

REALIZATIONS ABOUT SELF-LOVE,
LASTING RELATIONSHIPS & A MEANINGFUL LIFE

DEAR STRANGER, YOU DESERVE TO BE LOVED



ASHISH BAGRECHA

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for all the strange us.

*in loving memory of Chris Adams,
dearest brother, truest friend and
the most fearless dreamer i ever knew.
you were an abundance of love and light.*

*if a human heart can feel infinite pain,
it can also feel infinite love.*

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PREFACE

So, I am back and without wasting any more time, let's get to the truth. Everything we do in life is for love. Why? I don't know. Maybe love is what keeps us going. Maybe love is the means and ends to this life. Maybe the Universe runs on love. Whatever maybe the reason, love is what we all demand and love is what we all want.

But very often, we find ourselves without love. Some of us have even stopped believing in love. Right? And for some of us, it's worse because we don't feel we deserve to be loved. Well, I know all of this because I myself didn't believe I was deserving of love, for many years of my life. I truly understand how it feels like to be alone. To be rejected by the people you share your affections with. To be searching for someone to love all your life. To be hurt by love again and again. Honestly, I've been at rock bottom when it came to love, I had no love in my heart for others and even struggled with finding love within me for myself. But now, after three decades of my life, I find myself amidst abundance of love to give and receive. Surprised? I will tell you how this happened.

Over the years, I have tried to observe, analyze, experience and feel love in a thousand different ways. My quest to understanding love led to me to a realization of a thousand different things about it. And like always, I want to share with you my simple findings about this complex feeling if only you give me a chance. A chance to walk together. A chance to blossom together. A chance to feel loved.

You see, when I wrote my first book, *Dear Stranger, I Know How You Feel*, it gave me the chance to connect with people all over the world. I

understood that everyone's story is always a bit messy, complicated, and each as unique as a snowflake. Well I don't know the challenges with love that you have faced in your life but whatever you're going through, just know that you are not alone. I might not be able to picture your face in my mind or call you on the phone but, dear stranger, please know that I have been where you are now. I have felt empty inside and spent my days alone feeling lost, as I'm sure you feel now. But now you don't have to feel that way anymore. Your favorite stranger is here to help you. To show you, my friend, that it is possible to heal. It is possible for you to find the love in your life that you have always desired.

Which is why I wanted to write this book. To inspire you to believe and dream of a different world, where the love you want to give and receive comes easily to you. No matter how misunderstood you feel, no matter how low or uninspired you may feel right now, there is always hope. To love more, to live bigger, and to start saying yes to life and all the things that you hold dear. I know you've heard this word, *hope*, a million times from a million people in a million different ways and you're tired of hearing it. So I am not going to use that word. I am going to give you another word, okay? *Faith*. Because faith is more powerful than hope. It's difficult but effective. Most importantly, faith doesn't fade like hope. So no matter what dark place you feel stuck in, I want to provide you with faith, a beam of light, to show you the way out. It is easy, when you're in the dark to see darkness everywhere. But it takes the mind of a believer to try and see the light. And there is always light, my friend. There is always love being extended to you for you are love. The Universe loves you deeply, I love you deeply, and the people in your life love you deeply. You might not agree with me right now but by the end of this book, I *hope* you do. Well, I have *faith* that you will.

I was once in a dark place, where things like faith and love were hard for me to see. I have experienced rejection, denial, pain, and solitude. When I was struggling to love others and love life, I wish that someone would have

told me that my feelings were normal. I wish someone could have shown me that there was another way to think; another way to *be* in the world. I wish I didn't feel so alone, even when surrounded by people. The more I have shared about my own mental and emotional struggles, the more I realized that other people struggle too, only silently. There is no sense in staying quiet and suffering alone. Our pains may be unique but the reasons we have these pains are not. In this book, I hope you will see that your pain is my pain. That even the worst heartbreak can be overcome. Even if it's hard for you to see right now, trust that you will learn. That you will overcome this darkness that keeps you feeling heavy.

And that is why, I'm writing these thirty letters and poems for you. Letters of self-realizations about love and everything around that. Lessons I've learnt in my journey about loving myself, building lasting relationships and aspiring to live a meaningful life. One letter for each day to make you realize that you deserve to be loved deeply and completely. That you deserve to have a life that is brimming with the love that you have dreamed about. And this time, I have also added some suggestions for you at the end of every chapter. Little course of actions which helped me turn my life around and can help you do the same as well. I really hope you'd try to do them atleast once. Trust me, they will give you the answers you are looking for.

Honestly, I don't want to change the world with this book. All I want is to help one person feel less alone. To have one person read these words and feel empowered and hopeful for the future and their lives. I hope this brings you comfort; to know that your pain is shared by many. I hope this brings you the gentle compassion that you need to soften against the harsh and sharp edge of the world. I hope that you feel inspired to connect with people differently and heal your relationships; your relationship with yourself, and with people in life that you truly care about. Dear stranger, you deserve to be loved deeply and completely. You deserve to have a life that is brimming with the love that you have dreamed about and you are in control. Where

there is pain and darkness, there is always healing that must be done. It can be hard, to heal those parts of yourself that have felt broken for longer than you care to admit. Healing has a funny way of taking you on a ride of ups and downs but the love you seek exists. It's out there, waiting for you to say yes.

Don't give up. I am rooting for you. Let's do this together? Shall we, my dear stranger?

DAY 1

you are not hard to be loved
you are hard to be unloved.

-note to self



SELF-LOVE: IS IT SELFISH OR SELFLESS?

Dear Stranger,

Love yourself, love yourself, love yourself! That's what you are being told every day by influencers, brands, social media. But every time you decide to love yourself, people call you selfish. You don't listen to them for a while but then it starts bothering you. It makes you feel guilty. And you give up. The idea that loving others is the one only true selfless act and people who love themselves are selfish deepens inside your brain every passing day. Trust me, I know that conflict very well. And the scariest part is when you feel you've nothing inside you that can be loved. You feel you don't even deserve to be loved by your own self.

Dear stranger, I know how much you torture yourself. You spend your days racked with guilt, constantly worried that you have done something wrong or tip-toe around others to try and ease their feelings. You look at yourself and your life and compare it to the lives you see others living. It creates a burning hole in your stomach, making you feel even worse. You pick at yourself, the same scabs and wounds over and over again so they never have time to heal. It hurts, but it's a hurt you know; a pain that you're familiar with. You can plainly see all the ways that you're not good enough. You can count all the times you haven't been smart enough. You are consumed by the mistakes you have made in the past but feel paralyzed by your own insecurities. You spend time hating yourself, blaming yourself, beating yourself up because that's all you know. I see you, my friend. I see the pain that you're inflicting on yourself, worn like a badge of honor. You don't have to suffer alone, you don't have to be a prisoner to your own self-deprecating thoughts.

Loving yourself, appreciating yourself seems foreign and strange. Just like other relationships, you don't know where to start. You don't feel worthy of the time and attention that you feel called to give yourself. You are running on empty and refusing to fill your own cup, fighting like hell to abandon yourself as others have abandoned you in the past. I know how terrible it feels to be rejected and left by others. It happened to me so often, I began to reject myself. I didn't take care of myself. I would bend over backwards and contort myself into all the things that I thought other people wanted from me. I wore masks and tried to dance only to fall flat on my face, to be rejected once again. The darkness that comes with loneliness is like a black fog. I know how it clouds your vision, seeping into every cell and making it hard to see. Hard to breathe. Hard to make sense of yourself or anyone else.

My friend, instead of abandoning yourself in the pursuit of becoming what everyone else expects or wants you to be, I simply implore you to let all that go. I see the way the need to love and affection colors you differently. You are trying to be a lion when you were meant to be a dove. You don't need to carry the burden of other people's failures and expectations; they are not meant for you to carry. The masks and hats that other people will ask you to wear may not fit. You are so used to the rejection, so used to being alone with all your ill-fitted hats that you have all but given up on love. It is important to remember, dear friend, that you have neglected yourself in order to be someone else's idea of good enough. You feel eternally let down because you are letting down yourself. Instead of forcing yourself to be good enough for the approval of everyone else, why not try living life for your own approval? Caring for and being kind to others is paramount in this life, but trying to change yourself, neglect yourself, or to shape yourself into something different will always leave you feeling the same way. Misunderstood and alone.

Instead of merely taking all of the hats that people toss your way and trying to make them fit, go to the store for yourself. Try on the hats that you like, the ones that fit and feel good to you. Don't worry about the opinions of

other people. People will try to tell you that you've changed since you stop wearing their hat or that they don't like your new hat. You do not live, eat, sleep, and breathe to make others happy. You are your own love story, your own creation, your own work of art. Make the choice, my friend, to step out of the darkness and accept the sunlight. Bask in your own brilliance, follow your heart when something or someone calls to you. Find ways to nourish yourself, and your mind with unconditional love. All love in the Universe starts and ends with you. It is all that have come from and all that we will dissipate into.

Acknowledge your pain. Sift through the past with a gentle kindness that you might use to talk to a child or your best friend. Sit with the discomfort of the pain that you have been through in your life. See that each setback, each misfire has led you to this moment in your life. This moment where you know who you are not. This moment where you now know the hundred ways of being and costumes that are not meant for you. Learn from them. Fill yourself up with the things that feel good to you and fill your days with them. Speak to yourself as though you are talking to a friend. You are still learning how to be you, and you don't have all the answers yet, and you're not supposed to. This life is all about allowing and becoming. Allow yourself the space to be happy. Give yourself permission to do more of the things that make you feel alive. Let go of the darkness that kept you feeling small and insignificant. Let go of the past for there is nothing that you nor I can do to change it. You can do it, you can take up space in this world. The Universe needs you to be you. You don't even know that gifts you could offer the world because you have been denying yourself the love you need to be truly happy.

Taking care of yourself and filling yourself with the things that feel good is okay. I know that you feel like you need permission to make yourself happy. You've been told that happiness lies within relationships and, while that can be true for some, it is not true for all. You are perfect and whole entirely on your own. You know how to take care of yourself best. You

know that traveling helps you to process your emotions, you know that fresh air helps you feel grounded when you've had a bad day. You know that there is nothing that a bowl of comfort food and your favorite movie can't fix. So often you deny yourself the things you need to feel taken care of, to feel good. We're told and taught that other people are responsible for taking care of us, but that's not true at all. You are responsible for taking care of you and no one else will be able to do as good of a job as you can.

In this place of discovery, of expansion, or growth and becoming it can be easy to get lost. I have felt overwhelmed in life because of all the choices of who to be and how to become it. Yet, I've found that it is the moments of stillness and silence that help guide you on this journey. When you are faced with a fork in the road, listen to your gut. Our internal body wisdom is all knowing, all seeing, and all sensing. Your intuition will never guide you wrong, in fact, it will always lead you the right way. Listening to yourself, taking care of yourself, and letting your natural born identity shine will push away the darkness. In the process of shedding your negative thoughts, releasing your fears and doubt, and in truly blossoming by yourself and for yourself, the pain will lessen. The path becomes clearer. Your life shifts into focus.

You don't have to suffer in the darkness. You may not be able to control your circumstances or the people that you meet. You can't control the caste you have been born to or the hopes of others. But, dear friend, it is your choice to live in suffering. This Universe is a kind, loving, and abundant one. If you have a good heart, and I know that you do, please trust the Universe. Trust that everything in your life has all conspired to bring you something bigger. Somewhere bigger. Trust that the love you put into yourself and out into the Universe will be returned you to in delightful and unexpected ways. Trust that loving and caring for yourself is key to unlocking love in all other areas of your life.

It can be scary to step out of the shadows and into the sunlight. It can feel uncertain and scary. People will be seeing you, the real you, for the first time. Loving yourself and your quirks and your mistakes can all feel wrong. It might feel scary to love yourself no matter what happens, to know that you deserve all the good in the world regardless of whether or not other approve of you and the way that you want to live. It might even sound crazy, dear reader, but all love starts and ends with you. Other people won't even know you until you love yourself. You won't understand the depths required to truly love others until you love yourself.

No matter how impossible it may seem at this moment, you can do it. It is possible for you just as it has been possible for me. The Universe is patiently waiting for you to say yes to you. The You that you have always been, the You that you have always been meant to be. The second you start treating yourself like the priority you are, the more life unfolds for you. The more you come home to yourself and awaken to your potential, the more you grow into yourself; with confidence, with grace, and with unconditional love for others. Love is the key to healing the relationship with yourself. It's the key to loving others with sincere delight and will elevate all of your relationships, especially intimate ones. Loving the world, in all of its diverse experience and beauty will truly liberate us all from despair.

A life of love awaits on the other side of the darkness. It's just waiting for you to say yes.

Suggestions

1. Write yourself a love letter. What are you proud of yourself for? What talent and perspective do you bring to this world that is entirely YOU? Don't be shy. Write about it and start seeing yourself in a new light.
2. Create loving, positive affirmations for yourself. This can be as simple as looking at your reflection in the mirror and saying "I love you". Affirmations can be short and sweet, but you repeat it like a personal mantra when you're experiencing turbulence or resistance in your life.

3. Promise yourself one solo trip a year. If you can't do that, promise yourself at least one solo coffee date a month with yourself.

DAY 2

no matter
how much
you try
to hide
i know
you are quiet
on the outside
but you are screaming
on the inside.



SELF-AWARENESS

Dear Stranger,

Who are you? Do you even know? Living in darkness warps the way you see the world and see yourself. You feel as though you are a stranger to yourself. There is a part of you, deep inside that knows you are meant for something more but that part can't seem to find its way out. I know you wake up in the morning, dreading your day. You dream of a day when you feel excited about your work, energized by life but that day is not today. That life is not yours. So, you pretend. You fake a smile, and fill yourself up with things for the sake of feeling full. I have been where you once stood, my friend. I dreaded my work, dreaded meeting new people, dreaded the feeling of pretending to be happy instead of actually living a life that would make me that way. You have checked all the boxes, have done everything right but still feel empty inside. No material thing, friendship, or relationship will help you to uncover the truth about who you are, even though we search and dig for answers outside of ourselves to no avail. It feels as though we are living a life meant for someone else, like it is something apart from you and not driven by something within you. The energy it takes to reconcile with such a life leaves you feeling drained and uninspired.

I know you have become highly disillusioned throughout your life. You can't see the things you are gifted at just as you can only see the things you are terrible at. It is scary to be honest with yourself because we're never entirely sure what we will uncover. I know you have flaws, I have them too. I know you have hurt people in the past and I know others have hurt you in unthinkable ways. I know this is what makes it so hard to love yourself with

open arms. I know that we are messy and imperfect and it feels like sometimes you can't do anything right. You feel as though you don't deserve peace until you have answers. That you don't deserve kindness, not even from yourself, because of the misdoings that you have done. But, my friend, please know that this only makes you human. You push away your flaws and shortcomings because you think that without them you will be liked, that you will be loveable. The further you distance yourself from those less pretty and likeable parts, the more you feel like a fake and a fraud. The less you feel like yourself and the more you feel detached from this magical life you get to live.

I know you don't listen to your thoughts, and I mean really listen. I know you beat yourself up over your flaws and shortcomings. I know that you build up the people around you with love and compassion because you don't want others to hurt the way that you hurt. You don't want your friends or family talking to themselves the way that you talk to you. So, you're extra kind. Extra understanding. Always making allowances and excuses for others but hold yourself to the most extreme standards. I remember a time when I was hard on myself about everything. Nothing I did, nothing I wrote, nothing I said to anyone or myself was ever good enough. I called myself dumb, I told myself that nothing good ever happens to people like me. I know you've done the same. I have heard you speak to yourself; demeaning, demanding, and disgusted because I have done the same. I have torn myself apart on more than one occasion and it has only led to making me feel terrible, sad, and more alone than ever. It feels so hard to get anything right in life, and you feel like the only way to learn is to suffer.

I know that your goals and dreams are not entirely yours. It is much easier to adopt your dreams and aspirations from other people than to unearth and live out your own. I know you want to go to medical school to make your parents proud. I know you want to get hundreds of likes on your Instagram because it's cool to be an influencer now. I know that you have tried on dreams and goals like you have tried on hats, none of them ever really

fitting or feeling right to you but you continue to wear them anyways. Those dreams and goals will never feel right to you because they are not truly yours. You fight and claw your way to achievement, hoping that after one more degree, one more certification, one more vote of confidence from your family and you will feel good and happy. But that happiness is fake and fleeting because it is not truly yours. You can't ignore the calling, the pull, the temptation inside of you for you. You can't keep pushing it away in favor of achieving someone else's dream. Deep inside, you know it will never bring you the love and happiness that you have been looking for.

I know your values feel far away. The intangible things in life tend to be the most important to us and yet we never take the time to look at what they might be. You are a shapeshifter, having nothing to cement yourself to. Your emotions range from self-hatred to self-doubt, each new feeling bringing with it some sort of new condition, some impediment to why you shouldn't love yourself. Your ever-changing emotions lead to you to make rash decisions you later regret. Your feelings have impacted every choice you've made and reinforced the feelings that you have within yourself. When you feel bad, you make bad choices. When you feel ugly or hate, you make choices that are ugly and hateful to yourself. I have done it. I, too, have found myself victim to my emotions and have made my fair share of poorly motivated choices. I feel like I am floating out in space, with nothing to ground me. Nothing to keep me tethered, no yardstick to measure my choices up against. I know what it's like to make a choice that doesn't feel right, only because you need to feel something; anything at all. Even if it's only to feel pain.

You have spent so long, dear friend, living a life that isn't yours. Chasing things and goals that you don't even want simply because it is what other people are doing, and those people seem pretty happy. You make choices based on your feelings for the day that come and go and change as quickly as the tide, leaving you feeling worse than the way you started. It can feel like there is no where else to turn. You feel like you are simply spinning

your wheels but still not getting anywhere. There is no love in your life. There is no happiness that you can see. Even accomplishing the goals that everyone else is accomplishing, leaves you feeling alone and unfulfilled. You are starting to believe that nothing more is out there for you, that this is the best that life has to offer but you, my friend, are wrong.

Dear stranger, you don't need to live this way. You don't need to struggle through life, wondering if anything bigger or better is out there for you. When you turn your attention from the outward, inward, you will master love in all its forms and expressions. You have the power of choice. You have the power to make changes to your inner world. Only you can decide who you are and who you want to be. No one else on the planet can tell you what your purpose on this Earth is. No one can tell you that the things you want to do or be or have are wrong except you. You don't have to live under the cloud of other people's timeline, opinion, or dreams. You are your own person; magnificent in your own creation. Do not hide yourself away in fear that people will see you and reject you; that is their healing to do. Step back and listen to yourself. To your body, to your soul, to your spirit. Fearlessly follow the calling inside of you and you will not be led astray. The people who love you will see you and support you in being the happiest version of yourself. Will support you as you learn to love yourself and let your personality shine instead of trying to shrink it to fit in with those around you. Reconnect with your essence. With your being.

Love yourself unconditionally in all that you say and do. I know you don't always feel important. You have trouble seeing yourself as anything but a burden to others and their lives. You feel as though you *are* rejection, loneliness, and isolation. You feel it so deeply that those feelings have become you. You are too powerful for the limitations you put on yourself. Calling yourself names, beating yourself up, and harping on your flaws are the trademark of a person without self-love. You need to take responsibility for yourself. Parent yourself, encourage yourself, empower yourself. No one in this life will do this for you, it is up to you and only you. You will

always belong to yourself before you belong to anyone else. Speak to yourself as a friend would, do things for yourself that you might do for a friend. Don't be your own enemy or own biggest critic. You need to be on your own side. There is no love in life without self-love. Only by extending yourself love and patience you will allow yourself to take risks and do hard things in this life. The more you love yourself and treat yourself like someone you love, the more comfort and acceptance you will find within.

Identify your values and stand strongly in them. Your values will help to define you, and give you shape. Values take all of the things that feel good, feel aligned, and feel expansive and breaks them down into our motivations. Values help you make choices that are the most aligned with the person that you want to be, with the life you want to have. Truly sit with your experiences and take notice of how they make you feel, this is how you begin to decipher what actions feel right and what feel wrong. Take time to discover what values align the most with your truth. With who you are down to your core and not merely the picture-perfect person that you have been fighting your entire life to be. **Dear stranger, it is okay to not be anything to anyone as long as you are everything to yourself.** Let people come and let people go because the right people will always stay.

There is no courage without fear. Have courage, dear stranger, and allow your true self out into the light. Gently awaken to your soul's true purpose; a life of fulfillment and love. Understand deep in your being that you are capable of being, doing, and creating more. Many resist these feelings, callings, and urgings because, to our rational human mind, it seems silly or doesn't make sense. That, my friend, is when you rely on The Universe to step in and step up. Love and trust yourself enough to follow your internal guide. Trust that the risk and fear that tries to keep you small and unhappy will dissipate the more you spend time loving and knowing yourself. Allow yourself to choose liberation, freedom, and contentment over fear of rejection and the great unknown. Love yourself through the pain and

changes until you find love and adoration for the person that you are growing into; the person that you are being.

Become an observer of your life. Observe the things that bring you joy and observe the things that bring you down. Set and start accomplishing goals that are meaningful to you, my friend. Speak to yourself as I speak to you now, with determination and compassion. With great hope in the face of fear and rejection. With wonder and excitement as you discover parts of yourself that have laid dormant for quite some time. Extend love to both the messy parts of yourself and celebrate the things you love about yourself. Be one with your personality instead of resisting against it. Allow your soul to shine brightly, because the things that light you up inside will always be the source of your biggest blessings in life.

Allow. Breathe. And allow some more.

Until you are out of the shadows and able to see your true reflection in the mirror.

Suggestions

1. Meditate. Set a timer for 5 minutes, close your eyes, and focus on your breath. Try your best to clear your mind and keep it clear. If thoughts pop up-and they will- its your job to simply push the thoughts away. Observe the thoughts that you're having and try to control them. As you get better, increase the time you meditate by 5-minute increments.
2. Create a life vision-mission. Just like a business has a vision and mission that guides them on choices they make, you can create the same thing for yourself and your life. This takes you from a place of making choices blindly out of gut feelings, you now have a compass to guide you. Bringing awareness to the choices you make and *why* you are making them helps you get clear about who you are.
3. Keep a journal. A journal creates a permanent record of how you are thinking, feeling, and perceiving life. It can be helpful to look back on

past experiences to see your personal growth. You're able to process the events in your life in a safe space but also see how you might have changed from one experience to the next. You can see patterns that pop up over time which helps bring your awareness to those recurring situations for you to grow.

DAY 3

even if today
you feel like
you are
the world's most broken person
and no one really loves you
i promise you
there will come a time
when you will feel alive again
when you will feel
you deserve to be loved again.



ACCEPT AND APPRECIATE YOURSELF

Dear Stranger,

It is not enough just to know who you are in the world and discovering who you are meant to be, it is also about embracing it with your whole heart. I know you feel ashamed. Ashamed of the validation you require. Ashamed of the way your emotions always betray the way that you are truly feeling inside. You want to it all up, hide away and keep parts of yourself from the world. I know you do this because you're worried. Worried about rejection, worried whether or not you are capable of being loved and if anyone else in this giant world is capable of loving you. You shrink yourself down into a smaller, more muted version of the person that you long to be in order to be more palatable for others. You dilute yourself, manipulate yourself, and talk down about yourself because you constantly worry about the things other people are thinking or saying about you. You obsess over whether your friends really mean it when they tell you that they're happy for you and if your family will really support you on this journey. You have denied yourself the simple pleasure of existing as the biggest and best version of you to keep other people and yourself in a comfortable bubble that keeps you locked in place; unable to move, unable to make progress. You put so much pressure on yourself to have it all figured out that you are crushed under the weight of it all, and I see you. I see the way you struggle to maintain it all. I see the masks that you wear, changing by the day, hour, minute. I see how desperately you want to stop all of your pretending and simply *be*.

I know that you struggle with your social status. I see the way that you pose, click, filter, and pose some more all to impress the people on the

internet. At one point, I have tried to pretend to be someone else online that I wasn't in real life. I tried to be what I thought was cool, and interesting. I forced myself into the shoes of another person, walking and talking like them because I thought that they were better than me. I thought I had to change myself in order to be like them. I see you struggling with the same thing and I understand. I understand the pressure of wanting to fit in but knowing that you are meant to do something different. I feel your thoughts every time you drive past a nicer neighborhood or see a person with a nicer wardrobe, car, or relationship than you. I promise that you are not alone, when you want for more. You struggle when you don't have what you want but you also struggle when you do get what you want. You feel empty when you don't have something but once you get it, you still feel empty. My friend, I know that this can be confusing, but not everything in life is meant for you. Not everything that everyone else has will bring you the same joy that it brings others.

I see the way you feel apart from your family. I know that you feel separate from them. You are tormented between wanting your family to love and accept you for who you are while still trying to please the people you care about. Family wounds are the deepest. Family wounds change your beliefs about the world. About what is possible for you and what you deserve from life. I see how you fight and argue with your family, all in the name of standing up for yourself. All to try and make them see things from your point of view, which you feel like they never do. I know that it kills you, to do something without your parents or family's approval. I know that when you fight or argue, it is merely to be seen. To be heard. To be validated in your choices by the people who you love the most. I know it's hard and I know you feel as though you are fighting a battle you will never win, trying to change the hardened mindsets of the people close to you. It is okay to feel tired of it, it's okay to feel as though you can't fight anymore.

I see the way you take your autonomy and try to push it outward. You try to control everything and everyone around you because you know that there is

power and certainty in control. I know that you want everything in your life to change and you try to force it. You force relationships, you force friendships, you force people to accept you, you try and push and push to get others to see things your way. I know it feels like a battle that will never be won. I know it feels like you are fighting for your life out there in this great big world. It can feel like you are fighting to be loved by everyone around you, begging for people to see you and celebrate you the way you long to be seen and celebrated. I know how it feels when the people you want to lift you up and to be proud of you aren't. That life seeps out of you, like a balloon stuck with the pointy end of the pin. Air just leaks out; your life and energy just trickle out until you are nothing but the shell of something that was once perfect and beautiful and entirely full.

I promise, dear stranger, that you don't have to battle so hard against the world. You don't need to push yourself onto others and you don't need make any see things from your perspective. We are all entitled to our own thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. That includes you and everyone that you know. When you fully accept yourself, you won't need the acceptance and validation from others. Let your strength and conviction emanate from you quietly. Let your values guide your interactions with other people to find peace within your life. Accept that you will never be able to change anything in this world except your actions, your mindset, and your willingness to love others and yourself. Once you've made those changes, once you have stepped into the skin of the person you have always been meant to be, own your power. Accept who you are and let people know that who you are is not up for debate or for watering down. You don't need to make yourself small for anyone, my friend. You were meant to take up space in this life and the more you find acceptance within yourself, the more at peace you become with the world.

I know you dream of a day where other people; friends, family, romantic partners, begin to accept you. My dear, acceptance starts and ends with you. When you accept yourself, others will begin accepting you too. Take my

hand, and step into a new world with me. A world where you don't need the validation and support of others. A place where you can be entirely yourself no matter what social class, you're in, no matter what your family says, no matter who you had tried to be before this very moment. You can have this all right now, this very moment, if you decide to. If you extend this compassion and validation to yourself instead of desperately seeking it out in others. You are enough. You have always been enough. The more you accept yourself the quicker you will find that everything you have ever wanted has just been waiting for you to love.

Find an appreciation for your family. Instead of trying to make your family into something that it is not, simply allow your family to be the way they are. Respect the choices that your family members make, whether you agree with them or not. Just like you and I, the people in your family are entitled to their own thoughts and opinions. I know when your family doesn't understand, it can feel like the world is crumbling around you. You feel weak, and shaky, and unsure. I have felt this way myself, going forward in life even when my choices didn't meet my family's approval. I loved them and respected them regardless. I knew that I was doing what was best for myself; something they could chose to warm up to or chose not to warm up to. I understand, my friend, that it is in this period of discord that we push our families to take our side or we feel pressures to relinquish our own dreams in favor of the dreams and aspirations of others. Stay strong, my friend. Have faith in your vision. Accept that there will be disagreements with the ones you love but know that you cannot change someone. All you can do is love yourself and show other people how to do the same. Accept yourself, and with a little time and patience, the right people will accept you too.

Appreciate yourself. Congratulate yourself. Take time to stop and smell the roses along your journey. We do hard things every day; from simply getting out of bed in the morning, to telling the person we have crushed on forever that we love them. We face our fear of spiders and our fear of being alone

every single day. It is imperative, dear stranger, that you start to see how far you've come. Look back on the obstacles that you have overcome and allow yourself to be proud. Notice the challenges that you have championed along the way. You can tell me all of your accomplishments, whisper them to the pages of this book or write them down and mail them. I am here for you. To serve as a reminder that you don't need anyone but yourself to be proud. That being proud of yourself is the most important thing.

