point of tears.

On the wet and muddy path, little do I know I'm about to experience that once again.

Before long, the group seems to slow down and soon, comes to a halt.

We have arrived.

On our right, a big roundhouse stands with a dead fire pit in the center and some benches all around it.

On our left, there are some small trees scattered, and some holes are dug into the ground.

About 30 cm long by 30 cm wide, and 30 cm deep.

The rain is not falling hard, but it's continuous.

And it's cold.

We are told to sit inside the roundhouse.

"Please remove your shoes and socks."

I comply.

Then Mac steps in.

He is the leader of this programme and the man behind this place.

I cannot tell you the words he used.

I can only tell you about his presence.

He has piercing blue eyes.

Piercing yet extraordinarily gentle.

Like those of a child aware beyond his years.

And he has a voice I've not heard anywhere else.

On the first day I found myself sitting next to him during our first sharing circle.

When he spoke, I felt my insides vibrate.

I'm not even joking.

This man's voice comes from a depth that I've never known.

Under the thatched roof of the roundhouse, he tells us about native americans, and their connection to nature.

He has spent years living with them.

He has been mentored by some chiefs, learning the ways and customs and beliefs of native cultures the hard way.

He goes on to tell us about Mother Earth and the sacredness with which some traditions have considered her.

This is definitely not something that my Paris-born, Abu-Dhabi- and Bangkok-raised and London-dwelling self is very familiar with.

I've never been the nature-lover type.

Not that I dislike hiking, or a day kayaking.

But I've always loved big cities.

I love modernity.

However, in the past few days, I started becoming aware of an unfamiliar feeling.

It's like the windows of my soul started being cleansed, so that I may see something that was unavailable to me before.

Mac invites us to participate in an experience that will act as a bonding ritual between us and our Great Mother.

His last words outline that this will be held in silence.

As if that was necessary.

The significance of his message speaks volumes.

With gestures, we are pointed to the area with the holes in the ground.

We are each directed to a separate one.

They are a few meters between each of them, so we have our own space.

There is one guide to attend to the experience of two participants.

My guide is called Daniel.

He is a lovely man who's had a hard life.

He gestures to me to step into the hole.

The mud is cold on my bare feet, and squishes through the gaps between my toes as soon as I put my full weight in.

Then Daniel puts the muddy earth back on top of my feet until the hole no longer exists.

I am basically planted into the cold and wet ground, like a tree.

The weight of the earth on top of my feet is surprising.

I pull a bit on my leg, just to test it, and notice that I'm pretty much stuck.

Not knowing what to do exactly, I try to relax into it.

I close my eyes so as not to be distracted by the other tree-people that are in my line of vision.

And I start to go into a meditative state.

Half to make the most of the experience, and half to occupy my mind away from my increasingly freezing extremities, I imagine my roots growing into the soil under the sole of my feet.

I imagine my branches growing and as if on cue, I raise my arms to a horizontal position.

I must be a rather strange sight, but I don't care much at this point.

Everything in this programme is rather strange anyway.

A lovely kind of strange.

I lift my face towards the sky, eyes closed.

Raindrops are landing gently, lovingly and continuously on me.

I don't know what time it is.

I don't know what anybody else is doing.

I no longer mind the cold.

I no longer mind the wet.

I'm deep into this experience.

Then, suddenly, I become aware of the presence of the tall trees of the forest that stand right behind the roundhouse, on a little hill which allows them to look over the patch of land where we are ourselves planted.

Feeling a bit like a tree myself, I instinctively 'turn' my attention to them.

In my mind, I tell them I'm sorry I've been rushing through life, never paying much attention to them.

I apologize for taking them for granted, when they do so much for us and have done for centuries.

The last few days of tales and stories about native american traditions are informing my capacity, in this moment, to be connected to that.

And what happens next shakes me to my core.

I hear the trees speak back to me.

They say in a voice that isn't mine: "Welcome, brother."

That's when I truly realized how powerful and graceful they are.

I realize that while I've been ignorant, oblivious and entitled, living my careless and city-dwelling life, they've been there, serving the world in the ways that they do, waiting for me - us - to be ready to see them.

To actually meet them.

To appreciate them.

To thank them.

There is no ounce of resentment in that welcome.

Not a hint of frustration.

Pure loving embrace, and gratitude for my seeing them.

I start to weep.

The craziness of it all does not escape me.

I'm there, planted like a tree, in the rain and cold, and I'm weeping.

It would be funny if it wasn't so moving.

This experience has never left me.

I stood there for an unknown amount of time, processing the connection that just occurred.

Acknowledging the everlasting presence of these guardians who give shelter, shade and warmth and sustenance to so many forms of life, and have done so for hundreds, no, thousands, of years.

How ridiculously small and self-important the world I've created up until this point is.

This is not at all belittling.

It is awakening.

Since that day, I've often touched a tree when I walk past it.

I've often stopped for a few moments, just to look at it and acknowledge it.

They are always there.

Every time, my heart smiles.

Every time, they say: "Welcome, brother."

Chapter 3

No Barriers

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Rumi

I open my eyes.

The early morning sky is a purplish blue, tainted by the rays of the rising sun giving it shades of yellow, orange and red.

A few trees hang over me.

It's like they agreed to form the rim of a circle with their canopy, so that I may see the sky straight above me.

I gain my bearings again.

Feeling my body.

A light and warm buzzing permeates my limbs.

Like soft electricity.

And a beautiful calmness.

Like the calm after the storm.

I'm at peace.

Breathwork isn't completely new to me, but I wouldn't say I'm well versed in it.

I've come here, in Morillo de Tou, Spain, to participate in Wim Hof's Summer expedition.

My understanding is that he popularized a version of the Tummo meditation method in the West.

This method has been used by Tibetan Buddhist monks for centuries.

Wim does it in style, his way, with energy, passion and fun.

We are just 'waking up' post our early morning breathwork session.

Mats scattered all around the clearing that is used for this purpose.

I sit up.

The view is breathtaking.

Mountains all around, in the distance.

A wild valley in front of us.

The rising sun is just breaking across the horizon.

I feel fully alive.

My eyes meet those of a few people around me.

Instructors.

Participants.

Each time we connect, a smile lights up our faces.

A shared understanding of the peace within.

Gratitude for what we just experienced.

Then I see her.

She's coming towards me.

I stand and within a few seconds, she's right here in front of me.

Her face, torn apart by an unbearable sorrow.

Flash back to two days ago.

At lunchtime, I was sharing with some newfound friends something that I believe is missing in Wim's approach.

He often shares about the tragedy of his wife Olaya, who was suffering from depression and eventually took her own life, leaving him to look after his four children.

His healing journey led him to the cold, to the breath, to the mind.

This is Wim's calling.

Improving physical and mental health.

Sharing with the world how we can heal ourselves from depression, anxiety, disease.

This is beautiful and clearly heartfelt.

What I'm sharing with my friends though, is that I feel gratitude towards him, but I also feel gratitude towards Olaya.

It's a weird thing to say.

I don't mean to say that I'm happy that she suffered like she suffered, or did what she did.

I mean that I choose to see her sacrifice as a gift to us all.

Wim is sharing with the world his method.

She shared with us Wim.

She gave us this gift.

Without her doing what she did, Wim Hof would not be Wim Hof.

This is not talked about.

All that is spoken of, when Wim shares why he does what he does, is the pain and suffering he wants to help heal.

I would like it if we could see light in the darkness, not just after it.

So that's what I'm sharing at lunch.

It's a deep conversation, but it's only one man's opinion.

Then we move on to something else.

