

*From* **×/+**  
**GUARDS**  
*to Guardians*

UNCONDITIONAL FREEDOM  
TAGLINE HERE





“Captain once told me, ‘Society may often forget about the gatekeeper known only as a corrections [or] detention officer, but what would society do without him or her at the gate?’”


– Jerome R. Hall, former CO and former Marine

What would society do without you, the keeper of the gate? We owe you a debt of gratitude that is rarely if ever acknowledged. You venture into spaces most of us dare not tread, to do a job most of us could not do. You have seen things most of us could not imagine, and endured experiences that would break us into pieces.

Yet in reality, in spite of all this, there is the potential for something different. For something more. For a life that’s more fulfilling and satisfying. For a way to do your work in a way that’s more meaningful and more impactful, for yourself and the rest of the world. Maybe you’ve sensed this somewhere inside you. Maybe you’ve looked around and wondered what it’s all for—this maddening confinement, this watching people locked away from society while the world passes them by, and you along with them—and sensed that there must be a better way. A way beyond just punishment. A way that heals instead of hurts. A way that connects instead of rejects. A way that reaches beneath the surface and grasps the root of all that’s gone wrong and engages real solutions.

Maybe you’ve heard the whispers of your daimon. You’ve felt its unrest—this force that feels at times like chaos inside you, screaming out against the version of life in which you’re presently enmeshed. The pushing, the fighting, the domination. Always watching your back. Always working to hold the wildness at bay. Working to control your surroundings. To keep everyone in order, in line, in check.

An online job description for a Correctional Officer states that a CO is “responsible for enforcing the rules and maintaining routines.” Yes, that is the job of a guard. But the role of a Guardian extends far beyond this limited approach. When a guard becomes a Guardian, a prison resident is empowered to become a penitent. A contemplative. A monk. Not in literal terms, but in the way that a supportive environment with engaged mentors offers one space to engage in the journey of soulmaking. Instead of passing time and enduring punishment,



an incarcerated individual has the opportunity to connect with their soul, to connect with an atmosphere and attitude of freedom and flourishing inside of them. By embodying your role as a Guardian, you can help to support this, and in the process, engage in your own journey of soulmaking.

In this relationship, inmates and guards extend into the fullest versions of what they can be. They realize a symbiotic relationship where each recognizes and honors the other. It sounds idyllic, to be sure, and we're not out to paint a picture of some impossible fantasy. But all that comes to be in this reality was once part of someone's imagination. From inventions such as the automobile and the lightbulb to shifts in human relationships, everything in our present reality is open to change if we can imagine it to be—that is, if the right conditions are present. If we create the circumstances and provide the necessary ingredients for that change.

There is nothing wrong with you, or with your work, now. The work you do is just. It is important. But that being so, why does society not honor you? Why do we not include you among our storied of heroes? Where are your seats at the table? Instead, you are largely unseen—as invisible to everyday society as those in your care. Instead, you are left to keep watch on the so-called dregs and demented, while the rest of us enjoy the pleasures of life in the normal world.

You were not meant for this. You were not created to endure ceaseless trauma. You were not made manifest on this earth so that you can mind what society deems its trash.

As former CO Brian says, "I became jaded by the system when I realized we're not about correcting; we're about making sure they don't get out until they're supposed to. That diminishes our role as Correctional Officers." Yes, it ignores your true capacity and capability. It sells short your gifts. It overlooks your genius.

It overlooks the hope and the healing to be found in your own personal experiences, and in the stories you alone can tell. It also overlooks the capacity you have for impacting other human beings and facilitating their change as well as your own and for

finding the opportunity to restore dignity where and when it will matter most, as this story illustrates.

My dad was in the prison hospital, dying of liver cancer. When you have this form of cancer, you swell up and fill with fluids. There had been shackles on his wrists and ankles and I could see where the swelling had caused them to cut through his skin. He looked like he was still wearing the shackles even though they'd taken them off because by that point, he was in a coma.

I was standing there by his bed and I heard this voice apologizing to him. Then I realized it was my voice. I was apologizing. I don't know why, I just knew that it was important for him, before he died, to hear an apology. As for what for, I could figure that out later. Even if I never did, it didn't matter.

An apology sounds especially confusing if you know that this man, my father, was in prison for child molestation. People who are imprisoned for this, it's pretty well known how they're treated—like animals. Really, it would be considered inhumane to treat animals in this way. Often, they are just beaten to a pulp, or kept in isolation. It's like this one thing that most of the guards and inmates agree on—pedophiles are not human.

I was standing there next to my father's hospital bed and I was just shaking. There was a guard standing there in the room with me and he was what you'd expect most guards to be. Very stoic. Very masculine. Very stiff and formal. And there I was, coming apart at the seams. I felt safer in some way having him there, but I also felt embarrassed. But then something happened. I looked at the guard and all of the sudden, it was like he let me see him—the real him. He let me see that he felt pain, too.

Finally, he spoke. "Your father was a good man."

I stared. "Tell me more," I said.



The guard paused for a moment. “He was funny,” he said. “He would make me laugh.” He was silent again for a few moments, then added, “As much as a guard and an inmate can be friends, we were friends.”

I knew what he said was not right. Not that it wasn’t true, but that he wasn’t supposed to be talking to me in this way. He was breaking protocol. He was willing to do the “wrong” thing in order to do the honorable thing. This man was more than a guard, he was a guardian. Because with those words, he set me free.

Before that day, I hated that man. I hated guards. They were people who were hurting my father, who saw him as less than human. But that day, that man showed me his heart—a heart that chose this role. It wasn’t that space of terrified activation where a guard is afraid, they or their colleagues or an inmate will be killed. There in that room he showed me the truth of himself—his pure heart.

This was a moment when what is truly possible was made real. But for this way to come into existence, to become the norm rather than the exception, requires your choice, your commitment, and your action. You must pluck the possible from the realm of the imagined and make this vision real, as this CO did. To draw it down from the ether and up from the roots. And there is only one way to do that. Only one force that has that degree of power and magnetism. That force is your soul.

This is your path. The role of the Guardian is your calling to embrace and embody. But while this work is yours to undertake, we are here to help.

We are soulmakers. Soulmaking is the language we speak, and the journey we know. Our passion and our purpose are to help others rediscover or “remake” their deep connection to their own souls and align with them to become who they were meant to be and not who society and other people have molded them into. To live from the soul and in accordance with its voice.

Your soul has always been there to guide you, but you may not have always been listening or following that guidance because of external noise, distractions, obligations, pressures, and your own fears and insecurities. We might even go so far as to say that just as you are a Guardian to others, your soul is your inner Guardian.

We know that building a soul is the work of a lifetime. It is without end. None of us ever will be finished. Our task will never be complete, yet this is the work we are all here to do and it is the work that must be done, because without a fully embraced and engaged soul—in you, in me, in everyone, even and perhaps especially in prison residents you watch over—we fail to learn, grow, and thrive. We do not meet our potential. And every single one of us has tremendous potential. If you did not believe that, you wouldn’t be reading these words.

While each person travels a path that is unique to them, there are principles and practices that apply to us all. These are necessary steps of soulmaking. That is what we will share with you in these pages.



## FROM GUARD TO GUARDIAN

The story above comes from one among us. This story, her experience, is the genesis of our work to serve you, the CO. We are here to help you remember your own pure heart and to live from that space, not only in your work at prison, but throughout your entire life.

When we launched the Unconditional Freedom Project, it was with an aim to restore dignity to members of society who have been cancelled—those who have been marginalized or in some other way cast out, including individuals who are incarcerated. Our goal is to provide prison residents with nourishment and support to help restore their sense of dignity and worthiness so that they may find meaning and purpose in their lives.

As part of this program, we turned our attention to incarcerated individuals, wondering what our world would be like if prisons functioned more like monasteries. To some, that might sound ludicrous. Yet in your role as CO, that concept likely makes more sense to you. After all, you've seen firsthand at least one incredible transformation when an inmate chose to view their incarceration as an opportunity for deep self-exploration. Is it a coincidence that in many monastic traditions, monks' quarters are called cells? Perhaps not.

With this idea in mind, in 2020, through our book *The Art of Soulmaking*, we introduced women prison residents at a state facility in California to the types of contemplative practices monks use—including meditation and yoga—to experience personal transformation. Additionally, participants were paired with volunteers—people from local community centers, senior homes, donors, and others across the country—who act as touchpoints and supportive souls with whom they can correspond throughout their journey. Our waitlist is growing as women and men continue to hear about and become interested in the program.