I know that sometimes it feels as though you aren't making progress. I know from experience that growing an acceptance and appreciation for yourself takes time. Especially when this means accepting and appreciating the good along with the bad. It was once hard for me to accept myself, to celebrate and appreciate my uniqueness. I promise you that the things you consider flaws or imperfections are just the things that other people, people who are ready to love and accept you in all your humanity, will love the most. Don't try to sprint your way to acceptance or even appreciation. Start small and find small things to focus on. Life is long and each stage of life will require a new level of gratitude for all of the amazing things you have in your life and all the blessings that are making their way to you right now.

Don't wait, stranger, for tomorrow. Don't wait until you're further along in life, or until you lose weight or until your acne clears up. Don't wait until you find a romantic partner or until you get a promotion at work. Start right now and don't give up.

There is only today, right now. We are not promised tomorrow, my friend. Love and accept yourself if you want to find love and acceptance in your life.

Suggestions

1. Set clear boundaries. The people in your life should love and accept you as you are but even the people we love the most can inadvertently

trample our boundaries because they feel entitled to our time, energy, and their access to us. Clear boundaries can sound like;

- No.
- I prefer phone calls over texting for serious matters.
- If you keep posting rude comments on my social media, I will block you.
- I am not ready to talk about it.

2. Write a letter to yourself as a child. What did the younger you need but didn't get? How can you make the young child inside feel seen and heard? What can you change about the way that you treat the young child inside?
3. Send gratitude to your body and your mind. The first step to acceptance is respect. Learning to love and accept yourself starts with being thankful for what you have and respecting it. Show love towards yourself and give thanks for the things that you have. Shift your perspective from what you lack or what isn't good enough to what you are blessed to have in your life.

DAY 4

isn't it funny
how we could be
our closest friends
yet our biggest enemies?
maybe that's why
we struggle
to love ourselves.



IMPROVING YOURSELF

Dear Stranger,

I wanted to tell you that growth is hard, and change is scary. I know that the nightmares of the life you want to live haunt you every hour. You see your flaws and mistakes as parts that need to be ignored or hidden. You have shied away from them in the past but it is these things that keep you chained to your current life; a life without love, and growth. It's okay to have flaws, dear stranger. You see, us humans were all designed that way. You and I and everyone else in the world have baggage to carry. We live our lives and we collect things from others and from our own experiences. We hold onto them tightly and we define ourselves by our limits, our shortcomings, and our fears. I know it feels like you can't improve yourself or your life because there is just so much baggage there. Everything that you are carrying, dear stranger, is weighing you down on your life's journey.

My friend, it can feel like all of our flaws have piled up and that people will use our shortcomings against us. Others will wield your insecurities like a blade, meant to chop you down if you dare to get too big. I know you are worried about failure. More often than not, you are scared to ask others for help. I understand what it's like, to have big dreams and big plans but no guarantee. I used to let the thought of failure consume me. It would eat me up inside and stop me from doing anything. From taking any action. From trying new things and ways of thinking. I'm sure you know the feeling well, the unmistakable feeling at the pit of your stomach. The all-consuming thoughts that race through your mind about what will go wrong. About what will happen to you once everything goes wrong. I can hear the thoughts playing in your head now. What will they think of me? How will I

ever find the courage to start over? What does this failure mean about me? I've had these thoughts. I've wrestled with the answers until early in the morning, sunlight streaming through my window shades.

I know that fear is mean and icy. Fear taunts you to keep you small. It is cruel to keep you safe. If you don't ever really try, fear says, then you will never have to fail. Fear is an excellent debater and will use your past experience to sway you. Fear will confine you to the safety of your comfort zone where it knows that no true progress will happen. Fear makes it rational and easy to remain the same. To stay stuck in your old ways. I would know, fear and I have gotten quite close over the years. Fear has only tried to keep me safe but fear has ruined far more things than effort ever has. Fear has ruined things before they have even begun because fear is insidious and hides right under our noses as rationalizing and the truth. I know that standing up to fear, the big boss that he is, can feel impossible. I know it seems like he controls everything, but I promise that he doesn't.

Fear will do it's best to convince you that if you can't do something perfectly, then it is not worth doing at all. You see, fear is not original. Fear doesn't come up with fancy excuses or try to hide itself at something else. Fear tells you the same thing it tells me. It whispers that if you're not perfect, you will never be great. I know that it tells you that anything worth doing is only worth doing when it is done perfectly. This, my friends, is simply a lie that fear will tell us. Fear lies and tries to keep you in the same patterns of being and believing. Of course, we all want to strive to do our best. I know I do. I know that you do too, each and every day. All we want to offer the world is our best, but perfect simply doesn't exist. No one can do anything perfectly, there will always be this gap, this space, a room for continued growth and improvement. Even the things and people who appear perfect are not. I know it is easy to believe fear than it is to believe that you can try things and learn and improve without needing to be perfect.

I promise that letting go of perfectionism and the fear of not measuring up will free you. You will be free to try new things and make mistakes along the way. Dear stranger, even the master painters and composers had to start with a single note. A single song. A less than perfect idea that they had the courage to pursue in spite of the fear they felt. I know that when something hasn't been done before, we are nervous to mess up and get it wrong. Instead, stranger, try to see where things went right. Applaud the effort that you put in. I applaud you. I see you learning and stumbling but not giving up. I know that once you start taking more risks in life, once you start failing more, you will be free to chase your goals no matter where they lead you. I have a relationship with fear, I talk to him regularly, the same way that I talk to you. I tell fear that I appreciate the role he plays in my life but I let fear know that I don't need him for everything. I know he will always be along for the ride; myself, love, and fear. I know you will always feel him there too. You will see that it is okay to fail. It is safe to fail. **You can still love yourself when you fail.**

Dear reader, just because you have tried and failed does not make you a failure. I have tried and failed more times than I can remember. It is in the failures that we learn. Learn about ourselves, about the world, about what works and what doesn't work. **Failure does not make you bad in the same way success doesn't make another person good.** I know you attach good and bad to success and failure. I know that you're hard on yourself when things don't go precisely as planned. I know that when you fail, you make it mean something about who you are as a person. I have seen you let your failures define you before and I don't want to see it happen again. You are so much more than the things you struggle with. And I ask you my friend, to please be gentle with yourself. I know how you can put yourself down when you try and try and feel like you're not getting anywhere. Growth and progress do not always happen in a straight, upward line. Just know that everyone's path to success looks differently but your success will not be possible without some failures along the way. Failure, my friend, is our greatest teacher. Failure is, quite frankly, leading you to success with each

futile attempt. I know it seems like failure is the enemy, that we should condemn it on our quest for love and happiness but it is much easier to befriend it. Much like fear, failure will never go away, not entirely. I find that it is best to keep it close, study it, learn from it, and let it go. I see you trying. I see you putting in the time, the effort, the energy. Don't give up my friend. It will get easier to navigate these muddy waters.

My friend, it is you that is in charge. Being honest and accepting of your shortcomings is only the first step of many on the road to loving yourself. Honestly look without judgement at all the places and parts of yourself that need healing, that need love, and need improving. Leverage your strengths, dear reader, and use them to help balance out your weaknesses. Love yourself enough to see weaknesses as an opportunity to grow and improve yourself and your life. Take steps toward changing, growing, and expanding. It can be important to own your shortcomings and be honest about them but it is also your responsibility to improve upon them. There is so much information just floating out in the world. Books videos, articles, podcasts, and simply exchanging thoughts and ideas with other people. My friend, the things you want to improve upon are the same things that I, and thousands of other people have also wanted to improve on. I know that stepping outside of the zone where you feel safe and comfortable feels like the right place to be but you will never grow if you stay there. I understand that leaving this place feels like losing your comfort blanket or your lucky socks.

I promise that the things that lay ahead are far greater than anything you leave behind.

Suggestions

1. Get clear on the big, wild goal you want to hit. If you had a genie and unlimited wishes, what are the things that you would ask for? Think about the motivation for wanting those things. Do you want more money so you have travel and have freedom with your time and

energy? Do you want to be able to take care of your family? Get really clear on what you want to achieve and *why* you want to achieve it.

2. Think about where you are right now in relationship to where you want to be. Identify three things that you can start doing today that will bring you closer to your goals. Where attention goes, energy flows. You need to feed these areas energy so that they can grow and expand. Commit to your three things and work on being consistent in those areas to see real growth.
3. Find a mentor or motivator. When I am working on myself, sometimes it helps to have outside perspective. A mentor doesn't even need to be someone you know, it can be someone who isn't even alive. Consult your mentor internally when you're faced with a tough decision point by asking yourself, "what would ___(mentor's name)___ do?"

DAY 5

forgiveness is not about the other person,
dear stranger.
forgiveness is about healing yourself.



FORGIVE YOURSELF

Dear Stranger,

I know you have a past, dear stranger, for we all do. I know that our pasts are a mix of things; good memories, painful moments, grief, and unimaginable joy. Each and every person has gone through a time or event that was extremely stressful. I know you have been there. Feeling like a weight had settled on top of your shoulders, physically weighing you down. I know that you are quick to dismiss the good things as rare and lucky. You take all the joys from your past and you place them on a shelf to wonder and admire. You feel as though these shining moments deserve such fierce recognition that you forget to find the same joyous moments happening all around you, right this very minute. When it comes to the mistakes you have made or the terrible ordeals that other people have put you through, you hold onto them tightly. You don't put them on a shelf to be admired, you bury them deep down in your gut and try to push them away.

I know they are uncomfortable. I know you give yourself a hard-enough time with the things that you face each and every day, how could you ever add up the things from your past to that burden you carry? I know that it can feel scary to get up close and personal with your painful past, whether you caused harm or had harm done to you. Either way it can be uncomfortable. But either way, it's an important part of the process of loving yourself. I know you don't want to go there. I understand that there are parts of yourself that you don't wish to revisit, you'd rather chop them off and keep them entirely apart from you. I can see how hard it is, for you to reconcile yourself today with the person that you have been in the past. It is hard to be both. I know that the more you grow, the more impossible it

can be to be both, the person from your past and the person that you have always meant to be. I know they are odds with one another and I know, sometimes, that you feel like two different people both living in the same body.

I know you hold yourself to high expectations. I know that you feel your best when you are achieving more, doing more, and not taking a breath. I know that it is easier to stack you accolades, accomplishments, and awards than it is to sit with and heal from your past. I know you want to simply overlook all that forgiveness stuff, and just get on with your life already. I also know that there might be things you can't fathom forgiving other people for. I know there might even be things you can't fathom forgiving yourself for. I hear you when you cry out that another person doesn't deserve your forgiveness for what they have done. I hear you when you say that you don't know how anyone else could forgive you for the things that you have done, either, so how can you go about forgiving yourself? I know what it is like to hold onto pain. I have felt myself get worn down to nothing while trying to hold onto anger. I know how draining it is, to hate someone with every fiber of your being; especially when that someone is yourself.

I know it's hard. I know sometimes you think that it is your fault, you feel as though you have done something to cause this pain or bring it about yourself. I know that you look at all the things you did and said, trying to find a clue as to why. I know you are desperate to know why; why it didn't work out, why you were rejected, why that other person wouldn't commit, why, why, why. I know how easily thoughts of 'why' crawl into your brain and take over before you are on a downward spiral you can't pull yourself out of. Dear stranger, it is in those moments you must remember that it is not your job to know why. It is not your job to make sense of, or rationalize someone else's thoughts and actions. I know you want to, and I know it brings you comfort to understand. I know that why you can't understand why something happened the way and your hurts so much because it's all

you can think about. You don't want to forgive another person who can't even give you a reason as to why they did the things they did. I know because I have felt the same way. I have been where you now stand.

I also know that you do the same thing to yourself. You look at each misstep, at each failure, as a reason to hate yourself more. I know that each bombed attempt at trying something new, loving yourself, or approaching a relationship with another person leaves you feeling worse than you did before. I know that looking at the ways that you have wronged others makes you think the worst of yourself. I know you are punishing yourself far worse than anyone else is punishing you. I know that you don't want to make those same mistakes again. I know you want to improve yourself and learn from your past but it is hard to look at the less than flattering truth about who you have been in the past. I know that forgiving yourself doesn't seem possible some days. I know that you try to but you end up getting mad, disappointed, or sad all over again. It is okay to feel your way through forgiveness. I hope that you do. The past cannot hurt you, my friend, unless you let it.

Forgiveness is not about the other person, dear stranger. Forgiveness is about healing yourself. I understand that when you forgive someone, you feel as though you are condoning the hurtful actions that were done against you. But, my friend, that is not what forgiveness is about. Forgiveness is about releasing yourself from the anger, fear, and hate that another person has given you. Reclaim your power, my friend, by forgiving everyone who has ever hurt you. I know that once you start to forgive others, you will feel lighter. Forgiveness is a song that you can dance to; that moves you through life, freeing you of worries and your troubles. Carry the tune of forgiveness with you wherever you go, and you will find that nothing that anyone says or does can bring you down. Forgiveness of others, my friend, is all about accepting that hurt people hurt people. I know that there has been pain in your life but it doesn't mean that all that pain is for you to bear. Take comfort in the fact that others who hurt you have unresolved pain within

themselves. That when someone hurts you, it is a reflection on them and their ability to love and be loved, and not a reflection on you.

I know it feels impossible, but you can love the parts that aren't great. You can love yourself as you make mistakes and mess up. You can love yourself even when you find it hard to forgive yourself. I know it feels strange at first, but you can love yourself enough to forgive yourself for the things that you have done. Please, my friend, love yourself enough to try. I know that you have forgiven other people who have wronged you before. I know that you have loved people who have hurt you before, so I know you can love yourself through the hard times too. Love yourself in the face of your mistakes. Look deep in your heart, my friend, and truly learn from the mistakes that you made in the past. I know that forgiving yourself and freeing yourself seems scary. It feels like you are betraying some internal process, but, stranger, you are so worthy of healing. I know you are worthy of forgiving your past. I love you enough to walk alongside you as you figure out the road to forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is meant to release you from the negative emotions of the past. Self-forgiveness will allow you to remove the filter that you use to see yourself. Where you once saw weakness, you can see strength. Where you once saw a threat, you now see safety. Self-forgiveness is when you take the lesson and really apply it.

My friend, please trust that to access all of the blessings that lie ahead, you must release yourself from the shadow of the past you have been living in. I know it is tempting to live there, a place where you have been before, a place that feels comfortable and familiar. I know that when you don't forgive you repeat the same lessons, the same patterns as you always have. I know you fall victim to the same lies and the same mentality that has kept you small before. I know that the greatest blessings of your life come when you stop being so damn hard on yourself. I have seen the way people release the death-grip that they have had on the past, only to be immediately met with their biggest blessings. Letting go of all the things and parts of yourself that no longer serve you can feel like death. I understand it feels

like you are killing off an older version of yourself, an old person who has been trapped by circumstance and life. I also know that once you allow that version of yourself to go, once you release those parts of yourself you don't die at all.

In fact, dear stranger, you have been reborn.

Suggestions

1. Write a thank you note to someone in your past who hurt you. Tell them why you are grateful that they did what they did. Let them know that you forgive them for what they did to you. Let them know that you are no longer letting the event control you. You can rip the letter up when your done or tuck it away forever.
2. Let go of shame and get curious. Reliving past negative experiences and events is uncomfortable. Your face gets hot, you shift in your seat, and you want to run from those feelings. Instead, acknowledge the discomfort you feel and try to think about a lesson that you learned through that experience. What can you take away and learn from and what can you allow yourself to let go of? Clear out some of the baggage that you insist on carrying.
3. Commit to practicing the virtues that are the foundation for your psychological and emotional growth. This means committing to your values, whatever they are, and do your best to stick to them. Make choices that align with them and take your time to consider all sides of a decision before making one.

DAY 6

you will never be completely healed
you just have to heal enough.
enough to breathe and move on,
enough to forgive and feel again,
enough to love and live again.



HEALING FROM THE PAST

Dear Stranger,

I know what you have been through. I might not have been there when the trauma happened, or when the hurt was caused. I didn't see the tears streaming down your face as you cried more than you ever thought imaginable. I might not know exactly who hurt you, why, or just how deep the wound was. But I have had many dark nights. I have been woken up by nightmares like ghosts from my past haunting me. I have beaten myself up over the rejection I've felt, the guilt that shouldn't have been mine and yet I carried it around willingly. Healing yourself from your past trauma is the best thing that you can ever do for yourself and your future relationships.

I have felt stress response in my body; sometimes wanting to run away from the world. To run far away from anything that could ever hurt me again. Other time's I've wanted to curl my hands into fists, the fear rising up as rage in my arms. So angry that I had to be the one who got hurt; reeling from the pain, I only fight to protect myself. I fight to keep myself safe. Or I freeze. Sometimes, when I'm confronted and I don't know where to go or what to say. Sometimes I beg myself to move or to speak but find that nothing happens; no words come out. When I'm frozen, it's like I'm looking at myself from above, beckoning myself to move or talk and yet to be paralyzed by my fear that neither option feels safe. I want to do something, anything really, but I'm too frightened to do or say the wrong thing. To back myself into a corner, and be manipulated once again. I can feel it, when it's happening. I know you can too. It feels cold and erratic; filled with pain no matter what you decide to do. I have been where you stand, dear stranger, and I know that it is a terrible place to be.

I have been a victim. A victim of hurt, of emotional wounds, and of grief. I have been the one who loved more and harder only to be left. I have been lied to and manipulated before, just as you have. It can feel so heavy, dear stranger, carrying around all of this hurt. So many of us don't know who we would be without it. When I began to shed the layers of the extreme stress I have been under in my life, it was frightening. I was scared not of my trauma, but who I might become without it. For so long I had been the boy who wasn't loved by his father. The boy who was bullied in school. The boy who was sexually assaulted. The boy who lost people to death. The boy who was rejected and broken by the people who he loved. The boy who would feel as though he was alone in the world. I didn't know who I might become without those anchors, holding me to my identity. And yet the more I healed from my past and my childhood, the more I felt like myself. The things I was so scared to lose were gone and I was able to see that my power always lied in healing.

Who might you be if you decided that you were no longer a victim, dear stranger? I see you holding onto your pain, holding on to the things that hurt you. Please understand that being in pain won't make people love you more and it won't make people stay. You might have been a victim of trauma but you don't need to let those parts of your past hold you hostage forever. You must save yourself, my friend. Pull yourself up by your collar and make a choice. A choice to empower yourself instead of allowing your life to be a victim of circumstance. I know it seems hard but I know you can do it. What is possible for me is possible for all.

When we don't heal, dear stranger, we hurt those around us. When we keep our pain close to our chest, it becomes a barrier. A barrier that keeps people out and a barrier that traps us away. My friend, I know that you have been through pain. Enough pain to keep your heart aching in agony with each passing day. Hurting others may feel good. You may think displacing your pain onto others will help but it never will, my friend. Hurt people only hurt people. With our inability to let people love us. With our inability to see our

worth or our value. Your past should not be a weapon you wield against others. Being in pain is never an excuse to hurt another.

I know that the rise and fall of a voice can set your teeth on edge. I have felt the old patterns flare within me when faced with the familiar sting of rejection or conflict. Knowing your triggers is the key to navigating life in a healthy way. My friend, look deep inside. Get to know yourself deeply and be honest about the things that trigger your trauma. The trauma that you have experienced is not your fault but it is your responsibility to heal. To learn yourself and to grow. I have been reactive and allowed life to control me. My emotions were a wave I had to ride until I allowed myself to learn my triggers. Dear stranger, your triggers will keep you stuck. Stuck in the same patterns, just as I was. Learning your triggers will help you to be proactive in situations where they might come up. It keeps you in control of your emotions; in control of your life.

Create a positive mantra to help you when you encounter painful thoughts. Affirmations will help to guide you from a place of overthinking and worry back to a place of joy and serenity. When you feel your breath starting to quicken and your heart beginning to race, it can be helpful to choose your thoughts. Pick your mantra's wisely and repeat them early and often when you find that your mind wanders or triggers negative thoughts, it is far better to be prepared with a statement or mantra to ground you into the present moment. For me, my mantra is 'Trust the Universe' and for you, it can be anything. Grounding into the present moment can help to make both the past and the future seem less overwhelming. Taking the time to meditate on your positive statement for a few moments and observe how you feel in your body can help you reconnect with your body. Even though you try to bottle up your feelings and emotions, to make sure that no one can see how you're feeling or how scared you are when you feel your mind spiraling out of control you don't have to push those feelings away. Allow your negative emotions to come and allow them to pass. Give your emotions time and space to move. Let yourself actually feel instead of bottling everything up,

my friend. I will be here when the tears flow and the emotions move. You are allowed to cry. You are allowed to feel the hurt. You are just not permitted to stay in that place of pain for longer than needed.

Mindfulness is a great tool for healing yourself from trauma. Observe your feelings as they flow. Pay attention to how you feel in your body; in your gut and in your head. Mindfulness can help you to find presence in the current moment. You are not stuck in the past and you don't live in the future. Notice around you five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and repeat your positive mantra. Using your senses will help to regulate your thoughts and the emotions that you feel in your body that come from experiencing stress, trauma and triggers. Be kind to yourself, my friend. Healing doesn't always happen quickly and on a straight line. You can be healing and hurting at the same time along your journey. You don't need to be perfectly in control all the time and no one around you expects you to be. You don't need to hold yourself to those standards either. Take care of your emotions just like you take care of other things.

You can do hard things, like healing. You need to heal because it will set you free.

Suggestions

1. Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is all about being aware of what is happening in the present moment. When in the midst of healing, it's easy to get triggered and upset. Focus on your breath in the moment. Notice how your body feels and what is supporting you. What sounds you can hear, what you can smell, etc. This helps to stay grounded in the present moment even when you're working through difficult experience.
2. Learn how to express yourself. Some people express themselves through music, art, writing, or movement. Find what feels good for you and express yourself as often as possible. Tapping into other

mediums of expression helps us to release the trauma and pain of the past and recreate from something painful into something beautiful.

3. Shake your body. Think about seeing an unfriendly dog after an encounter, you will notice that they always shake their bodies. This is how they release the pent up energy from that encounter. Put on a high energy song and shake your body to release the pain that exists on a cellular level.

DAY 7

we are all running out of time
and that's why it's important
to never run out of love.

– *death can arrive any day.*



CREATING A LOVING ENVIRONMENT AROUND YOU

Dear Stranger,

I know sometimes, it feels safer to be alone. To be isolated from others has always felt safer for you. You push people away or keep them at a distance because it feels safer than letting people in. I'm sure I can see the people you've surrounded yourself with. Do they make you feel loved? My friend, look around at where you work and live. Are these places filled with joy and abundance and love? Dear stranger, you deserved to feel loved in every fiber of your being. In every place you go, you should feel the love permeating from you and reflected back to you. I know it seems impossible, to shift your relationship from one of negativity to one of love. You deserve it all. Dear stranger, you have control. Over the people you allow in your lives and the environments you place yourselves in.

Dear stranger, I have been where you are now. Taking inventory of my relationships and my environment. I had to make a lot of hard choices for myself and you may need to do the same. Letting go of toxic relationships and environments has been hard. I know the thought of losing people can make you feel terrible. It can make you feel guilty or maybe you're feeling scared. Please know, dear stranger, that it is better to be alone and content than surrounded by people and feeling disconnected or unloved. You will be able to start loving yourself in the safe container of solitude. I know it seems lonely and scary to be off on your own, but in releasing the negative, you allow room for the positive to grow, a value of love front and center.

You cannot sit in your comfort zone and wait for the right people to find you, my friend. You must put yourself in the position to meet people. I know that it can feel scary to try and forge real connections with others. It forces you to be yourself. It forces you to trust other people. It makes you take some risks with the type of people you surround yourself with. I know the world can feel like a lonely place, but it doesn't have to be. I was able to find community and healing through social media. I know many others who have made lifelong friends in Facebook groups or by messaging another person on Instagram. We are all humans searching for a connection. We long to be connected to one another but won't put ourselves in the environments we should to get more out of love and life.

It sometimes feels hard to open up to people when you've had trouble with love. It seems like a better idea to be alone but that is not the case. Being alone is a choice. Surround yourself with loving friends and family. Get a pet or some plants to make your environment a more joyful place. You, yes you reader, can set the tone for the environment around you. It's all in the way you care for it and the energy that you bring to it. You have the power, but have been giving it away to other people for far too long.

Opening up your space and your energy can be tough but you don't need to let people in all at once. Sometimes, just the act of being around people, even when you're not interacting much with them can be enough socializing for a day. Take your time and be gentle with yourself and with others. Remember that you are in control of what and who you allow access to you and your life. You don't have to be alone and you don't have to feel lonely when surrounded by a sea of people. There is plenty of time to build solid foundations of love.

To know what you want in your life, it is important to really think about the things that you want. So many people that I have spoken to over the years always seem to focus their thoughts and energies on the things that they don't want. Instead of wasting your precious time and thoughts on the

negatives that you don't want to have in your life like arguments, disrespect, or diminishing your thoughts and feelings, you must focus on the positive attributes that you want. Focus on your thoughts and energy on harmony in yourself and in your relationships. Focus on feeling optimistic; like the thing or person you have been waiting for is just around the corner. Focus on the positive relationships that you have with others and figure out what makes them so positive. Notice and talk about the positive aspects of the relationships that you already have.

Also, dear reader, focus your intention on assuming the best from everyone. I know after you have been hurt, it can feel like everyone is out to get you. Your jaded thoughts turn into jaded actions and the next thing you know you feel as though the whole world is ganging up against you. That the people in your life don't have any good intentions in their actions and words that they direct toward you. In a positive environment, you need to give people a chance. You need to be strong and willing enough to assume that these people in your life are not trying to harm you or bring you down. That the people in your life genuinely want to make you happy and be there to support you in finding your own happiness. Assuming the best doesn't mean that you should let someone upset you or blow you off without regard, but it does mean listening to behavior and words as a way to understand where the other person is coming from and to express your own feelings. We can't assume that everyone knows how we will react to different situations and people. But when you are assuming the best it allows space for a positive relationship to bloom and keeps little negative quirks and frustrations in check for a happier and love-filled life.

A positive environment will be different for you than it is for me. Taking the time to visualize what your ideal environment can look, sound, and feel is a great way to get in touch with the aspects of a loving environment that are important to you. Close your eyes and imagine the sort of environment and people you want around you. Imagine how that environment looks and feels. Allow the pictures in your mind to fill you up and hold onto them

tightly. Notice the differences between the reality that you're living now. What changes can you make in your life to get yourself closer to that loving and supportive environment in your head. Make small changes to your attitude and what surrounds you. Taking any steps to achieve the type of space you want to have around you will bring you closer to the environment you wish to have. Seeing the changes around you, and feeling the energetic shifts within you will help to elevate your positive attitude and the love that surrounds your relationships and living spaces.

Arouse your feelings of happiness within you. Think about past positive experiences and feel those memories in your body. Think about a time that you felt peaceful, loved, and full of joy. This can cleanse the space within you and around you. Filling yourself up with happiness and love all on your own is a sure-fire way to attract more love in your life; by emanating it from the inside out. Allow happiness to flood you and fill your body as well as the space around you. Meditating on happy memories and feelings can help you to tap into those feelings of joy and gratitude right now. Hang pictures of happy memories around your house and your work space. Decorate your surroundings with things that fill you up and make you feel positive and joyful. Take control of your space and make it a reflection of you. Your environment should be a safe haven, a place that you feel at home to be yourself and is a place that helps you to feel loved all the time.

You are responsible for everything that you allow in your life. If you want a safe and loving environment around you then you cannot wait for someone to come and provide it to you. I know you are reading this and thinking that it sounds hard. And that you're not sure whether you're ready to start creating this space but this is an important part of the journey. You can do hard things, dear stranger, like take the risks to meet and trust new people. To fill yourself and your environment up with as much love and happiness as you can because it will bleed over into every other aspect of your life. Take control of yourself and your surrounds by letting aspects of yourself to be reflected in your environment. The essence of who you are is powerful

and influential. You can influence everything around you based on your thoughts, feelings, and the actions you take.

You are greater than your environment, but you are influenced by it daily. Make your body and your environment two places where you feel love and happiness. Make these places environments you want to be in and that reflect who you are.

You will radiate love. You will summon love to you simply by being yourself.

Suggestions

1. Listen to others. Listening without judgement and without taking the feedback from your environment and the people in it personally, you will cultivate a safe place for expression. When you allow others to be themselves, you create an environment of love around you that steps from your ability to simply listen and respond instead of react.
2. Rearrange your furniture or paint some walls. Hang up art and photographs that make you happy. Make the space that you live in a reflection of you and you will feel the love reflecting back to you from your environment.

DAY 8

dear self,
fixing others won't fix you.