Later that day, a lady who was present during lunch, said to me: "Would it be okay if I spoke to you, in private, when you have a moment?"

"Sure", I say. "Whenever you like."

"Thank you", she replies.

And she walks off.

I have no idea what she wants to talk about.

Until now.

She's standing in front of me.

In the clearing with the rising sun.

Eyes full of tears.

"My son took his own life a year ago.

He had his whole life ahead of him.

He was about to fly home after two years away."

The world stops.

In an instinctive movement, we hug, and she starts sobbing.

I am here, with her, and I hug her tight.

It's like her grief enters my body.

Something I've never felt before occurs in me.

The boundaries between her and me start to dissolve.

It feels like her emotion pours into me, but it's coming from inside me.

There are no more walls.

No separation.

Pure love.

Her pain is my pain.

I weep for him.

I feel it all.

People are standing and moving around us, but for us there is no one else.

I knew that some breathwork exercises shut down your neocortex, the part of the brain that is responsible for thinking and reason and intellect.

I knew that it helps you connect more deeply with your limbic system, the mammalian part of our brain that governs emotions.

And I've often felt cleansed, relieved, present to a felt body rather than a busy mind, after a breathwork session.

But this is a whole new level.

This is an experience I have never experienced before, or since.

We are totally connected through our emotions.

We are one in this moment.

And it is beautiful.

And sad.

So, so sad.

After being suspended in time for God knows how long, the emotional wave of grief naturally passes, and we end our hug.

Still holding her hands, I give her a loving smile.

“Thank you for sharing him with me.

It is beautiful to witness how much you love him”.

She smiles back.

She is raw.

She now needs her space.

I let her walk away.

This experience will create a lasting bond between us.

Once she is gone, I walk to the edge of the clearing, overlooking the valley.

Tears well up once more and I begin to weep again.

The world in front of me is so stunning.

I am overwhelmed with sadness.

Life is so beautiful.

How can anyone make the choice to leave this place?

What kind of suffering must they be going through to be in so much pain?

To see nothing but darkness?

It's hard for me to wrap my head around this.

But right now, my head isn't necessary.

All I know and all I feel is my heart.

And my heart is aching.

My heart is loving.

Thank you for showing me who I am.

I am Love.

Chapter 4

3 Days deep

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.

Ram Dass

Gong.

Day 4.

We are beginning to learn the actual Vipassana meditation.

The first 3 days were just preparation.

A warm-up of sorts.

Now the real work begins.

But during my walks, and during my breaks, and during my meals, I'm not really thinking about that.

I'm thinking about the last 3 days.

I'm amazed by how my mind is reacting to the intensive meditation process.

In this case, to Anapana meditation, which is "mindfulness of breathing".

It is simply the basic practice of observing your breath going in and going out.

On day 1, the sheer volume of thinking inside my mind was high.

In meditation, you are asked to bring back your attention whenever you catch yourself drifting in thought.

At first I was positively surprised to find out that I had no problem doing that.

I could catch myself quickly, become aware that I had lost my attention in the pursuit of a thought, and bring myself back to the breath.

I just realized I had to do it... a lot.

There was always something new.

Always another thought to consider.

For perhaps the first time ever, I properly experienced what the Buddhists call the monkey mind.

Throwing itself forward one branch after the other.

Jumping around.

It was impressive.

Relentless.

When you experience it 10 hours a day, it's quite a shock.

But I could take it.

That first day, the challenge was just a matter of high reps.

Catch your attention.

Bring it back.

Repeat.

Easy.

On day 2, however, I noticed that the pattern of my thinking had changed.

The volume of thinking diminished.

I *felt* my mind slow down.

It's as if much of the superfluous thinking from the day before had vanished.

Pruned away.

Now, the thoughts that emerged seemed limited to aspects of my life that I would qualify as important to me.

My relationships with my wife and my family.

My coaching business and my clients.

My parents' health.

My health.

Money.

I could stay focused on my breath for longer, but when thoughts came, they were more compelling, and much harder to pull away from.

It was the strangest thing.

I felt like I spent more time present with my breath.

Breathing.

Being.

In some kind of peaceful stillness.

But when a thought came in, WHAM!

I was properly gone.

I drifted for much longer, unable to catch myself until what felt like several minutes later.

It was as if amidst a beautiful stillness that seemed to last forever, the odd thought came in, and when it came, boy did it take me along for the ride!

It was an odd experience.

Less thinking, but more compelling.

Like my monkey mind saw that volume didn't do the trick, and so it devised something else to stay center-stage.

And then on day 3, I seemed to experience a loosening of even those types of "important" thoughts.

They still came, but they weren't as captivating.

I caught myself quicker.

The reduced volume remained so.

When I did lose myself in thought, I was more aware that this was a choice.

I noticed sensations in my breathing I had never experienced before.

More effortless concentration emerged.

More stillness emerged.

By the end of the day, I had truly slowed down.

I got quiet.

I had arrived.

On that 4th day, I caught myself thinking about writer and mythologist Martin Shaw.

He says that when aboriginal teachers look at modernity, they say that our Western society is "only 3 days deep".

They say that on the 4th day in the bush, or the jungle, a lot of the ambition, hubris, and ego of modern life have dissolved, and in that moment there is the possibility for us to dream with the land itself.

The bush, the jungle, or a meditation hall in a monastery.

No matter.

I love experiences that remove all the everyday *stuff* we are accustomed to.

Experiences that get me out of my habitual ways of thinking and being.

Experiences that remind me of the depth of who I am.

I have learned to seek them.

They help me stop running after dopamine hits.

They nourish my soul.

They take me out of what I know, so that maybe, maybe, I catch the glimpse of a truer way of being.

The possibility of a new dream.

Vipassana meditation wasn't the starting point of my journey.

But I already know it will forever be a key milestone.

I didn't know how much I needed this.

Until I lived it.

Chapter 5

I Love Myself That Much

*If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.*

William Blake

Weak.

Selfish.

Arrogant.

Manipulative.

Conflict-avoidant.

I'm looking at those traits, those judgements I have of myself written down on paper, and it's not pretty.

I've been asked to write down the ones I resent and dislike most about myself.

It's not easy to go into your darkness, get hold of the demons that live there, and bring them into broad daylight for all to see.

But as I will soon learn, there is more to the picture than meets the eye.

These are some of the ways I think that I am, and that I hate.

We first need to acknowledge that we are trying very hard to hide those to the world, but actually other people see it too.

Not always, not everyone, but if we look deep enough in our past, we will find.

Realizing this is like putting salt on the wound.

But it's also funny, in a way.

And because everyone in the group is doing it, the tension everyone feels gets somewhat dissolved in slightly embarrassed laughter.

It's helping me realize I don't need to put so much energy into hiding these aspects of me.

I can free myself from the shame and the games I play to mask a part of *being*.

Then I'm asked to find evidence that I am also the opposite of that.

This is interesting.

It's not negating my story, but it's definitely expanding it and helping me remove the blinders that I had about *who I am*.

Or, should I say, who I *think* I am.

Strong.

Selfless.

Humble.

Truthful.

Confronting.

I look at all of them and, low and behold, I find memories and instances of being each one.

Not only that, I find evidence where other people have experienced me as That.

I'm not convinced at first, though.

I can easily justify that my mother does not constitute a representative and objective sample of the population.

But the more I look, the more examples I find.

The more memories come back to mind.

So this is starting to register.

I am both.

This is already somewhat liberating, but the next part will blow my mind.

The next part of the process we are doing on that day is looking at how these negative traits benefited me.

That leaves me blank at first.

How is my weakness a benefit?

How is my selfishness a benefit?