Yet in spite of this initial success, the program will not truly succeed without also providing this same transformative experience to the most critical partners in turning a prison into a monastery instead of a cage. The Guards. The role you play is of equal importance and this program is for you, to help you become the best you can be not just for yourselves and your loved ones, but for the incarcerated who interact with you every day.

After all, who is in closer, more regular contact with prison residents than COs? Who plays a greater role in influencing their experience of incarceration? Our mission is to help turn prisons into monasteries, but monks need mentors. They need guides. They need Guardians. Failing to appreciate you for your role, for who you are and what you can offer, for your untapped skills and your desire to serve not only makes it harder for incarcerated individuals to do their work of soulmaking, it leaves you behind. It relegates you to a role of the despised, the misunderstood, and the unlovable.

You, too, deserve better.

You, too, deserve to be freed from the shackles that restrain you.

You deserve to live in wholeness, to experience a life not filled with anxiety, fear, anger, and despair, but with hope, pride, and love.

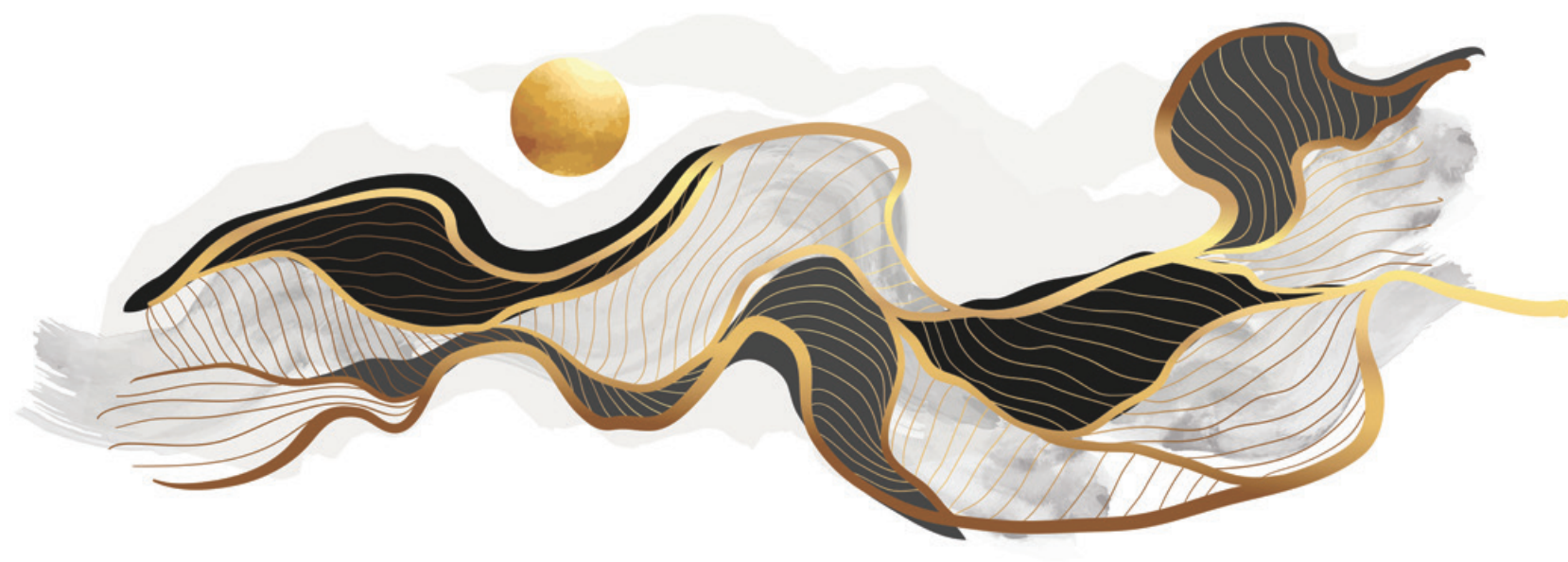
## REMEMBERING YOUR TRUE SELF

Hanuman is a god of ancient Hinduism who was known for his extreme strength and courage, along with his selfless service. But Hanuman wasn't always this version of himself—like Wolverine, Batman, Iron Man, Captain Marvel, or any other of today's comic book heroes (and heroes in real life), Hanuman has an origin story.

In many forms of Hanuman's tale, he was born of a mortal mother, but his father was Vaya—the wind god, who gave Hanuman the ability to fly. One day, young Hanuman awoke hungry from a deep sleep and found that his mother, who usually provided him with sweet, delicious fruit to eat, was gone. He looked around, but couldn't find any fruit to eat. When he cast his glance skyward, he saw the most beautiful, delectable piece of fruit he'd ever seen. In reality, the "fruit" he saw was the sun. Hanuman took off into the sky after the fruit, but Indra, the god of Heaven, seeing Hanuman charging towards the sun cast a lightning bolt at Hanuman which struck him in the jaw. When Vaya, Hanuman's father, saw this he became so angry he struck back at all of the gods, entering their bodies and making them ill. Hanuman retired to a cave to recover from the lightning strike. Feeling bad for what had happened to Hanuman (and wanting to appease his father) the gods gathered around Hanuman and bestowed upon him a powerful assortment of gifts, including extraordinary strength, knowledge, wisdom, the ability to make himself as large or small as he wanted, and immortality.

Yet in his youth, Hanuman was mischievous and he grew to abuse his powers, using them to play pranks. The gods grew tired of Hanuman's relentless antics and prayed to Brahman, the supreme god, for help. In response, Brahman and the gods put a curse on Hanuman that made him forget his superpowers. And so it was that for many years, Hanuman had no awareness of his true abilities—that is until one day, when others who knew approached him and reminded him of his powers.

Perhaps like Hanuman you, too, have forgotten who you are. Perhaps in the atmosphere of confinement, with the screaming, the stench, and the stress, you have forgotten your pure heart. It has become buried underneath the tremendous burdens you bear day after day.



Yet no matter how distant it may seem, your true abilities and your true calling—your genius—lies deep inside you; it's something you can never lose. But years of toil, doing a critical job without acknowledgement, without many tools or resources, may have left you feeling anxious and dejected. Maybe you feel discouraged and ineffective, or as if all you're doing is day after day is just trying to hold back a dam that could break at any second. You're not alone. Half of COs say they rarely feel safe at work. For hours at a time, everything is calm, then suddenly there's a fight, alarms are going off, or you encounter someone who has taken their own life. At the end of the day, you're expected to switch it off and go home, talk to your spouse or play with your kids as if everything's fine. This continued cycle where you go from static routine to a sudden spike into extremes of fear, shock, or grief with little or no support

or recovery time can dysregulate your nervous system. Over time, the way the world looks can start to shift. You may begin lose your positive outlook and your belief that you can be an instrument of change. Perhaps you begin to doubt that what you do makes a difference. Your dream and your desire to serve becomes clouded as you struggle to remember what you're doing it all for. Is it the money? The security? Trying to create a life for your family?

Given this stress, given the darkness you've had to endure, it's easy to forget. In such circumstances how could you possibly feel inspired to recognize and embrace your greatness? Instead of coming closer to yourself, you begin to lose sight of what brought you here in the first place and focus instead on your own survival. As you've seen, far too many of your colleagues don't make it. They drink or do anything else they can to numb the pain and the rage, and some of them, feeling at the absolute end of possibility, take their own lives. Statistics show that on average, every week three COs die by suicide.

But there is a way back from this brink.

There is a greater opportunity and experience that awaits you.

There is a way to remember.

To find it, let's begin at the beginning.



## THE HEART OF A CO

How do people come to be COs? Many, like former CO Jerome, who spoke the words you read at the start of this Introduction, first served in the military. Whether they served in the armed forces or as police officers before transitioning to work in the prison system, or traveled another path, one thing most COs have in common is that they came to the work out of a desire to serve. Not only do they want to protect their community—to guard the gate, as Jerome’s captain described—but most desire to protect prison residents from harm, as well.

Because what goes on behind prison walls is something most of us don’t see, we rely largely on media portrayals to form our opinions of COs. Unfortunately, and as you no doubt know, COs are often shown as abusive, sadistic, or corrupt at worst, or at best passive or disconnected. As Brian Dowe, a former CO with 16 years of experience, says, “There is so much negative stigma of what goes on behind these walls. Most things people are told that go on in corrections are overblown and people judge us on that false narrative.”