– *reminder*



BLOCKING NEGATIVE ENERGY & PEOPLE

Dear Stranger,

Negative energy is insidious. When it inches into the corners of your brain, you feel heavy, dark, and gloomy. You get emotionally reactive and defensive. The view that you have of the world is colored by fear of rejection, anger at yourself and at the larger world, and worry that you aren't doing or being enough. Your shoulders get tense when someone starts angrily stomping around and slamming doors. Your breath seems to get shorter; trapped in your chest making it feel hard to breathe. Negative energy is toxic to your body and your brain. I know that it seems to overtake you without warning, and that you want to fight against it. Protecting your energy from being influenced by other people is more about what you allow than it is about blocking things from others. You have the power of what you allow in your space and your energy. Blocking negative energy means setting good boundaries for yourself and around yourself. It is about making your thoughts sacred and the space around you sacred.

How many times have you let other people's negativity bring you down? You know the feeling, when something great happened at work and you rush to tell someone important. Yet when you finally get them on the phone, that person can only whine or complain about their own life or even end up making you feel bad even after something good has happened. Or despite having a great day you consistently come home to a partner who only talks about their troubles and can't even sit to listen about your day. These types of people drain your positive energy and I know it makes you feel as though you aren't loved. It makes you feel as though you don't matter. Being

treated this way makes it so much harder to be grateful for life and to actively find the good in every situation.

I know, dear stranger, that it feels easier to give your power away than it does to stand up for yourself. It seems easier to allow people to use you as their emotional punching bag, hurling snarky comments and negative thoughts towards you because they cannot process their own negative emotions and thoughts but all it does is hurt you. You know deep inside that negativity and toxic behavior aren't the foundations for true love. I hear you when you cry that you just want the people you love to love you back; that you just want to get this love thing right. You have worked so hard to love yourself but you also crave the love and affection of the people you care about. It feels like an internal tug-of-war. Making a game out of loving yourself enough to know what you are worth but always being pulled back into the negativity by the people and relationships that you've built. You don't need to give your power away because you love and care about someone. I have loved people dearly who I have had to stop talking to and hanging out with because of their negativity and toxic behaviors. I know you see the negativity in your life, you don't need me to point it out. But I urge you, my friend, to make the changes needed to invite more love in.

Don't allow another person's negativity to seep into your mind. Another person's negative thoughts and emotions do not need to become your responsibility. You don't need to fix every problem or issue that crops up with other people that surround you. You desperately want to fix anything you can to make your partner happy but fixing their emotions isn't your responsibility. You aren't responsible for the things that everyone thinks or what they feel. That is their responsibility to work through. Your role is to offer support if it's needed, but your sovereignty is always the most important. You need to protect your own thoughts and feelings to allow other people the chance to work through theirs.

Complaining is one of the largest negative energy drains that you could participate in. Complaining is the opposite of being thankful for everything in your life. Complaining means that you are pointing out all of the things you don't like about your life and that is it. You hear others complain and you want to offer support and sympathy. You want to validate the other person to let them know they aren't alone in the pain that they are feeling. Chronic complaining though, will keep you stuck in a cycle of only seeing and talking about the negative without being able to move past it. Just because another person; a coworker or spouse, is complaining, it doesn't mean that you need to join in on their pity party. You can be kind while setting boundaries around complaining. It is okay and safe for you to tell others that you aren't in a good mental place to listen to them drone on about their problems. You are allowed to tell people that you are focusing on complaining less in your own life and would rather focus your time and energy on finding solutions for your challenges or trying to reframe them in a positive light. You don't need to join the pity party that others throw for themselves. I found that complaining less meant that I could see the world in a new light. You will be conscious of the thoughts you are having and recognizing that problems are a state of mind.

If someone is unloading their emotions on you, you are allowed to disengage with that person. I know you desperately want to help and fix things, to take their pain away and makes things okay again. You are willing to contort and change yourself into someone or something you're not just to meet other people's opinions or expectations. You don't need to change a single thing about yourself or your standards. You don't need to fix everyone's problems and you don't need to be the one who always tried to make things okay. It's okay to walk away. You can free yourself from the burden of negativity by going to a different space, or even ignore the person who is draining you. I know you want to engage; you want to help. You want there to be peace in your world but your peace shouldn't come at the cost of compromising who you are, your expectations, or your values. Some things in life are not meant to be negotiable. Your energy, your soul, and

your time are not negotiable. You deserve the joy, love, and peace that you long for. You deserve to have it in your heart and surrounding your space. So, walk away, dear stranger. Whether it's for an hour, a day, or a lifetime. You are allowed to walk away from the things that aren't serving you, from the things that don't make you feel loved.

Your life is your responsibility and instead of simply allowing things in your life that don't feel good, that don't feel like love, you can choose something different for yourself. When you are working to cultivate an environment of love around you, it's your job to be choosy with everything you allow in your life. Stop seeing the friends who constantly bring you down and make you second guess yourself. Stop dating people who don't make you feel like you're ever going to be good enough. Stop working for people who don't appreciate you and value your talents and skills. If it doesn't feel like love to you, then you don't want it. Allow the good to flow to you in abundance by engaging with what feels good to you. Follow where your heart is leading you because it is bound to lead you somewhere far better than the draining and toxic people and places you leave behind.

Suggestions

1. Create a time duration and protect yourself from negative people stealing the time that you're not ready to give. Keep minute needle running in your head when negative people consume your time. Decide the limit of your time you can spare to them and once the time bound is crossed spare yourself from them.
2. Form a Mantra for yourself that you can affirm after dealing with negative people. Say, "This is not my energy; I am unaffected by what they are saying." Or "I will let go of what they are speaking. Their thoughts don't belong to me." Repeating sentences like these in your head will guard your body and mind from getting drained with the negative energy of those kind.

DAY 9

sometimes we use pain
as an excuse
to remain unhappy
because we are too scared
of happiness.



DECIDING YOUR TERMS OF HAPPINESS

Dear Stranger,

You have been saying “no” to yourself for far too long. Notice how often you tell yourself no and decide that you can’t do the things you want to or can’t have the things you truly want. For some reason, we take other people’s definition of happiness and hold onto it for dear life. We are told what happiness is, shown the one way that the world has accepted it to look and we desperately try to mirror that in our lives whether or not it actually makes us happy. We deny ourselves the things that we want or like to fit into someone else’s idea and definition of happiness and we get caught up in pleasing others. Impressing people who we don’t even know. I know you feel pressure to be, do, and have the things that others expect of you but you will never find happiness and love for yourself or your life that way. You need to look inside to see what really makes you happy to guide your choices and your life or risk being perpetually unhappy.

You and I are being perpetually influenced by marketing on social media. Marketing that used to be focused on products and what they can do for the consumer has shifted to a different approach. Marketing is now made with the goal of making you feel left out. Marketing pits people from similar industries and interests against one another in the name of selling products and services. Marketing today makes you feel as though if you don’t look a certain way then you won’t be happy. Tells you that you’re not standing out enough creatively, that you aren’t cool enough if you don’t have a certain product or a particular number of likes. You end up with a bunch of stuff that you don’t need and feeling worse off than you did before you made that online purchase. This is because you have resigned yourself to everyone

else's definition of happiness instead of taking the time to define happiness for yourself.

Don't fall into the trap that is set by society. The trap of working towards achievements and milestones that don't feel exciting or happy to you. Social media and society will always try to tell you what you need to be, do, or have in order to be happy. You see the same social media posts that I do, peddling products and services that are guaranteed to make you as popular and happy as the fake influencer selling it to you. When you haven't taken the time to define what happiness means to you, you will be influenced to find it any way you can. Material possessions, Instagram likes, achieving things for the sake of achievement and not out of true happiness and desire. I know it seems like nothing has been able to keep you happy in the long run and you're not alone.

Look deeply at yourself and your life. Think about the times in your life that you were truly and effortlessly happy. Notice what you were doing, who you were being, and the people that you were surrounded with. Pay attention to the things that light you up and give you energy. Happiness leaves clues, in the smile on your face and the peace in your heart. Some things do make you feel alive and you lose yourself in the moment. Those are the things that are the most worth doing. Get to know yourself on a deeper level. We have all been born with innate skills and abilities that help us on our journey. These gifts are part of our how we leverage our happiness in this life.

What things can you do every day to support your own happiness, dear stranger? We all have a guiding voice or gut feeling inside of us that we need to check in with every day. This is the wisdom that tells you when you have a cold coming on and need to rest or the feeling that tells you something is a bad idea. This guiding voice can also be used to guide you toward making decisions to support your happiness. Asking yourself questions like, what can I do to feel my happiest today or what can I do to

bring joy into my life today will open your intuition up to guide you. It will always give you the right answers and this can be a helpful tool while you're still learning to listen to and trust yourself.

Let go of the things, thoughts, and people that don't support your happiness. You are human and even after learning to love yourself deeply, you will still think negative thoughts from time to time. You will still feel negative emotions and you will still have to face negative experiences. You have power in the way that you decide to look at the world. If you choose to see struggle and pain than that is what your experience will reflect. But if instead you decide to choose more empowering thoughts and pick language that supports your happiness instead of your negativity, you will be an overall happier person.

I know when you were a kid, you were probably best friends with your neighbor or the kids across the street simply because they lived close by. You made friends with other children at school who were in your classes because those were the people that were around you. Fast forward into adulthood and we meet new people all the time whether it be in person or through social media. If you're anything like me, you may not have had much practice with setting boundaries or expectations with your friends or romantic interests simply because you were never taught how.

Feeling happy in your relationships is a combination of you being able to meet your own needs but also having friendships and relationships that meet your expectations; that add to your overall happiness. Laying out aspects of your friendships and relationships that you find important are a great way to tell whether or not you're truly compatible with someone or whether you simply don't want to be alone. It is okay to expect kindness, positivity, respect from your friends and romantic partners. You deserve to be treated in a way that makes you feel good and that doesn't drain your energy. You don't need to put up with toxic people and toxic relationships. You are worth so much more than that.

It is okay to set limits around your time and your energy with people in your relationships, especially when it comes to your happiness. I know that you are so used to sacrificing to make other people happy. Compromising your time and your emotional energy in order to be a good friend and to make sure that your partner feels good but your happiness is just as important as everyone else's. It's okay to set limits around the time you spend with certain friends or the things that you talk about. It's okay to ask for space from your partner to try new things and have time on your own. I know with our culture today it feels as though you need to be available to everyone all of the time but you are allowed to set boundaries around that too. Don't feel as though you need to be constantly available if that doesn't make you happy.

You deserve this much in your relationships.

Setting your terms of happiness, focus on doing more of what makes you happy and less about what looks cool on Instagram. Having genuine happiness is much better than getting likes on an edited photo. Genuine happiness is about living in the moment and less about doing things that are picture perfect. Happiness may look like taking yourself out to dinner alone or going to the movies by yourself. It might be going to the beach and reading or it might be attending a museum. Investigate the things that make you feel the happiest and find ways to incorporate them regularly into your life. **Make your happiness as non-negotiable as brushing your teeth.** Not everything needs to be captured and shared with the world. Most of the things in life that will make you the happiest can't be captured in a single moment or photograph anyways.

When it comes to happiness, more doesn't always mean more. I know many happy people who live in tiny houses that can be driven all over the country and many unhappy people who live in lavish mansions. Just because you have achieved a lot does not mean that you will be happier in life especially when the things you've achieved don't serve a higher good or purpose. I

live a minimalistic life. Simple taste in terms of fashion and I prefer to be comfortable and it is how I prefer to live. I drove the same hatchback car for many years because I was happy with what I had and I didn't have a need to impress others. I have seen people raising eye-brows whenever they saw me driving that car because they expected me to drive a luxurious one after all the success and fame. But I never wanted people to judge me based on the car I drove but for what the values I carry. I recently upgraded my car to a SUV for the safety of my family but I haven't attached my happiness to it. The things that make me the happiest are not things that can be bought or successes that advertised, it is the people I love.

I have learned to do the things that make me happy for myself. Not for other people. Happiness isn't about getting likes on Instagram or posting a picture of you smiling. It's about going out into the world and living your life. It's about finding your people and lifting them up in every way you can. It's about knowing yourself and being able to lift yourself up as well. No one in life is going to be able to come along and make you happy except for yourself.

Live happily for yourself and for the people you haven't met yet who need you.

Suggestions

1. Do one nice thing for yourself every day. Maybe it's making your favorite beverage to start the day or soaking your feet in a hot basin at night. Doing one thing just for you everyday will help you feel cared for. It also helps you learn the things that bring you happiness, joy, and comfort versus the things that do not. You learn what works for you , what meets your needs, and what truly brings you joy.
2. Make a list of the things that make you the happiest. Make a list of the things that you do every day. Notice the differences between the lists. If your to-do list filled with the things that do not bring you happiness,

you need to revamp your daily checklist and make sure that you are on it.

3. Invest in your interests. Your interests and hobbies are just as important as the things you do for money and the self-care that you do to care of your emotional and physical selves. Take a drawing class, join a gardeners Facebook group, go ice skating. Whatever it is that makes you the happiest are things that deserve a committed space in your life. You'll feel like a happier, more well-rounded person.

DAY 10

“how do i move on?
how do i become happy?”
“dedicate yourself to a purpose
and not a person.”



FULFILLING GOALS, DREAMS & PURPOSE

Dear Stranger,

A job, a partner, and material things will not keep you happy forever, my friend. External things and relationships cannot sustain your happiness, because we all have the innate need to serve a greater community and have significance in your life. Significance comes from contribution. Contributing to a greater purpose and helping the world at large. When you dedicate yourself to a person or a career over your purpose, you aren't necessarily happy. You can feel it, the jolt of excitement when you hit a new goal. You feel alive and energized until the shine and dazzle wears off. Sometimes the excitement starts fading from you only hours after accomplishing big goals. This is because it was never about the goal, my friend. It was always about who you had to become in order to accomplish your goal.

When you don't have anything that you're working toward, life can feel bleak and meaningless. It is easy to give into the heaviness of depression or the panic of anxiety when you don't feel as though you have anything to offer the world and no sense of drive or purpose. It is important to have goals that you are working towards. Not just any goals, my friend, but goals that will push you out of your comfort zone. It's imperative that the goals you are setting are forcing you to grow. In nature, we are either growing or we are dying. From the trees to the earthworm's nature is either in a state of growth or a state of decay. The same is true for humans. It is imperative to set big goals for yourself so that you are always growing personally, professionally, spiritually, and emotionally.

Remember, my friend, accomplishing your goals will feel great but the importance is never actually on the accomplishments themselves. The importance is in the internal shifts and changes that you make along the way to accomplishing those greater goals. As you expand and learn and deepen within yourself, dear reader, your goals will also expand. You start by shifting and changing your mindset for yourself and then your purpose and goals grow along with you and the desire to help support others on their own journey's becomes paramount. The desire to help and give back to others is a huge part of every one's purpose and part of enlightenment itself and will always bring you happiness.

Growing up in a middle-class family meant that our necessities were always covered but my parents had to say no to a lot of things. Even as a kid I knew that my family was different than other families because I knew that my family couldn't afford things that other families could. A huge goal of mine was to become financially independent. I saw my dad working so hard to pay off my family's debt and to keep our heads above water. I knew that I wanted to earn a lot of money to be able to support myself and to give back to my parents. I wanted to help ease their life by providing financial support and gifts to them for all that they did for me as a child but I also want to be able to start saving money to have a family of my own.

My large goal of financial independence meant that I had to take a look at my finances. I started with a goal of making a certain amount of money every month. Setting monthly income goals was a step in the right direction on this larger journey. I started investigating ways that I could make money all of which required tremendous amounts of self-determination and growth. When I started hitting my goals every month, I began setting bigger goals which opened me up to start dreaming bigger dreams. It was no longer just about hitting monthly goal targets month after month. It had become about connecting with and helping more people. It became a bigger plan; opening me up to a five- and ten-year vision and mission for myself

and my career, family, and personal interests. I thought about ways I could give back more to my community, ways to travel the world more.

All of these goals relate to my higher purpose, the reason that we have all come to experience life on this planet at this divine moment. Giving back to the people who need support, investing in myself and my family, expanding my impact as far and wide as possible, are just a few ways that my goals have evolved into bigger visions for my life. So often, we think we are center of the universe. That's how we plan our entire lives, but to truly love ourselves is to step into your purpose. And your purpose is all about the impact that you make on other people. Your purpose is your friends and your family. Your purpose doesn't need to change the world but it will impact your world. By living out your purpose and healing the relationship you have with yourself, you show others what is possible for themselves. Living your purpose and truth helps others to begin to heal the relationships they have with themselves as well. Healing yourself is great but healing the world and everyone you come across is life-changing.

I know that every new year you set the same tired goals for yourself and every year you wonder why you can't seem to stick with them. I know you have to force yourself to stay committed for longer than a week and every day that passed, the resistance becomes worse and worse until you decide to give up entirely. My friend, this is because the goals that you are setting for yourself don't light a fire inside of you. About 10 years ago I set the goal for myself to start making INR 100,000 a month, this was because I refused to struggle for money. I refuse to live paycheck to paycheck. My goal lit a fire in my belly, a fire that kept me going when times got hard. A fire that wouldn't let me quit, even if I wanted to. Dear stranger, look at your goals and ask yourself *why* you want to achieve them. If you can dig deep into your gut and find a reason that will motivate you to get out of bed at 4 am or that will keep you moving forward when you feel as though you want to give up, then it's a goal worth pursuing.

The goals with the strongest ‘why’ attached always leads you back toward your purpose. It is the call inside you, those desires that are guttural and woven deep within you. They are typically the desires that you might be hiding or trying to convince yourself that you don’t want or that you can’t do because it seems too risky or you don’t think it makes logical sense. Your strongest desires, your most igniting ‘whys’ will always lead you to your purpose. You might think that you are being selfish or materialistic for wanting things, but as long as you want things out of genuine desire and not because you feel as though you are missing out or are trying to fill an emotional wound with a material object than you should feel comfortable going after the things you want. I wanted financial independence as a personal goal, but that personal goal led me on a much greater journey of helping people across the world.

Goals are so much bigger than simply monetary or business related. Those things are definitely important, but I learned very quickly that achieving monetary success doesn’t mean that you feel fulfilled. What makes you feel fulfilled is the impact you have on the people around you and your own personal growth. Looking at the vision you have for your friendships, your family, and your other relationships. Not everyone is meant to go out and create massive change in the world. Not everyone should be the next Gandhi or Oprah or Musk but when you take the time to put energy into the people around you, those relationships will naturally expand and grow. Think about the direction you want those relationships to expand in and what impact you hope to leave on people. The impact we leave on those close to us is our legacy.

When you are able to lose yourself in the service of others, you grow in self-love. I know that you always feel good when you help out a neighbor or you lend a hand to someone who needs it, dear stranger. You have kindness in your heart and it feels good to share that kindness with others. When we share our gifts and our gifts have an impact in the lives of others, we find a deeper love and appreciation for ourselves. The more I helped

spread light and love to other people, the more I could love and appreciate the challenges I had to overcome because I found my purpose in helping others. I loved myself more because of the impact I am able to leave on others lives; it makes me feel as though my life journey was entirely worth it.

When I feel low or I feel down, I just reflect on the impact I have had in the world. I know that my life and my purpose in life is so much bigger than me and the things that bring me down. My purpose is so much greater. Find the goals that set you on fire and don't stop until you achieve them. Remember that it's less about the goals themselves and more about who you become in the process of attaining those goals. Let your goals expand and unfold until you find your way to your true purpose; living a fulfilling life and being able to give back to the people you care about in this world.

You will always feel good knowing that you left the world a more beautiful place than you found it.

Suggestions

1. Journal about when the last time you felt pure joy was. For some, it might be a memory from childhood while for others it might be last week. Note what you were doing, and who was around. Typically, these things are connected to our greater purpose in the world.
2. Write about what you want your life to look like in 20 years. What have you accomplished in your life that you are most proud of? What impact did you make on people near and far? Dream up a future that excites you and makes you just out of bed in the morning, hungry to chase those goals.
3. 30 Day Giving Challenge. Every day for 30 days, give something away. It could be something that you already own, something that you buy or make. But every day for 30 days give something away to

someone who needs it. We feel the most fulfilled when we are helping others and contributing to the good around us.

DAY 11

every inch of love you give
will come back to you
in one way or another
never stop giving
the universe is keeping a track of it.



TRUSTING THE UNIVERSE AND BEING PATIENT

Dear Stranger,

I know it's hard to see right now, the big picture of your life. I know that it seems frightening or overwhelming not to know how your life will turn out in the end. But if we all knew how our lives would end up, it would take all the joy and delight out of life. It would strip life of all its wonders and surprises. The Universe is the divine intelligence that makes your heart beat and can hear your every thought. The Universe is aware of you and interacts with you regularly even if you might not have noticed it before. The Universe knows when it is the right time to bring people and opportunity into your life but so often us humans are not patient enough to wait for that divine timing. We worry that the Universe has forgotten about us or can't hear us when, instead, the Universe is simply waiting for the perfect time.

I hear you thinking "why is this happening to me". The times have been hard and it feels like you're walking down a dark tunnel with no end in sight. Things keep moving in the shadows or threatening to jump out of the darkness and send you running back in the direction you came from. Many times, it can seem like the challenges are never ending. Sometimes when you're faced with a series of challenges, it can feel like the Universe is working against you instead of for you and I know sometimes you wonder if you're even getting any closer to love and happiness at all. When you're wading through the dark, you feel as though everything is a setback. Or, you find that the Universe gives you exactly what you asked for but you aren't ready to receive it or accept it, pushing away from the things that you

do actually want because you don't feel worthy of them. Despite what you may think or feel at the time, all of these challenges and scary steps in the dark are all meant to serve a greater purpose for your soul and your life.

We all want things to happen in our lives quickly. Instant gratification has become so pervasive, waiting a day can feel like a lifetime. I'm sure you've laid in bed at night wondering when you'll finally receive the blessings you've asked for. You think, gosh, I've been doing all this internal work for a whole *week* but nothing's changed yet, why isn't it working? The Universe doesn't work on your schedule or mine. I hear your ego yelling loudly now, trying to convince you that you won't get what you want and I know you want to give up because you're worried about feeling like a fool. You don't want to feel as though you're sitting around and waiting for the Universe to decide to show up for you but **the Universe will always give you what you need in addition to what you want. There may very well be lessons for you to learn about loving yourself more before learning to love a partner.**

You cannot rush divine timing. I hear your thoughts, wishing that you were further along than you are now. Wishing to have it all figured out, to skip over the messy and complicated middle and go right to their happily ever after. My friend, it isn't that simple. The process of loving yourself evolves on the journey. Going through all of these steps is essential for true change and lasting self-love. The Universe tests you to teach you. I know it feels like test after test has just become too much. That you don't believe that the things in life that you want are meant for you. I have stood in your shoes more than a few times and I have been right on the brink of giving up and giving in. Until I remember that I deserve all of the things that I desire simply by being myself. That all I need to do is continue to follow where the Universe leads.

Remember, dear friend, that every challenge in life serves a greater purpose. The dark stretches of road lead you to the most impactful lessons and,

ultimately, your biggest blessings. I know you might be looking at the different parts of your life and thinking that there is no way any of these situations have anything good in them. I implore, friend, to look again. Look a bit softer and with more compassion. What can these life lessons teach you? How can they help you to grow? The Universe will guide you to the people and things that are meant for you if you take the time to listen and learn. My hardest times taught me my most important lessons. If I hadn't gone through all the bad stuff I did as a child and a young adult than I wouldn't be the person that I am today. I would have never found poetry to express myself. I never would have written and shared hundreds of letters with strangers online and I wouldn't be able to impact the lives of as many people. I realized that it is because of the challenges that I'm able to impact the lives of thousands of people today.

If you knew that you would be successful no matter what, dear stranger, what are the things that you would do? What are the creative ideas that you would try? What kind of relationships would you want to have? My friend, you must live each day like it is about to be the best day of your life. I have chosen to believe that this is a loving and kind Universe. I believe that everything happens for a reason as long as we are patient. You are not the sole creator of your reality. There are many things I know you long to control, believing that by controlling things you will get the outcome that you desire. However, dear stranger, when you relax and simply allow the Universe to co-create your reality with you, you become more open to receiving and allowing the best people, relationships, and love to come to you. Controlling everything doesn't mean that things will happen the way we want them to so you must loosen the reins on your life and let the Universe respond to you and give the Universe time. It is moving and shifting and building something new for you and creation doesn't happen in a day and it doesn't happen the moment we want it to. Creation is the process of building and compounding and the Universe needs time and space to reorganize itself all for you.

The true test of patience comes from a place of faith. You must have faith in the Universe and in yourself. You need to remember that everything in your life is happening for you and your highest good. Not only that but you should remember that what is for the highest good for you is actually for the highest good of everyone involved in the long run. I know that everything that is happening in your life is happening in your favor because the Universe is your protector. The Universe and I want your life to be filled with love and joy and abundance. The Universe wants the best for you and will always give you exactly what you ask it for. The Universe is an all-knowing being and knows what is best for us before we know what is best for ourselves. Surrender to the present moment and live in it joyfully. Trust that the people and relationships you desire are already on your way to you. Live each day as if your biggest prayers are about to be answered.

Faith is something that sounds great but is actually hard to practice. Having faith means that you must believe something against all odds that it is true. I know that you want to look at facts and figures, you want to point out exact dates and times that things will start working in your favor or know that precise moment you have met your soul mate but those things don't actually require faith at all. Faith means believing in things that aren't necessarily backed by facts and science. It's knowing that just because you can't see things doesn't make them any less real but faith also means believing in the things that you can't yet understand or see. I know you are staring at the puzzle pieces that make up your life and can't see how they fit together. But having faith means that you believe they can and they will make a complete picture. If you have had faith before, you know that faith doesn't exist without challenges or uncertainty. That it is when you finally rise up to meet the challenges head on that you need to have the most faith of all. My friend, I promise that once you have all the piece of your puzzle, you will see that they fit together perfectly.

So often the Universe wants to bring you your desires in the form of something even better than you had planned. This is what it means to stay

open to receiving and letting go of when you will receive the things you desire. I know you are focusing so hard on the things that you want so that they appear in your life as quickly as possible. But I don't want you, my friend, to be so caught up in looking for exactly what you want that you miss something even bigger and better that the Universe has sent you. I have seen friend after friend, messages from stranger after stranger who have turned down an opportunity that could have resulted in their dreams coming true but they were so focused on something else that they couldn't see it at the time. They missed out on receiving their blessings because the Universe didn't just bring them what they asked for but brought them something even better but because it was different than they expected, they didn't take the chance. This, my friend, is a warning I hope you heed. Be open to life. Say yes to experiences that will help you grow. It could be the Universe sending you the biggest blessings in disguise.

So, dear reader, how do you *know* when the Universe is showing up for you? You will start to see the same things coming up for you over and over again. Different people may mention the same documentary to you multiple times or you'll run into the same person again and again. I know you've seen the synchronicities. The way you always see a blue jay when you're dreaming about a better life. When you have a strange calling or feeling to go somewhere out of the ordinary or explore something or someplace new. Allow yourself to be led by these curiosities and small daily enchantments. It is safe for you to follow your intuition, it is safe for you to receive. Follow the nudges and inclinations that come to you daily because this is how the Universe works to nudge you in the right direction; towards your desires and dreams. Don't be afraid to take the step, dear stranger, when you feel as though you are being led.

I know that in this big sea of people, it is easy to feel lost. It is easy to feel as though you are the only one grappling your way through a dark tunnel with no end in sight. It feels like everyone else has it all figured out and that you are the only one that's struggling to see the light at the end of the

tunnel. I promise that we all feel alone and unsure at times. We have all felt like we are the only person who has had to face the insurmountable odds to achieve the things that we want or that we have to wait unthinkably long to reap our rewards for being patient and trusting the Universe. When I have felt that way myself, I have pondered upon my own life for inspiration. Today I am exactly where I am supposed to be. In retrospect, every pain, struggle and suffering seem to have guided me and made me into a person I am. Dear stranger, in retrospect, life will always make sense. Okay?

Suggestions

1. Make a vision board. Sometimes while waiting for our desires to appear in our life, we can feel as though we are twiddling our thumbs. Instead, create a collage of images that represent your desires. Surrounding yourself with visual reminders can help to keep you focus and motivated, as if your desires are already here and waiting for you to experience.
2. Spend time visualizing. Close your eyes and see yourself living the experiences that you want to have. Add motion, sound, and other people. Imagine that you are actively living the life you desire you will not feel like you are missing out on anything; just patiently waiting to receive.
3. Follow your intuition. Intuition is your soul's wisdom. It lives in your body and can visit you as this internal voice or gut feeling about something. Your intuition is here to help guide your choices and always contributes to your higher purpose. If you are getting downloads and messages all related to the same thing, it's your sign to listen to the Universe and take action. Get familiar with what your intuition sounds and feels like to start listening to it.