How is my arrogance a benefit?

But again, we are here to confront our mind and simply search for an answer to the question.

So I look inside myself.

And soon enough, I start to see something.

Weakness got me to think twice before doing certain things in my life - not certain I was strong enough to do them.

Okay, that's not crazy good but it's not nothing.

What else?

I look again.

It's gotten me to seek more balance.

The thought of weakness has lead me multiple times not to go all-in on something at the sacrifice of everything else.

It helped me preserve my sleep.

It helped me preserve my energy.

This self-judgment has gotten me many times to lead a healthier life.

Okay, not bad.

Still not amazing but I start to get the drift.

Then suddenly the bigger ones start to come.

I see moments where I needed to seek out support.

Others saw my vulnerability and felt valued because they got to help me.

I may hate the idea of it, but if I think about it objectively, it's actually pretty good all around.

I have examples where I did get help and could achieve something I would not have been able to on my own.

And this raised the confidence of whoever helped me, as I usually come across as self-reliant, so suddenly acknowledging my limitations was a boost for others.

It also created more humanity and connection between me and them.

And so much relief in me actually.

No longer did I need to pretend.

Or present a powerful façade.

I got to breathe and relax.

And *so often* do I need to breathe and relax...

Wow.

Didn't see that coming.

My weakness helps me be more empathetic to others, especially high performers who hide theirs.

I can relate to them.

I get them.

That's making me better at my job as a coach.

It is keeping me humble...

Hmmm...

As I keep going, a new possibility emerges.

As I work on other traits, selfishness, arrogance, manipulation, conflict-avoidance, I start to see how my life has been shaped by these “darker” aspects of myself.

I also start to see that without them, I wouldn't be who I am today.

I wouldn't have all that I am proud of having.

I wouldn't be all that I am proud of being.

Where did I think my quest for self-development came from?

All the knowledge and wisdom and insights I've accumulated, and I can now share with others.

What was the fuel for that?

It didn't - at least initially - come from loving myself fully and completely.

It came from seeking so hard to be better than who I *thought* I was.

It led me on this beautiful journey of personal growth.

And I definitely wouldn't change *That*.

That day in the fall of 2015, in a small meeting room at the heart of London, something big shifted for me.

There is much more to the story.

There is much more to the extraordinary process we went through on that day.

But I'll never forget the moment I stopped writing.

I stopped writing benefits.

I saw the truth of it.

I got it.

And I became grateful to myself for being who I am.

Up until that moment, I had lived in a black and white world of good and bad.

Hiding what I thought were these dark secrets that could never see the light of day.

My judgments of me inevitably led me to judge others when I saw in them what I disowned in me.

And where there is judgment, there cannot be love.

This is not a world I want to live in.

A beautiful man was asked once: “How can you love others that much?”

“I love myself that much”, he replied.

Roger that.

Chapter 6

I Am

Everything in the natural world knows how to be itself.

Boyd Varty

What's the thought that had me leave this state of presence?

Last night, after a wonderful game drive in the South African wilderness, we experienced a magical sound bath.

At the end the facilitator showed us what happens to water molecules when she spins her tool around the bowl.

Droplets jumping around in all directions, dancing.

Imagine that happening inside your body.

Feeling totally serene.

Loving.

Grateful.

And then, suddenly, I lost it.

The thought responsible for that?

It can be boiled down to a simple one.

An old one.

One that does not belong to me, but to all humanity.

I am not good enough.

Now we can do the work.

This is the first time someone is going to take me through Byron Katie's process.

I'm very familiar with it.

I've done it many times by myself in my journal.

I've read her books and watched her videos.

But here, we're going to do it live, witnessed by 8 other people.

He says to me: "We're simply going to learn about ourselves.

We're going to notice how we behave when we have and believe a particular thought.

There's nowhere to end up.

This is an inquiry.

A meditation."

I close my eyes.

I am not good enough.

He asks the first question: "Is it true?"

I look inside me.

I wait.

The words echo in my mind and body.

Distant yet familiar.

And a clear "No" comes back.

I'm not new to the journey.

I know this isn't *true* as such, even though it looks that way at times.

He goes on to the next question: "How do you behave when you think it is true?"

I go back in.

What happens inside me when I believe the thought?

In my mind I go back to last night, after the sound bath.

We were having a beautiful dinner by the fire.

A friend asked us all to share a story about ourselves that people would not find on LinkedIn or on our website.

And my energy just fled my body and gathered in my head.

Noise filled up the space between my temples.

What story can I tell?

I don't have great stories to share.

Nothing special happened to me.

I am not a skilled storyteller.

What story would have an impact?

What story would be inspiring?

I keep looking.

Searching.

Feeling.

How do I react when I believe the thought?

I travel back to what happened yesterday.

When I believe the thought, in the moment around the fire, this is what happens in me.

When others share their stories, I am only half listening.

I compare and nothing that I could say makes the cut.

Some ideas come to mind about what I could say.

But I shoot those ideas down and dismiss them.

It's like I've got a Mr. Hyde in there.

Ready to pounce and rip apart any timid suggestion my Dr. Jekyll makes.

Part of me belittles the other.

Undermines it.

Shames it.

Bullies it.

I am moved by the sheer brutality of it.

I had never paid enough attention to see that.

I'm not hurt.

I'm shocked.

Shocked at the fierceness with which I judge myself.

When I believe the thought *I am not good enough*, it gets pretty nasty in there.

As I'm sharing all this out loud, I'm feeling everyone around me as a witness to my process.

I realize the violence with which I treat myself.

This is not a word I'm familiar with.

Violence.

It's not how I would have ever defined my temperament.

But paying close attention to the turmoil that occurred in me last night, I have no other word.

As I slow down and come to a stop in my sharing, he gently goes on to the next question: "Who would you be without this story?"

I continue to use yesterday's example as case study.

If that thought had not even crossed my mind yesterday, how would I have reacted instead?

I would be fully present.

I would listen whole-heartedly to others' stories.

I would be excited by the possibilities I have.

I would be playful and light-hearted.

I would easily choose to share something from my life.

I would not try to make it something good.

It would just have to be what it is.

And I would feel good.

I would be free.

I am familiar with this process, but I am amazed to fully experience it and speak it aloud.

The only difference between these two experiences of reality, being trapped in my head and out of presence, and being totally free and contributing, is a thought.

One thought.

One thought creates an entirely different world.

I open my eyes.

Going through this process is enlightening.

Learning about myself, and all that happens in me when I believe a particular thought.

He then moves on to the last part.

“What are the turnarounds?”

Turnarounds are statements that portray some kind of opposite to the initial thought.

In this case, the first is obvious.

I am good enough.

I look for evidence where that's true.

It's not that hard to find actually.

But then I don't really get ideas for the next one.

So he offers a suggestion.

I am not bad enough.

Huh ?

“You're too good!”, he says with a smile.

Too gentle.

Too nice.

My stories are not outrageous enough!

My mind shifts.

Instead of trying to share the good stories, why don't I share the bad ones?

Instead of trying to look good, why don't I share my shadow?

The embarrassment?

The deceit?

The lying?

The shame?

I have plenty of THAT too!

This is oddly liberating.

I realize where I'm still owned by my ego.

Pretending not to be there, but clearly still running the show.

Trying to look good.

I feel complete.

I feel I got my insight.

But then, she comes in.

She's been pretty silent up until now.

Listening.

Observing.

She looks straight at me.

"There is one more turnaround", she says.

She gets up, goes to the flipchart, and strikes out the words "not good enough".

I stare at the board.

She speaks the words for me.

"I am."