What we rarely, if ever, see is your victories. We don’t see you having meaningful conversations with the people you protect, talking them down when they’re having a bad day and feeling like they’re going to lose it. We don’t see stories of COs like Kyle, who says when he worked as a CO in Arizona, he focused on being a problem-solver for inmates. “If I saw an inmate had a problem or was frustrated about something, my first reaction would be to talk—to get him to explain what had happened so that, together, we could find a solution,” says Kyle. We don’t see you putting yourself in harm’s way to prevent a fight. And we don’t see the struggle and despair you experience when you find yourself at home struggling to relate to your spouse and yelling at your children as if they were inmates. We don’t understand how hard it is to be gentle and compassionate and greet your family with a loving heart when all day you’ve been dealing with the constant threat of violence. As former CO Brian describes it, “We all know when we sign on that this job comes with physical danger, but they don’t tell you about the danger to your mind and spirit. Over time you begin to lose your natural tendencies towards human empathy and compassion. A part of your humanity is slowly whittled away.”

To engage in this work and do it well, especially over the long term, requires not just a calling, but superhuman abilities. Some might even say the abilities of a superhero. Under the extreme duress you experience from day-to-day (or night-to-night), you have had to focus entirely on survival skills, foregoing the realization and further development of your deeper gifts. You have become caught in a cycle of diminishing returns as the fulfilment you once anticipated or experienced from your work has declined,

or perhaps disappeared entirely. According to a national survey of COs, 91 percent agreed with the statement that “PTSD is a serious and pervasive issue within corrections.”

When we become marginalized or fixated on survival, our focus and perception narrow. It becomes harder to see a way out, and to imagine the possibilities of what can be—of how things might be different. Instead, your circumstances—those that Brian described—have you feeling your way through the dark, just trying to get through from day to day and doing whatever you need to do to cope.

Perhaps by now your gifts have become a distant memory, or maybe you’ve forgotten them altogether. Yet it is all still there.

What is someone like Kyle doing when he’s able to engage meaningfully with inmates on a personal level—on the level of one human being to another? What superhuman power is he invoking? It’s neither vague nor mysterious, but it is much larger than all of us. That power is love. If you wince or recoil at the mention of love in this context, think for a moment about the incredible transformative power that love has had in your life, when you’ve received a word of kindness from a friend or even a stranger, an embrace from a parent, an “I do” from a spouse, or looked in the eyes of your child. Love changes us. But though it’s everywhere around us if we choose to see and connect with it, it can be difficult to make that choice. Your special power lies in the ability to offer love to those whom society has deemed unlovable.

Of course, no one is actually unlovable; it’s a choice to see people that way. But it takes an exceptionally powerful person to be willing to offer compassion and care to those who have been judged unworthy. Who may have done things so horrifying and appalling that they are difficult to contemplate. That ability is part of the special genius inside you that you will connect with and remember. And it is not an easy one. You will have to have strength and fortitude to be someone who shows kindness to those who may never in their lives have experienced love. To do this, you will have to connect with your own deepest, truest nature.



## FROM GUARD TO GUARDIAN

Once Hanuman was reminded of his abilities, then learned how to connect with the wisdom of his compassion, he became a kind of servant-hero. That is a transformation that you can make, as well.

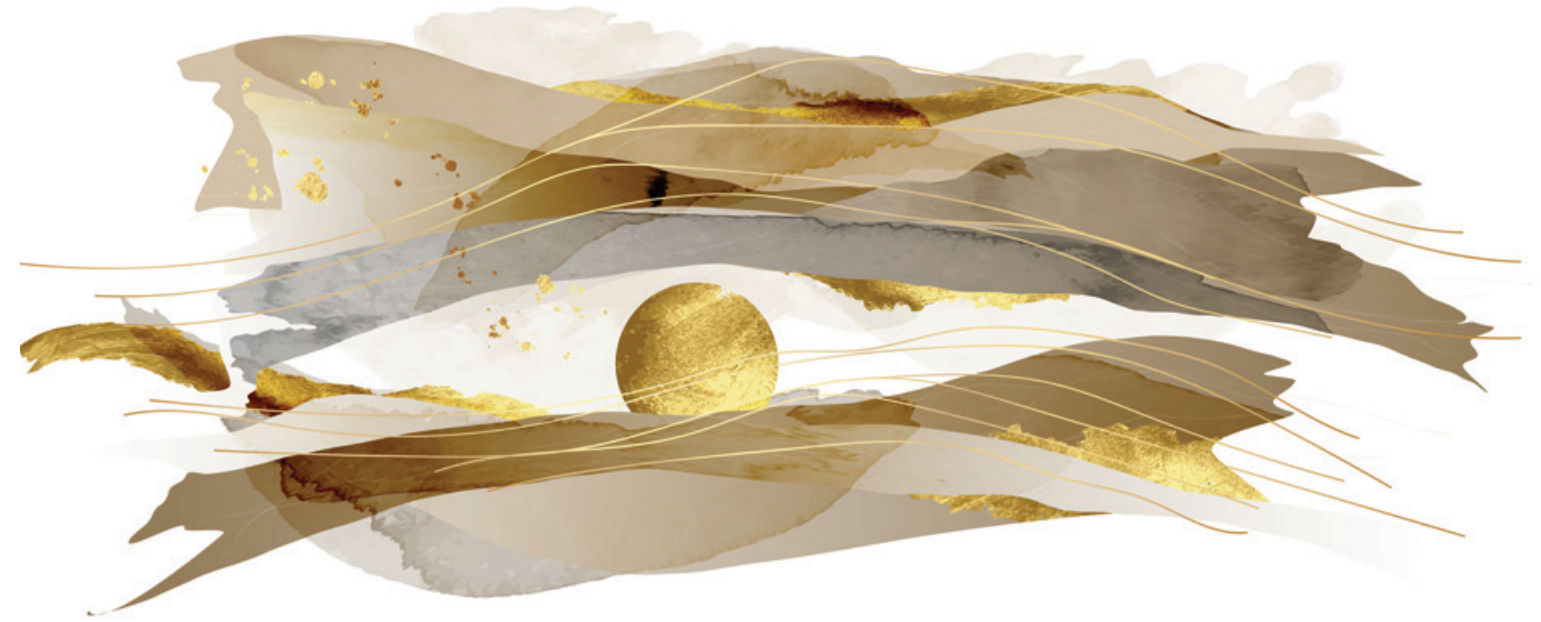
Everything you need to begin is in these pages. We'll share this information through a combination of stories and mythologies both modern and ancient, science, and perhaps most important, insights from other COs who've shared many of your same experiences. We'll also offer a series of exercises that will help you remember. In these pages you will find insights and practices that will help you connect with your brilliance, your genius, your gifts, and support you as you reconnect with your commitment to service. You'll learn to develop and access resources that will help you process the tremendous stress and strain of the work you do. And you will learn how to open to and connect with intelligence of your heart as you shepherd those entrusted to your care and protection through their own personal transformations. As a result, you will be offering something more to society than a guard at the gate. Yes, you will continue to help protect the world, but your work will have a broader and deeper impact. You will be taking what society often sees as a wasted resource, in the form of these incarcerated individuals, and helping them remember a more expansive and powerful version of themselves.

In the 1950s, a crew of workers were tasked with moving a statue of the Buddha to a temple in Bangkok, Thailand. It was a lovely statue, covered with stucco and colored glass, but a rather unremarkable one except for the fact that it was exceptionally heavy and therefore difficult to maneuver. The workers engaged diligently with their task, but in the process of straining and struggling, a piece of the stucco was accidentally chipped away, revealing a shocking surprise. Underneath the layer of stucco and glass, the Buddha was made entirely of gold. At some point in history, estimated to be 200 years prior, the monks had covered the statue to conceal its true worth. Today, the "golden Buddha" sits in the temple in Bangkok, brilliant and shining, its true nature having been lovingly uncovered.

Sometimes our true nature remains covered until the time is right to reveal it. Until, in the midst of struggle, some portion of our outer concealment breaks free. Those you care for are the golden Buddha, as are you.

Through this process, your work will shift. You'll find that you relate to prison residents and to your peers differently, in ways that feel more effective, impactful, and empowering, to yourself and others. We're not here to fix you, because there's nothing wrong with you. And we're not here to tell you who and how to

be. Instead, this book is intended to help you uncover something already inside you, to sink to the level of your soul and connect with what empowers and enlivens you. And you'll find that the shift that occurs within you will raise up those around you, shining a light on them, as well. That's right—for once you'll be focusing on helping yourself instead of others.