DAY 12

people will tell you
a lot of different things
but the truth is
love is not the problem
not being able to love is.



GRATITUDE

Dear Stranger,

When times are hard and you can't see an end in sight, it is easy to make things harder on yourself by focusing on the negative. I see how it piles up, day after day. The endless feeling of climbing with no relief in sight makes it hard to see anything good at all. When it rains, it pours. It can be impossible for us to see anything good when a series of bad things seem to be piling up. It is when times are the hardest that we need to do our best to be thankful for everything that we already have. No matter what experiences have gotten you to this point in your life, it is paramount to be thankful for them.

I know that everywhere you turn, it can seem like things are negative. Between your own limiting thoughts and beliefs as well as the negative mindset of majority of people in the world. It is not your fault, dear stranger, that negatives are all you see. Seeing negatives all around is your brain's way of protecting you. Our brains were created to keep us safe from danger and harm. When you look at challenges it is natural to be overwhelmed by the potential negatives than being able to see the silver linings. You're hardwired to always be on the lookout for things that are lurking around the corner, waiting to cause you physical or emotional pain. You want to be prepared for it so that you're not surprised by it. Your brain was never a tool that was meant to ensure that you are happy.

And that is why we need to talk about gratitude today. Gratitude is the positive emotion you feel after being the beneficiary of a gift. I know that your life feels far from perfect and that it can seem as though you have no gifts in your life. Gifts don't have to mean material things, my friend, but

can be little moments and experiences that make you feel joy and peace. For every challenge and situation that you go through in your life, there is a gift attached. You don't feel it though there is anything positive going for you in your life but there are always things if you dare to look hard enough. Life itself is a precious gift. The chances of you and I existing at this exact moment in time on this planet is a miracle. The fact that our hearts beat and that our most precious resource- water- rains down from the sky, there are things both big and small to be grateful for every day.

When you don't practice gratitude, it can be easy to feel selfish. You only focus on yourself and how you are being affected by things. When things are negative your stress response is triggered. You immediately feel as though you need to protect yourself and become hyper-focused on yourself and your needs. Lacking gratitude leads to focusing solely on yourself and how you are impacted by the things in your environment. It also shows the Universe that you feel as though you are superior to other people and, maybe, to the Universe itself. You believe that you have a right to good things instead of good things being something that you cultivate within yourself. It's a selfish way of thinking, but it's how we deal with the threat of not having enough.

Being in a state of lack can negatively affect all areas of your life. When you feel as though you are lacking in some way, you will never be able to feel as though you are grateful. Being in a state of lack isn't just about material things but it also means thinking and feeling as though you never have enough time, you never have enough support, you never have enough energy, you never get enough sleep, and so on. All of those ideas portray a state of lack. When you're focused on all of the things that you are lacking, it is impossible to be thankful for the blessings that you already have in life.

Where you put your focus and energy expands. Just like focusing on my monetary goals each month increased my profits, when I focus on the things, I'm grateful for, those things expand. I start to notice other things

that I'm grateful for and my gratitude snowballs. Gratitude can be flexed like a muscle. When I first began practicing gratitude, it felt like hard work to find anything that I was thankful for. The more I began to look for the positives in every situation, the happier I felt every day. Focus on the areas of your life that you have been struggling in and appreciate the good things that you already have going for you in these areas. I promise you that when you start to appreciate the good things, you will find more good things to be grateful for.

How often do you thank other people? I know that it's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life but it's important to take the time to pause and let the people around you know that you really appreciate them and all that they do. The long-lost art of the thank you note should make a comeback in my humble opinion. Don't hesitate to tell the people that you love how much you appreciate them or your co-workers how great they are. The more you can celebrate and honor the blessings that you already have in your life, the more you will find to celebrate.

Gratitude isn't just about thanking other people or thanking the Universe for their gifts. Gratitude also means finding things to be grateful for when times are hard. Challenges are gifts from the Universe to teach you a lesson. In every challenge, dear stranger, there is also a gift. A gift that you cannot see unless you practice the superpower of gratitude. Be grateful for the hardships that you face because of the lessons that you learn from those experiences. When you can find room in your heart to be grateful for both the good things and the more challenging things, you will have truly mastered the art of gratitude.

It's great to make a list of the things that you are thankful for every day but gratitude is the most powerful when you can appreciate something in the moment. Staying in the present moment when it comes to gratitude is so powerful. Imagine the Universe is just like any other friend. When a friend gets you a gift, you thank them and you need to treat the Universe the same

when. As soon as you are blessed with something by the Universe, show your appreciation by saying 'thank you' out loud or in your head. Take a moment to tap into your feelings and the way that gratitude feels in your body. Gratitude can change your life if you let it, dear stranger. Changing the way, you think from negative to positive will help you to lead a happier life and being grateful for the love you already have will only amplify the love you have in your life.

Living a life of gratitude helps you feel more optimistic. Instead of always expecting things to go wrong as you always have, gratitude allows you to stay in the present moment and take each situation as it comes to you. You are always expecting things to work out when you are grateful. You know that even if things don't appear to work out from your perspective now, that the challenge will provide a lesson that will help you at some other point in life. Gratitude makes it easier to believe that the world is a good and kind place regardless of what happens in your external world.

Gratitude, happiness, and love go hand in hand. Use them all to amplify each other and lift each other up.

Suggestions

1. Write a thank you note to someone who you feel as though you never got the chance to properly thank. Giving a handwritten note is a great way to brighten someone's day and extending gratitude will help to bring more things to be grateful for into your life.
2. Make a list every morning of three things you are grateful for. These can be big things or little things. It can be the same three things every day for weeks until you are able to find something else. Focus on the good to attract better.
3. Give the people around you positive praise. When you notice the kind, thoughtful, loving things that other people do for you- tell them that you notice! The things that people are praised for are the things that

they will do more of. Lay on the love for others and watch how your life shifts.

DAY 13

i think
the universe makes souls in pairs
and sends them alone
to find each other
so that they can learn
its biggest magic.
the magic called love.



KNOWING THE RIGHT PARTNER

Dear Stranger,

I know that romantic love seems like a fairytale. We are sold this fake notion of what romantic love should be and we wholeheartedly believe in it. I know you feel as though you have searched high and low for that perfect partner and feel like there is no one out there for you. My question, dear friend, is whether or not you have *really* looked. You see, I know you convince yourself that you've conversed, met or dated so many people but still haven't found a match which makes you start to question whether or not love even exists. You have tried to date but every time you get close to someone, they suddenly disappear. The more people that leave your life, the more you begin to question yourself. You start to wonder if something is wrong with you and might have even grown cynical about love itself.

You have been used or abused in the past by someone that you loved. I know it was painful and I know that you didn't deserve to be treated that way. I also know that after so long of being treated the same way over and over again, you start to believe that is the way you deserve to be treated. You start to think that this is how everyone in the world is and that there is no one good left so you resign yourself to a relationship that doesn't make you happy and doesn't make you feel loved. Dear stranger, I promise you that the world doesn't have to be a place that is full of heart and you don't need to endure relationships that don't make you happy. Even being with someone who is nice is great but if that person also doesn't make you happy and you don't enjoy spending time with them, they might not be the person meant for you.

There are other people who are desperately searching the web and the bars to fill a void. These people aren't looking for a partner, but are simply trying to fill a void. They just want a person to share their bed with instead of being with someone that they truly want to be with. What are the qualities that I want in another person? Become self-aware. Get specific about the kind of person you want to meet. At different times you might want different things from people but knowing the values and qualities that you value in a partner is important. Having that self-awareness to know what you actually want in a person will save you heart ache in the long run.

Be discerning about the people that you allow into your life. Remember that not every person that you meet will be someone that you want to spend more time with. You need to be selective with the people you date and the people that you make commitments with. Don't be blinded by someone who is only showing you what they think you want to see. Take it slow with people. Sometimes love happens in an instant but that isn't always practical. Take your time to get to know people for who they are instead of who we want them to be or someone who is only trying to put their best foot forward. This also happens with friendships as well as relationship. Look at someone's true nature. We don't always get along with every person that we meet but what is important is that any person you allow in your life should be kind and loving at their core. Someone who is kind to you but not kind to the waiter or the janitor is not a truly kind person. It is okay to let people go with love, hoping to hold onto friendship but accepting that relationships end and it doesn't have to be a bad thing.

My dear friend, leaving relationships behind that don't serve you is the best thing that you can do for yourself. Once you are able to make space in your life for the right people to enter, they will. The Universe needs space to work its magic and a place for the energy to go. If you hang on to relationships that aren't meant for you, it will stop you from meeting the right person. Knowing the right partner might take time and practice. Sometimes people have to grow apart in order to come back together. Other

times you outgrow people and they can no longer give you the things that you need in order to feel happy and loved within your relationship. Knowing who you are and what you are looking for in a happy relationship is important for making decisions about who you chose to keep in your life and who you need to let go of.

Know your values and see if the other person has similar values. Dating apps make it hard to discern people's true values and goals. Dating has become more about what the other person looks like in their Instagram pictures and less about their dreams, goals, and contributions to the world. It is not enough to know and measure your own goals and values but you also need to get to know those aspects of the person that you're dating. Getting clear about what your values around family, spending money, career and quality time will only make it easier to find someone who finds those same things important. You may not have the exact same values and experiences as other people and that is okay. But having vastly different values than others can cause friction in your relationship and heartache in the long run.

Opening yourself up to love is the most important part. You can't be closed off from the potential of receiving love. I know that wounds from the past run deep and sometimes, the thought of getting hurt again makes you want to be alone forever. Just the thought of having to endure that kind of heartbreak again can make your heart race and stomach ache. In order to truly know if someone is meant for you, you must open yourself up to them. You must be vulnerable and wear your heart on your sleeve. Be yourself and don't hold back. If a person is meant for you they will love you; your quirks, your flaws, the way you express yourself, your hopes and your dreams. Express yourself clearly and often because life is too short to hold back any part of yourself in order to be liked. I know you want to make a good impression on the person you're dating and you want to be liked. In the beginning of a new relationship, you want to be agreeable and put your best foot forward. But if you want to be loved for being yourself, you must

have the courage to actually be yourself even when it means not being the prettiest, more manicured person in the room.

Don't think of dating as this cat and mouse game that people get caught up in playing these days. Don't think of dating as you trying to woo or impress someone else. Think about dating as a time to see if someone fits well into your happy life. At this point, my friend, I hope that you have developed a love and appreciation for yourself and all of the things that make you great. I hope that you have started doing more of the things that make you happy regardless of whether or not you have someone to do them with. Having a full and happy life all on your own, before you start dating, is the key to a happy relationship. You know your worth. You are just as happy by yourself as you are with another person around. You don't need to flaunt your accomplishments and try to tout yourself as an amazing partner. What you need to do is think about whether or not the person you're dating will fit into your life. They should help to expand your happiness and possibly even add to it. You get to be the one who decides where the relationship goes and you are the one in control.

Take the time to list out the five or ten things that you absolutely must have in a partner. We all have qualities and attributes we look for in other people but I know that you tend to try to see the good in everyone. While there may be good in everyone, it doesn't mean that you need to be in an intimate relationship with everyone. Think about the qualities and aspects of your ideal relationship that are non-negotiable and do not settle for anything less. It might feel like you're trying to think positively or trying to see the good but what you're really doing is compromising because you're simply afraid to be alone. When it comes to the person that you are spending most of your time with and sharing a future with, you should not be compromising. Keep your expectations high and don't waiver from the vision of the relationship you long to have. You don't need to have an Instagram worthy relationship and you don't need to be trying to keep up with the people around you. Be self-aware enough to notice when you are compromising on the things that

you really want in a long-term relationship. Meet new people, date people that are different than your normal type. Date people that are different than you are and people that have a different view of the world. You might be surprised to find that someone different than you can have such a similar view of the world as you. Don't be quick to judge someone from the outside until you've had the chance to really get to know them. Love may happen at first sight but more often than not, love happens when you allow someone to learn about you deeply and share your life with them which happens over time. There is no rush, you are not behind in some invisible race. Take the time to truly know someone before deciding whether or not you want to date them.

Some people come into your life forever while other people come into your life for a season or to teach you a lesson. Some people may be fun to be with in the short term but aren't what you need or want in the long term. I know you can easily get swept up into the fun and drama but it won't be fun when you end up with a broken heart because the other person couldn't give you what you needed or wanted. Don't be afraid to let people down gently who you don't see a future with and that there will be relationships with people that don't work out. There is good love out there. There are good people out there. By allowing yourself to be open to these people and this love, you will meet them and they will fit into your life like a perfect puzzle piece that helps make the picture of your life a little bit clearer.

Suggestions

1. Write down a list of all the qualities that your dream partner possesses. Get clear on the things that are really important to you and start treating other people as if they are interviewing to fill a position in your life. Use discernment to decide if someone meets the criteria on your list or if they don't and make a decision about what their position in your life will be.

2. Be open about your dreams and where you see your future. If you want to sell all of your stuff and travel the world but someone you are seeing doesn't have any dreams of ever leaving their hometown, you might not be compatible. Make sure that the person you are dating has similar aspirations as you.
3. Look at someone's heart. Is this person you're dating doing the best they can to make you happy and show you respect and kindness? Or do they disregard your feelings and point the finger at you when challenges arise. Take off the rose-colored glasses and take note of how this person treats others; their family, their friends, strangers, in addition to you to help determine the sort of heart someone has.

DAY 14

maybe love is simply about
finding out that one person
who has the ability
to hurt you the most
and yet won't hurt you.



KNOWING WHEN YOU'RE IN LOVE

Dear Stranger,

When you've decided that you're ready to date someone, you clearly like to spend time with them. Entering into a relationship with someone typically happens when two people enjoy the company and conversation of one another. You've gotten to know someone enough to decide that you want to share more of your life with them and open them up to more of your world. Dating means that you see how someone acts around your friend and first thing when they wake up in the morning. You share meals and intimate thoughts with that other person and it can feel as though you are carving out a growing place for them in your life. We all get to a certain point when we begin dating someone and that point may come early or it may come after a year but it is the point of deciding whether or not you're in love.

There is a vast difference between liking someone and loving someone. The muddy water of emotions can be hard to navigate, especially as you work to decide how you feel about the people. You can like someone, sure, but loving them requires a new level of depth and vulnerability. Liking someone can still be lighthearted and noncommittal but loving someone means that the relationship has the capacity to enter new depths. I know that you've gotten to a point in your life where it can feel hard to tell the difference between like and love. Often times, I think that people tend to know the answer to this question intuitively but it's easy to get into your head about things and overthink every aspect of your relationship, putting it under a microscope to analyze every little thing. You drive yourself crazy looking for the very answers that are straight in front of you because, sometimes, we're afraid that we might not like the answer that we find.

Liking someone and enjoying their company is not the same thing as being in love with them.

When considering whether you like or love someone, it's important to consider the dynamic of your relationship. Of course, liking someone will make you feel good. Humans love to be needed and appreciated by other humans. I know how you long to feel truly connected to other people and when another person gives you their undivided attention it can feel good; like a true connection even when you're not even really connecting on anything of true importance. You like a person because they make you feel nice. You appreciate what the other person is doing for you. Liking someone is more about how that person makes you feel because of their attention and companionship. Liking someone is not really about who they are or whether or not they're adding anything beneficial to your life besides stroking your ego. When you like someone, you are less consumed and preoccupied about being intimate with that person. Your relationship is based more in emotional support and what the other person can give to you.

Of course, when you are caught up in liking someone, it can be harder to distinguish your true feelings. When you date someone, of course there will be times when you enjoy being around that person. No matter how much you like someone, if it's only like and not love, this person may not be at the top of your priority list. When you're dating someone you merely like, you'll notice that they might not be the first person you tell good news to or they're not your first call when something bad happens and you need to vent. When you like someone, you might complain about their quirks and you might be more willing to call off plans in favor of something or someone else. When you only like someone, you have a short fuse when the person is talking too long or too much. You notice all of the little things they do that simply irritate you sometimes. We all get frustrated and annoyed with our partner sometimes, but if you notice that more often than not you end up annoyed or frustrated at your partner just for being themselves, you might be in danger of simply liking them.

I know that there have been times in your life that you've been willing to settle for simply liking someone instead of truly loving them. It's important to give the person that you are dating a chance to get to know you and for you to get to know them because, again, loving someone isn't something that typically happens overnight. Some people need time to open up and find the trust it takes to be vulnerable with another person. Allow yourself and your partner time to get to that place emotionally and don't worry if it takes some people a longer time to get there than others. I know you want to know if it's real and you want to know whether it will last but the truth is there is no real way to know except for trying. Allow yourself to try to be in love with the person you're dating but never settle for merely liking someone. Dear stranger, you don't need to settle for less. You know, deep down inside that you deserve more. More than just okay, more than just having an average love and an average life. You deserve to be in love. Have your own great story to tell.

When you're in love with someone, it feels like half of you is on fire. A person feels like home and an adventure all at once. Love is respect and yearning. It is friendship and longing in one. When you love someone, you want to share parts of yourself with them that you normally keep hidden away because they make you feel safe to be yourself. Much as when you like someone, you will love spending time with your person when you're in love. In fact, you may find time flying by when you're talking or slowing down when you hold their hand. Love is yearning to be close to someone in every way imaginable; physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. You love someone not just in the way you open up to them but also in the longing you have for them to open up to you. You'll find that you ask questions and want to really listen.

When you're in love, you are consumed with serving and it is more about what you can give as opposed to what you can get. Being in love with someone makes you feel like you're living in a Disney movie where the birds sing and help you get dressed in the morning. When you're in love

you will do anything to make your partner happy and you do it with a smile on your face. Not because you're under another person's thumb but because making the person you love happy is the greatest source of joy in the world. It feels amazing to put a smile on your partner's face each and every day. You are ready and willing to build their trust by going above and beyond every day to make sure that the other person knows how much you care about them. When you are in love, you want to serve the needs of your partner and you want to support them in all that they do.

When you're in love, you will find that you begin to prioritize spending time and energy on your relationship and with your partner. Relationships with friends and family will always be important, but when something great happens during the day you will want to call your partner first. When you've had a terrible day, you go to them for support. They become the person that you turn to for advice and you find that you move your schedule around to make time for them. The person you love becomes a priority in your life and the things they love also become important to you. Their friends and family become important to you. Their job becomes important to you. When you love someone, you want to know about their thoughts and how their day went. You want to be included in their life and you go above and beyond to show them that.

If you're in love you'll want to introduce this person to your friends and your family. Loving someone means that you see them as an important part of your life. Loving someone is a big step for a relationship because it means that two people are committing to sharing their lives with one another. If you love someone, you will want to imagine a life with them. You will share your dreams and goals with the person you like but a partner that you love will become a part of your dreams and your goals. When you're in love you start to dream together, not about what the future looks like for you alone but your future together. Loving someone means trusting them with the vision for your life. Real love is having the confidence to say

that you imagine a future with someone and you open yourself to building that future together.

Once you realize that you are in love with someone, you feel like you are bursting at the seams. You want to bring up your partner in every conversation, and you begin obsessing over when and how to say it. Expressing your love to someone can be hard, especially when you've been rejected and hurt before. Fear of rejection is normal or if you're getting mixed signals, it's okay. Maybe you aren't sure how to express your love because how vulnerable and scary it feels. You wouldn't be alone, dear stranger, many people are afraid to express love because they don't want to be hurt. Scared to express your love because you are worried that there is no future. Maybe because of your caste, maybe because of societal expectations or pressures. Having fear only proves how much you care. When deciding whether or not to tell someone that you love them, really consider all the qualities that you love about the other person. Look at the whole picture of your relationship; the physical, emotional, spiritual qualities to gather your thoughts and take inventory of your feelings.

It's important to tell the other person upfront that these are YOUR feelings. The last thing you want is for your partner to feel cornered or pressured into returning your affections before they've had a chance to think about the relationship in the same way that you have. Tell them that you are telling them your feelings because you need to get it off your chest. Own that your feelings are yours and yours alone and that it's okay if your partner doesn't feel the same way. This isn't about what you may or may not get back from the other person, but it is about being honest with yourself and your partner about how you're feeling inside. No one will know how you feel unless you tell them. Once you express your feelings, you need to let the other person go. Give your partner time and space to process their own feelings before anything.

If someone doesn't love you, it doesn't mean that you're not lovable. I know rejection feels like a sting. A sting that reminds you that you're not good enough or not worthy of love. Not having your love returned doesn't mean that anything is wrong with you and doesn't mean that you are a terrible person. You never know where people are emotionally or mentally and while you may be ready for a more committed relationship, your partner may not be. The truth is, dear friend, that people will reject you for all kinds of different reasons; some good, some bad, some rational, and other's completely irrational. You will never be able to control the thoughts and feelings of another person. You can't make the other person see the same future as you do. When it is love, you want the other person to be happy. Being rejected gives you the space to be supportive of the person you care about to make the best decision for themselves, even if that decision isn't you. You should support them to be the happiest and it allows the space of room for the right person to enter your life.

Of course, some people may not be ready to love you but may indicate that they could see themselves loving you sometime in the future. You may even be swept up in the idea of waiting for someone to fall in love with you in a romantic comedy movie kind of way but you can't spend your life waiting for an answer. If someone tells you that maybe there could be a future together, the other person shouldn't expect you to put your life on hold while they decide whether or not they're in love with you. Give the relationship time to blossom without pressure, but know what your emotional limits are and don't stop living your life waiting years for someone to make up their mind about you.

Because you deserve it, dear stranger. You deserve the passionate, intimate, loving relationship that you deeply desire.

Suggestions

1. List the qualities and traits that you love about the person you are dating RIGHT NOW. DO not include things that they have done for

you in the past, and don't consider what you hope to be, do, accomplish in the future. Think about what makes you love the person right in front of you and write them all down.

2. Think about the reasons that you want to be in a committed relationship with this person. If you are telling someone you love them out of insecurity or because you want to move the commitment of the relationship to "lock things down" you probably aren't saying that you love someone because you truly do.

DAY 15

a short term hurt
is better than
a long term heart-break.



DEALING WITH REJECTION

Dear Stranger,

There are 8 billion people in this world which means that there are 8 billion chances to find love. As long as there has been love, there has been rejection. Not every single person that you have a romantic interest in will return your feelings. There will be many times that you find yourself longing for someone who doesn't feel the same for you. It is important to handle rejection with love. It can feel so hard to allow yourself to open up only to not have your feelings returned. It can feel like a stake through the heart, a twisted, angry, knotted feeling in your stomach. It can make anyone feel upset and resentful of love. Rejection will bring sting, and burn, and pain.

Rejection can get to every person. I was rejected many times as a teenager and a young adult. It seemed like everyone that I liked never liked me back and when you're young and impressionable you start to believe that you are the problem. You believe that something is wrong with you or that you are doing something to drive people away. It impacts your confidence and you feel like you're always being judged. You begin to question your self-worth and start wondering if anyone will ever be able to love you. You start to think that maybe you're not worthy of anyone's time or attention at all. It can feel as though the Universe is ignoring your desires or is purposely leading you astray. **Bear in mind that the Universe works in the eleventh hour. Sometimes it takes getting to your darkest in order to see the light.** The Universe will always bring you what you desire so hold the faith that the relationship you are looking for is also out there looking for you.

Dealing with rejection is hard and it's bound to sting. When someone chooses not to be involved with you romantically, it doesn't mean that you are wrong or broken. Rejection isn't someone rejecting you, it's someone who can't give you the things that you want and need in order to feel happy and loved in your relationship. I know it's sad and can hurt when your feelings for someone aren't returned, but count it as a blessing. If someone truly doesn't feel the same way about you, then you are able to spend your time getting to know other people who could be more open to loving you. When someone excuses themselves from your life, they are making space for the right person to enter.

Stop blaming yourself and finding flaws in yourself. I hear you beating yourself up for every little thing in your relationship that you feel like you did wrong. I know you think that changing those things would have made a difference but the truth is that if someone loves you, they love you whether or not you argued with them about where you wanted to go for dinner. You can't keep beating yourself up over relationships that don't work out. If anything, the other person lost a chance to be in an amazing relationship with you. Someone who is worthy of your love and companionship would be lucky to have you. Stop devaluing yourself because someone else can't see your value. The person that you are going to spend the rest of your life with is out there in the world looking for someone exactly like you. The right person will see you and appreciate you for exactly who you are and you will never question yourself again. You must believe that the love you seek is out there in order to find it.

Yes, rejection stings. But it's better to be rejected while being honest about your feelings than to have regrets. I know you don't want to grow old wondering "what if" about a person or a relationship. It is far better to have told the person how you feel about them; to take a risk and speak your truth than it is to always wonder what could have been. With the passage of time, you don't want to wonder about the one who got away and the life you could have had if you had only been honest about your feelings.

Sometimes, people need the honesty in order to make them realize how they feel inside. You can never be sure what someone will say when you tell them that you love them but whatever happens just know it is always better to have tried. You can fool other people but you can never fool yourself and you are the one who has to live with the regret of never knowing because you didn't have the courage to speak up. You only have this one life, don't hold back from telling people how you really feel about them.

You can't let one rejection dictate your entire life, your entire self-worth. The people you care about will always matter and their opinions are important but their rejection or love for you shouldn't have the power over you that it does. When someone rejects you, or doesn't return your affections, it's okay to move on. You know that the love you have for yourself isn't determined by whether or not someone else wants to or can love you. A relationship with another person doesn't add to or take away from your worth as a person. And, you don't really want to be in a relationship where the feelings aren't mutual. You are a gift; the time you spend with people and the energy you give them is too precious to waste on someone who doesn't reciprocate your feelings. You are powerful beyond measure, my friend, and you need to own it. Let that power live in your body so that you aren't shaken if someone doesn't reciprocate your feelings. All it means for you is that it is time to close that chapter, that relationship, and to honor a new one. One where your loving energy is deeply felt and wholeheartedly returned. One where you can love freely, be yourself fully, and know that you are understood and taken care of.

You might just find that one day that you tell someone you love them and they tell you that they love you back. That's what we all hope for when being honest about our feelings with someone that we care about very much. But you never know what experiences or relationships other people have been through. Someone may love you very much but still not be able to be in serious committed relationship with you. If one person is not in a position to fully commit to you in a loving intimate relationship, it could

mean that they have more healing to do. Just have faith in the Universe and know that what you seek is also seeking you. The relationship you desire that is fulfilling, giving, passionate, and full of love exists. The person that you are looking for is out in the world, looking for someone exactly like you. You are someone's ideal exactly the way that you were born to be in this world.

Know it.

Own it.

Go out and find it.

Suggestions

1. Process your emotions. Have a good cry, eat your favorite comfort food, move your body in nature. Do something that allows you to feel your feelings and work through them. Allow yourself to grieve for the relationship that you desired but don't keep all that energy in; allow it to be expressed and removed from your energetic field.
2. Rejection is often the Universe's way of saving you from something that was not meant for you. Make a list as to what better things may be on their way to you at this very moment because of that rejection.
3. Make a list of the reasons that this reject is the best thing to ever happen to you. Read it every day until you are able to believe it.

DAY 16

sometimes love is
as simple as
watching the moon
and sometimes
it's as difficult as
counting the stars.
but I love doing both
for you.



SUSTAINING A RELATIONSHIP

Dear Stranger,

Once you have found a person to love, it is easy to become complacent. Relationships are their own entities. They require just as much love and energy as dating does. It is not enough to date someone fantastically and then slip into the comfort of routine. Relationships with two people require both people to learn about one another. Learning each other's ticks and temperaments is only the beginning of a relationship. There is so much more to your intimate relationships than simply learning one another's quirks. If continue to do the things that you did at the beginning of the relationship, you will find yourself in a happy and healthy relationship for life. Sustaining a relationship means that you are giving your relationship the energy it needs to grow, that it's getting your attention and enthusiasm. That you are being a partner worthy of love and respect as much as it is about getting it in return.

Keep your expectations realistic. No one should be put up on a pedestal and no one single person can be everything we may want them to be. When we start out in relationships, the person you're with and the relationship itself is shiny and new. I know the feeling where you can't sleep, and you find it hard to eat. You can't stop thinking about the person that you want to be with, everything they do, even the annoying things, make you swoon. This is love, my friend. The butterflies you get in your stomach, the willingness to do anything for the one you love, singing and dancing around your kitchen, all of those incredible feelings. The trouble comes with time. Over time, we let the stresses and outside world affect our relationships. Instead of focusing on all of the good things that your significant other does, we see

all the negative things. We see the dishes piling up in the sink, the laundry left unfolded, and feel the tension from work or family seeping into the cracks in your relationship, coloring your expectations.