My mind immediately sees what this means.

Pure awareness.

Only presence.

One human expression of the divine consciousness.

A simple wave stemming from the ocean of intelligence behind life.

I am.

Like the elephants and the lions and the leopards and the rhinos.

They just are what they are.

No need to add anything to it.

Now I know for sure.

The work is done.

Chapter 7

Sweet Angels

Before you were conceived, I wanted you. Before you were born, I loved you.

Before you were here an hour, I would die for you.

Maureen Hawkins

I am lying on the floor.

Rugs under me.

Cushions all around me.

Eyes closed.

Facing the warm sun.

I'm still feeling a little bit what others have referred to as the asteroid belt.

A period of time where one feels queasy, nauseous, and overall uncomfortable.

You might hit an asteroid or two on your way to space.

Hang on tight.

But once you are across it, there is a magical place.

This is the unknown that I'm in the process of discovering.

This plant medicine is a beautiful one.

It's called Huachuma, or commonly known as San Pedro.

I've never taken it before.

I've never taken any medicine before, actually.

I came to Portugal to participate in a ceremony with other men.

This included a day journeying into ourselves and between ourselves, with the help of Huachuma.

We have begun early this morning, and now the Portuguese spring is in full force.

Lying there, my mind is wandering with little control or steering from me.

I don't really feel able to do much right now.

I went into this journey with an intention about what I wanted.

Regaining trust in myself.

In the most magical way, the plant will give me that before the day is over.

But right now, it's not focused on giving me what I want.

It is intent on giving me what I need.

And what I need is healing.

As I lay there, eyes closed, tears begin to well up behind my eyelids.

And without my habitual social conditioning to hold them back - the plant will take care of that for you - they start pouring down my face.

Grief overwhelms me.

I'm taken right back to 15 months ago, when the doctor told us in no uncertain terms that our baby wouldn't make it into this world.

He didn't use those words, but that's how I heard it.

This is the moment I discovered a deep desire to become a father.

Until then it felt like an exciting but rather intellectual possibility.

But coming home after this doctor's appointment, I mourned the loss of something I had never seen or heard or touched, and yet already loved.

A couple of weeks later, my wife and I conducted a beautiful and loving ceremony to say goodbye to an angel.

This was our first miscarriage.

About seven months later we had another one.

Again, we held a beautiful ceremony and gave our farewells to another angel.

Feeling blessed to have had both of them in our lives.

And hurt not to experience much of it with them.

I trust that they have chosen not to come to this world for their own reasons.

It sounds weird to say and my cartesian mind is hesitant to even write those words.

I don't understand why they chose not to be with us.

But I am choosing to trust.

So in the pain and the grief, there is also some faith and letting go.

But clearly, I have some more grieving to do.

On the day of my San Pedro experience, my wife is 5 months pregnant with our third angel.

We are beginning to think we may see this one come into the world.

Everything is going well this time.

As I am lying there in the sun, the medicine is working its way through me.

It is taking me straight back to what I need to feel.

And the grief engulfs my entire body.

I cry like I haven't cried for a very long time.

I would have loved to meet them.

I would have loved for them to see the world.

I would have loved for them to experience the beauty and the magic of life.

And my tears are not only for the loss that the plant is helping me feel so that I may continue to heal, but also for the absence of these two angels in my future daughter's life.

Curled up in the fetal position, I sob.

"I'm sorry."

I feel like I haven't protected them.

They were never born and yet I feel like I failed to do my fundamental job as a father.

I know it's not *true*, and yet the feeling is there.

And suddenly, as I am desperately trying to channel my pain with an apology that has no reason for being, the sweet and sparkling voices of angels echo in my awareness.

They speak clearly and calmly, which is a stark contrast to the storm that is going on in my own head.

"It wasn't your role to protect us.

It is ours to protect you.

We will always be there for you."

The wisdom in those words shocks me out of my sorrow.

I know the "you" they are referring to isn't just me, but our whole soon-to-be family.

And just like that, those angels became our family's guardians.

Like a gentle wave kissing the sand, peace emerges inside me and spreads throughout my body.

My daughter-to-be isn't even born yet, and she already has two guardian angels looking over her.

This warms my heart.

I thought it was my place to watch over them.

But there is something strangely comforting about knowing that it is actually the other way around.

I weep as I'm typing these words, more than a year later, but I am also joyful.

Because I choose to believe that they are with us in spirit.

That they are a part of the heart of our family.

And that I will see them again, one day.

Be at peace, my sweet angels.

I love you.

Chapter 8

I Need Do Nothing

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalms 46:10

Gong.

I can't do it.

Gong.

I need to sleep.

Gong.

Day 6.

Gong.

I'm struggling.

I don't want to leave the retreat.

But I do want it to be over.

The days are long.

The longest I've ever lived.

I am fighting drowsiness dozens of times a day.

I'm taking naps between meditation sessions.

I'm walking in the woods as often as I can.

And I'm struggling.

I completed a half iron-man race a year before.

That's 1.2-mile swim (1.9 km) , 56-mile cycle (90 km) and 13.1-mile run (21.2 km).

I thought *that* was hard...

Now I'm thinking that compared to *this*, it was a piece of cake.

This experience is challenging me to another level.

I expected it to be hard, but this goes way beyond my expectations.

I love living.

I feel blessed.

I have my frustrations, my disappointments, my hurts and my aches, like everyone else.

But I've done the work, and I keep doing the work.

I resolve what I can.

And overall, I love the ride.

The experience of being alive.

I think we all can.

No matter what environment we grew up in, or difficulties we faced.

I believe loving this life is available to all of us.

There is so much to appreciate.

One of the things I do, but only always, is look for something productive to do.

I read a book, I listen to a podcast, I wash the dishes, I do push-ups, I call a client...

I have a habit of using time to achieve things.

This has served me greatly in my life.

I get things done.

Often I've felt like I didn't have enough time to do everything I wanted to do.

But now, right here, I am facing a demon I did not fully know I had.

I have...

No-thing...

To do...

No reading.

No writing.

No watching screens.

No listening to content.

No exercising.

No stretching.

No talking.

Only meditating.

In a sense, only not-doing.

I 'knew' this is what I signed up for.

I was even excited and looking forward to it !

But little did I know that the experience would be like awful-tasting medicine.

Not only do I not have anything to do (for once), but instead of enjoying having all the time there is, my mind is seeking to submit me into unconsciousness!

My brain isn't tired.

My body isn't tired.

And yet drowsiness flows through me like the rising tide.

Its latest trick.

I can hear it speaking to me.

If you sink into blissful oblivion, you won't see time pass.

When you wake up, you'll be a little closer to the end.

To the moment when you can be busy again and get lots of things done.

Let it be over with.

Fascinating.

On this day, I am realizing that part of my proud productivity is not healthy, conscious or deliberate.

I am truly *seeing* that part of it is an escape.

The demon is my inability to be still.

French polymath and genius Blaise Pascal said : «Tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos dans une chambre.»

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

I have now experienced this within myself at the deepest level.

What a visceral experience.

Even when I know this is going to end soon.

Even though I chose to be here.

Even if I know it is beneficial for me.

My mind would rather switch me off than have me stay quietly in a room alone!

That day, through the struggle, I became 1% better at not-doing.

1% better at being.

Since then, it hasn't been smooth sailing.

The productivity-monster has been back.

But I'm having better conversations with him.

I give myself a lot more space.

I know that fundamentally, I need do nothing.

In fact, I *need* do no-thing.

Funny how from this place it all works out.

Lao Tzu said as much in the Tao-Te-Ching.

“When nothing gets done, nothing is left undone.”