For those dedicated to serving and helping others, especially those who are in positions where they're faced with a litany of demanding external challenges, one of the hardest things to do is focus on ourselves. It's the plight of the servant. Caroline Myss, a scholar and spiritual teacher who studies archetypes, writes, "We all serve someone or something. ... The Servant engages aspects of our psyche that call us to make ourselves available to others for the benefit or enhancement of their lives. This task can be done in a healthy manner only if the Servant is simultaneously able to be of service to the self. Without the strength to maintain your own well-being, the Servant becomes consumed by the needs of those around you and loses all focus of the value of your own life." Does that sound familiar?

When we want so much to help others and keep them safe that we focus only on them, we ignore ourselves. We begin to bury our own feelings and needs. We harden ourselves to our own pain and suffering, and eventually our hearts feel as if they are turning to stone, like the hard, dull stucco coating of that golden Buddha. We still feel, and feel deeply, yet we lose the ability to demonstrate these feelings. We cannot reveal our soft underbelly—our kindness and our compassion, as well as our playfulness and mischievousness. (If you've ever seen a picture of the Dalai Lama, you will notice that it's not just love and serenity that show in his eyes, but the sharp twinkling of the Trickster, as well.)



In the process of trying to help others, too often, we become the casualties. More than one-third of COs say that someone in their life has told them that since becoming a CO, they've become more anxious and depressed. When we are unable to access the care and tenderness to relate to ourselves, we also lose the ability to relate to our loved ones and unintentionally hurt them, as well. To those you protect in your role as CO, your isolation from yourself due to the stress you endure relegates you to the role of disciplinarian. According to a survey examining stress experienced by COs, 15 percent reported having mood swings at least once a week, while more than 8 percent said that at least once a week they had periods where they experienced a total loss of feeling for their family and friends. That is not what you signed on for.

Distancing ourselves from our emotions is a protective mechanism, and like all protective mechanisms it may have served an important purpose at one time. Now, however, that protective mechanism has created a dysfunction. Yet as the philosopher Pythagoras once wrote, "A stone is frozen music." The music of life, of love, of connection is still inside you, behind your hard, stony exterior, and it can be liberated. The insights, stories, and practices in this book will help release some of the tremendous pressure on you so that you can feel again your brave, noble heart, and that beautiful heart will pulse and flow with vibrant, life-giving energy once more. Make no mistake, connecting with the power of love is not about becoming weak or ineffective, but the opposite. Love is a great clarifier and allows us to see and speak truth, and to connect with the truth in others. Love is the very energy of life, and we can learn to wield it like a sword that can pierce even the toughest exterior.

If prisons really were monasteries, you would be the teachers, the priests, the senior monks. You would be charged not with warehousing and punishment, but with creating a safe and nurturing environment for prison residents to connect with the gold inside them. To realize this vision—to become a Guardian—you must first turn inward to retrieve that which probably feels lost to you.

Transformation is not easy. The ancient Celts had a process for breaking open stone. They would kindle a roaring fire and place the stone inside it, stoking the fire until the stone was burning hot. Then, they would douse the stone with cold water. The sudden temperature change would cause the stone to crack open. As the poet Rumi wrote, "You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens."

Soulmaking is hard work, and sometimes painful. But it is worthwhile, and you do not have to make the journey alone. In these pages you will find something you may have never experienced before, as a CO or otherwise. You will find understanding, acceptance, and love. Because as we believe, nothing changes without love. The very laws of physics reflect this, how focused attention and even simply noticing causes a state change. Imagine, then, the seismic impact that can be initiated by the pure attention of love.

All of us are imprisoned when we do not feel love, and we wish for your heart to be free. We wish for you to release the burdens of shame, fear, anxiety, cynicism, grief—anything that is blocking you from connecting with the pure intention of service and purpose that brought you here.

You don't need to feel regret or resentment for any of these emotions or for any of your past experiences. Instead, consider them as evidence of what a deeply feeling, caring, and strong person you are to have borne them this far.

Now, however, it's time for a different way. A more empowering way. You were made for this, and everything you need is already inside you, waiting to be acknowledged. Waiting to be witnessed. Waiting to be remembered.

Somewhere inside you already know how to walk this path, it's just that you've encountered obstructions and obstacles that have barred your way. Let's remove some of them now.

## THE PATH OF SOULMAKING

Making a soul is like building a home. It is your true home, one that can never be abandoned, burned down, or foreclosed upon. As with constructing any domicile, there is a series of steps to follow and order in which to follow them. That is what is contained in this book. The building you must do yourself. Again, it is the labor of a lifetime, so best to approach it as a labor of love.

As with any new construction, we will begin with a plan. A blueprint. Some sense of what you're building. We will start at the choice point, at the options that confront you as you begin. And we will delve into what it means to embody one's genius or calling, and what that might look like for you.

Next comes the clearing of the ground. The excavation. You will start by understanding and accepting that you are worth this mighty effort. That your gifts are very real, and that given time, attention, and nurturing, they will come forward. And that you deserve the great satisfaction of seeing yourself and your true work made manifest in the world. These are not simple concepts to embrace, especially for those who've remained so unseen and unappreciated for so long. Who may have engaged in patterns of thought and behavior that perhaps have made you feel that you belong in a distant place far from society's sight. At this stage you'll acknowledge your past experiences and the projections levied against you, along with their impact. You'll examine the toll of trauma in your life—your own, and that of those in your care. And we'll discuss how, acknowledging this, you can clear the way for a solid foundation.

Next comes the creation of a solid base. The pouring of the foundation. We'll look at how you can learn to do something that will likely feel wholly unnatural for you—putting yourself before others. Though caring for yourself first is a concept that's probably hard to fathom given your deep desire to care for and protect others, you'll see why it is a crucial component of your ability to fulfill your purpose effectively and over the long term. You will also read the survey map of your land, noting its boundaries and observing how boundary violations affect you and those around you.

Then it will be time for construction. Building your house. This will involve embracing a different system of order than the one you've known—because the last thing you want to do is mindlessly re-create the dilapidated structure that existed previously. To do this, you'll open to new ways of being in the world and of relating to others. You'll also learn how to transform into gold what now appears as ordinary lead. How can it be that a house becomes a home? That a prison becomes a monastery? You will begin to work with this craft of supreme transformation. And, of course, you cannot build without the necessary tools. We'll share with you new approaches to communication that will aid this transformation. You will discover the power of flow—what it is and how to experience it more often in your work and your life, even and especially when the forces around you feel like they're doing everything they can to work against you. And you will learn to engage your daemon—that chaotic force we described earlier that stirs inside you, that pushes you to extend yourself, to reach, to work, to realize full connectedness with your deep self. To make your soul.

If only our work were done once construction was finished, but as any home-dweller knows, there is always maintenance. And once we sit down in our comfy chair and survey what we've created, quickly we start to notice that we can improve upon our work even more. As the journey of this book comes to a close, you will create a plan for how to continue this work. For realizing the full depth and breadth of your transformation, and for living a life in which you experience the unparalleled pleasure and intense satisfaction of living your purpose.

## DEALING WITH INITIAL DISCOMFORT

At this moment, anticipating such an undertaking and all that it will require of you, you might be experiencing anxiety, fear, excitement (or a mixture of these). Know that at the most basic level, these emotions are your brain signaling to you through chemical and electrical messengers: I'm about to be challenged. I'm about to explore new territory. When we approach an undertaking that lies outside our present ability, whether it's learning something new, starting an exercise program, or developing a new thought pattern, our brains release a combination of electrical signals and neurotransmitters such as norepinephrine—the brain's version of adrenaline. These chemical messengers can make our minds and bodies feel agitated or anxious, unleashing sensations that we can experience as unpleasant and label as negative. Yet what these chemicals and signals are doing is helping you to focus and enabling your brain to change. They are preparing for and assisting with your transformation.

Frequently, though, we let this sense of agitation derail us. If you've ever procrastinated on starting difficult project, it's likely because like so many of us, you struggled to get over this initial hurdle of discomfort. If you were in the military or a similar vocation, you probably learned to lean in to the discomfort you felt at the prospect of jumping out of a plane or working with live fire for the first time. You learned to go towards the fight, not run away. As far as our brains and the whole of our nervous system is concerned, this is the type of response we want to train. It's the type of response that will enable us to, when we encounter stress, experience it more often as a challenge we can meet rather than a threat that may overcome us. While your feelings right now might seem uncomfortable, know that they are indications that your body is preparing to support you.