We expect our partners to meet our needs without us letting them know what they are. We expect our partner to be cheery all the time or expect them to remain unchanged over time. Life is full of ups and downs and changes happen all the time. We can't expect that our partners will always be in the same mood as us, or in the same mental place as we are. Having clear expectations is important to sustain a healthy relationship. The people that we develop relationships with are humans, just like we are. They have their strengths, weaknesses, and flaws just like we do. We can't expect that our partners will be everything for us, do everything for us, will always be available to us. We need to accept that our partners will be their own person who deserves our love unconditionally. You don't want the perfect image you have of your partner to crumble under the real-world stress which is bound to accumulate in you both. Give your partner grace. Allow them to be human and see them for who they really are and not the perfect version that you want them to be.

It's no secret, dear stranger, that communicating is wildly important. From gossip columns to relationship books, you will always find the advice to communicate often and effectively. I know sometimes communication can feel like a rocky terrain. You don't want to say the wrong thing, so you end up saying nothing at all. Or, you find yourself talking way too much and oversharing which is also something that can be hard to navigate when your partner isn't the same way. It can feel as though you're either shoving your foot in your mouth or waiting for your partner to engage with you after you've ranted and feel deflated when they don't. We all need time to our thoughts; to decompress after our workday is done or process an experience before sharing about it. We all feel the need to feel the quiet air at times, you and I are the same in that, but I always try to be mindful of when people just need quiet and not communication.

I know that once the glitter fades and reality set in, it can feel hard to articulate to a partner what you need. I know you're worried about upsetting them or pushing them away when you are clear and honest about your wants and needs. I know you would never do anything to intentionally hurt your partner or their feelings and you would never want to hinge on the freedom and introspection that they might sometimes need. Being an introvert myself, I know that having space, silence and the ability to "unplug" from people and conversations is paramount to my happiness and wellbeing. Instead of hiding that from a partner or getting frustrated and upset that you aren't getting the things you need, it's important to tell them. Explain where you are coming from and why these things are important to you. Tell your partner simply that you love them and enjoy spending time with them but then sometimes when you feel drained, having time alone can help you to recharge. Let them know that you will let them know if you need space and for them not to worry about it too much. It is your responsibility to give yourself what you need independently and as a couple to be truly happy and feel your best. The people who love and respect will be able to understand that asking for time by yourself doesn't mean you love them any less, only that it helps you to feel your best. We all need space. We all need time to ourselves. We all need to be alone sometimes and it doesn't make you any less of a person or a partner to gently request that space.

Just as you are your own person, your partner is their own person too. There will be many things that you love and admire about your partner but for everything you love, there will be something that you don't love. For everything that you enjoy and share as a couple, there will be things that your partner doesn't enjoy or doesn't like or approve of for themselves. There will be times when these conflicts clash and it feels as though no one wins. You argue that your activity or way of being is better than your partner and expect them to conform to your thoughts and your ways of being but your partner argues for the same things. There is truly no winner when you are both pining to be *right* instead of *in love*. When something

arises in your relationship that your partner doesn't like or doesn't approve of, it is important to listen to them and get curious. Try to understand why they feel the way that they do. So many of us rush to defend ourselves, our values, and our beliefs but defensiveness doesn't breed understanding. You want to hear your partner and address their concerns. Let them know that the way they see the situation is okay and it isn't wrong. That you see the situation through another lens that you can share with them. Explain to them why you make the choices you make or why you decide to do the things that you do. If, at the end of the conversation, you still don't see eye to eye, that is okay! You won't agree with your partner about every single thing. Sometimes you may be able to find common ground once you are both willing to listen to one another but other times you won't. At the end of the day, my friend, you have done so much work to get here. To be proud of who you are and own the parts of you that you once believed were flawed. Your happiness comes before anything and if changing or compromising doesn't make you happy, it is okay to move on from that person with respect and love. Let that person know that it's okay to disagree but that this is who you are and just because they don't like something doesn't mean that you have to conform. The right people will still be there. They will still love you, regardless that you are different than they are.

Communicating proactively is always better than to find out that you and your partner aren't on the same page about the big, important things. You want to communicate with them about your values and what things are important to you. Communicating doesn't serve anyone when it's draped in sarcasm that may be truth or when you're talking in a roundabout way to avoid making a point. Communication is so important because it allows your partner a view into your mind. Telling them about your day also tells them what mood you might be in. It allows your partner to feel connected to you as you go through your day-to-day life. Your partner wants to know the people you interact with, the problems you face, and wants to be included in it all. Communication is the bridge between your life and your loved ones. Communication means including them in your plans for the weekend and

the plans for your life. Sharing your dreams with your partner is an important step to sustaining a relationship. The more you are able to share your hopes and dreams with your partner, the more they feel included in the vision for your life. Your partner wants to grow alongside you and if they don't know where you're headed, they won't be able to keep up. Sustaining a relationship, my friend, means being willing to share the vision of your life with another person and not to hold back.

Communicating about your hopes and dreams is highly intimate. Sharing your fears, and deeply rooted doubts and beliefs can feel as though you are standing naked on a stage, an entire auditorium of people staring and laughing back at you. Sharing intimate things doesn't have to be this way and shouldn't be this way if you see a future with your partner. We feel ashamed talking about our deepest fears, shame we may have felt in the past, or even our largest and silliest goals and dreams. Communicating about intimate things also means communicating about your intimate needs with your partner. Not talking about sex guarantees that you will be having bad sex. Your partner wants to love you in a way that makes you feel wonderful. Your partner wants to give you this incredible experience and wants to satisfy your needs. If you never tell your partner what those things are or how to do it, they are playing a guessing game with you. Or they're assuming that you like the same things that they do. You can be very compatible with a person mentally and emotionally but not compatible sexually. Being not compatible sexually can change if you are honest and communicate with your partner.

So often, people don't know how to improve their intimate lives, and this is because they don't know themselves intimately enough. Take the time to have sex with yourself, to get to know the things you like and dislike, the things that feel the best and the things you don't really enjoy. Think about times in your past that were passionate and what felt good but also what didn't. The more you get to know yourself, the better you are able to communicate or show things to your partner. Don't be shy to try new things

and ask your partner whether or not they liked something. If this is a person that you're committed to and may want to spend the rest of your life with, it's important that this part of your relationship gives you both what you need to feel your best during something so special and when you are so vulnerable. Talking about these things openly and honestly is a part of relationships that typically goes unaddressed but can save you a lot of frustration. Letting your partner know your needs and how to meet them is a gift and I know that if you could serve your partner in a way that they loved and made them feel amazing, it would make you happier, more excited, and a passionate lover. Knowing each other's intimate needs will bring you closer and keep your passion alive.

When problems arise in a relationship, and they will arise my friend, it's important to keep them to yourself. Bashing your partner or airing their dirty laundry is a sure-fire way to end a relationship fast. When you are sharing the problems that you're experiencing, the people who care about you will influence your actions and your relationship which could make things messy. Not to mention, dear friend, it will erode the trust between you and your partner. If there is trouble or things that you don't like, write it out in a journal or say it out loud while you're on a walk. Venting on other people won't make the situation better, the only one who can do that is you. When working through problems with your partner, it's important to make sure that you are in a calm state. **We are all having different experiences even when we are experiencing the same things.** Let your partner know what you're thinking and experiencing like, "The story I'm making up in my head is that I did something to upset you. It's making me feel anxious and worried and I wanted to know if I did or if something else might be bothering you?" Communicating in this way helps your partner to understand what you're experiencing without blaming them. Talking about conflicts and problems in this way helps you to see eye to eye without the issues escalating over hurt feelings.

There are other aspects of sustaining a healthy relationship, like supporting your partner in their own personal growth. I know you have big plans and dreams of your own. Dreams that feel so big, they almost scare you. It's one thing to let your partner in on your dreams and to dream together, but your partner also needs to feel as though they are supported. Look at the ways in which you're showing up for your partner and ways that you might be falling short. Are you constantly late to dinners with their family or are you inadvertently signaling to them that their job or dreams aren't as important as yours? To maintain a relationship, it is all about what you are able to give in addition to what you receive but most of the time, we feel better when we give. It feels good to support your partner and watch them shine. Notice the ways that your partner might need support in their life and offer to help. Some people are more willing than others to have someone help support them but it's important for them to know that they can lean on you for emotional, mental, career, and family support. You two are a team and it's important for the other half of your team to be as happy and fulfilled as you are.

Once you've been in a relationship for a long while, you fall into a routine of sorts. You take the same route to and from work every day. You eat the same meals for dinner. You go the same restaurants and cafes, and you talk to the same people. Routine is comfortable and easy to get stuck in but the happiest couples who have been happy together for 30, 40, even 60 years will attest that trying new things keeps your relationship thriving. When we get stuck in our routines and rituals, our life becomes monotonous and, frankly, boring. No one here wants a boring life, a boring lover, or a boring relationship. Intentionally keep your relationship new and exciting by trying new things together. Decide between you and your partner how often you'd like to try something new and different. Some people may only want to try new things, do something expansive a handful of times a year while you may crave more adventure than that. It's okay to have different tolerances for surprise and excitement, but honor your needs to live an expansive and exciting life and bring your partner along when they're ready. Taking a

cooking class, going to a museum, traveling to a new city whether it's near or far, even staying overnight in hotel that's in your city every month could be a fun date. Certainty and routine are important to keep relationships working but spontaneity and surprise will keep things fresh and new over the years you have ahead together.

Sustaining a relationship comes down to is having the uncomfortable talks, communicating even when it feels hard, and being honest with yourself and your partner. Don't settle for an okay relationship that fizzles out year after year. Bring the passion that you want from your relationship to your relationship. Be passionate about everything, from your partner and supporting their dreams to passionate about loving them and experiencing life with them. Passion comes from you and the energy that you bring it to your honey day in and day out. Be mindful of how you're showing up and don't hold back. When you bring passion, you'll get passion back.

So, dear friend, bring it with all your might. With all your heart. Like your relationship depends on it; because it truly does.

Suggestions

1. Create a monthly date night that is permanently scheduled on your calendar. Try a new restaurant, go out for a night in the town, or do something new and unexpected. Give your date night a theme or set an intention together before heading out. Connecting in a different way will help keep the spark alive.
2. Journal every month about the way that you have been showing up in your relationship. Do you feel as though you are meeting your partner's needs? Showing them kindness and compassion regularly or have you allowed the stress of life to interfere in your relationship dynamics? Constantly check in with yourself and adjust accordingly.

DAY 17

the more
i know you
the more i feel
you deserve to be loved
more than
you have ever been.



TO EXPECT OR NOT TO EXPECT?

Dear Stranger,

Where do expectations come from? We all have them and yet, most of us don't understand how or why or where our expectations of our partner in our relationship have some to be. The truth is, many of us base our expectations of relationships on movies, television, Instagram, and from friends and family. The truth is that movies and tv are fake. 99% of social media is fake. Friends and family might have a great relationship but just because something works for them and their partner doesn't mean that it will work for you or your partner. You can't base relationships off on what you see in the movies or what you see people posting on social media. You can't understand the depth and true nature of the relationships that your friends and family members have with their partners. We have all these expectations about what we want and what we think we deserve but we don't understand that many of the things that shape our expectations aren't genuine.

I know you scroll social media and compare your relationship to other people's relationship's. You see other people post pictures of their Maldives vacations or Sunday Brunches while your partner worked late so that they could take you to a nice dinner the following weekend. Or you see a picture of your friend and their boyfriend on Instagram where you read the caption, the sweet words that her boyfriend said, you feel upset that your boyfriend doesn't do the same. You only see 1% of people's lives on social media. You can't base relationships off those pictures. So many people post cute pictures and loving captions even though both people are unhappy and too scared to be alone than to leave each other. Other people may seem happy

but fight all the time and actually hardly get along. You don't know the state of people's lives and relationships behind the screen. Establishing expectations shouldn't be about those things at all, but should come from an internal place rather than external.

Many people focus on what that person does for them, how they're treated, and what they get as opposed to looking at your expectations and establishing them from your personal values. Establish your expectations based on who you are and the intangible things that mean the most to you. If you value loyalty, respect, and love then those should be the things that you expect from a partner. Notice all the ways that your partner does adhere to those values. Sometimes, we expect that loyalty will look one way but our partner gives it to us in a different way. We expect that our partner will post our picture all over their social media instead of seeing the commitment they give you each and every day. We expect our partner to love us by posting pictures and captioning them with flowery words but we can't see the way they love us when they offer to get us a noodle soup and flu medicine when we're sick. Expectations need to come from a place of understanding who you are and the things you value, and making sure that your partner aligns with those expectations but be open minded. Just because someone doesn't do all the things you might want, that's not important. What's more important is whether or not that person lives their values the same way that you do. Establishing your expectations is a form of self-love and ensures that you are getting what you need in a reasonable way. You shouldn't throw away a great relationship over whether or not your partner is liking your Instagram posts. It needs to be based more on how you get along with one another. These expectations are not wants, but **MUSTS** and *must* be made clear upfront and early.

Just as every person has their expectations, they also have their deal breakers. Deal breakers are things that would immediately end any relationship if those lines are crossed. We all have them, we all need to face them and define what they are. This is a piece of relationship that so many

people don't consider until the issue is staring them in the face; a boundary has been crossed and now, you're forced to decide what to do. Every relationship will have dealbreakers, things that you definitely will not tolerate in your intimate relationships as you should. Deal breakers like cheating, lying, refusal to communicate, not including you in their lives or plans are all potential dealbreakers. When these things happen, having a clear boundary marked in the sand is helpful. It shows your partner that you have self-worth and aren't willing to be hurt in order for another person to feel good. These deal breakers help guide you when your emotions are caught up and invested in a person that you care about and love. Knowing that you have the power to leave a relationship behind the second that it stops serving you gives you confidence and clarity. Confidence that you know what works for you and what won't, clarity on your decisions despite how your heart is feeling.

After you've gone through and sorted out your baseline expectations and dealbreakers, you should be set to go out and live and have a happy relationship. If it were that simple, there would be many more people happily in love with their perfect partner instead of seas of people who are scared to love, afraid to get hurt, and pessimistic about love. So, my friend, why are people so unhappy even when they might be in love? We put our little, nagging, expectations on people all the time. We build our partners to be everything to us. We see our partners as perfect things; we hold them to unrealistic standards. We build up our partners in our minds to be this thing or that and so often it takes away from all that they truly are. We expect them to cook our dinners, make our lunches, clean the house, remember to walk the dog or run the dishwasher and you expect them to do it all with a smile and a curtsy but at the end of the day, they are a human just like you. You are not perfect, you have flaws and quirks that all add up to make you, you. It's not fair to burden your partner with your expectations of perfection or holding them to an unrealistic standard. It is a balance between expecting a certain level of respect and love from your relationship but when you start

to place unrealistic expectations on your partner, things can get stressful for you both.

Releasing your partner from the expectations you hold them to means allowing them to simply be who they are. Of course, you want to feel loved and supported in your relationship but trying to change someone will only lead you both to unhappiness. Try to take a step back and recognize what you are bringing to your relationship and what expectations you may be placing on your partner because you're getting too comfortable around them and start placing your views on them. Are you expecting them to cook all your meals and clean? Expecting them to rearrange their schedule in order to accommodate you last minute, expecting them to buy you flowers, post pictures, rub your feet, smile at you and chat all the time, and more. Are you expecting things that are unrealistic or is this person truly not meeting the expectations you have of your values? It's important to make the distinction between the truth and how you're interpreting your partner's behavior. It's possible that you're caught up in expectations and you're not taking the time to appreciate your partner for the beautiful human that they are.

Relationships aren't always picture perfect and they go through peaks and valleys like anything else in life. There will be busy seasons, full of growth and change and expansion individually and with one another. There will be slow seasons, full of work and routine, and sometimes, resistance. **Not every day will be magic but it's important to look for the magic in every day.** If you look hard enough, you will be able to find it and appreciate it. To love and be loved. To respect and trust to be respected and trusted. Your partner may not show love and appreciate to you in the way that you imagine, but that doesn't mean that they don't love you and show it in other ways. Look at the way your values and needs are being met because you can't set expectations just on your own views. It's always important to consider who the other person is.

If you are looking honestly without your life, and your expectations truly aren't being met, you must communicate it. Let your partner know how you're feeling and why. Having strong values that are congruent with your partner is highly important to a relationship that can withstand the test of time and trial. If your expectations still aren't being met after time, making the same violations again and again, it's time to consider what you're truly getting from your relationship. If your values aren't aligned, and someone truly isn't able to give you what you need then it's important to consider letting them go. This can make it much easier to make decisions about people because it comes down to whether or not you're willing to compromise on your values and I hope that you don't. You deserve to have a love as deep and congruent as you are. A love as profound and committed as you. It exists and it's out there. It's okay to let relationships go when they aren't serving you anymore. It's safe to let go and trust that the right person is out there for you.

Expectations are both a guiding star and a potential place for friction. As long as they are made from a place of love and positivity, from the values that run deep in your soul to being more playful and intimate. **Knowing what is and isn't really important in the grand scheme of life is a skill that not all possess.** You're not like the most. You have the discernment to know what's truly important in life and what isn't. Focus on loving the person in front of you over anything else.

They are worth it and so are you.

Suggestions

1. What is the goal of your expectations? Is it to have control and security or is to feel dignified and respected? Notice the root of the expectations you hold for others and whether or not they come from a wounded place or a healed, self-respecting place.
2. Check in to see whether or not you are meeting your own needs and expectations. It can be easy to turn the finger from yourself and start

pointing it at others first. But it's always important to check in with you first.

DAY 18

you are chasing
the idea of love
and not love actually
that's why you end up
with an illusion of love
and not love actually.



THE RED FLAGS

Dear Stranger,

Looking back at your past relationships can leave people with highly conflicted feelings. At first, people might look back angrily and longingly. As time passes, we might start to have our view change and become resentful toward that person. We find there were signs, things that we brushed off during our relationship that we shouldn't have. After more time passes, we look back on those relationships and think *I should have seen that coming!* The further we get from that relationship; we realize that things ended for a reason; the relationship wasn't as great as you thought it was. You suddenly understand why things ended and how you ended up where you are today. These red flags are typically all the ways that your partner isn't loving you and supporting you in the ways that are truly meaningful to you. These are the things that you've communicated to them over and over again, hoping that something might change but nothing really does.

We're willing to ignore some red flags because we would rather feel certain that we're not going to be alone. **Most people would rather have any partner than to have the right partner.** But that's not why you're here, my friend. You're here to have an extraordinary life and an amazing love. Having red flags in your relationship should gain your attention quickly and signal to you that it might be time to reevaluate your relationship. A person who is constantly not living up to your most important expectations in regards to loyalty, trust, respect, passion, or joy might not be a person that you should be with, wasting your time in a relationship that ultimately leads nowhere is a terrible way to live and feel every day. You deserve more than that, my

friend. A person who is elevating your life and someone who is truly committed to you.

Red flags could be when someone crosses BIG boundaries without remorse or without communication. These big boundary crosses feel like a punch in the chest, they feel like you've been violated, humiliated, and gutted. Yet, because we are in love, we compromise on our non-negotiables because you don't want to be alone. It can feel scary to leave, especially to leave someone that you might care about very much. It's far more important to give yourself a chance at true love, connection, and happiness, than it is to stay in a relationship that only hurts you. You compromise on these expectations but it's more important to be true to yourself. Big boundary crossings look like cheating, or lying. Not following through and not communicating about the important changes and things in life. These big boundary violations tend to get worse and not better, my friend. If someone is willing to hurt you over and over again, it's not you that has a problem.

I got a letter from a girl who read my first book, *Dear Stranger*, who wrote in and asked me for some advice about her relationship. She told me that she was unhappy, and she wanted to leave her partner but was afraid. When their relationship began, her partner was adoring. He would write her letters and leave them on her desk, he would call her and they would talk on the phone all night long. Then, he would call and text her all the time when she was with her friends. He always wanted to know what they were doing, it felt like every minute. He called her and when she didn't pick up because she was in the fitting room, trying on clothes, he started calling her over and over again. He texted her, calling her names, and started losing his temper. When she finally looked at her phone when they left the store, he had called her over 10 times. She apologized like crazy when she finally called him back, he flew off the handle. She tried to explain but he didn't want to listen.

She felt terrible, crying the rest of the night and into the morning. The next afternoon, he showed up at her house and apologized for flying off the handle. He bought her flowers and they made up. She said that this sort of thing didn't happen often at first. Things were really great most of the time, he was sweet and caring and her parents loved him. Then his outbursts started happening more and more. If he lost his cool, called her names, he always apologized and did something to make it up to her. She was worried that if she left he would lose his cool and, really, she loved him.

Some of these things might not seem like huge issues to you, to others, it might not seem like a big deal. Let me be clear, this is a problem and her story is littered with red flags. The reason that I can share her story is because I know it's not just her story. It's the story for a lot of boys, girls, and people. If this doesn't apply to you, I'm sure it applies to someone you know. This is not only a larger boundary violation but could also be considered a pattern of bad behavior. Patterns, or small amounts of red flags over time, become a problem in relationships when communication has really broken down between two.

Patterns of behavior; perpetually not keeping you informed about important events or dates, not being honest about people or past events, calling you names during arguments, they demand your phone is for social media passwords, or they make you feel stupid are all red flags. When people violate you in this way, it's a clear sign that they don't respect you and are only looking for a person they can manipulate. You might think it's love, you might think that the person cares so much but this is not the behavior of someone who truly cares about you and your wellbeing. This is a person who is looking to control another person because of their own wounds and hurt. It might sound harsh, but it's the truth. You know it, deep down, that you deserve better than this. You want to be in a mutually loving and supportive relationship, you want to love and give love and trust freely. Those relationships do exist, free of control of belittling and those are the types of relationships you truly deserve.

You should be able to trust your partner without hesitation. You should feel safe with your partner; physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This is the person that you spend most of your time with, you want to ensure that this person is your best friend and your second biggest supporter, the first being yourself. It's realistic to want to spend quality time with your partner and quality time with friends when your partner isn't around. You know deep down inside whether or not your relationship is merely filling a void and a need to be with someone and be loved or if you truly love them and they make your world turn. That you can trust them and love them without reservation. That is the relationship that you have always dreamed about and the relationship that you really desire is out there.

It might be the relationship you already have, it might be a relationship in the future. Don't turn a blind eye, even when you're in love. Until massive amounts of healing have been done, it is likely that the person who hurts and disrespects you will do it again. People may be able to change, but only after massive shifts in attitude, limiting beliefs, and healing. With the passage of time, and a lot of inner healing, I do believe people can change. But it's not necessarily overnight- especially if they're not ready to face their inner demons. You have done the work. You have slowly mastered the art of healing yourself and you have become much more self-aware. You deserve to be with someone who is on your playing field or working towards it. Not someone making you feel small and insignificant when you deserve to be someone's priority. Your feelings, emotions, wants, and needs matter. There are so many people that would be lucky to be with you, you only need to find them.

Suggestions

1. Write down the non-negotiables in your relationship. What are the things that, if they happen, you would leave the relationship no questions asked? Get firm about them and stick to them.

2. Notice how you *feel* after leaving an interaction with the other person. Do they leave you feeling happy, loved, and energized or do they leave you feeling sad and dejected?
3. Cut off the people who continually disrespect your boundaries, thoughts, and feelings. While it might not be egregious behavior, you shouldn't have to worry about walking on eggshells with the people that you love. You are important and should be treated accordingly.

DAY 19

sometimes love ends so fast
gives more pain than joy
that you wonder
what was the point of it all?
but sometimes
that's all we need
to remind us
that we too deserve to be loved.
that we too deserve a forever.



EMBRACING HEARTBREAK

Dear Stranger,

How do you embrace heartbreak? Listening to sad songs, watching sad movies, droning on and on while staring at old pictures of you and your ex are not the real remedies to heartbreak. This will only romanticize your pain and heartbreak. Before too long, it starts to feel good to be in pain. Pain becomes a comfortable place to be and before long you begin to find yourself in pain more and more often. Looking for ways to poke your own wound because at least you're in control of your own hurt. This is the start of your downfall. It can feel cathartic, but you can't let that take over your more logical brain and take you out of your truth. Embracing heartbreak doesn't have to be all tears and extreme pain.

You know all the ways that you've continued to prolong your pain even after a relationship has ended. You look at all the old pictures, you read all their mushy past messages and obsess over every inch of their social media. I know you hold onto those things tightly as a reminder of the past. You start to think that there is no other love that exists out in the world. You begin to start romanticizing your past relationship. You remind yourself of all the good parts of your relationship and you tend to color your memories to be a lot rosier than they may have been. We all do it and I'm sure. Don't read the past messages. Don't look at the old pictures. Don't leave them an inch in your life because that inch always rips and grows into something more, something deeper.

You curse your heartbreak. You yell up at the sky, fists clenched and a fire burning in your belly. We all know the feeling of heartbreak. Not every person we meet is meant to be in your life forever. Some people come into

our lives for a reason, to teach us a lesson, or a season, to weather the ups and downs together. Some people will be in your life forever but the truth is that most people won't be. Heartbreak is a natural part of being human, my friend. It is the consequence of human relationships. We expect that every person we meet will have a profound impact in our lives forever and it makes the heartbreak even worse when it eventually comes. Instead of holding so tightly to the expectations that you have for other people and their part in your future, love them hard now. Be present with the people you have while you have them. When it's time for you both to move on, move on with understanding that most things end at some point in time. Heartbreak is the beautiful consequence that exists when we love someone hard, when we care deeply. Without heartbreak, we may not ever truly know that what love is or how euphoric it can truly be.

Heartbreak is a gift and a teacher. Heartbreak shows us how much we truly cared about something or someone other than ourselves. I know we don't tend to like to get up close and personal with our heartbreaks because they are painful, but I implore you to start. I don't think dwelling on a past relationship is healthy or good for anyone, but looking back to gather lessons and learnings can help you grow into the kind of partner that you are proud to be. Identify the things that made you feel great in your past relationship but also the things that brought you pain, or discomfort. How could your expectations have been more realistic; how could you have been more loving and accepting of your partner? Think about your communication style and what worked well in that relationship versus the type of communication that didn't work well. Each relationship has valuable lessons to teach us if we are willing to peel back the layers and really look. Once you've been able to extract a lesson or a gift from that relationship, move on. Leave it in the past where it belongs. Send love to the person who hurt you, send love to yourself. Leave the old behind in favor for the wonder that awaits.

If I would have made exceptions on the things that really mattered to me or settled for a half-ass love, I wouldn't be as blessed with love in the abundance that I now have it. When relationships end, I know you are sitting there and beating yourself up. You are consumed with the thought that if you weren't so damaged and weren't so emotional that someone might loved you better. You play out all the what-if's like a non-stop movie reel in your mind. What if I was thinner, would they like me better? Would they have stayed if I was funnier or more outgoing? You put yourself on the chopping block and focus on your flaws and shortcomings. It's not always your fault, my friend, that relationships end. You can be the perfect partner and still have your relationship end. Relationships end all the time for all different kinds of reasons and more often than not, they don't end because of you. They end because of the expectations, wants, and needs of the other person. Those are all things that are outside of your control. You can't make the wrong people stay no matter how hard you try. So, my friend, stop trying so damn hard. You are worthy of love just for being yourself. You are incredible and magnificent just as you are, and you have so much love to give the world. Embrace yourself and the right person will lovingly embrace you back.

Healing from heartbreak takes everyone a different amount of time. Some people are able to process their emotions and move on from their past relationships in a month and for some people it may take a year. The point is that everyone will process and heal from their heartbreak at a different rate. If you are actively looking to heal, there are a lot of activities that can help. Take yourself out on a date by going to see a movie, sitting at the bar and grabbing a bite to eat. Spend time pursuing your interests and investing in yourself instead of spending your money on another person. Take the time to journal and discover new things about yourself. Journaling can include writing down things in your life that you're grateful for, writing your biggest goals and desires and really fleshing out the life of your wildest dreams. Journal about your feelings when things get hard can help you to process the thoughts and feelings that you have when they start to

cloud your judgement and mind. Surrounding yourself with the love of friends and family can also help you to acclimate to your single life. Get involved with your friends and family and reinvest yourself in their lives. Intimate relationships are not the only source of love in your life and it's important to be grateful for the love that exists within your friend group and family as well.

Heartbreak is not the end, but it is the beginning. The beginning of finding a better love. Of finding your soulmate and partner for life. You won't born with heartbreak, and you won't die from heartbreak. Look back on your love and your life and find the lessons. Learn what you can learn and leave the rest in your past where it belongs.

Let yourself feel.

Let yourself grieve and cry.

Then brush yourself off and stand to face the future.

Suggestions

1. Make a list of the things your heartbreak taught you about yourself and relationships.
2. Appreciate the relationship for what it was. Thank the person for the time that you spent together and show them gratitude.
3. Fill up your time. So often when we are with someone in a committed relationship, we spent a lot of time with them. Fill up some of that time trying new things are getting out of the house. Heartbreak can make us feel isolated and lonely, but it doesn't have to. Surround yourself with people and things that fill you with joy and make you feel your best.