Living has never been more beautiful.

Chapter 9

Inner Fire

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.

Oprah Winfrey

The pain is excruciating.

Come on man, let's go.

Left, right, left, right.

My arms are numb.

They feel ten times heavier than usual.

My legs are shaking uncontrollably.

It's a miracle I'm somewhat keeping the horse stance.

Every time I try to push the energy from the palm of my hands outward, like we were shown during the warm up, it's like dozens of little knives are being driven through my fingers.

I can barely feel my hands, and when I do, it really hurts.

Not fun.

Somewhere nearby a drum is beating, keeping pace.

It is taking me every ounce of concentration and focus to keep going.

My mind is going nuts.

Go get a towel!

Put some clothes on, at least to cover your hands!

But I'm committed.

I will warm up the way we were shown.

This is where the magic is.

I'm not about to give up.

Plus I know it's ineffective, I'll still be cold and in pain.

The only way out is through.

I keep moving.

Left, right, left, right.

My thighs are killing me.

The horse stance is not an easy position to hold for one minute, let alone ten.

It's even less easy when your muscles have been frozen in ice-cold water.

For fifteen minutes.

The shaking slows down a bit.

Then it resumes.

My hands start to feel a tiny bit better.

Then out come the knives again.

Left, right, left, right.

Breathe, motherf@ker!*

Wim Hof is a few meters away from me.

Sitting on the floor.

Hitting his djembe like mad.

Having a blast.

How he is able to be drumming right now when he himself has spent fifteen minutes in the water with us is beyond me.

I feel like my fingers would break if they touched anything right now.

And he's playing the drums.

I'm picturing flames inside myself.

Licking the inside walls of my torso, legs, shoulders and arms.

Shooting arrows of warmth all the way to my fingertips.

Left, right, left, right.

And, slowly, beautifully, inevitably, I start warming up.

The shaking in my legs becomes a mere trembling.

Then it starts to go, and come back, and go again.

The knives in my fingers are less acute.

The pain is turning into a light numbness.

A tiredness of the arms.

But that's okay, I can push through that too.

Eventually, the shaking dies down.

Eventually, the pain dissipates.

Eventually, my body warms up.

Eventually, I stop moving.

What I feel then is impossible to describe.

I feel warm.

I feel peaceful.

I feel relieved.

I feel amazed.

I feel worn out.

I feel powerful.

I feel indestructible.

Some around me are still shaking.

A couple still look bright red.

More are in the ice-baths, taking their turns to experience the power of the cold.

I'm remembering what I just experienced less than half an hour ago.

At first, stepping into the ice-cold water, the body goes into shock.

My mind feels fine, I'm excited to do this.

So I lie down fully, and concentrate on relaxing.

My breath goes a long way in doing that.

I focus on it.

I take deep inhales.

And even deeper exhales.

The cold is everywhere.

At first, I feel it most in my chest.

I sense a constriction reflex which I fight against.

I make a conscious effort to remain calm and open.

And the sensation of compression soon dissolves.

Wim is in the water with us.

Singing.

I turn my gaze in his direction and, along with a few others, chuckle.

But almost immediately I am brought back to full presence.

The cold is relentless.

One moment of inattention and my body freaks out.

Ice-cold water is a hostile environment to life.

Not all life, but definitely human life.

The human body knows it.

I need to focus on my breath.

Stay in my zone.

Then I start to feel pins and needles in my hands.

In my feet.

A few minutes in, the cold is doing its work.

Blood vessels are constricting in the extremities of my body so that warm blood remains in the core, protecting my vital organs.

Guess hands and feet aren't on the protected organs list.

The slightest movement of fingers and toes is both difficult to make, and very painful.

But it's also hard to remain perfectly still, because that's beginning to be painful too.

Stuck between a rock and hard place.

I'm laughing internally, realizing the absurdity, in a sense, of what I'm putting myself through.

But there's also an odd excitement to the whole thing.

Pushing my limits.

Seeing what I can do.

What my body can do.

What my mind can do.

Probably about 9 or 10 minutes in, perhaps earlier, I start to shake uncontrollably.

This is not your typical shivering.

It's not like, *woooo it's cold this morning*.

This shaking grabs my legs first.

I'm lying there, and they start bouncing up and down in the water.

Because others are lying next to me I'm trying to keep it somewhat concealed.

Call it a mix of concern for not disturbing them, and a slight competitiveness that does not want to show that it's getting hard for me.

But I soon find out that this is impossible.

I let go and let the shakes in.

I let my body do its thing.

After the legs, it's the arms.

Then the jaws.

And eventually the whole body.

I keep breathing.

I keep focusing my mind on remaining calm and centered.

Everything is fine.

And it is.

Finally, a few minutes later, the countdown for the final 10 seconds starts.

A wave of relief surges through me like a lightning bolt.

Ten!

Nine!

Eight!

Seven!

Six!

Five!

Four!

Three!

Two!

One!

I've never been so cold in my life.

But, oddly enough, I've never been so fine with being cold either.

Getting up is difficult.

My body responds like that of a clumsy toddler.

I can't feel my feet.

That's odd.

Luckily an instructor sees that.

They are here for that.

I am helped out of the ice bath.

It's all quite funny actually.

I make my way to the sunlit clearing.

But the ordeal isn't over.

Now it is warm up time.

Light up the inner fire.

This is the test.

The pain is excruciating.

Come on man, let's go.

Left, right, left, right.

Chapter 10

The Gift

Each night, when I go to sleep, I die. And the next morning, when I wake up, I am reborn.

Mahatma Gandhi

As I wake up, the sky is still pitch black.

Countless stars are visible due to the absence of any light pollution.

I fold up my sleeping bag, take down my tarp, and gather the few items I've had with me every night for the past 4 days.

A tin for kindling.

A spade.

A book.

A flask.

A headtorch.

A few clothes.

I start to make my way towards the morning circle.

I didn't sleep much last night.

After 3 days of fasting, I think the symptoms started to make themselves known.

My heart felt like it was beating more loudly.

I could feel blood pulsing in my temples.

Tingling sensations throughout my entire body.

Perhaps it was the excitement of knowing we would break fast in the morning?

Or maybe, after 3 days, my body starts to do its thing.

Either way, I am still amazed to realize I've been going for more than 80 hours without food.

I am perhaps even more shocked that I didn't feel uncomfortable at all for the first 3 days, and that only the 4th night has been a challenge.

As I'm walking, I see an unfamiliar light from a distance.

Every morning, we gathered at the morning circle to welcome the sunrise.

Today, we had to get up earlier, and the night is still in full force.

I don't expect to see the light of day yet.

But this light isn't daylight.

It is not still.

It is flickering.

As I come closer, I realize that what I see is the glistening light of a massive fire ablaze.

Right by the morning circle, where the gates of the East, the South, the West and the North are set, stands a huge inferno.

The base must be something like 2x2 meters.

Flames are dancing upwards towards the sky, taller than I.

I have never seen something like this close up.

A sort of small tent is raised closeby, covered in skins.

Like a yurt, but smaller and lower.

I have never seen a sweat lodge, but I recognise it as soon as I see it.

In silence, we walk through the gates and step inside the morning circle.

We begin the dance we have been doing every day for the past few days.

We welcome the four directions.

Some people are topless.

Some are naked.

I wish I was part of the liberated ones, but, still inhibited by my conditioning, I keep a small piece of cloth around my waist.

As we dance, the inferno keeps growing.

The sound is deafening.

It is probably about ten meters away from me and yet I can feel the heat.

The flames cast eerie shadows on the grass, on the wooden poles that mark the gates, and on the humans gathered inside the circle.