As you go through this process, you will literally change into a new person—a richer version of yourself. Your brain and your body will help you by making new connections and enlivening parts of yourself that have dwelled in darkness and been ignored or shut down, and by discarding at all that no longer serves you. All of this will happen at the very level of your cells, and these changes will ripple outward, shifting your perspective and your emotions. How you engage with life will change. You will feel more effective and connected, as if you are fully capable of completing your mission. Of doing what you came here to do.

Meaningful change is difficult at first. Imagine crossing a field after a blizzard. No path is visible and it's hard to make your way through waist-deep snow. Yet as you venture the trail more often, following in your own footprints, a route is carved, and it becomes easier to make your way.

It all begins with one step. Followed by another. Then another.

Before you know it, you are home.



# CHAPTER ONE: WEEK ONE

## THE CHOICE POINT

“When I was in my mid-thirties, I had worked different jobs, but I was searching for something that would give me more of a sense of purpose. I had an opportunity to move to Kansas for a job with the Department of Corrections in Ellsworth. I just loved it. I found this family, this home, where I could... use my gifts of humor and my ability to teach in different ways. I saw it as a new challenge.”

— Gregory Piper, a CO who has served as a Master key control Sergeant, member of a Special Operations Response Team, corrections counselor, among other roles

Whether it was your first, fourth, fourteenth, or fortieth shift, most COs report having at least one that started, or ended, with some form of the question, What have I gotten myself into? Michelle Threatt, a 15-year veteran of corrections, recalls this feeling. “The first day I walked into those gates and they shut behind me, I looked around at all of the inmates in their uniforms and the fear just hit me. ... The first inmate to ever speak to me walked up and said, ‘Officer, what’s your name?’ I told him and he said, ‘Tomorrow when you come in here, you show no fear. Because it’s all over you.’” Yet just a few years after that terrifying first shift, Michelle was up for an award for detention deputy of the year. Not only had she saved a prison resident from choking, but she also survived a terrifying incident where someone who was admitted to the hospital ward managed to work loose a sink faucet and savagely beat Michelle over the head with it before trying to escape. In spite of her injuries, Michelle took off down the hall after him and, when given the opportunity to shoot him, held her fire. She had the option and the opportunity to retaliate, yet she chose not to. Instead, the prison resident was recaptured safely.

How is it that some COs love their job, while given the same circumstances, others hate it? That while some COs are despised by prison residents, others are respected and even revered? Why do some COs see their job as just a way to get paid, or worse, as an opportunity for abuse, while others hold a sense of honor and dedication around their work? How does a Greg become a Greg, and a Michelle become a Michelle?

It all starts with the perhaps the most powerful tool each of us wields—choice. In this chapter we start the journey of soulmaking at the very beginning. At the choice point.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE

Every day you are surrounded by the consequences of choice. You see lives that, in some cases, in just the blink of an eye have been transformed by the impact of choice. To lie or not. To rape or not. To kill or not.

The reality is that every day each of us is faced with countless choices. When will we wake up? What will we eat? How will we conduct ourselves? The list is endless.

And yet, what if we were to tell you that at the heart of everything, at the very center of life, each of us faces a single choice. A choice so pivotal and influential that it shapes all of our other choices in life? And that this choice is the same for each and every one of us, regardless of our gender, the color of our skin, our incarceration status, and on. This choice relates to how we will meet life and all that it has to offer us. And it is a choice that, if we do not make it consciously, will be made by default, and not to our benefit.

## WILL I BE A VICTIM, OR WILL I CHOOSE AWARENESS?

When you encounter discomfort, pain, or other challenges, will you choose to avoid them, or to sit with these difficult sensations? Will you choose to experience life as what happens to you, or will you choose to see your role in all that is? Will you view everything that happens, your circumstances, what’s given to you and what’s withheld, as opportunities, as raw materials with which you can build your soul? Will you choose to try and exert control over the world around you, either through aggressive or passive means, or will you change the game, agreeing instead to take on the mantle of responsibility for your own life and all that comes with it? To understand and embrace that you are the shaper of your own outcomes? Will you opt to step out of the light-filled world of logic and certainty, and instead make the dark journey into something deeper, more lasting, and more real, even though the way is not always clear? And will you choose to welcome everyone around you, even incarcerated individuals, especially incarcerated individuals, as potential teachers who can provide profound insights for your own development?

When we experience any form of pain, for most of us our natural reaction is to try and make it stop. We need to react, often wildly, or do anything else that will expel the source of pain from our lives. With the incarcerated individuals we encounter, we want them to shut up, to settle down, to obey. Their acting out and their wrestling with their own challenges frustrates or angers us or fills us with fear. But discomfort isn’t about what anyone else is doing. Instead, it is about your internal state—how you are experiencing what is happening.

A victim reacts to what is happening outside them. Someone who has chosen accountability is able to direct whatever energy is present in a situation in constructive ways. Think about martial artist Bruce Lee, who had what many regard as superhuman abilities. In addition to being a legendary martial artist, Lee was also a philosopher. One of his most famous adages was to “be like water.” Lee

said, “Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object, and you shall find a way around or through it. ... If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.”

“Darkness is everything I do not know, cannot control, and am often afraid of. But that’s just the beginner’s definition. If I am a believer in God, then darkness is also where God dwells. God may also be frightening and uncontrollable and largely unknown to me, yet I decide to trust God anyway.”

– Barbara Taylor, theologian and Episcopal priest

Trying to make sense of prison is like trying to stop the flow of water. In many ways, prison is a senseless place. Less than half of COs believe they are making a positive difference in the lives of the prison residents, or that when an individual is released from prison, they will be better prepared to function as a law-abiding citizen. The way many prisons in the U.S. function, with a focus on warehousing over rehabilitation, defies logic. There is no way for the brain to make sense of it. However, all is not lost, because even in the most illogical of environments, the soul can take what is available and make meaning. Water finds a way.

Even in the most degrading, demeaning environment, there is still opportunity. The question is not Why? That is a victim’s question. The question is What? What can I make of this place that will serve me? That will make me stronger? That will make me more open and loving? That will make me more resilient? And on.

The opportunities are endless when you change the way you view your circumstances.

We’ll explore the fundamental choice and this idea of victim consciousness more in a moment, but first, let’s clarify what we mean by your soul. This is an essential understanding as your soul is the source of your blueprint for the place inside yourself you will come to call home. It is also the most powerful resource at your disposal for operating lovingly and effectively in a gritty, chaotic, and nonsensical world.

## WHAT IS YOUR SOUL?

In this book, we’ll refer to divinity as well as to God. This isn’t meant to imply any particular interpretation of what God, other than the energy that runs through all things, weaving us all together in a vast interconnected web. You can think of God as an organizing principle, as a Higher Power, Unity, or even as a Great Mystery. You can think of God simply as Love or as Home. This book is secular—it has no grounding in any religion or single concept of God. You are free to interpret God in a way that feels right and makes sense to you. But make no mistake—soulmaking requires that you believe in something larger than you. That some principle or force with more intelligence or insight decides your worth and your value. In this work, as you connect with your soul and remember your deepest self, your worthiness is not up for negotiation. That decision has already been made. As one of our friends says when it comes to her sense of her own worthiness, “That decision is above my paygrade.” It’s non-negotiable.

As with God, the words spirit and soul are often associated with religion, but in their deepest truth they operate entirely free of such structures. As with God, you can choose to view them through the lens of a particular religion if that’s helpful for you, but you don’t have to.

The spirit is that inside you which aligns with logic and reason. The spirit is clean and crisp. It likes order and organization. Most formal religions are concerned with tending the spirit, and they lay down a prescribed series of steps and rules to follow to feel the unity of our spirit with God. Through our spirit we carry the DNA of God inside us. This is powerful and beautiful. And it is not the soul. In many ways, we can think of the soul as the opposite. Not as anti-God, but as the seat of our self rather than our divinity.