DAY 20

i know you are terrified
to end the love
you thought
would stay forever
but trust me
this ending won't mean
the end of you.



GETTING OUT OF TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

Dear Stranger,

Toxic relationships have recently become a cultural phenomenon. Having a ‘toxic’ person in your life wasn’t really even language that existed outside of traditional therapy. Our parents’ generation didn’t talk about toxic relationships, people, or environments. Most of our parents don’t really acknowledge the culture of toxicity that so many of us know and understand today. Our parents’ generation got married and were expected to stay married forever, despite toxic traits of their partner or toxic situations that people found their way into. Nowadays, you’ve probably heard the term toxic work environment, toxic relation, toxic people. It’s a term that you’re familiar with but toxic is always something that we use to describe something outside of ourselves. It’s not something people are comfortable using to describe the state of their own lives or relationships yet it’s more likely than not that you have toxic people or places in your life.

I’m sure you’re thinking now that maybe that is true for some people but its definitely not true for *you*. You may think that you’re different, or an exception from most of the people on the planet. I implore you to think about the things that your partner or ex-partner ever did that made you feel scared. Did they yell or raise their voice after you’ve asked them to please speak more calmly? Did they throw dishes or slam doors? Has a friend ever talked about you behind your back or tried to steal happiness from you? These things are all toxic traits that other people may possess. When we truly love our friends, partners, and family, we try to explain away this toxic behavior. Or, when we confront the other person about it, nothing changes. Our thoughts, feelings, and needs are disregarded by the people who are

supposed to care about us the most and that never feels good. Don't try to explain away their behavior or allow them to make excuses for the way that they act.

Fear is not love. If your partner or parent is making you feel intimidated or fearful, it's not a healthy place for you to live in, physically or emotionally. Does the other person have an anger problem, flying off the handle and exploding over little things? Putting the dishes into the dishwasher the wrong way triggers an angry outburst. You feel as though you need to walk around on eggshells, always trying to be careful not to trigger their intense feelings. You know the signs. First the frustration kicks in, slamming doors, muttering and yelling loudly. You can feel the frustration building, a snowball rolling down the side of a mountain, gaining speed and momentum faster than you can try to process and fix. You know that you can't fix it or stop it even though you desperately try to. You try to make sure that you do everything right, that you anticipate their needs, you adjust your schedule to make them happy because you don't want to upset them. Avoiding another person's anger is not living a happy relationship. Spending all your time trying to appease another person's feelings is not a full and happy relationship and it won't lead you to a full and happy life.

Controlling behavior is not love. Friends can be controlling, family can be manipulative, and partners can all be controlling. People are controlling for a whole host of reasons, mainly as a way to protect themselves. The most controlling people are people who simply want to try and avoid pain in their life and gain more certainty. They think that holding on tighter, controlling everything will mean that you can't leave them, that you won't want to leave them. Even though their intentions aren't bad, it doesn't mean that this behavior is acceptable. You should be able to do the things you want, spend time with the people you care about, and freely speak your mind. Someone who is controlling might not want you to spend time with other people, might make you feel guilty for taking time to yourself and they expect to be the center of your world. **Caring about other people means that**

they will be a priority to you and a priority in your life, but you should be the most important in your life. Controlling behavior happens when we allow it to happen. When we are the ones giving in and compromising all the time to make our partner happy, we don't feel happy and fulfilled. Controlling behavior will never leave you happy and will never make you feel loved.

In toxic relationships and friendships and partnerships you won't feel empowered to communicate safely. So many people brush this off as a personality quirk or something small. But not feeling free to communicate your deepest and most vulnerable thoughts to other can make you feel misunderstood and alone. You won't always agree with the people around you and that's okay, but you should always feel like your thoughts and feelings are encouraged and valid. The people around you should want to hear about your side of situations that effect you and your relationship. You shouldn't have to hide your true thoughts and feelings for fear that you won't be heard. That you won't be validated. That you won't be met with love and compassion. The people you love and the people who love you will always welcome your communication and want to hear about all the workings of your brain. They want to know you and respect you deeply, they shouldn't be threatened because you think differently than they do. Communication is the foundation of every healthy relationship and without it, you won't ever have the relationship that you dream of.

Getting out of a toxic relationship can leave people with a mix of feelings. I can't tell you when the right time is to get out of a toxic relationship. People will stay in toxic relationships much longer than they have to because their self-esteem is impacted by all this negativity that surrounds them. But that's not you and that's not your story, my friend. You are empowered. You have learned to love yourself and have learned to choose thoughts and beliefs that lift you up and enhance your life. Even still, leaving toxic relationships is hard. You'll tell yourself that there is history, that there was love there in the past or you hope that there will be love again in the future. In the middle

of romanticizing the past and yearning for a future that doesn't even exist, you will miss what is happening right now in the present moment. You can't base a relationship off the way it used to be or how it *might* be in the future. You need to make hard decisions based off the way your relationships are at this exact moment. Decide. Decide whether or not spending any more time with a toxic person is really worth it. Is it really worth sacrificing your mental and emotional health for? I can't tell you when it's time to leave, only you can decide that for yourself. But I can tell you that facing your fears and removing yourself from toxic people and situations will set you and your soul free.

Once you decide, you need to remove yourself from the environment right away. Get yourself away from the toxic persona and completely block them from your life. Block them on social media, block them from your phone. Toxic people do not take well to being left or rejected, especially toxic people. Taking a stand and owning your autonomy is scary to them and threatens their own sense of safety. Toxic people can respond in all sorts of negative ways, calling you names, making you feel guilty, threatening to hurt themselves because of you, all sorts of terrible things. You don't need to continue to take responsibility for the thoughts and feelings of toxic people. You need to care more about your own mental health than staying available for others. Delete the pictures of you and your ex-friend, lover, or family member. Don't leave any window open for the other person to crawl back into. Tell your friends that you are cutting off that person and that you don't want to talk about that toxic person or situation. Completely eliminating the toxic person from your life is needed and the most successful people in life make hard decisions and stick with them.

Do it for yourself. Your mental health. Your quality of life.

Do it for your future relationship.

For the family you hope to have.

For the love you deserve to find.

Suggestions

1. Decide to take action. Leaving a toxic relationship takes a lot of courage and strength, but you also need to have a plan. What happens when you leave? Where will you stay? Who are people who will help you to feel safe? Come up with a plan, count to three, and make it happen.
2. Block the other person on all mediums. No calls. No texts. No peeking at their Instagram and no texting them either. Toxic people know that they hold some degree of power over you and it's your job to shut down the power imbalance and take it back by not giving them even an edge back into your life.

DAY 21

the first time
i fell in love with the moon
was from my mom's lap,
outside a broken window
inside a broken family
at an age
i barely remember.
the first time
i believed in hope
was when my mom whispered
with tears in her eyes,
the moonlight protects you.



DEALING WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Dear Stranger,

There are more relationships in life than just your romantic relationships. Romantic relationships are important because those are the people who you are typically spending the most time with. Every day at home, every weekend that comes and goes. Whenever you're not at work or spending time alone, you find yourself with your partner. It's been said that you become most like the people who you spend most of your time with. It's important to make sure that you have quality relationships with your friends and your family. To make sure that you're happy with how you're showing up for the other people that you have in your life.

So many of our deep-rooted patterns form with our family; the way they act, react, and the state that we expect them to be in are all patterns of being. Gen Z kids who are grown up now into adults feel as though their parents don't love them. There are swarms of kids in the last few generations who have grown up and feel like they weren't loved as kids. They don't understand that their parents are doing the best with the knowledge and the skills that they have, that their parents gave to them. Your parents didn't know what love was from their parents or their parents before them. Your parents might not be vocal about loving you and they might not show it physically, but every parent has their way to say that they love you. Parents struggle to tell their kids that they love them but each parent will have their own way. Your mom will cook your favorite meal. Your dad might come down a little harder on you, pushing you to be your best. They care but they don't always know how to show it. Your parents are doing the best they can with the things they learned from their families.

You worry that you won't be understood by your parents. That they won't listen to you or give you the time of day when you decide to finally speak up about the things that you want out of your own life. Your parents would be much happier for you to take the conventional route. Where you go to school, get a safe government job that will pay you well and get married. Your parents have spent years trying to control you, telling you what to do with your life. Maybe, instead of thinking that your parents don't love you and that you're a reject from your family, you can think of your parent's point of view. They love you and they only want the best for you. They grew up in a different time and a different place. These are the things that your parents had to do to be successful in life, to have a better than they had. They have lived through a different time of life. Your parents may not understand you, or what you do, but they want you to be happy and fulfilled. They want you to live your best and fullest life. They are only sharing their opinion about what they think is best but it doesn't mean that you need to take their opinion as fact. It's your job to show your parents, respectfully, the world that you are living in and want to help create.

We can't choose our family. Not the people we're born to and not the cousins or uncles we have in this life. I believe that we were all born into our families to learn a specific lesson, to have a specific start to life that would put us on the path that we needed to be on in order to grow and evolve the most. Honor your parents. Honor their rules, their opinions, their values and traditions. You don't need to yell and stomp your feet because your parents disagree with you. This is how your parents have lived for their entire lives, give them time to learn and understand. You can get your point across by speaking your truth and living your life based on what is in your control, and they will come along as long as you're showing them love and respect. Communicate with them and hold faith that they only want you to be happy.

There may be toxic family members as well. It is difficult to avoid toxic relationships that are blood because you don't always get the choice about

spending time with them or seeing them. If there are family members that you aren't able to avoid, maintain a distance for yourself to stay away. Come up with a plan to avoid having to socialize or talk to them. Getting support from other family members may be helpful. Even if you can't express yourself to the person who is toxic, trying to communicate to the person who is toxic might not feel safe and that's okay. Communicate with a person who is close to the person who is toxic in your life. See if they can get the message through to the toxic person that you have had trouble with. If the toxic person is that troubling to you, it's important to get out of the environment that you're in as soon as possible. Live alone, find a roommate if needed, figure out what needs to be done in order to find your own place, and get out of the environment that's bringing you down.

The key to healthy and happy family is just like any other relationship, it needs energy and love and patience and understanding. Your most important relationships need energy and curiosity. Look at what will help you to be closer than looking at the things that threaten to drive a wedge between you. Friendship is another relationship that needs your love, and time, and attention. We sometimes expect that our friends will always be there but if we don't take the time to nurture those friendships, they tend to become stale and ultimately fade away. We all have our different pockets of friends; friends we've known since we were kids, friends from work, the friends that we find inspiring and the friends who are lazy and unmotivated. Good friends aren't always the people that you have known the longest or the people who you were close to in the past. Good friends are people who always have your back. Who you could call in a second when and if you ever needed them and they would be there for you without a question? You don't need a ton of friends in your life, you don't need friends who are only hanging out with you because of your money or status. You do need a few really great friends; friends who challenge you to grow and change and are right there alongside you in your life journey.

It's important to take inventory of your life and the friends who you spend the most time with. These are the people that influence you the most; your thoughts, your inner language, and your energy. Fake friends are people that spend time with you when no one else is available. They don't really listen to you when you talk about the things you like or the goals you're after. Fake friends are the ones that make you feel bad about yourself or pressure you into doing things because it's 'cool'. The best thing that you will ever do for yourself is love yourself enough to walk away from the people who don't leave you feeling your best. You deserve loving friendships. Your friends are an extension of your love within yourself and set the tone for all of your loving relationships. Friends should make you feel great and empowered. They are the people that you have learned to trust and respect. These people should be the ones holding you down or keeping you back in life.

Not all friendships are perfect. Just like other types of relationships, there is bound to be friction at times. Misunderstandings between people happen often and, sometimes, when it comes to friends, we expect that they will always be there. We expect that our friends will love us hard and unconditionally and it sometimes leads to us taking advantage of the people we care about most. Or, the natural progression of life or distance has forced you to drift apart from the ones you used to be the closest to. It's easy to lose track of days, weeks, months, or years when you are busy with progression and making this life outstanding. When you don't live around the corner from your best friend, or you end up pushing back your monthly happy hours back to every other month and then every three or four months after that. Before long you realize that you haven't seen or heard from your closest friends in years. When a friendship has been broken and it's a friendship that you have found to be beautiful, respectful, and loving, it's important to reestablish those connections.

People don't try to mend broken or lost friendships because of their own ego's. You don't want to be the one to reach out. You don't want to be the

first one to apologize. You worry that you'll be rejected yet again by another person if your friend decides that they aren't ready to have you back into their lives. If you want to have a friendship with a certain person, waiting around for them to reach out to you only guarantees that you won't hear from them. They are their own person with their own lives. If you want to make anything happen in this world, you can't sit around and wait for someone else to encourage you or take the initiative for you, my friend. You must own your mistakes and reach out for yourself. Because you never truly know how someone will react unless you decide to give it a shot. Push your ego aside, reach out to the friend you miss and apologize. Apologize for whatever you did in the past that was flawed for things that you wish you had done better. Let the other person know that your friendship is important to you and thank them for all the love and support they have given you in the past. Whether or not they want to continue to put energy toward their friendship with you is entirely up to them. You can't have a one sided friendship or relationship. If all is forgiven and they want to rekindle their friendship with you, you need to make a concerted and consistent effort to keep them in your life. Make regular phone calls, commit to seeing one another regularly and keeping in contact. The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your relationships with the people who matter most to you, friends included.

Making new friends can sound like a terribly daunting task. I know you're reading this and thinking, *if I'm going to make friends that means I need to TALK to people*, and you would be correct. We are so scared that other people might reject us that it keeps us from ever opening up to others. It's much easier to make friends than it is to meet romantic partners. Get involved at an animal sanctuary and volunteer your time there if you love animals. I know for a fact that when you do that, you will meet other people who also love animals and, BOOM. You already have something in common with the other volunteers. Join a soccer team and start playing with new people once a week if you love athletics and staying active. At the very least you'll be getting great exercise and meeting other people who like to

exercise and play. Putting yourself in the right environments to make friends will ultimately lead you to making new friends. You have nothing to love when you start putting yourself out there because if someone doesn't want to be your friend than it is truly their loss. Show your friends and other people how much you care and don't hold back. Be yourself and the right people will be attracted to you and your energy.

Making friends is great and having a healthy friendship with people that you know and trust is a beautiful thing. Friendship can present itself in all different ages, shapes, colors, and ethnicities and it's important to be open minded and try to find diverse people to spend your time with. Let's say you already have that core group of people around you, they're diverse, creative, risk-takers, and loving people but still you want to enhance your friendship. It's important to not only love your friends and be available to listen to them and help them with their challenges and problems but also to actively elevate and lift them up. Support their interests and be candid with them when they need to hear the truth. Loving you friends means giving to your friends. Giving your friends the gift of your time, attention, support, and love is the true treasure of all relationships.

Your friends and your family love you unconditionally.

Love them back with that in mind.

Suggestions

3. What qualities in your family or friends do you struggle to love and accept? Notice that you may have those traits inside of you as well. People outside of us typically mirror our inner experience. When you learn to better love and accept those traits within yourself, you are better able to love those traits in others.
4. Practice holding space for others. Holding space is when you listen to someone without responding to the things that they say. It can be helpful to repeat the things that people tell you back to them in your

own words, but holding space means that you are witnessing someone else expressing their thoughts and feelings without imparting yourself into the matter. The more we are able to simply hold space for the people we love, the more we are able to remove ourselves from the situation and the better we feel.

DAY 22

why do we love?
to feel the sun
shining in our bodies
to feel the stars
exploding in our hearts.



TO MARRY, OR NOT TO MARRY?

Dear Stranger,

In recent years, marriage has changed a lot. Some people are waiting to get married until they are well into their 30's or if they even want to get married at all. Depending on where you're located in the world and the way that you were raised, you might have a vastly different view on marriage than the millions of other people in the world. While some people find the tradition of marriage dated and insulting, many others find beauty in the union. Some people find it frivolous to spend boatloads of money on a ceremony while others cannot imagine celebrating without their community around them. Because views on marriage differ so greatly from one person to the next, it's important that you're crystal clear on your views so that you can be crystal clear with what you do and do not want for your relationship down the line.

People who are adamantly against marriage tend to believe that being married ties you down or holds you back in life. I've heard from many fans all over the world who are worried that marriage means the end of their freedom and independence. I know it can seem easier to not get super involved or attached to someone who might not be around forever or who might try to change you. It seems like the easier thing to do; casually date, hook up with random people, and just have fun. You move from person to person without forming any real bond or connection. You might be thinking, why do I need marriage when I can be a bachelor, doing and having whatever I want, whenever I want it? If this sounds like you, I urge you to pause and think about the life that you're living and all of the things

you could be missing out on by having a healthy marriage with someone you respect and enjoy.

Whether you've made this decision consciously or have simply followed along with the 'bachelor' culture that is plaguing young people, it will not lead you to a life of happiness and fulfillment. You feel lonely, even when you're with friends. You feel like you don't have a larger purpose in life and can't seem to figure out what comes next. Living this way keeps you stuck at a certain level in your life. Unable to reach the next threshold of love and joy that can exist. We can only be so happy and so fulfilled on our own. We cannot expand our own joy, expand our own love, and happiness when we don't share it day in and day out with the people that we love. Life isn't about how much you can accomplish on your own. There's no extra bonus at the end of life to the people who did it without anyone's love, support, or help. All you get is a life that's filled with meaningless material things instead of thriving and deep relationships with the people who mean the most to you. Deciding not to get married means accepting these as consequences for the rest of your life.

Other people reject marriage because of how heavily it is pressed upon them. Perhaps, my friend, your friends have all recently gotten engaged or married. Your parents have been casually dropping hints about setting up an arranged marriage that haven't been all that casual. I know you're tempted to take them up on their offer because you're scared. You're scared that being alone now means being alone forever. That maybe there is not one out there who's meant for you, or if there is then maybe you'll never cross their path. You're turned off by dating because you feel like no one is really looking for a genuine connection anymore. Your family puts an okay match in front of you that seems safe. You might even feel as though your family is forcing an arranged marriage onto you because you're happily single or just starting to date seriously at the age of 26 or 27. This can hold you back, especially as a female. But you are more than an object to be won or a small part of a big picture. You are your own person and should be respected as

such. And you deserve the kind of love that you crave; that sets you on fire and feels like home. Don't let society, friends, or your family pressure you into something that isn't *your* something.

You can't pick the family that you are born into, but marriage is a chance to curate the family you surround yourself with every day. Your wife or husband becomes your partner and your confidant. They are there on the days you need support, and you are there for them when they need you too. Marriage helps us to get to know ourselves on a deeper level as well. When we're married, our flaws or struggles can feel as though they get amplified because something isn't just affecting you and only you and more. And as scary as that can be, it also means that the opposite is true. Having a partner expands your joy, abundance, happiness, and yes, even love. Knowing someone deeply and sharing your life with them teaches you how to communicate better. How to accept people more and be more patient. Marriage gives you a safe container to grow and try and fail and try again. Encourages you to be vulnerable with your feelings to know that it's safe to be yourself, no matter what that feels and looks like every day.

When deciding whether or not you want to get married; whether you're in a serious relationship now or are just getting prepared to attract your ideal partner, it is important to keep your family in the loop. I know you hear your mom's voice saying that you can't marry outside your cast and you feel the heat coming from your fathers piercing glare. You don't want to disappoint them. You don't want to let them down but they don't understand. Your parents can't see that the times have changed. They are still stuck in their old ways. Just remember that your parents only ever want the best for you, they just have their own idea of what is best for you and that idea is probably greatly different than your own. Give your parents time to adjust but don't be afraid to be firm in your decisions to marry or not to marry. Don't let other people influence your decision but once you decide whether or not you want to be with your partner forever, it's important to let your parents know.

No one likes to be blind-sided and that includes parents. Not every parent is going to adore your parent right off the bat and many times, it can be hard for parents to open up their trust to someone new especially when they have their own expectations for you in regard to the caste or maybe gender of your partner. It can be a tense and emotional topic of conversation but don't shy away from having it. Having a respectful conversation with your parents about your level of commitment to your partner. Let your family know the reasons as to why you love your partner and explicitly tell them the reasons you want to marry them. Talking to your parents in a mature way will show them that this person is important to you and ask for them to simply get to know your partner before passing judgement on them. Don't force a relationship between your parents and your partner but let them know the relationship is there if they want it.

Marriage is not something to be taken lightly, dear stranger. It is one of the biggest life decisions that a person can make. You shouldn't enter into a marriage unless you are certain that you have chosen the right person. You don't want to spend the rest of your life with someone who doesn't make your life better, and easier to handle. Just as a relationship takes conscious work and energy from both people, a marriage does too. Just because you decide to get married, it doesn't mean that either person stops putting in the effort that they once did. I know that you might be feeling unsure or uncertain. The idea of committing to someone for the rest of your life is both exciting and terrifying. I know that you worry about whether or not your partner will be there for you when you need them most or that they will still love you years from now. That is the risk you must be willing to take for love. To trust that you can fall freely into the arms of your honey and that they will be there to catch you.

I have heard from many of you from all over the world. You want to know whether or not you should get married or you want to know how to tell if you're ready. I know you have struggled to see the benefit of marriage and the people around you don't seem to be happy in their marriages 20, 30

years down the line. I know it makes you hesitant, to trust someone and to feel like you can truly open up. I hear your thoughts, mulling over marriage and whether or not it's really for you. The big commitment, trusting another person with your money, your family, and time. Time being something you don't want to waste, right? You don't want to put in all the time, energy, and love into someone who may leave you in the end. The thought of losing love, your marriage, and your family sounds worse than never committing to marriage in the first place. But you will never know unless you try, my friend.

I have found that when my relationship started to develop, the commitment to one another happened organically. The more I got to know my partner, the more I wanted to know her. The more I wanted to show her how committed I was to her, to our relationship, and to our future together. I found myself wanting to organically share my dreams and life plans with her. The plans that were once all about me, my goals, my aspirations became ours. I wanted to include her in the plans for my life not today, next month, or even next year but for five and ten years down the line. I shared everything with her, from my monetary goals to how many children I wanted to have. We wanted to be vulnerable with one another, wanted to learn from one another deeply and share the intimate details of our lives with one another. We didn't have to force the conversation and it wasn't something we had planned to talk about. We just knew that we had these two beautiful lives that we wanted to merge together.

When deciding whether or not you want to marry your partner, you need to discuss all the critical factors that will influence your relationship long term. It's important to make sure that your partner even wants to get married. You might be wanting one thing and your partner might be wanting something entirely different. Ensure that you and your partner are looking for the same level of commitment is an important start. You need to discuss your relationship with money, savings, and debt. Not just about where you are now but also where you want to be financially in a year or

five. Discuss whether or not you want to have children with your partner. Deciding whether or not you want to have kids is a huge decision and not something you want to be surprised by after you say “I do”. These are foundational conversations to be having with your partner when deciding whether or not you want to marry your partner.

It's important for you to discuss your goals and aspirations with one another, my friend. When you are getting deeper into a committed relationship, you're deeply in love and looking to take your relationship to the next level, you must discuss your dreams. Talking about where you see your career going and what you hope to accomplish in your life. Be upfront and clear about the things that are the most important to you and ensure your partner knows that those things need to remain a part of your life. Set personal goals for yourself and share them with your partner. Include them on all aspects of your life, especially the things happening outside your home. Communicating about the future ensures that you and your partner are aligned in your visions for the future. Being compatible physically is one thing but being compatible mentally and emotionally is another thing entirely.

Yet, getting physical is an important part of any relationship. Getting personal about the things that you want in the bedroom and physical affection is so important because people with two different sex drives who don't communicate is a recipe for disaster. I know, you might think its taboo to talk about intimacy with your partner but it's an incredible part of a relationship. Talking about the things you like, how often you'd like to be intimate, and other ways to stay connected. Sometimes being physically intimate can be snuggling before falling asleep, but you won't know unless you have the conversation. What are the things that really get you in the mood and what are the things that make you roll over and think “maybe not tonight”. Be honest with yourself and with your partner about getting physical because if you hold back in this area, you are sure to be dissatisfied for a lifetime. Your partner wants to be a good lover, wants to make you

feel good as much as you want to do the same for them. You deserved to be loved in all your beautiful forms, including physically.

Before getting married, my friend, it is important to notice how you & your partner fight or what happens when you disagree. Being with someone for the rest of your life who calls you names or puts you down when you argue doesn't sound like a recipe for long-term bliss. Someone who screams at you when you disagree might not be the person you want to be with forever. Life is not easy and there will be many challenges that come with all of the blessings that you will experience. When you and your partner disagree, it's important that you have healthy and productive disagreements. Remember, people aren't perfect but you and your partner are on the same team. It's not about being right, it's about being in love. It's about navigating conflict in a way that brings you and your partner closer together instead of pushing you further away. Communication skills are important, especially when you are working to navigate life with someone by your side. Always communicate looking to understand your partner and where they're coming from. Make sure that you marry your best friend, someone who you can disagree with but still love deeply. Someone who is playful but can be serious when they need to be. Find someone who disagrees with you in a way that makes you feel loved and respected because you deserve to feel loved always, even when your opinions are different.

Once you decide to get married, don't change. Keep dating each other. Keep surprising one another. Keep the passion alive. It's not just about being married its about giving to someone for the rest of your life. Giving the same level of love and passion through the years that you gave in the start of your relationship. It's ensuring that your partner knows they are the most important thing to you and that no matter what happens, they are an important part of your life. Travel, explore, and try new things together. Once you have kids it's necessary to continue to dedicate time just for one another. When you treat your partner with the same excitement, passion, and joy that you had at the beginning of the relationship after years

together, you will still find ways to be excited, passionate, joyful, and in love forever. You deserve a marriage that is bursting with happiness and love. Not just for now but for the rest of your life. Great marriages don't get that way by accident. It takes time and intention and trust. Be prepared to put work and energy into your relationship but also don't hesitate to also marvel in wonder at the state of your relationship.

This is how you keep that love that you deserve for the rest of your life.

Suggestions

1. Make a list of all the things that you think might change with marriage. Make a list of the things that you do not want to change once you get married. Discuss these things with your partner to make sure that they are willing and able to give you the things you want and need.
2. Visualization helps. Sit back, close your eyes and visualize your future routine, how does it look like when you wake up next to your partner every morning versus seeing daily sunrise without anyone in the room apart from you. Imagine saying YES to marry will make your life easier or not.
 - Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Are you physically as well as emotionally in love with your partner?
 - What happens when you have an argument with your partner?
 - Do you share similar core values?
 - Would you be able to put your partner's needs above your wants?
 - Would you be faithful and trustworthy to your partner?

DAY 23

you made me fall
in love with love
and for that
i owe you everything.



GROWING TOGETHER

Dear Stranger,

If a relationship is not actively growing in some way, it is likely to be dying. Growing individually is important but as a partner in your relationship is even more important. You have made incredible growth this last year even though it was hard and even though, at times, it didn't feel like you were growing at all. That's the thing about life, it happens to us when we are busy living it. Take time to notice the ways in which you've grown as a person and think about the ways you could still improve. This is the same idea that you want to bring to your intimate relationships. You want to be taking inventory of your intimate relationship all of the time to see what is going well and what you, as a couple, are really great at versus the things that you could be better at. Understanding and practicing this is hard though. Many people have a tough time being radically honest with themselves and have an even harder time being honest with their partner. It's natural to want to defend yourself in the face of an accusation of not doing or being enough for your partner but it's important to remember that we often get too clouded by our own expectations and judgements that we resist growth. We resist change. Instead, open your arms to the endless possibilities that await as your life and path unfolds.

When it comes to any kind of relationship or partnership, communication is key. Without candid and vulnerable communication, growth is all but unattainable. Growth between two people happens when they are willing to talk about not only their positive thoughts and hopes but the negative ones too. To talk about things that shaped them as a child. To talk about the things that shaped that as a person. To use conflict as a means of growing a

closer connection with someone as opposed to letting conflict push you apart because of ego or pride. Communicate with your partner often about their needs and whether or not they're being met. The only way to know if you need to improve is by knowing that you need to improve. You may think you're doing a great job meeting your partners need when, in reality, they've been feeling neglected for quite some time. Not everyone is comfortable outright saying what their needs are but you also don't need to play detective. Communicate often and trust that when you ask your partner to step up, they will. Let your partner know the things you are working on individually and also try to be candid with your partner about whether or not your needs are being met in return. This will always be in a constant state of flux and it will always be changing for you both which is why communication is key.