Upon completing the dance, we are invited to step inside the sweat lodge.

We receive a blessing with sage before kneeling and walking in on all fours.

It is dark.

I can barely see a thing.

A deep hole is dug in the center.

I make my way around it to find a spot against the wall opposite the entrance.

Some people already there are kneeling, or crouching, or sitting on the floor.

The ceiling is too low for anyone to stand.

Once we are all in, the door is closed and the darkness is complete.

Then, over the next two hours, 4 rounds of 8 scorching hot stones, each the size of a large grapefruit, are being brought in and pushed into the hole in the center of the lodge.

Now I understand what the inferno was for.

Each time, a ritual unfolds.

It ends with: "Welcome, stone."

Each stone adds to the heat in a palpable manner.

By the end of round 2, we already reach what feels like sauna temperature.

I wonder how I'm going to make it through to the end of the 4th round.

I could not tell you everything that occurred.

Deprived of vision.

Overstimulated with other sensations like heat and sound.

The mind enters a different state of consciousness.

I believe the singing began shortly after the arrival of the first stones.

Beautiful melodies rising in the darkness, echoed by some 15 voices or so.

Followed by invitations, acknowledgements or gifts.

Words are spoken.

I don't remember what I did or said but for this one moment.

In the blackness, I speak these words.

"I give myself the gift of patience."

I don't know where this came from, or why.

My senses completely overwhelm me.

I have no idea what time it is.

Or how long we've been here.

I think about my life and my wife and feel overjoyed.

I think about the love I have for my family and I weep.

I think of the gratitude I feel for the work I do, coaching and serving people.

I pray.

I hear the words I spoke echo in the dark.

I give myself the gift of patience.

These words have served me well.

Me, the typical achiever.

Me, a type 3 on the enneagram.

Me, comparing myself to my heroes who are ten, twenty years older than me and feeling like I'm behind...

Ambition has always been part of my makeup.

The drive to be better, to do better.

Even when I try to mask it, I remain competitive at heart.

But as I'm growing up, and as I'm slowly becoming a little wiser, these words make their way deep into the fleshy tables of my heart.

I give myself the gift of patience.

To this day, years later, it is the gift that keeps giving.

And the gift I must continue to receive with open arms.

After an extraordinary experience out of space and time, we make our way out.

The sun is up.

The night has been replaced by day.

Gently, we are guided towards a pool that has been formed by the waters of a river streaming down the mountain.

The cold is electrifying.

It is like being born again.

Nothing around my waist.

At that point, the self-consciousness is gone.

It has no more grip on me.

Freedom from my own thinking.

As we exit the water, plates with thin slices of apple, some blueberries, yogurt and honey await us.

Never has food tasted so good.

Never before, and never since.

Chapter 11

Slowing Down

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive.

Joseph Campbell

The first part of my journey was a cognitive one.

Actually that's not true.

The first part of my journey, up until the age of about 18, was all about the body.

I felt deeply.

I accomplished physical feats.

I fell in love multiple times.

The kind of exuberant teenage love my wife loves to watch in romantic tv shows.

Then at 18, something inside me switched on.

I started to go to my mind.

I started to embrace the intellect as a path.

A path to achievement.

A path to career success.

I studied business and political sciences in two of the very best higher education institutes in France.

I got a double degree in corporate and public management, graduating summa cum laude.

I started working in investment banking, in London, putting my intellect to use on the tracks of conventional success.

Even when I switched from banking to coaching, my early years in personal development were heavily influenced by the mind.

Cognitive psychology, humanistic philosophy, logotherapy...

For a decade, I have learned to make a difference to people by using their mind.

By empowering the stories they tell themselves.

The business I worked in for 7 years, iDiscover360, was - for me - the pinnacle of cognitive transformation.

I have never found a more powerful system to understand the human condition, from a self-actualisation perspective, and to empower the individual to take ownership of their life.

I dabbled here and there in other approaches.

Embodied practices.

Somatic tools.

But it did not feel like my realm.

I never felt confident or clear enough to really use it.

If someone had an issue with what they were feeling, my response was to help them change their thinking, and the feeling would follow.

In many ways, I still believe this to be one of the most powerful tools we humans have at our disposal.

Both to be free, and to create.

But I have come to discover another path.

Equally powerful.

Equally important.

I knew of the power of the body.

I knew about it intuitively.

I had tapped into it in my younger years.

Now, working with people, I came across it again.

I knew about it intellectually.

But I didn't know how to use it.

And increasingly over the years, *it* called me back.

I went on a quest to quieten my conscious mind.

To reconnect with the unconscious.

With the feeling.

The body.

This is why I fell in love with Embercombe's mysterious journeys.

This is why I sought out a Vipassana meditation retreat in Herefordshire.

This is why I went to the mountains to learn about Wim Hof's Method.

This is why I traveled all the way to Londolozi to experience the art of tracking wildlife.

This is why I attended a ceremony involving plant medicine in the Natural Park of Arrabida.

I was seeking the experience of feeling, rather than thinking.

I wanted to learn to speak the language of the body.

And I did.

When I was in the South African bush, I realized that I had never quite understood the meaning of the words "slow down".

I had heard them from my coaches.

I had used them myself with my clients.

I had an understanding of what that meant, *kind of*.

I thought it meant something like "do less, be more".

I thought it meant something like "do what you do, but take your time, don't rush".

And there certainly is some truth in that.

But in the bush, I saw a different meaning to these words.

I started to notice that I was paying more attention to my internal experience in each moment.

I would be having a conversation with someone, and I would have 10% of my attention on the inside.

Feeling my own energy.

Noticing where it was active in my body.

Paying attention to how it was moving in me.

And I would feel how it shifted.

And I would use that as information to bring into the conversation.

If my energy went up and left my body to move into my head, I would pause.

I would know that the conversation was getting into a territory that was less grounded.

The conversation was losing power.

Diminishing in value.

From there I would have a few choices.

I could stop the conversation altogether.

I could come back to the previous topic.

I could notice what had led to this change.

I could bring it forth and explore with the other person.

Literally what I would do next had little importance, except it had to be in integrity with this energy change.

When I say “energy”, you could equally use words like “sensations” or “feelings”.

Even as you read these words, you can keep 10% of your attention on the inside.

Noticing your body.

All of it.

Feeling a faint sensation somewhere.

Perhaps in your torso.

Perhaps in your arms.

Perhaps in your belly area.

Perhaps in your hands or feet.

No matter, you can feel something.

A sort of gentle buzzing.

A simmering.

A pulsing.

Boyd Varty calls it a faint sense of aliveness.

Noticing this, and giving it importance, is what I now understand as slowing down.

In any activity.

In any conversation.

I'm paying attention to the inside.

And not only that, I am trusting this as a guidance system.

The physiological is an entirely different pillar to the cognitive - although connected of course - and both angles are hugely powerful.

I think they can both elevate humanity.

Just in different ways.

They are different portals, giving us access to different possibilities.

Being strong in both is the ultimate gift to build awareness.

This somatic system is a new track for me.

I used to not even notice it.

Then I learned to notice it, but I would dismiss it and override it without a second thought.

Then I learned to notice it, feel it and be with it, but I still wouldn't trust it.

Now I learned to actually believe it.

To use it.

And that is the new discovery of what “slowing down” means.

When I think “slow down”, this is what I’m hearing.

Tune in.

Listen to your energy.

Is what you’re doing aligned?

Are the words you are speaking alive?

Are you being true?

When my energy gets ungrounded, I wait.

I let it settle before I move on.