It’s tough to offer a precise definition of the soul, because by its very nature it is a messy entity, and not easily conceived of. It must be felt. Experienced. And it is as unique to you as your fingerprint. The soul is unkempt. It does not fear mud or grime. It thrives in chaos because it embraces any situation that requires us to grow. And it likes to lurk in dark places. Your soul drew you to your work as a CO, and it thrives in this unpredictable environment, ripe as it is with so much potential not just for chaos, but also for human flourishing, as the two often go together. Sometimes the soul comes up behind us and whispers in our ears, beckoning us to do things that we do not at first understand, and may never fully grasp with our logical minds. Why would I choose this job even though I could probably find something easier, that would require less of me? Why would I offer that man a kind word when he’s in prison for rape? Why would I opt not to punish a prison resident harshly for his insults, even though it’s in my power to do so, and many even want and expect me to?



The soul's urgings can come to us as unbidden and nonsensical thoughts, or we can feel its direction in wordless spaces within our bodies, inside our very cells. It speaks to us in myths and riddles, through fables, poetry, and art. To hear the soul, we must engage all of our senses. To receive its guidance, we must soften our gaze and cock our heads a bit to the side and allow ourselves to perceive things that are just out of focus. To comprehend its deep desires, we must allow ourselves to feel everything and deny nothing. If that is frightening or unappealing, then you're paying attention. The path of soulmaking is not the path of complacency. Like any relationship worth having, it will require your full attention and engagement.

"It's how you see it. What really for me was a change in point was looking for the good that could come out of my bad situation. I purposely looked for it, and I molded that thing until I could see it—pit bull focus—and now, you know what, I'm living it."

—Jamila Davis, American author, activist, and former Federal prisoner #59253-053

## YOUR SOUL ASKS MUCH, AND IT GIVES MUCH.

In our culture, we thrive on control, or rather the illusion of control, but control is impossible. Life cannot be tamed. When we're connected to our soul, though, we no longer need to control because we have the ability to respond and work with whatever arises. We "rise to the level of our training," as they say in the military. What we've trained is the ability to be centered in all situations—to know and respond from our deepest self, and in a way that is true and authentic to us.

As Richard Lovelace, a 17th Century poet who was imprisoned for fighting on the side of the king during the civil war, wrote, "Stone walls do not a Prison make; Nor Iron bars a Cage...If I have freedom in my Love, And in my soul am free, Angels alone that soar above, Enjoy such Liberty." This is the space the soulmaker inhabits—the space where you create your own reality through the choices you make about how you will interact with the world around you.

You and your fellow COs have quite a bit in common with those in your care. Every day you are surrounded by confinement. By oppression and by suppression. You see broken bodies, broken spirits, and wounded souls. In some ways, the only difference is that you get to sleep on a real mattress, eat a pizza if you want, and get a week off every year. Other than that, though, you're constantly exposed to the same brand of stress, violence, and despair.

Yet every once in a while, there is someone different. Someone who enjoys liberty in spite of their circumstances, and in some ways, they find a greater freedom inside themselves because of their harsh surroundings. A CO or an incarcerated individual who does not allow their external circumstances to master them, but instead has learned to master their circumstances. There is a Greg, a Michelle, or a Damien Echols.

Damien Echols was part of the infamous West Memphis Three—a group of teens who in 1994 were convicted in Arkansas of murdering three eight-year-old boys. Echols was sentenced to death and lived on death row, including 10 years in solitary confinement, for 18 years. Eventually he and his friends were released as part of a plea deal in which they were allowed to maintain their innocence, yet the state did not have to exonerate them. Echols described how he survived the hopeless circumstances he experienced each day by doing what he could to reconnect with his soul and embrace its guidance, and that it all began with a single choice.

As Echols recalls, "The first guy I met in prison told me I could sit in my cell and slowly stagnate and go insane like the vast majority of the people in solitary OR I could turn my cell into a monastery and continue to grow, evolve, and learn." He chose the latter. Even though in many ways Echols experienced some of the worst victimization many of us can imagine—first through his conviction then through his experiences in prison, where he says he was beaten and harassed repeatedly and mercilessly, including by COs—he chose to develop the consciousness of acceptance and accountability. He chose the path of soulmaking.

## OWNING AND HARNESSING OUR DRIVE

One way we can frame this choice of victimhood versus accountability is whether we choose to operate in the land of projections, where our perceptions are based on unconscious beliefs, or we choose to see the truth and harness the power of our own inner workings. Philosopher Ken Wilber provides an instructive example.

Let's say you want to clean out your garage. It's a total mess, filled with things you know you'll probably never use again, and so cluttered you have trouble finding the things you're actually looking for. One Saturday morning you get up bright and early, put on some old clothes, pour a fresh cup of coffee, and head out to the garage. At this point, explains Wilber, you're in touch with your drive. Maybe you're not relishing the work ahead of you, but you're focused more on your desire to have a clean garage than you are on the drudgery of the work ahead.

When you open the garage door and survey the task, however, something starts to shift. Man, there's a lot of stuff. How did all this crap wind up in here, anyway? Instead of getting down to business, you come upon some abandoned projects and start to tinker a bit. You move a box here, shift one there, but without making any real progress. At this stage, you're still in contact with your drive to have a clean garage, but that connection has faded a bit. You're starting to forget it, and as Wilber explains, that's when you'll start to alienate it, or see it as something outside of you.

Your drive is still active, so it demands attention, but you're less aware of it. You don't feel your desire to clean the garage as much as a desire to clean the garage. It exists, but you don't recognize it as belonging to you. So, feeling this drive to clean the garage but not identifying with it, you start to get annoyed, tossing things around. Who's making you do this, anyway? It's a gorgeous day. There are so many other things you could be doing, and after all, you only have so much time off work. You should be relaxing! At this point, a projection exists, but it's without direction. Like a heat-seeking missile, it's zooming around, looking for a target.

Enter, your spouse, who peeks in and asks, "Hey, how's it going?"

Target: acquired. Now you're free to project your irritation on your spouse, perceiving that they are the source of the drive to clean the garage.

"Geez," you reply, "I said I'd do it and I'll do it—stop nagging me!"

Now you might believe it was your spouse's drive that's got you shut up in the garage on a gorgeous Saturday morning. But if you were truly disconnected with the drive to clean the garage—if it belonged to your spouse alone, and you decided that it was more important for you to get some rest that day instead of clean, you could simply have said, "You know, honey, I was thinking I'd do this today, but I really had a rough week and I could use some recovery time, and it's such a beautiful day. How about if we take a nice walk, instead?" But you don't do that because you are connected to the drive. It matters to you. But since you're not aware of the connection, and since someone wants the garage to be cleaned, it must be your spouse.

Another way to perceive of a projected drive is as pressure. When we feel pressure, we feel a projected drive coming at us from the outside. That heat-seeking missile has locked its sights back on us, but we have no idea that we're the ones who launched the missile to begin with.

Let's look at this idea of drives and projection from the standpoint of your work. One of the reasons your work can feel so stressful is because you have a drive to help people who are incarcerated be in some way rehabilitated or otherwise experience a positive change because of their time in prison. You know that even though you can't totally affect the outcome, you do play a role in how that situation unfolds. If you didn't have a drive for this result to occur, you wouldn't care what happened to the prison residents. When it feels like the odds are stacked against you in your work, when it feels like the challenge is overwhelming, you can start to externalize that drive and project it on those around you. You feel pressure from your co-workers, or your boss, or the prison residents themselves.

When we externalize our drives, we are choosing to meet the world as victims. We feel powerless over the forces acting upon us, and we become aggressive to what we perceive as pressure from others, or we push back on them, yelling, using abusive language, or even physical force. Or we become passive. We turn down the volume on our frustration and our feelings by shutting down our emotions or drowning them in anything that can help us tune them out, whether it's alcohol, food, television, or drugs.

The alternative and the way of accountability is to recognize that if we feel pressure, then the drive must come from within us. And if we can connect with that drive, we can act on it. We can find constructive ways to interact with prison residents that can support their rehabilitative process. We can develop tools for interaction that demonstrate love and compassion, providing them with an atmosphere in which change is not only possible, but more likely. As Damien Echols wrote in his journal during prison, "I believe love can fix anything...I just need more of it than I can get in here." We can make that transformative love readily available.

Our level of awareness about our drives and projections has a massive impact on how we experience life. Similarly, our thoughts are powerful shapers of our life experience, and on the experiences of those around us.





because it is the choice that is made by default, when we do not consciously choose to experience life otherwise.