Learn to coexist. Not every moment of your relationship is going to be breathtakingly exciting or full of intense passion. Sometimes life is playful and sometimes life falls into a routine or pattern. Not every moment needs to be bursting with activity or pulsing with conversation. In relationships sometimes we feel as though we need to entertain our partner or always have something interesting or insightful to say but this isn't realistic. Anytime you spend a lot of time with someone, it's natural that there will be lulls in conversation. That there will be days or sometimes maybe even weeks where you don't have a ton to talk about and that is okay. Learning to coexist with another person is hard but when the skill is mastered it allows both you and your partner a chance to grow. You don't feel pressured to be 'on' all the time and you can just be yourself. Someone that gets bored of you in the hum-drum daily life is someone who is easily bored with themselves. You deserve love from your partner even when your world is quiet, and you don't have much to talk about. Letting yourself relish the silence and simply exist is a treat and a treasure.

Before you met your partner, I'm sure you had hobbies that you dabbled in from cooking to gardening to white water rafting, it's healthy to go through

phases with new hobbies. People I have met in person and online sometimes tell me that they are threatened when their partner takes an interest in a new hobby, especially if it's something that they can't or don't want to necessarily join in on. It can feel like the time that you had with your partner is getting cut shorter. Like they're choosing something else over you but, my friend, I assure you that's not at all the case. It's healthy to have hobbies in common but also to have some that are different, but the truth is that the longer you're with someone, the more likely you are to see hobbies come and go. It's important to always honor your partner's interest and hobbies. It can be fun to get involved and try new things together, of course, but getting involved could also look like asking them questions about it. You never know what hobby might be something that holds their interest for a long time and showing interest in it, even if you're not participating in it with them, will help to keep you connected.

Traveling together is a great way to stay connect to your partner and continue to grow with one another. When you travel you are creating new memories together that will last a lifetime. Trying new things together and experiencing new places and people together. Traveling gives your quality time with your partner to be in the present moment. It can be hard to stay connected when life gets busy and priorities shift but when you travel with your honey, it gives you permission to slow down and savor the moment that you're in. To relax and unwind together without having the responsibilities of keeping up a home or taking care of children. Even if traveling together isn't possible because of your budget or a global pandemic, a staycation is just a fun and effective for making quality time to connect with one another. Spend the night at a local hotel after going out to dinner. Having a change of scenery is always a little nicer when you don't have to worry about being interrupted by one of your babies who will inevitably need something before you night is over. Just remember that your relationship is what made building a family of your own possible. Children are a gift to be treasured and staying home sometimes is wonderful, but you need to continue to nurture your relationship with one another. Keep your

relationship growing with one another, independent of your children who will stay for a while before going to live their own lives. Take time to treasure each other and make memories together because your relationship is the foundation for everything else in life.

Assume the best of your partner and if you do disagree about something, learn from the argument. Assuming the best of your partner means that you always assume that they're trying their best to be their best. And giving them grace when they admit to being off their game. Assume that your partner is trying to be the best version of themselves but don't be afraid to point out when they're not. You're also going to take missteps and make mistakes along the way. When it happens, admit it and apologize sincerely. Look to understand how to do better and be better. To make the other person happy, yes, but to also learn and grow. To balance both who you are and who your partner sometimes needs you to be. It's growing emotionally and mentally as you learn how to navigate life in a fulfilling and meaningful way with a person that you love.

Make love with your words and actions as much as with your body. Someone once defined foreplay as any time from the moment you finish one intimate moment and when you initiate the next. You are always romancing your partner with your words and actions. If you're not romancing them, it's likely you're pushing them the other direction. Romance can be taking out the trash or bringing home a small trinket that made you think of your honey. It can be making them their favorite meal on a special night.

Always go the extra mile. You should always be trying to outdo yourself. It's in going the extra mile that shows your partner consistently over time how important you are to them. When you go the extra mile, you're constantly proving your commitment. Why not do a little bit extra that ultimately has the huge payoff of making your honey happy and feeling safe and supported? The little extra things are what set you apart and keep you

and your partner growing together. Your partner will naturally want to give back to you when they are feeling taken care of. Love, remember, is an energy of giving. Going the extra mile will always mean that someone will be willing to go the extra mile for you in return. You deserve a love where someone is willing to go above and beyond for you but in order to get it, you need to be giving it.

Don't fear change. Change is easily the hardest part of a relationship to navigate. It can feel scary, knowing that the person you're with today may be vastly different than the person you end up with ten years from now. We get so caught up in wanting to keep things the way they are for fear that we will lose them. That when you and your partner start growing and getting outside your comfort zone often means that there will be discomfort. You will likely need to face a lot of fear and limiting beliefs head on as your relationship grows and morphs from one thing into something else entirely. The key is not to resist the change but get comfortable with inviting it into your life. Look at the wonder that surrounds you and fall in love with your life every day all over again. Become a curious tourist, ask questions to yourself and your partner and fall in love with each change all over again. We have the luxury of being many things in this life and as we grow, change is inevitable. Don't fear it; accept it as a part of life and continue forward. Falling in love with each version of yourself and each version of your partner is the key to sustaining a growing relationship. When you allow your partner to grow and change and spread their wings over time, you will have a more loving relationship. A relationship built on trust, understanding, and support. This is the love that you deserve, and this is how you make it last forever.

Suggestions

1. Make and set goals as a couple. Check in with each regularly on the progress you are making individually and collectively toward your goals.

2. Participate in workshops together. Whether it's specifically about building up an already great relationship or working through challenges that pop up over the span of a lifetime, it is helpful to turn to the experts. Look to a relationship coach or program that you can both take together. Learn more from other people's wisdom about what works and what doesn't work.

DAY 24

you ask, what's love?

i ask, what's not?

– *hopeless romantic*



BELIEVING IN THE GOOD

Dear Stranger,

Living in the world today can feel like everyone has a hidden agenda. If someone is nice to you, after a while, you begin to wonder *why*. When you feel like the world is out to get you, you feel like everyone's actions aren't genuine. That people are only being nice to you to use you for something. Maybe you've felt like you've been used before. That you gave and gave and gave kindness and time and energy only to have the other person not be there when you need someone most. I know it can feel oppressively scary. It takes knowing your worth on the inside to be confident enough to take a leap and trust the world because the world has let you down before. But that was then, and this is now. You know that you are worthy of being surrounded by the good things in the world and receiving good from the Universe. You are strong enough to trust others because you trust yourself. Because you have trustworthy people and relationships surrounding you. More often than not, people can be good. Most people in the world are, in fact, kind, compassionate, and empathetic people and if you believe that they exist, you are more likely to find them.

Yet, negativity makes so much of the noise. It can feel as though there are a million things to worry about and be concerned with. News headlines are made to sell so they cover the front pages with headlines filled with doom and gloom. Warnings of the things that lurk in the dark, around every corner that threaten your safety. Threaten your survival. The media and people who designed popular technology tools want to grab your attention by scaring you, jarring you. The social media posts and news that gets delivered to our emails and litters our timeline is preying on your

insecurities. All of this negativity that you take in all day, every day from the media is dangerous to not only our mental health but it shapes our model of the world. When we only see the terrible things that happen, only hear negative things about ourselves, it shapes the things we start to believe. **Mindset is everything.** If you allow yourself to be surrounded by negative energy in real life or with media and technology, you will find more reasons and things to be negative about. But if you start to look for good, my friend, you will begin to find that too.

Consuming all the negative energy and bringing your awareness and attention to all the horrors of the world can drastically affect your mood and stress levels. Be mindful of the media that you consume. It's one thing to stay connected to the news and events of the world. It's about deciding for yourself how much media you can handle without it effecting your mental health but you don't have to watch the news if it affects you. You don't need to follow every headline that flashes across your home screen. Unfollow toxic social media handles. If people that you are following don't make you feel empowered, happy, or understood then it's okay to unfollow them. That goes for people from high school and the big-time influencers. **If someone doesn't have a positive impact on your day and your energy, it's your job to remove them from your life and it's all within your power at the touch of a button.**

When you've worked with people who have a deep mistrust of the world and the people within it, it can be hard for them to open up. You don't want to be used, hurt, and exploited for your good character, good paying job, or simply because you're a kind person with a generous heart. You are so closed off because you can only see the potential for harm and not the potential for meeting amazing people who will make a positive impact on your life. You are worried that people will become catty or judgmental of you when you are looking for love and support of your own. That the people who you have helped financially or emotionally will take what you gave and disappear. In your experience, all people do it hurt you and leave.

The people you know as well as strangers on the street! If this sounds like you, you're not alone. But you can't go the rest of your life expecting that people will hurt you simply because they can. You need to prove to yourself that there are good people out there that do positive things for others. Look for the small, good deeds that we do for one another all the time. Keep a list of all the positive things that you notice. Someone giving up their seat to another on the bus. Holding the door for someone else. Paying for the coffee of the person behind them in line. Noticing the good things that other people are doing to spread positivity can really help you see the good in the world that ultimately helps you to believe it.

We don't talk about the good things in our society. The good things, the positive ways that we treat each other never garner the type of media coverage that hurt and pain does. Talking about a charity parade will always be less desirable for ratings and views than a story about hardship and pain. Instead of letting the world decide what you focus your attention on, decide for yourself to start celebrating the positive things that you notice in your life. Start talking about and celebrating the good things in your life and in your community. Make a point to share the good things that you have seen and experienced for yourself. Be proud of yourself and of other people doing great things. Celebrating the positive things in your own life sets an example for other people that you meet whose lives you touch. When others see you celebrating, empowering, and encouraging yourself they are more likely to do the same. They are more likely to start seeing the good in the world too. Just by altering your language and the things that you give your attention to; the good things will begin to ripple out from you to the rest of the world.

The better you notice and feel reflected in the world back to you, the more you will have a drive to give back. You might find that you have an abundance in your life. An abundance of time and resources and realize that it's time to give back. To share what you have because you know that what you have is plenty. By recognizing all the good and positive things that you

already have going for you in your life, you will be more apt to give back and share your plentiful resources with others. The more action that you take to do good for others, out in the world the more you become surrounded by other people who are doing the same exact thing. Surrounding yourself with others who do good in the world will help to change your beliefs about the people of the world. When you start putting yourself in a position to you will experience the good of others firsthand.

What you believe about the Universe is what you will see. When you start to trust the world and its benevolence, you will be able to experience it. Have faith in the Universe that it will bring you exactly what you need, exactly when you need it. That when people are rude to you or hurt you, perhaps it is a lesson that you need to learn. Perhaps the Universe is saving you from something that is not truly meant for you. You need to look at the Universe as a friend who wants to give you the things that you need as well as the things you want. It will keep the things that are not meant from you away so that you can have room for the things that are meant for you. To get to the point where you can trust freely and have faith is never about other people or about the state that the world is in. You are able to trust the benevolence of the world because you have trust in yourself. You're able to see the good in the world and in other people because you have practiced recognizing and celebrating the good in your life, your relationships, and in your community. The Universe desperately wants to encourage you to live a positive and blessed life. Trusting the good of the world is when your inner trust of benevolence reflects itself into the world around you. Because you deserve to love yourself enough to feel the good that exists all over the world.

You deserve to feel the positive feelings and love you give

Suggestions

1. Take an inventory of the things that you are consuming. Make a list of the places that you get your information, note about how long you

spend interacting with each platform and how you feel afterwards. If you're not feeling energized and happy after your interactions with social media- change them! Make adjustments to the amount of time and energy you put toward negative media and make changes to reduce the time you spend interacting with those platforms.

2. Notice and celebrate the good things in the world. Keep notes about the things that you have witnessed that made you believe in the goodness of humanity and keep it in a place where you can read it often. Seeing is believing so make sure that you see it often to believe it.

DAY 25

when i was a child
i wanted to be a superhero
with amazing powers
and save the world.
now i realise
it's more important to be
a human with no super powers
and save one person.



YOUR ACTIONS MATTER

Dear Stranger,

I know you've seen global issues amassing much attention on your timeline or on television. Sometimes, the weight of these global issues feels like too much for one person to carry. Even through a global pandemic, people doubted their ability to impact the outcome of their participation in world mandates and travel bans. "How could *I* impact the world?" you may say to yourself or others. Can one person really make the difference when it comes to global warming or world hunger, you may inconspicuously think while watching the news and our dismal predictions for longevity. Maybe we've been outright told in some way that we can't make a difference. Perhaps you've tried to make changes but have given up because you haven't *felt* the changes for yourself. You can't feel them and, therefore, it's hard to stay motivated toward taking action. Even when taking action is scary, hard, or uncomfortable, it is always better to do something than stay stuck where you are. Every action you take makes a difference in your life whether you feel it right away or not.

More likely than not, you have gotten to a place where these problems feel so much larger than you. The problems feel so large and out of control that it doesn't feel like anything you do will help the world in a meaningful way. It sounds bleak and sad. It feels bleak and sad in my body and when you put yourself in that state, of course you don't feel motivated to make a change. Of course, you don't feel like you could ever make a difference in the world. It starts and ends with what you believe is really possible. Because the truth is that for every action, there is a consequence that exists. All of the consequences- could be good or could be bad consequences but there

are consequences all the same. Every action that you take will either bring you closer towards a goal or farther away. Will either be adding positivity and love to the world or will be taking it away. When you believe that one person can really make a difference with their actions, you start doing the things that it takes to make a change. You feel good in simply knowing that the actions you take aren't hurting anything or anyone and it makes you want to do even more.

You can't spew hate and violence to and believe that it won't find its way back to you. People tend to think that the Law of Karma only applies to good things. If I do something good, then something good will be done to me, is the common line of thought when we discuss karma. But this isn't exactly the case. Whatever energy you put out into the energy that you're going to get back. If you perpetuate violence, or hurt others, you can expect that violence and hurt will appear in your own life at some point down the line. The Law of Karma doesn't just exist for positive behaviors, it exists for negative behaviors too. This is a good thing for us because it means that when you put good, positive energy out into the world in any and all of its forms, it will also come back to you. The better you do, the more positive action that you take, the more positivity you get reflected back into your life. You get to make a choice that affects the people around you and the energy that you receive back from the Universe.

Starting with small actions is the way to make long lasting changes in your behavior. Something happens when you start taking small, consistent action. Your actions begin to compound, the small positive changes begin adding up and snowballing into larger, more positive consequences. This to say, everyone starts with taking small action first. You can't expect to start taking action and change the entire world over night. Most readers might leave this book wanting to take massive action in their life, and massive action is great but that's not always how it starts. It starts with one choice a day. Choosing to donate some extra money to a charity for the month or deciding to use reusable shopping bags and commit to keeping them in your

car. One small choice everyday compound on one another and you begin to feel better. And that's the key, to meditate on the positive impact that you're creating. It can be hard to conceptualize the good you're doing for the planet and the Universe. But think about how the action you took could help one person make a more positive choice or help one tree make more oxygen. Pay it forward not just for your benefit but for the benefit of humanity. Knowing that you have the power to contribute on a global level will keep you motivated to make a difference in the world as much as possible.

Everyone underestimates the impact they can have on the world because they think they need to change the entire world. Change starts and ends with you. You need to focus on changing yourself and showing the people around you what is possible when you work on yourself. You can't control what other people do and the choices that they make. All you can do is show up for yourself every day and show other people the way. You hold influence over the community around you. Like we said, dear friend, it's not about trying to change the entire world over night but, instead the effects of taking positive action to help others in world has a ripple effect. You show yourself joy, love, and abundance so that you can share those gifts with others and they can grow their joy, love, and abundance. And the person you helped now helps someone else discover love, joy, and abundance. The same goes for taking real action in the world. You can make a tangible difference in your life, your community, and your corner of the world when you have a healthy relationship with yourself and with the people around you. Let the good that you do for yourself and others make its ripple outward instead of trying to force yourself to have a greater impact right away. Start slow but start right now. Connect to one person at a time and larger change will inevitably happen.

Give back to people. Donating money will always feel good in the short term but seeing the difference you made in someone's life is unparalleled. When you're able to see the real-life impact that your kind action had on

the life of a total stranger, it is an experience that you will never forget. People will never forget how you made them feel and you will never forget the feeling of helping someone out of the genuine kindness of your heart. Having a greater sense of involvement in a community will give you an instant sense of gratification and joy that will encourage you to do more with your time and resources. You realize how much you actually have and how much you are able to help others when you go a little bit out of your way. People who have received kindness will always look for ways to give that kindness back to the world. Doing good for the world, for other people, will make you feel amazing and will leave a lasting impact on the real people that you help. We all want to contribute to our community, to a cause that's larger than ourselves because it helps us to have more love in our lives. We feel loved from the inside so deeply that we can see that love exhibited to us in our close relationships but also in the world at large.

Knowledge is great. Reading and learning and expanding your mind will always help you grow in awareness. It will help you to grow in love. But it is in taking action, making changes in your life that will help you to really gain wisdom. It is when we practice this positive mindset and take positive action in our days that we begin to impact others. When we have a positive impact on the world around us, we feel more fulfilled. We feel more loved. We feel the vibration of the world raising around us. Focus on those feelings when you decide to try something new. When you decide you want to give back to the world. Even so much as giving away one free meal to someone in need means that person has one less meal, they need to worry about procuring. Just from that one action, you will feel love grow in your life. Start small and put these little things into practice that will help your life expand. Once you start giving more, taking action more, and expanding your impact more, you will feel the results from the actions you're taking. You feel lighter, and happier. You smile more at strangers and hold the door open for others. Taking action produces wisdom and muscle memory in your body meaning that you're likely to keep your kindness spree going when you feel the rewards from the action that you're taking.

Action is energy and energy is never created or destroyed. So, the actions you take always have some sort of energetic effect on the world; a consequence or a payoff. Every single action you take, every choice that you make works to bring you energetically closer to your goals or energetically distances you from your goals. This goes for small actions as well as large actions. Don't you want your actions to bring you closer to a life that is filled with an abundance of love? What actions could you take every day that will help bring you closer to a life of love? Can you help others? Thank others? Show your love and gratitude for others more often? What choices can you make differently to reflect the kind of life you want to be living? The key, my friend, is to always consider the direction that you want to be moving and make choices that will help to push you in that direction. Every little thing you do for yourself and you do for the world makes a difference.

You already have the love inside you. Around you. It flows from you to others all the time and it is safe to give and receive love with the Universe. You will be the better for it and the world will be better for it.

Suggestions

1. Make a list of the causes and issues that are truly important to you and why they matter to you. Find a way to get involved with one of those causes every month. Maybe one month, you donate \$5 to an organization that you respect and another month you volunteer to help make sandwiches at a shelter. Start taking action on the things that really matter to you and see how much better and more aligned your energy feels.
2. Notice how you feel after doing something good and putting your money and energy toward the things that are important to you. Allow yourself to feel proud of the contribution you make. Think about the people and the planet that you are helping. Soak up those feelings and you will be wanted to take more and more action!

DAY 26

judgements, harrasments,
roasting, trolling
all of them
come from a place of
unresolved issues
and damaging pain
be kind to them
they don't know yet
how to really heal themselves.



KINDNESS, COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Dear Stranger,

I know that sometimes, it feels like the world is working against you. That no one deserves your kindness, compassion, and empathy. You don't want to open that up to the world because you feel like you've only been used in the past. Been under people's thumb because when your niceness ends up being taken advantage of. So, instead, you only worry about yourself. You're willing to screw over anything and everyone to look out for yourself first, always. You never consider that other people may have their own past and their own challenges to deal with. When you feel all alone and separate from the world around you, it can make you feel angry at the world. You're upset that you feel so misunderstood and because you don't feel like you belong, it can make you depressed as well. There are so many negative ways that lacking kindness, empathy, and compassion can inhibit your life and it is only these three things that can fix it.

We all have a fear of not coming in last. Life can sometimes feel like a rat race where we are constantly looking about trying not to be at the bottom of the food chain or the last in line. This idea stems from a lack mindset; the belief that resources are limited so we all must compete for them. We think that the only way to get ahead in life is to hoard the resources that we have. People won't risk being taken advantage of because they don't want to end up with nothing. They would rather be selfish than to try and be understanding. Perhaps you're one of the many strangers who has been hurt in the past. Has given time, money, and emotional support to someone who was never available to return it. Getting hurt like that, getting let down like that, really felt awful. Not only are you worried about being taken

advantage of financially, you are also worried about being taken advantage of emotionally. Being someone's shoulder to cry on, helping someone with no questions asked when they're in a pinch but they can't seem to find the time or the energy to return the same compassion and support to you. All of that changes your view of the world and it's naturally to want to protect yourself and watch out for yourself first but cutting yourself off from everyone around you and your family won't breed happiness. There is more to life than building wealth for yourself. There is more fulfillment in the world when you open yourself up to kindness, compassion, and empathy for others.

When you lack kindness, compassion, and empathy you are so quick to judge others. We only see people's actions and we don't see all the things that have happened to bring this person to act that way. We don't always see people as the complex humans that they are, especially when there are a lot of emotions involved. We see what someone did and we judge them on that action alone, or, our interpretation of their actions. When your best friend snaps at you, you're likely to make up some sort of excuse as to why they acted the way they did because you see your best friend in a certain light. Yet, when someone that you think is manipulative is nice to you, you automatically think that they must want something from you, even if their intentions are pure. Having kindness, compassion, and empathy, my friend, means that you always assume the best out of people. You always assume that they are normally a happy person, trying to do their best in a world that can be hard to manage. It means you're able to see beyond the situation that is unfolding right in front of you in favor of looking at the bigger picture of who a person is and how they view the world.

Judgement of others before you get to know them and their story breeds hate and negativity. We tend to only view things through our singular model of the world and that cuts us off from true growth. When we are quick to judge others, we refuse to listen to how they got the way they are. Judgment pushes people apart and alienates us from one another. When we don't

know where other people are coming from, we can't find any similarities between us and the random strangers of the world. But everyone has a story.

We all have a past that includes heartache and pain. Judging people without understanding the challenges they faced, the hurt that they have been caused, or understanding where they are coming from keeps people apart. Actions are important but intent also needs to be considered. Having a lack of empathy causes us to judge each other relentlessly, constantly evaluating where we are in relation to everyone else. A lack of empathy breeds a lack of love and understanding. Do you truly have unconditionally love if you can't extend kindness, compassion, and empathy to others?

So, what does it really mean to have kindness, compassion and empathy, and how can we all share more of it with the world? Kindness means being friendly, generous, and considerate to others. We all share this planet and call it home. We are neighbors and friends all working toward the same goal; to live our lives the best way that we know how. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in ourselves that we forget a part of being human means interacting with other humans. We were not designed to go through this life alone or to be completely solitary creatures. Showing others kindness by being friendly towards someone who might need a friend, by being generous with your time and your money and investing it where you feel most aligned, and by being thoughtful towards others and their circumstances you will have a richer life. Your life will feel more vibrant and meaningful. Your interactions with each person become a time to make their lives and their day just a little bit better because of their interaction with you.

Compassion is having sympathy for others and their circumstances. Instead of comparing your suffering to someone else's suffering or taking no pity in the plight of others compassion offers us a chance to intervene. Compassion isn't running around and feeling bad for everyone all the time, but instead it offers us a chance to share what we have with others. Sometimes we can share our time and attention with others who need a friend or a person to

talk to. We can volunteer at a shelter or offer to support a cause we care about with our efforts because it is the right thing to do. We forget that helping one another and lifting each other up is a fundamental part of being a human. Everyone deserves compassion for the trials they have been through and it's important to sympathize with people's past and treat them like the human beings that they are instead of the version of them that you have created of that person in your mind. We all have a story that could break someone's heart and people should never use their past as an excuse to hurt you but we need to remember that everyone comes with their own history that can't be discounted. Many times, people just need a little bit of understanding from someone in the world to feel like they have a place on this planet.

Empathy happens when you put yourself in another person's shoes to really understand how that person is feeling. Without empathy, I don't think you can truly be kind and compassionate towards other people. Empathy means that you can understand how someone might be thinking or feeling from their perspective. You think about how you might feel if someone or something similar happened to you; how would you react? Having empathy means truly taking on another person's point of view to see how it would feel to be hurt or wronged in the way that someone else was. In extreme cases, people without empathy can damage the world and the people around them. Without empathy, we can't understand how anyone else has an opinion different than ours. Without empathy, we think that we are right all the time and that there is only our way of thinking or doing things. We can never see that there is more than one side to things, more perspectives and stories to unearth as to why people are the way that they are. We hurt people without considering the consequences leaving people to feel misunderstood and alienated from the world.

A life without kindness, compassion, and empathy for others is a truly lonely life. Even if you're surrounded by people, you won't ever feel close to them because these are the traits that help us connect to other humans no

matter what our political, sociological, or spiritual beliefs may be. These are the basic traits of humanity that we seem to have lost touch with the more we are inclined to compete with one another for resources, time, and attention. You can't worry about being used or hurt or exploited by others all the time. The more you worry about those things, the more you will bring those situations on yourself. Part of doing this work of loving yourself really must be done in loving the world. So often the parts of the world and of others that we have trouble loving is because it represents a part of ourselves that we have not healed or learned to love yet. When we can't find it in our hearts to extend kindness, compassion, or empathy to others it's important to ask yourself why and how loving that trait or that identity within yourself will help you to better love others and the world at large.

Kindness and compassion will make others feel good but it will also bring YOU more peace, joy, and love. The people around you will be more comfortable being themselves around you because you are a safe person for them to express themselves around. When you extend these basic human traits to others deepens the connection that you have with the people in your life or even strangers on the street. It opens you up to learning about other people's way of life and helps you to understand cultures, opinions, and decisions beyond your own. Giving others kindness and compassion shows that you value your peace of mind over trying to be top dog. Showing others these traits make you less likely to judge other people and their actions so harshly because you know that there is no such thing as right and wrong, only the things that empower you and the things that don't empower you. You are more focused on the good in others, how to be of service to others, how to empower and uplift others that you don't have time to focus on anything but kindness, compassion, and empathy. Once you are focusing on giving love and your outlook toward the world becomes positive and it will make you feel good. Making other people happy and making a difference in someone else's life is the ultimate gift. Helping our fellow man helps us to feel like a valuable member of society and it's a need that we all have deep down inside. Fulfilling this need for contribution in the

way of giving kindness, compassion, and empathy will always find its way back to you even stronger than when you gave it in the first place. You will feel so much peace and fulfillment when you extend these gifts to others. It will give them hope. Big things like saving someone's life just by validating their struggles, to little things like making someone smile from a compliment will bring meaning to your life. When you extend kindness, compassion, and empathy first the world instantly becomes a better place to live in.

When you are able to see yourself and all your flaws, you know that humans aren't perfect. You understand that we all have done things we were not proud of but when you learn to give kindness and compassion to yourself, you are better able to give empathy to others. You know that humans are flawed and that is okay. No one is perfect and yet we all deserve kindness, compassion, and empathy.

We should all treat each other with love so that we may all get love in return.

Suggestions

1. When you find that you are getting worked up or frustrated about another person or something that seems terrible from your point of view, pause. Write about how the experience might seem or feel from the other person's point of view. How are they feeling? What might they have been thinking?
2. Make a pledge to leave people and places better than you found them. With this commitment, kindness and compassion are always on the forefront of your mind. When you take a pledge to spread kindness and compassion, you will start to hardwire those behaviors into your personality until kindness and compassion are just how you act with everyone. Always trying to be kind and make the world a better place will leave you feeling amazing.

DAY 27

death will come to you
the very moment when you're of no use
when you've nothing to give
when no one needs you.
you being alive is the reminder
that somewhere someone out there
is searching for you
that someone still needs you
that you've so much more to give.



GIVE MORE, DO MORE

Dear Stranger,

Most of us are driven toward getting more in life. If you're anything like me, you grew up hearing phrases like "money doesn't grow on trees" or were constantly told that your family couldn't afford the things that you wanted, at no fault of your parents. This was how their parents view resources of the world and this view was handed down to you. It's the idea that more money, more fame, and more luxury is always better and will make us happier. We think that having more means that we will be loved more. We focus on accumulating resources for ourselves. Our sole focus is on getting things for ourselves. We hoard our resources. We feel as though we are the center of the universe and we try to get as much as we can from others. This comes from a lack mindset; something that most of us grew up around. Not thinking or believing that we have enough. I've seen people with a million dollars who still feel as though they don't have enough. There is no end. You want more and more and the accumulation never ends until you find fulfillment and peace just where you are.

The money isn't what makes you happy. The fame and acclamations don't make you happy either. You don't love the things that you buy because the thing itself brings you joy; it's always about what that thing makes you feel and what it really represents. You like money because it means that you can enjoy the luxuries in life without worry or concern. You can treat the people you love great food and new places. You don't want fame you want the love and appreciation of other people. You want to be able to support your parents and live debt free. It's not that you want a lot of stuff, it's about sharing the new experiences with other people. It is in sharing and giving

that we feel the most love and fulfillment in life. Giving gifts to the people that you love most in life. You love having the freedom to travel with the people you care about. You love making other people happy because it feels good to give. It feels amazing to be the reason that a family was able to have a hot meal on their table or the reason someone can take a bath with clean water. There is no price tag that could match the feeling of being able to give back to a community that you care about.