Or I tentatively move forward.

Noticing the moment I will feel a stronger, more powerful and more grounded sensation inside.

Then I know I’m on track.

Chapter 12

Is It Really True?

In low levels of consciousness it is unwise to believe, trust or follow our thinking.

Jack Pransky

Gong.

Day 7.

I have just experienced the strangest thing.

A couple of days ago, I was going on my walk around the woods of the monastery.

By then I had done this walk perhaps 50 times.

It was late morning.

Or maybe afternoon.

I don't remember.

What I do recall is that I ended up thinking about my life, and in particular my professional future.

I recall being overwhelmed, in that moment, with thoughts of doubt, concern and worry about the financial viability of my business.

I recall fearing the possibility of failure as I defined it.

What if my clients don't get the results they want?

What if nobody hires me?

What if I can't generate the income that will allow my wife and my soon-to-be-born daughter to live well?

What if I'm not as competent I believe myself to be?

What if I can't make it work?

I recall that within 30 minutes of this mind storm, I had an “insight”.

The insight went something like this:

Wow, I am actually insecure deep down. I don't believe in myself. I have a lot of work to do. Maybe I'll go to therapy. I'm hurt, but I'm glad I discovered this now. I never knew this was so deeply rooted. Crazy.

And on I went with my day.

Back to the meditation hall.

Somewhat humbled by my discovery.

Me, a confident guy, discovering such deeply rooted insecurity.

I had seen something about myself that felt real.

And deep.

And important to address.

Gong.

Two days later, nothing has really changed in my world.

I've meditated for say, 20 more hours.

The quantity of time does not feel significant.

The meditation I am practicing is all about noticing my body and paying close attention to every subtle sensation.

That's it.

There's no intellectual enquiry.

No exploration of my thoughts.

No process of change in meaning, or belief, or narrative.

And with no contact with the outside world, no access to the internet, no journal, no book, no communication with anyone whatsoever, it's fair to say that literally, nothing on the outside has changed.

And nothing has occurred that could obviously lead me to change my thoughts on the inside.

But I'm now on that same walk.

And as I am walking I find myself thinking about my life again, in particular my professional future.

Only what occurs this time, is the complete opposite of what has happened 2 days before.

I am flooded with a series of thoughts of confidence.

Of optimism.

Of certainty.

Of clients who loved their work with me.

Of individuals who trust me.

Of miracles that have occurred in my work with others.

Of extraordinary results which my clients created.

My mind takes me on a journey of contemplation and it is nothing but positive.

And I'm feeling absolutely, unabashedly and unequivocally confident.

I'm trying to remember what I was thinking 2 days ago.

I bring back the sentences that were swimming through my head.

They feel hazy.

Incomplete.

Untrue.

From where I'm standing now, I don't believe them.

They don't have their hooks in me.

In that moment, they aren't real for me.

How can this be?

Nothing has changed.

No one cheered me up.

I don't have a new client.

My bank account hasn't changed.

I've not been sitting with a therapist.

Do I feel insecure? In this moment, absolutely not.

I can't believe this experience.

Thinking about the very same future, the very same profession, the very same topic, and yet experiencing a completely different feeling and perspective about it.

I'm a coach.

I love this kind of stuff.

Anything that happens to me and that is powerful, I get to share and use with others.

Here, what is astonishing to me is that I thought I had an 'insight' about my limitations.

About something in me that was holding me back.

It was bright as day.

2 days later, it occurred to me as nonsense.

A compelling and powerful illusion.

I'm not deeply insecure.

I don't fear the future.

I need do nothing.

I had the visceral experience that what I believed to be true about myself actually isn't.

That my disempowering judgements, though they may seem true, have no basis in reality other than the feelings I experience which reinforce the illusion of their 'truth'.

And sometimes, all that might be required is to not take them too seriously.

To create some space and lightness around my thinking.

To trust in the impermanence of all things.

To give thoughts time.

To wait.

Be still.

Let your mind settle.

Like murky water you allow to rest still in a bowl, it will eventually clear up.

And you'll see the truth of it.

Chapter 13

Footprints

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.

Harper Lee

We are walking on the land.

The effects of Huachuma are wearing off.

I can have conversations.

I can walk.

I have eaten and am feeling very much myself.

But I'm not fully back to my usual state of consciousness.

The difference is subtle, but tangible.

Unmistakeable.

As we come off the path and start walking through the land, Esteban makes a request.

He asks us to walk in a single file.

He asks us to step exactly on top of the footprint of the man ahead of us.

We're up for the game.

At first, it's a bit messy.

I'm struggling to keep a consistent pace.

I'm not the only one.

The column of 8 men must look like a human caterpillar.

Some giggles punctuate the somewhat awkward start of our walk through the wilderness.

But soon, as if by some mysterious invisible hand, we fall into a rhythm.

We stop speaking.

We get into a kind of synchronized zone.

Esteban leads the way.

Each man follows the man preceding him.

All our right feet land in the exact same spot.

All our left feet do the same.

The pace is smooth, fluid, and mesmerizing.

For perhaps only twenty minutes, I fall into a kind of trance.

I find myself walking in the middle.

Then walking at the back.

Things shift, but the walk remains hypnotic.

I would have happily done this for an hour.

When the chain breaks off due to the playfulness of a few, I find myself next to Esteban and start asking him about the experience.

He tells me about all the insights this walk contains.

He tells me about some tribes in Latin America who, to this day, will walk this way.

Single file.

Each person steps into the footsteps of the person in front of them.

He tells me about the respect for nature this discipline embodies.

This limits the number of species - plants or animals - that will be crushed because all the tribe steps on the same spot.

He tells me about the responsibility of the leader, who, should she make a mistake about the direction or about where to place her feet, takes the entire tribe with her.

He tells me about the impact on the tribe if someone in the middle stops, gets injured or becomes incapacitated in some way.

The rest of the tribe cannot go on and must come to help this one.

He tells me about how difficult it is to be the last and keep up.

Surprisingly, I have noticed that too.

It is no easy thing to be at the back of the line!

He tells me that this walk can be done with a child in front too.

Then one learns about how children see the world.

I find this fascinating and get an idea.

For the next hour, as we walk in nature, I take it in turn to follow each person in the group for about 5 to 10 minutes, stepping into their exact footsteps.

This has given me a totally new understanding of the phrase “putting oneself in someone else’s shoes”.

It is a fascinating thing, to walk behind someone in nature.

You learn a lot about how this person does life.

One man, a wild, creative, smart and chaotic soul, just could not keep two consistent paces.

I kept risking falling just trying to follow his footprints.

His paces were all over the place.

Another one had long, slow, relaxed strides.

I could feel his leadership, charisma as well as a little bit of his general nonchalance in his gait.

And on and on.

If you want to experience how another person sees the world, I thought, you can gain a lot by walking, *literally*, in their footsteps.

Chapter 14

Tracking

I don't know where I'm going, but I know how to get there.

Renias Mhlongo

“Tracking is kind of like life !”

He laughs as he utters these words.

We all do.

We all see it.

We all get it.

After a few days in the South African bush, tracking wild animals and experiencing the magic of this land, I have stopped counting the metaphors and analogies that tracking has with living.

Tracking is the ancient artform of following animal tracks to find said animals.

It encompasses logical deduction, imaginative enquiry, storytelling and a love for the wilderness.

As I share with you a summary of what I learnt about tracking, I invite you to think about an aspect of your life you wish to be more fulfilled in.

Think of the animal I want to find as a goal you have in your life.

Think of finding this animal as reaching your career goal.

Or your financial goal.

Or your romantic goal.

Or your health goal.