## OUR CORE BELIEFS

Some of the thoughts we have seem transient—they are situational and rely on what’s happening around us at the moment. Other thoughts have been around much longer and play in the background of our lives like a movie soundtrack. Many of these thoughts, which we call core beliefs, were inherited from our family members. As very young children, from our earliest days, based on the actions and inactions, the words, the responses, the tone of voice, the presence or lack of affection from others, we developed core beliefs about the way life is. These beliefs function as unquestioned assumptions. People who’ve done bad things are bad people, and they’ll never change. Or, Given the right circumstances, anyone could make destructive choices. Love has the power to open any heart.

Chamelle experienced a shift in her core beliefs when she chose to relate to her role as a CO not as a victim, but as a someone who is in touch with and accountable for her drives and motivations. She explains, “I had this big ‘a-ha’ moment and realized I didn’t have to be mean. I didn’t have to go cold. They are inmates, but at the end of the day, they are also human beings. One could be my brother or my sister. It could even be me in there. When I started changing the way I acted towards them and my perception of them, my job got easier, and it shifted my whole perspective.” Rather than living life as a victim, operating in reaction to what others do or don’t do, Chamelle recognized herself as the shaper of her own experiences. With that, she was able to see the power and potential of the impact she can have on others when she operates in conscious collaboration with this creative energy of life.

Negative core beliefs, such as Chamelle’s original belief that the individuals she worked with were inhuman and otherwise fundamentally different from her, operate like a tape playing in the background so quietly that we often aren’t aware of it. Yet these beliefs shape our conscious thoughts and actions. We allow these unquestioned assumptions to define us and our world.

When we do not make an active choice to engage with life not just thoughtfully, but soulfully, our reality is controlled by our external circumstances. We are at the whim of what’s going on in the outside world, with little to no ability to control our internal state. Instead, our lives become a reaction, and any goals or desires we want to realize or experience are held hostage by what happens around us. We cannot direct our lives. Victim consciousness is everywhere,

What does otherwise look like? In a word: freedom.

It is the choice to see everything life gives you, from the love of your partner to the anger and hatred of those you work with (or vice versa), as an opportunity for growth, for understanding, for learning. It is to live without judgment of your circumstances and to accept what is. To dedicate yourself to seeking out what is true in this moment and separating it from what is not—the unconscious thought patterns, including projections, that would lead you back to victim consciousness. When we operate as a victim, we tense and push back. We try to force some concept of external justice or logic onto a situation. Instead of letting it be what it is, we try to force a narrative fueled by our unconscious core beliefs.

As Bruce Lee observes, “If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves.” When we tense and shift into victim mode, we become blind to what is possible. If we stay open and pliable, willing to work with what is, endless possibilities become available to us.

Remember Michelle, who experienced a vicious assault? She was truly victimized in that experience and at first, she did wonder Why me? But as she now says, “My question now is, ‘Why not me?’ I’m glad it was me because that seed [my attacker] planted pushed me into my purpose. I still call it ‘the best worst day of my life’ because everything changed for the better.” This is the power of accountability. It is an agreement to live in perpetual flow with all that is—to do as Bruce Lee says and be like water.

## HOW OPENING TO STRUGGLE MAKES US STRONGER

Scientists who study the brain say that people who are able to meet life on their own terms, rather than meet it with fear or unnecessary aggression or by freezing and shutting down, who instead cultivate a willingness to lean into their discomfort and who say “yes” to circumstances, are those who most consistently raise their level of performance. They do life better. They are more resilient and recover more quickly. They continually expand what they’re capable of, physically, emotionally, and on, because with

each incidence in which they lean in willingly, their ability to perform well in challenging circumstances grows. In a very real way, they become unlimited.

Similarly, scientists are now looking at stress differently. We're mostly taught that stress is bad, and when it's chronic, it's true that it can have some extremely negative effects. But not all stress is bad. One psychologist, Kelly McGonigal, who is an expert in stress research, describes stress simply as a signal that we're meant to move. For example, the body releases stress hormones early in the morning that make you hungry and thirsty. The stress is designed to get you to move so that you take care of your body's needs. That's a good thing. The stress of loneliness, as McGonigal describes it, feels terrible, but its underlying message is that it's moving you to connect with others. We know that human relationships are essential for our health and wellbeing, so this is another example of stress actually serving us. As McGonigal says, "Embracing stress is more important than reducing stress." So, we're not just trying to

cut off all of our stress signals or live in some kind of perpetually happy space where we become disconnected from ourselves. Instead, we're becoming

smarter and more thoughtful of the signals around and inside us, becoming better judges of how we're meant to move in the world that creates the most benefit for ourselves and others.

Those who learn to lean in to challenges are people who, when a battle presents itself, draw their swords and run towards it. The battle is often metaphoric, but sometimes—especially for you—it may be quite literal. These are the guards who are able to deal with prison residents' defensive and aggressive behaviors and with other challenging circumstances without internalizing the

experience—reliving the stress in an unending loop—or numbing their emotions.

Seeing people locked up for months and years on end, seeing so many lives lived in confinement, has the potential to be soul crushing. If you are dealing with these and other horrors of your work by shutting down your feelings, you've likely found that it's not so easy to turn them back on again when you clock out and go home. When you teach yourself to become numb to circumstances that evoke a difficult emotional response, it's like throwing the master switch on an electrical box. The power to everything—the ability to really feel anything—is switched off.

Ben King served in the Iraq War as a Psychological Operations Sergeant. He says it was nearly a decade before he realized the deep psychological effects his deployment had on him. As a result of his experiences and his struggle to deal with trauma, King created Armor Down, an organization that helps service members and others who have learned to "armor up" as a way to cope with their work, compartmentalizing and shutting down their feelings—learn instead how to "armor down." King explains that it's not about feeling perpetual peace or losing your edge, it's about learning how to engage all of your resources more effectively and appropriately all day, every day. When you live from a standpoint of acceptance and accountability, King says, "You can recognize when you're getting spun up and instead of getting into flat-out aggressor mode, you can get into a space of being able to assess the situation with your highest level of processing and perceiving. It's not that conflict disappears, it's that whatever shows up is no longer 'good' or 'bad.' There's no longer that narrative. You look instead at the qualities that show up and your relationship to them. You observe how you can participate with an incident of aggression, for example, in a way that affords you the opportunity to control the situation without getting attached to it." You never have to turn off your feelings, instead you relate to them differently, using them to inform your actions.

Anyone who is consistently exposed to harsh realities benefits from this ability to retain flexibility in how we relate with life. Mother Teresa, who every day was exposed to massive amounts of human suffering in the rank, dirty slums of Calcutta. Much of the suffering she saw she could do little to nothing to alleviate. Yet she was not consumed by it, nor did she have to shut down her feelings to deal with it every day. Over decades of service, she was able to help countless people—thousands upon thousands. This same woman, who lived with the horrifying consequences of human neglect and uncaring, once said: "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." Instead of focusing on judging those who could have helped but didn't, she focused on the power of love to impact the lives of everyone around her. She did not let what was around her every day make her jaded or numb, she opened to it, and she was able to do this because of her deep connection to her soul. One thing you never see said or written about Mother Teresa is that she was weak or ineffective.