Most of us have more than enough to live comfortably in life and yet we always worry about having enough. We are so worried that we will run out of the things that we have which is why we hold so tightly to our resources. But this becomes your own patterns of hoarding wealth and time because you are scared that you don't have enough of either. We think that maybe once we start making more money, or once we have more in our savings account, or once we have more free time that we will start to give back to others who need it. However, just like everything else, having enough is also a mindset. Are you choosing to see all the ways that your needs are being met or are you hung up on the stuff that you want? Until you realize that you have enough and that you've always had enough is the moment that you will be able to step into the flow of giving more and doing more with what you do have. Have faith that in giving more, you will be receiving more in love and gratitude that you will ever be able to receive in anything monetary or physical. And those are the things that life is really about. Giving the time, love, support, and positive energy you have will always open you up for receiving more of the same coming back to you.

When I talk about giving, everyone's mind tends to jump to giving money. While most charitable causes do need funds to keep their missions alive, there is more than money that you are able to give to the people and causes that you are passionate about. Giving money is amazing but you after the money leaves your hand, the joy you feel might escape with it. Not to mention that if you are financially struggling, you shouldn't be completely going into debt to give back to others either. You have skills and talent that

people and places need. You have love in heart that can help bring passion back to an important cause. Sharing the skills that you have in communicating can help spread awareness about a cause that's important to you. Sharing your gift of love by fostering a child who needs a safe and caring home to grow up in can be an incredible gift. Sharing your photography skills by capturing flicks for free at a charity event could be an amazing contribution. If you want to start giving more and making it a priority in your life, you will always be able to find something to give.

When you start to contribute your skills for a cause that you are passionate about, it brings about a sense of belonging. When you are working with a group of likeminded people towards a common goal you will inevitably find yourself meeting people who are passionate about the same things that you are. Surrounding yourself with other people who have the same goals and interests as you it helps you to feel like you are serving something larger than yourself. Finding people who help you carry out a mission helps you to see the ways that you are similar to the other people instead of being divided by our many differences. It helps us to see other people as teammates that we can learn from and work with as opposed to challenges to overcome. Bridging gaps and differences between people of the world helps you to create a network that is powered by genuine connection and contribution. Good people willing to take action to make the world a better place. Surrounding yourself with people who always want to make the world better is bound to make your life better and more meaningful.

Contribution brings gratitude. When you start giving more and doing more for others, you can see very clearly that you have enough. Giving to people who have less than you automatically make you more thankful for the things that you have instead of focused on all of the things that you want. That you might lack. No, giving more to others shows you that you have plenty. That you have healthy food to eat, a safe place to live, and the love of friends and family. You have lungs that allow you to breath and a beating heart that allows you to experience this one life. Gratitude for your life and

everything in it is the key to giving and receiving love. Because your thoughts are not on what you're getting, even though you end up getting a lot. Your thoughts are on giving because your life is so full and you are better off than so many others. Sharing what you have is the trademark of someone living in abundance. When you are overflowing with an abundance of self-love, joy, and appreciation it is much easier to find love, joy, and plenty of things in your life to appreciate. Stop being so self-centered. Put other people into the center-stage and start giving back. Do something in your circle, in your community. Consider how you can uplift them. Support them. Love them.

After publishing my first book and blowing up on Instagram seemingly overnight, I thought I was going to be happy. But the more famous I became, the lonelier I got. Unless you find ways to feel loved right where you are, you won't stop chasing success. You won't stop chasing fame. There will always be a part of you that can't ever rest, can't ever settle, can't ever feel good enough. It wasn't until I started really serving others in my community that I began feeling fulfillment and passion for my work. I became obsessed with helping people and wanted to give back to my community as much as possible. Not just because helping others gave me a sense of purpose and fulfillment that is unparalleled but because I can give more. I can help more. I have learned that you don't need to run over other people in your pursuit of greatness for yourself. Instead, give back as much as possible because that is what truly matters at the end of the day. That's what will mean the most to you when you are old and grey. It feels good to empower and lift up other people, especially people that you want to see winning in life because there is room at the top for everyone.

The more you contribute, the better you feel. There is always more that you can do. It's easy to get comfortable in life when you are making good money and impacting the world in a positive way. When you have a healthy partnership with someone you adore and a growing family that surrounds you with love. You may look around and wonder what else there is. What

else can be done? But there is always more to do. More to give and more to grow. As you evolve through this life, dear stranger, your level of giving and contribution will evolve too. Just don't wait to start giving because if you wait it will never happen. You will always find a reason that it's not a good time or a reason you don't have enough. Trust that when you give, the energy will always return to you. The more you give, the more you have coming back.

Doing more for people will bring you greater joy and happiness. People who you have influenced, or help will enrich your life in their own ways. When you help people, they want to help you back. They want to share their love with you even when they might not have anything else. Giving to others helps you find a deeper meaning for your life; a purpose that makes you excited to wake up every day.

It will deepen your love and connection with the rest of the world.

Suggestions

1. Imagine that you are in a dream world. You have the power to give anything to help the causes and charities that are the most important to you. What do you do/ give? What makes you feel like you are greatly contributing to the good of the world? Once you have these things identified, start taking the steps to doing them. What would you need to do and who would you need to be to make these dreams a reality and be able to do more?
2. Give 10%. Make the commitment to yourself that every month you will donate 10% of what you earn. This is a great practice to get into now because you will be used to giving that much no matter what you are earning. Yes, you need money to survive but giving a regular contribution will show you that you always have an abundance.

DAY 28

“don’t fall in love with me. i’m a devil.”

he warned.

“i know, but i still want you.”

she smiled.

“do you even know what a devil is?”

he questioned.

“an angel filled with pain.”

she kissed.



LISTEN MORE, JUDGE LESS

Dear Stranger,

We're so quick to jump to our own defenses. We have our own view of the world and when other people challenge it, we often rush to judgement and defense. We believe that our way of living is the only way to live and when other people break out from the mold of what is regular or expected, we want to give them our opinion; to share our truth. Remember, the life that we are living and the things we are experiencing are how we are interpreting our own individual life. Other people who have grown up in different places, with different beliefs of the world and life experiences often trigger us and unhealed wounds within our own past. Who gets to decide that one way of living is right and another way of living is wrong? As long as the way you live your life doesn't hurt other people in the process. We tend to hold so much judgement over other people and the way that they decide to live their lives. Get curious. Ask questions. Seek to listen and learn, not even to necessarily understand. Hold onto the things that feel right to you and let go of the rest.

The world is not made up of just black and white. We are often all variations of grey. A beautiful mix of thoughts and opinions that create who we are as individuals. There is such a variance of people in the world and yet we feel qualified to judge what is good and what is bad. What is the right way to live and what is the wrong way to live makes you form opinions about people without taking the time to understand them? I know that it's easy to feel threatened by another person's view of the world. It makes us question our own which can feel scary. Especially when we need our reality to be a certain way in order to feel safe and certain in life.

Validating another person's version of the world does not mean that yours is wrong. We as a society need to step away from labeling things as good and bad. Stop labeling things as right or wrong and change our language to change our thoughts. Things can either serve you or not serve you. They can empower you or disempower you. We all get to assign those meanings to the things in our own life and no one else can assign those meanings to anything for us no matter how badly they may want to. This means that you don't have the authority to judge people and the decisions they make for themselves and you aren't threatened by the choices that they make. This is truly being open to diversity and how you support people that you might not agree with. As long as we are not hurting others, we all deserve to live our truths while being loved, happy, and safe.

We talk over the rest of the world, trying to make other people fit the mold that we have made up in our minds. We don't take the time to listen to others and end up rushing to judgement. Instead of looking to understand other people, we try to justify our view of the world, spewing all our thoughts and opinions out so we can prove why we are right and other people are wrong. We don't actually take the time to hear other people. Not just the words they're saying but the way they're saying it. We refuse to listen to the wisdom that other people have because we can't make it fit in with what we already think is true. We reject things simply because they're different instead of trying to understand other people's point of view and vision. You don't have all the answers. You likely don't even have some of the answers. A part of growing and loving the world is being open to other people's perspectives. Other people's truths are still truths whether or not you agree with them. Resisting or denying other people's truths will always keep you blocked from receiving the love that you and others deserve to have in this lifetime.

By listening more, we have a greater understanding of the way of the world. We become more self-aware of our thoughts and whether or not our thoughts are really helpful or are actually harmful. Listening to simply let

other people be heard is powerful because it allows them to be seen for who they are. Listening to others shows people that you value opinions and identities outside of your own meaning you accept people for who they are at their core as opposed to thinking that people are good or bad based on the way they look, their gender, or their culture. Listening to others helps you to celebrate the diversity in the world. Knowing that we are all different and unique and that is what makes us deserving of love. Not being perfect, not being thin or educated but being a kind person with a good heart. Listening more shows that you are secure in who you are and what you believe. That you are open to changing your mind and learning more about people as opposed to forcing others to be like you. You know that different never means bad and listening doesn't mean that someone is walking all over you it means that you are big enough of a person to let other people see their thoughts and opinions without having to interject or correct them.

It shows the people in your life that you respect and value them. That you don't always need to agree or get along in order to love and respect others. This is why the world is as divided as it is right now. We are all so committed to viewing the world our way and we can't hear one another to see that we all want the same things; love, respect, happiness, and abundance. We don't have to deny someone basic human rights to show that our way of living is better or right. We don't have to silence and entire race of people because they have an opinion or culture that is different than our own. Understanding that other people don't need to validate your reality for it to be true and you don't need to validate other people's reality. Your focus should be on extending love to everyone. Helping others live their best lives alongside you. You don't need to force your way of thinking or living on other people just as they shouldn't try to force you to adopt their way of thinking or living either. Allow people to express themselves, and get curious instead of defensive. We need to be working to bridge gaps that makes us feel different or separate from one another and this happens when we listen to other people without imparting our opinion or judgment onto

them. Let people live and support other people's right to live life their way, even when it's a way that you don't agree with.

We learn how limitless the Universe truly is the more we discover ourselves and unearth our true purpose in life. You don't need to agree with everyone, their way of living, or their thoughts and feelings. Being more empathetic to others helps you to see past people's hurt and pain to see that they are just a person doing the best that they can, just trying to get through life and live as the best version of themselves. Once you begin to live your truth you find that you want other people to do the same because we can be anything we want to be in the life. Why not be something or someone that makes you truly happy? Why not be someone who makes the world a better place? Just by listening to others you can change their lives. You can help them to be seen, heard, and validated. Once you learn about someone you can identify with them. We all have common themes that pop up in our lives and if you have gone through a hard lesson, the chances are that someone else has felt the way that you are feeling. We are all human beings. Brothers, sisters, neighbors, and friends. Empower one another to live their best and most authentic life. Show people that loving yourself opens you up to a world of possibilities because loving yourself means saying 'yes' to the things that feel aligned with you. That make you feel satisfied and successful, not resentful, and frustrated. Sharing your thoughts and listening to the experiences of others helps you to be a more empathic and caring human being because you are able to see the ways that you are similar instead of the ways that we are all different.

Judgement will divide us. Thinking that there is a right or a wrong way to live divides us. Focus more on listening and on trying to understand people as individual people. Each with their own story and experience. Judgement cuts us all off from understanding of self and understanding of others. Share, communicate, collaborate, and celebrate. The more we understand one another, the better we make sense of the Universe and all its infinite forms.

All its forms which deserve to be listened to, validated, and affirmed; all the forms that deserve to be loved.

Suggestions

1. Diversify your friends and your feed. When you are always surrounded by people who are exactly like you, it reinforces the thoughts and beliefs you already have. When you are able to hear thoughts and opinions that are different than your own, that challenge your beliefs, you expand. You are able to be more tolerant of things that might not align with your thoughts and actions. You learn that there are other realities different than your own and that none of them are better or worse than any other.
2. Treat every interaction as a learning experience. In this experience, you are listening to learn about and understand other people. Their beliefs and their motivations. When you are listening to understand, it lowers your guard so that you aren't consumed with defending your point of view out of fear that it's wrong or that it needs defending. Listen to understand what people really want and need to be a less judgmental person.

DAY 29

maybe the universe didn't send you here
to connect the dots or find answers
to unsolved mysteries of life,
maybe you're here
to share the fire you brought within you
with the souls lost in darkness.



MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

Dear Stranger,

During every wave of social justice issue that flare up, there is no shortage of people who take to the internet to discuss their feelings about whatever injustice is currently being broadcast. I'm not talking about the people who are looking to share content and resources as well as their genuine feelings about some misgivings in politics or in the public eye, but the people who condemn all other people who only look to blame others for the problems happening in the world. The people who point their fingers at influencers and yell at them about why they aren't championing causes for Ethiopian children who need food but promote a charity about saving dolphins. These are people that we commonly refer to as keyboard warriors. You know the ones. These are the people who will fight feminism with an empty hashtag or repost something on their social media with zero inclination to take action to affect real change. Keyboard warriors want the clout of doing something for others without actually having to do anything. You don't want to take an empty action or do things just for the applause; you want to make real change and affect people's lives for the better.

Sharing a hashtag or a post is great for awareness. When a cause is gaining momentum or popularity it's great to have people spreading awareness and letting others know that this is a problem that you are passionate about solving. It can broaden the awareness of others by letting them know this is a cause that's worthy of their attention in the first place. But there needs to be something else besides just awareness. Awareness is great but without action, there is no change. Your actions need to align with the opinions and information that you share online. Action is what makes a real

difference in your life and in the lives of others. Keyboard warriors are more concerned with the clout they get from being “woke” than they are about helping others. They would rather everyone think that they are great because they are championing a cause instead of those whose actions show what causes are important to them.

Some people only do good things for others to share on the internet. There is also a name for people like this and it’s called virtue signaling. Virtue signaling is a personal pet peeve of mine because of the intent behind it. The people who are virtue signaling are more concerned about getting validation from others for the kind thing that they did for another person as opposed to getting satisfaction from the kind act that they did. They might post themselves giving a homeless person a meal or post themselves doing a kind deed for someone so that other people can gush about how great and kind they are. Instead of finding joy and satisfaction purely in the fact they did something good for someone else, they now need to publicize it so others can see how great they are. If you are doing something for the applause you get for doing it, is it coming from a place of love? Is it making a real difference or only a superficial one? I can’t answer these questions for you; only you know the real answer. But these are the things to consider when you are trying to help others. To ensure that your intentions are pure and that you are coming from a place of love because when you attempt to make a difference from a place of love, you will gain more love that you could ever imagine back from the world.

When you’re just causally chatting about these social justice issues online, it might give you a sense of impact and fulfillment. However, those feelings are typically short lived. You might have the sense of fulfillment and impact for a while when you correct someone on social media or share your knowledge on a particular cause that’s important to you. But ultimately, awareness without action is empty. The feelings of impact are fleeting and you don’t feel the love from your contribution. On the other hand, when you’re able to make a real difference in someone’s life the happiness stays

with you forever. When you see the smile on someone's face, you get a hug from them with tears streaming down their face you will know real fulfillment. You know what it means to step out from behind a keyboard and take action on something because it's the right thing to do. To take action on a cause because it means something to you, because the people of the world need you. Seeing and feeling the impact that you have on someone else's life will last forever. You won't forget the people that you've helped and they will never forget you.

There are so many large issues that the world faces from hunger, to casteism, racism, and feminism. It can be overwhelming to take responsibility for all of the causes all of the time. The impact that you have in each area isn't as much as when you concentrate on making a difference person by person or one cause at a time. It's about doing more than sharing something on social media. It's educating yourself on the history of the issue and the current-day position that the issue is in. It's going out of your way to do something for other people because life isn't fair to everyone. It's feeding your neighbor because she has three kids who you know go hungry most nights. It's taking the time to protest alongside your friends for equal rights and for systemic change. It's going out and taking charge in your community to make a difference for the people that live there. Picking up garbage. Planting a community garden. These are the ways that you take your support from social media and start doing things in real life that will have an immediate positive impact on your state and the state of your community. You give back to the people who need the most help and immediately reap the rewards.

Consider the impact that you want to have on the world. Do you want to be remembered for posting a lot on social media and having a lot of money? Or do you want to be remembered for helping others and making a difference in the lives of other people? The choice is yours to make. Inspiring others can be helping millions of people with food insecurity or it can be helping your sister break the cycle of trauma and fear that has kept

her a victim of life and its circumstances for far too long, helping people is healing people. Even if you only make a difference for one person on this planet, it means that the time you spent here was worth it. Helping even one person and making a difference in even one person's life can elevate our own. Why not go out of your way to make a difference for someone that you meet? Do good for others because it matters. Because changing someone's day in real way not only makes your life better but makes that other person's life better too.

What you get out of making a difference in someone's day is always so much more valuable than what you give anyways. You always receive more than you give. You always grow and expand when you make a difference for others. Don't discount all that you can do. The impact that you can have.

Some small act of love toward your fellow man could change someone's entire life. You have that power. Use it often.

Suggestions

1. It's time to get out from behind a phone or a keyboard to start living your life. To start making a real difference in the world. Invite friends to come and volunteer with you to serve as accountability partners and to encourage you to follow through.
2. Write down a list of the things that you are good at and your skill. Organize an event or create a product that you can sell to give money or donations entirely to a just cause. Doing something to raise funds using the skills and knowledge that you have will push you creatively and will inspire you to do more.

DAY 30

like the moon
we all go through phases
just to feel whole again.



KEEP LEARNING, KEEP GROWING

Dear Stranger,

There is always more to learn. When we stop learning and growing, we start dying. Our mind dies. Our soul dies. Staying comfortable is only actually comfortable for so long. At some point, you just can't stay stagnant anymore. You can't stay where you are and not be advancing in life. The key to living a life that is full of life and happiness is to never stay too comfortable where you are. Enjoy your life along the way and by all means, live in the present moment. But also stay hungry. Being hungry for knowledge and expansion means that you are always looking ahead. Looking to stay engaged with life and be relevant. To continue to explore yourself and the world around you. Getting complacent with where you are at in your life happens to us all. We get accustomed to the things that we have around us all the time. The more used to a certain level of life we get, the more likely we are to stop appreciating it. To be comfortable resting with where we are.

When people stop growing, they turn to extremes in life to get the thrills they crave. People would rather buy a sports car or bleach their hair blonde than look inward at ways they can still stand to grow and expand. We are not all perfect beings and even the most enlightened people have new challenges that pop up that need to be addressed. Even the feeling for certainty and comfort, can and should be challenged for the sake of growth and expansion. Things outside of yourself will never make you happy and they will never keep you satisfied or happy and in love. No, it is only continuing to get to know yourself as you grow and change over the years. It is allowing yourself to move along with your life and reinvent yourself

over and over again for each new phase of life that you're in. We are infinite beings with many passions and purposes in this lifetime. Allow yourself to explore all the parts of you that are important to you and the experience you are destined to have here.

The goal is to have a mission in life that is greater than yourself. When you are serving a mission or a purpose that is larger than you, your family, or even your city it is easy to continue to pursue growth and knowledge. When you commit yourself to a cause where other people are counting on you and part of your purpose is serving other people, you can't help but wake up hungry for life. To chase new dreams and new goals as you develop and learn things about life. I have achieved a lot in my life. I have worked hard to get where I am today. I have never fallen into my comfort zone. I am happy with my life. I feel as though my growth is limited because I don't feel as I have a reason to change but I still have big dreams and goals. I am still passionate about helping people with their mental health and their relationships. Not just their relationships with themselves but also their relationships with friends, family, and the world. To show people that the world doesn't need to be a scary place. That whatever you are going through is normal and that you're not alone but also to show people that there are other ways to think. That you can decide the kind of life you want to live and that you don't have to be a victim to your life circumstances.

This mission excites me. This mission is what pushes me to do more writing so that I can help more people. To start a podcast so that I can share my knowledge and my wisdom in a different and more digestible way. Growing my family has also given me a reason to commit to a new level of growth. To learn and grow into my new role as a father in addition to a husband. This is a whole new area of life that takes time and patience. I will open my arms and welcome this new stage of my life with all of the lessons it promises to teach me. As the saying goes, "new level, new devil" meaning that there is always some part of our life that needs our attention. Where we could be better. Part of us that are tested as new personalities are

added to our life and new needs need to be prioritized over our own. This is not the time to think I know it all or have all the answers. Until I have lived through something and practiced it myself, I don't claim to be an expert. There is always something else out there; another mountain to climb another aspect of my identity to conquer. I don't want to limit myself during this one lifetime of what I can achieve all because I got comfortable. I don't want to limit the impact that I can make on others because

We can do so much more. We can grow so much more. We can achieve so much more. We tend to forget that we can always be expanding into something new. It's great to be in a good place but you don't want to stay complacent. You don't want to stay stuck in your comfort zone. You're loving people, people are loving you. You truly deserve that you are worthy of the truest love. We forget that we are infinite and always need to be expanding ourselves. With knowledge or experiences. With trials and failures or great successes. Get comfortable with taking risks in your life. Every day that you are gifted here on Earth is a day that you are able to live out your purpose. Find contentment and happiness where you are but you can't take life for granted. Things can change in the blink of an eye. Constantly be learning new things. Meeting new people. Expand your relationships. Read more books. Take a new course. Never stop learning about yourself and other people.

Never stop growing and expanding your circle of reach and the things you learn for a life where you love yourself endlessly enough to explore new schools of thought and pursue new dreams as your life unfolds.

You deserve to love yourself as you grow and change.

Suggestions

1. Set a yearly or monthly book reading goal. Maybe you can commit to one book a month or 10 books a year. Whatever goal you decide to set, reading will help you gain more knowledge. Reading personal

development books or even rereading old books can help to reveal new insights.

2. Get comfortable trying new things. Growing and expansion come when you try new things. When you put yourself in a position that you've never been in before. Even just trying something new will help you to learn more about yourself and get you pushing yourself outside your comfort zone more regularly.

FINAL WORDS

You and I have come so far together, dear stranger. I have loved spending this time together and I hope you took something new away from this book. I hope you feel a bit less alone on your journey of loving yourself, loving others, and loving the world. We need more people like you. More people who are interested in doing the work that is needed to heal their relationship with themselves to heal their relationships with others and change their view on the world. I want you to know that I have once been where you are now. I did a lot of work on myself to realize that I was worthy and deserving of the love that I desire, the love that I gave away to others in hopes that they would return it to me. The truth was, it was never about those other people. I could have been everything to everyone else and still not have been happy with myself. I still wouldn't have ever been able to look at myself and say that I loved myself, let alone liked myself. Because I knew it wasn't true.

It wasn't until I loved myself like crazy that my relationships with other people began to shift. I noticed that the more I loved and accepted myself as I was, the easier it was to date. I looked at getting to know other people as an exciting adventure. I also had a new regard for myself, my time, and my energy. I knew what I was available for and what I wasn't available for. I didn't have to explain to people what my boundaries were, it was simply part of my energy and my identity. I went from a kid who desperately wanted love and all the while pushed it away as fast and swiftly as I could to someone who evaluated the people I dated. I made sure that *they* were worthy of *my* time and not the other way around. I didn't entertain the crap that I entertained from the same people on months earlier. My relationships changed because I changed. Because I knew what I was worth and what I

wanted in my life. I realized that if people didn't want to be with me then it was their loss. I was going to make something of myself no matter what and it gave me faith that the person I would love forever existed and that she was also seeking me. It took the pressure off of myself and feeling like I needed to impress someone and allowed me to be myself.

Getting to know my partner was a rollercoaster ride of a journey. All relationship has ups and downs but being in a committed relationship reveals a lot of baggage and a lot of stuff that we struggle with. I learned, over time, what real trust looks like. What real dedication and commitment looks like. I have opened myself up to the gifts that can be found when you decide to make the woman of your dreams your partner for life. The mother of your children and your other half in business. I've learned a lot about communication and what it means to give and to take. I constantly strive to be better because I know that expanding myself means that I'm bringing a bigger and better version of myself to our relationship. My friends and family have continued to grow alongside me. It isn't always easy, dealing with family. They can sometimes trigger us the most out of anything or anyone in this world but you are in control. You control your thoughts and your expectations that ultimately color your relationship. You get to decide how things unfold because other people don't control you, you control you.

Once you have come to truly love yourself and love the people in your life, it's important to look outward. We all feel a sense of joy and love when we are making progress towards a goal. We always feel joy and love when we are able to make the world a better place and help another human being. We don't though. And we hold back in this area for so many reasons. A lot of times, we might be nervous to start sharing our experience. We are worried that we might be judged by our friends and our family. We worry that as we grow, we might lose people. This is an incredibly real fear to have. It's something that I dealt with for so long until I realized that my growth only means that I get to have a deeper connection with my family. A deeper knowing of myself only means that I am sharing that more aware, and more

enlightened version of myself with the people that I love the most. If anyone doesn't resonate with who that person is, I am comfortable letting them go knowing that I am only being true to who I am.

The more I honor my relationships with friends, family, and my partner, the more I feel at home and safe in these relationships. The more I feel seen and heard by those who are closest to me. Feeling this joyful, surrounded by so much love make you want to sing from the rooftops. You want to help everyone and anyone achieve the state that you have reached. It can be hard to soften to a world that has been hard and made you bitter. It can leave you fearful and pessimistic. But the world is waiting to be experienced and witnessed by you. And not the you that is scared and worried that tomorrow they won't have enough but the you that feels supported and loved throughout your entire being. When you come to realize how infinite you are, you want others to wake up to their own infinite potential as well. You want to make a difference in the world and help other people. You want to give back as much as you can and always be looking for new ways to serve people. Not because you have to and not because you read it in a book (even though it is great advice). You do it because it's the right thing to do. Because helping people and making a difference in the world is part of the reason you exist. It has always been a part of your purpose.

Giving unconditional love to all beings is not easy. Some people even call it radical. And maybe unconditional love to everyone seems radical but I don't think it should be. People going around and hating one another over little differences is the real radical problem here. Being a being of love doesn't mean that you let other people hurt you or take advantage of you. It means that you know everyone is doing the best they can with the knowledge and the skills that they have and that we all have our own stuff to work through. You know that loving people is your karma and the way that they treat you is their karma. The only thing that you can control in this world is yourself. You will never be able to control other people, only offer them the type of love and support that you know we are all worthy of

receiving. Giving unconditional love to others shows your fearless commitment to yourself above anything else. It shows the world that you trust yourself enough to stand up to people trying to take advantage of you. That you love yourself so fearlessly that you are willing to take a chance and make a radical change in your life. That you love yourself enough to pursue the life that you want to live. To live on your terms and no one else's and to encourage other people to do the same.

When you are a genuine, positive person other people take notice. They love you. They love your energy. They love that they can relax and be themselves when they're with you. Listening and accepting others without judgment or expectation is the most beautiful gift that you can give people. Encouraging them to live their best life is what people do when they are comfortable in their own skin and in their lives. They know that they have the power, that they always have had the power. You have known your whole life that you were meant to change the world. Even if it's just one person. Even if it's just in one way. You are here to leave your mark.

Lead with love. Love of self. Love of others. Unconditional love of the world and you will have the love that you have always wanted. The love that you have always deserved.

Always writing for you,
Your favorite stranger.

*pain is a reminder
that love is needed.
note to self*

Thank You
Universe

ABOUT THE BOOK

Dear Stranger,

Everything we do in life is for love. Why? I don't know.

Maybe love is what keeps us going. Maybe love is the means and ends to this life. Maybe the Universe runs on love. Whatever may be the reason, love is what we all demand, and love is what we all want.

But very often, we find ourselves without love. Some of us have lost love, some of us have lost ourselves in love and some of us don't believe in love. And for so many of us, it's worse because we don't feel we deserve to be loved. Right?

I know how it feels to feel unloved for many years. To feel alone, empty, and numb. I know how difficult it is to find light, hope, and healing amidst the darkness, pain, and suffering. To lose the people you truly care about and even lose the purpose of life.

And that is why I'm writing you again. Thirty letters and poems of realizations and lessons about loving yourself, loving others, and loving the world.

One letter for each day to make you realize that you deserve to be loved deeply and completely. That you are not alone in this journey.

I am with you and I am rooting for you. Let's do this together? Shall we, my dear stranger?

Love and light,

A stranger who knows you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashish Bagrecha is a best-selling author and one of the most loved Instagram poets in India.

His books, *Dear Stranger*, *I Know How You Feel* and *Love, Hope and Magic* have sold lakhs of copies. He is a strong mental and emotional health advocate and voices his experiences and observations through poems and reels which have found a connection with millions of youngsters online.

Ashish is also a popular audio creator and you can listen to his podcasts and shows on Audible and Spotify.

You can know more about him on Instagram @ashish.bagrecha

Also by Ashish Bagrecha

Dear Stranger, I Know How You Feel

Love, Hope and Magic



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