Whatever it is.

And see how a casual day tracking in the bush maps to your desire.

If you're anything like me, the first thing you notice when you set foot on the ground and start to track, is that you don't know much about the signs and you don't know where to start.

You don't really know what the track looks like.

You don't know what to look for.

The whole terrain is a mystery.

You see things here and there that are probably some kind of information, but you don't even know what you're looking at.

The first time, nothing is familiar.

Slowly, you must teach yourself the language of the wild.

Gradually, you must learn to see and notice what matters.

You must become attune to the ways that one sees the track.

Animal prints.

Broken branches.

Blades of grass flattened in a certain way.

Mud on a bush.

Animal dung.

And so on.

You must learn to see the signs that you're on track.

How it looks.

How it sounds.

How it feels.

How it smells.

How it tastes.

Then you can start to pick up clues and stumble forward.

Slowly.

Very slowly.

Then you need to practice changing your focus from looking at your feet, close to you, and looking up, casting your eyes at a distance.

Zooming in is the way you get confirmation, especially when the terrain is harder to walk through.

Zooming out serves several purposes.

You might actually see the animal you're looking for earlier than you think.

You might pick up on other clues like birds flying away from a particular spot in the distance.

You might see danger which tells you to stop, take a detour, or improvise a different course.

So you have to develop this ability to switch focus and alternate between detail and big picture.

As you move forward, you must continuously pick up on signs, evidence, clues, and continuously build the story of what the animal is doing, where it is going, and what is happening.

To help you understand what is going on and what you're actually engaged in the process of pursuing.

Basically, trackers are master meaning-makers.

They tell a story.

And they refine that story constantly.

That's how they develop more and more certainty about the track.

As you keep going, the next thing that will happen is that you will lose the track.

One moment you see the path clearly, and the next you don't see it anymore.

This happens multiple times in a single tracking session.

You start to look around, but nothing is clear.

You feel a little lost.

At first you might look around aimlessly.

It feels frustrating, confusing.

You might even feel anxious.

But the way we find the track again is to start walking methodically, in increasingly wider semi-circles, to scout the terrain for signs.

You might need to come back to the last known track and from there, try a different direction.

You might need to eliminate some options without seeing this as a waste of time.

It's part of the process of enquiry.

Eventually, if you are patient, you find the track again.

As you follow it, you might come across the footprints of another animal.

You will then have to make a decision.

Do I continue with my original goal?

Or do I change my mind and follow this new possibility?

Do I continue with the rhino?

Or go for the leopard?

Both can be exciting.

Both can be wonderful journeys.

But I cannot do both simultaneously.

And I don't know if I'll achieve one or the other, or any of them.

The choice is mine.

The only thing I cannot do, is not choose.

Because then I'll get nowhere.

I have to kill one possibility in order to pursue another.

The reality of trade offs.

Let's say you stay on the initial track.

Well, you've been tracking for a while and you're getting impatient to find this animal.

But the only way to get there, no matter how long you've been going at it, is one track at a time.

You can't just skip ahead and say: "oh well, I'm guessing this male rhino is somewhere 500 meters west of here, let's go there to check it out."

Odds are you will never find what you were looking for.

But if you do it one step at a time, one track at a time.

Then you're bound to get there, sooner or later.

That's the meaning of Renias's piece of wisdom.

I don't know where I'm going, but I know how to get there.

You have a vision of your goal, but you don't know where it is.

All you can do to achieve it is to find the next track that leads you towards it; and the next track; and the next track.

Sometimes when we lost the track, we had to go on a detour to cross off some sections from the realm of possibilities.

So we'd walk around for 200 or 300 meters until we'd confirm that the animal had not come this way.

That didn't feel like a waste of time.

It was really valuable information!

We knew the path was not here.

We weren't hell bent on making sure that we had to take the right path on every crossroads.

We were just trying things that seemed to make sense for a little while, until we either found confirmation we were on track, or found confirmation we definitely weren't.

Then we'd come back to the crossroads and try something else.

So simple.

The final piece was the most beautiful to witness.

I was amazed to see how the trackers who were trying to find the rhino or the leopard or the pride of lions with and for us, weren't getting agitated about whether or not we'd find it.

There was no pressure to show the animals to the tourists.

They were collaborating with each other calmly, methodically, and without stress.

They were really just engrossed in the process of following the track.

That was its own reward for them.

Finding the animal was fun, but only the cherry on top.

And if one day we had to abandon the track because it was too cold and it would take us much longer than we had to catch up with the animal, they would simply explain it to us and call it a day.

Nice tracking session.

We'll get it next time.

No big deal.

No disappointment.

And I understood why.

The goal was just an excuse for them.

An excuse to get on the journey.

Because that was the true reward.

That's where they got their fun.

That's where they felt alive.

On the track.

Chapter 15

Within Me

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Anais Nin

Gong.

Day 10.

Gong.

In 2 hours, we will be breaking the silence.

For now, everything is quiet.

Peaceful.

Still.

We have all done a deep surgical operation inside our minds and bodies.

Simply by observing the flow of life within ourselves.

Fascinating journey.

A wild ride that was one of the hardest things, genuinely, I've ever done.

Right now I'm pumped.

I'm ready to take on another 10 days!

I can't believe I'm feeling this way, when I've experienced the desire for this to end dozens of times in the last few days.

But here's the last and greatest lesson of all for me.

In the past 9 days, I have been excited, and I have been calm.

I've been fearful, and I've been confident.

I've been angry and I've been peaceful.

I've been sad and I've been happy.

I've been bored, and I've been elated.

I got into imaginary conversations with people in my life.

I have argued with people I love.

I have revisited conversations that should have happened.

I have projected conversations that should happen.

And absolutely none of it actually happened.

Not only that, but nothing in the material world has occurred that would lead me to reflect on any of the above!

I was in the most serene environment for 9 days.

No triggers.

No events.

No conversations.

No news.

No people.

None of these 'stressors' we commonly refer to in everyday language.

So now I know that everything I felt originated within me.

Literally.

All of it was in my head, so to speak.

I have had the absolute privilege and immense blessing to see and experience first hand how all of the world I experience is created by nothing other than me.

Regardless of what happens 'out there' - or doesn't happen !

We live in an outside-in illusion: we believe that what happens out there makes us feel something in here.

So and so made me feel this way.

X happened so I felt Y.

But this is an illusion.

It only always happens inside-out.

What I think in here makes me feel what I feel and 'see' what is out there.

This collective illusion is so strong that even when you know it, you still fall prey to it from time to time.

I know that some people reading this will be doubting it.

Maybe even reject it.

Some readers will have 'examples' pop up in their mind.

Are you saying breaking my arm doesn't hurt?

Are you saying wars are not horrible if I just think they are not?

And so on.

These are thoughts created by the part of you that does not want to see that you only ever feel what you are thinking.

I experience these thoughts too.

What we can do, is learn to distance ourselves from them.

To not trust them so much.

We then get to experience a different world.

Because I only ever feel what I am thinking.

And what I think is something which I have access to and which I can choose to change.

Whether I want to or not is a different matter.

But the ability to is a human prerogative.

No matter who you are or where you're from.

The outside-in illusion is strong.

That does not make it real.

I'm also far from the only one to point to it and to speak of it.

If you wish to see through it, you'll find plenty of ways to do so.

I knew it intellectually before this journey.

Now I know it in my body.

The world I experience is all within me.

This does not make it easier.

But it does give me greater access to my own power and freedom to be and to act in the world.

It does not matter what I'm looking at, what matters is what I see when I look at it.

And I am the creator of what I see.

Always.