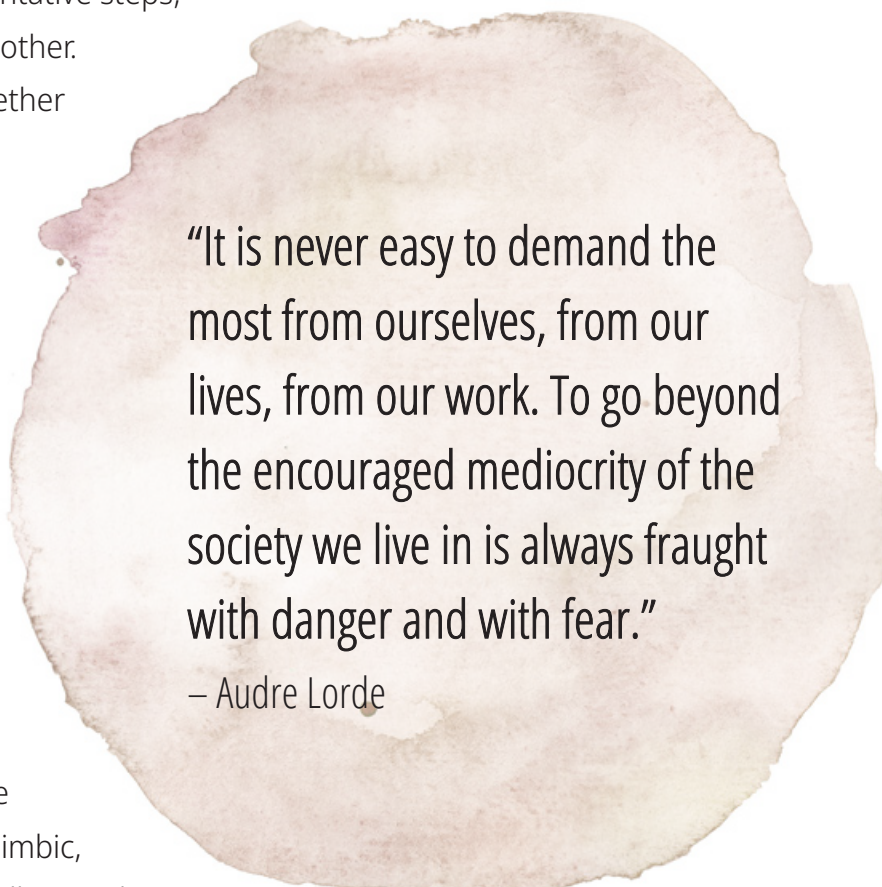
When we learn to move towards our circumstances, no matter how daunting, we are able to maintain our center. If force of some kind is required, we are able to apply it appropriately. We are able to maintain balance, feeling that steady center point inside us. This center is our soul. Your soul will become the truth to which you orient as you interact with life, because nothing and no one knows you better. Simply being who you are and remaining rooted in yourself will begin to influence your surroundings. All that is around you will relate to you differently, and you to it, simply because of the way you walk in the world.



## WHO WE ARE AFFECTS OTHERS

Scientists study an almost mystical, but very real phenomenon called limbic resonance. We're aware of the idea that babies can't self-regulate most of their own internal processes. You've probably seen a toddler just starting to walk take a few tentative steps, then fall. Immediately she looks to her mother. Based on how her mother responds, whether she expresses distress that the baby has fallen, or whether she offers a smile and a gentle "oops!", the baby responds by crying or by laughing and getting back up. She is reading her mother for cues as to how she should feel. Similarly, when a baby cries and her mother picks her up and holds her close, offering soothing sounds and rubbing her back, this interaction helps to regulate the baby's nervous system and calm her. We share deep emotional states with one another through limbic resonance—the limbic, or emotional, centers of our brains, actually signal one another. And this doesn't only happen in childhood, but throughout our whole lives. Though eventually our bodies learn to self-regulate in many ways, we still pick up a tremendous number of cues from other people. If you've ever heard the idea that emotions are contagious, it's because of limbic resonance. As poet John Donne observed, no man is an island. What one of us does and what one of us feels impacts us all.

You experience this every time you are in the presence of people whose minds and hearts are filled with anger and aggression and you begin to feel irritated and disgruntled, or when you come home and your dog jumps up into your lap and you begin to pet him and feel a sense of calm settle over you. You've likely noticed how prison residents and correctional officers affect one another, pulling each other up or down. You've seen this among your co-workers, too, if you've ever had that toxic person on your team or your shift who seems to pollute the very air around them with their negativity.



"It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of the society we live in is always fraught with danger and with fear."

— Audre Lorde

Most of this influence is unconscious. It's like some invisible force is driving our train.

Later in this book, we will discuss the importance of connecting with our emotions and bodily states, along with our thoughts, so that we can consciously drive our train. We become aware of our direction and of all obstacles in our path, and we are able to seamlessly course-correct when necessary.

When you choose the soul path, you commit to consciously driving your own train. When this happens, you will become an unstoppable force, influencing everything and everyone around you. That does not mean that you become responsible for others—in soulmaking you are responsible for yourself, alone. But you are responsible entirely, without excuse, without fail. Still, all you need to do is your best, then you can let go of the outcome, for yourself and others. That will take care of itself. People in your life—your family, your co-workers, the incarcerated individuals you watch—they are responsible for their own souls. They will be influenced by you. What they do with that influence is up to them. That is their choice.

## THE CHALLENGE OF SOULMAKING

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the work of soulmaking is not easy. This choice may feel like a simple one and in many ways, it is, but it is a difficult one to make real in your life. In a society where people are encouraged towards passivity and on overreliance on faceless and soulless systems, blame and entitlement are the currency of the land. They are intoxicating and can be extremely difficult to give up. It's easy to blame the system. It's easy to blame the prison residents. There are very real problems and issues with your work, very real challenges. But in time and with practice, you will become accustomed to a different reality, one where you experience true control—not over your circumstances, but over your reactions to them. You will begin to master your inner world and see from this vantage point that the only power others have over you is that which you willingly give them. Chamelle describes her own realization. "I have to say, I did not like my job for the first 10 years, but I needed it for the great benefits and decent pay. The first two and a half years in High Point, my job was hard and intense, but I learned that I was the one that made my job so hard. It wasn't the inmates. It was me..."

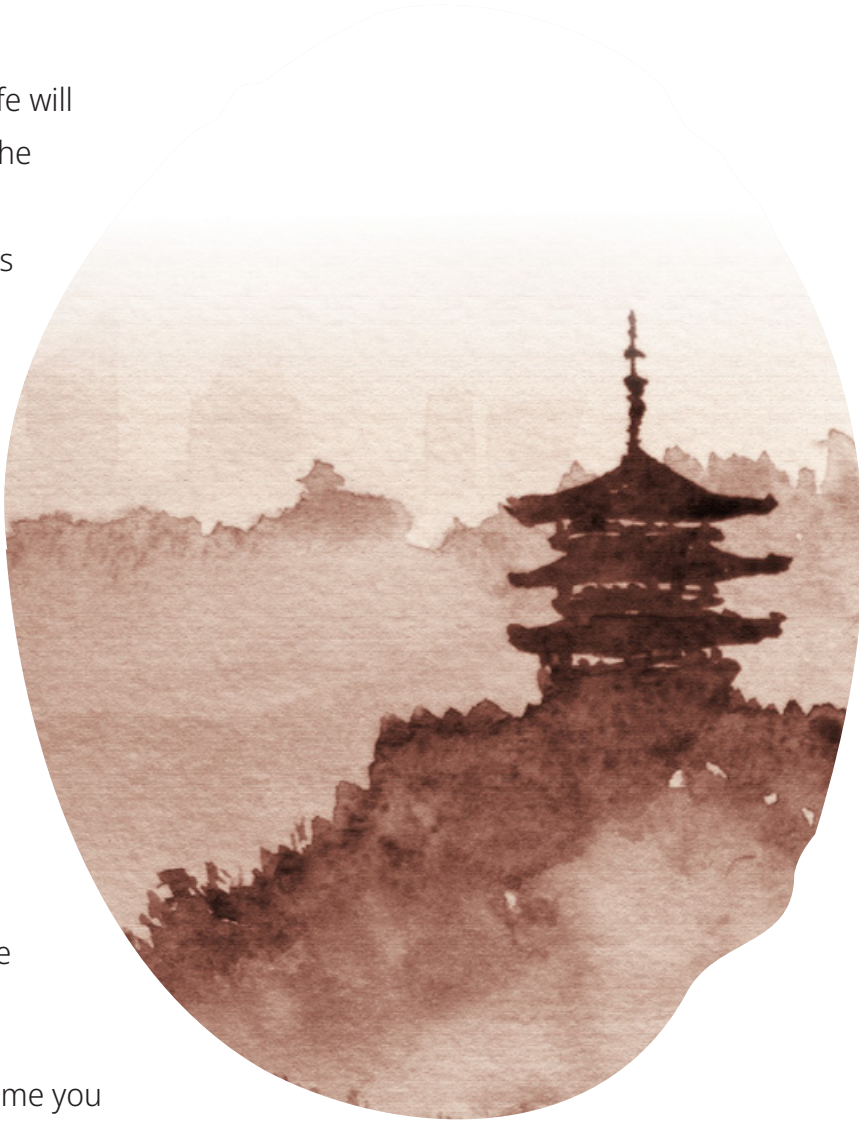
In this world of soulmaking, the most difficult battles are reserved for those who are strongest. Think of them—of yourself—as a member of the soul's Special Forces. The tip of the spear. This choice, the choice for absolute presence and absolute accountability, is one most people do not make. By stepping on this path, you go where others dare not tread. (The fact that you opted for a career as a CO shows that you are already willing to take the brave, noble, and unconventional path.) Your life will change dramatically as a result of this choice. As you grow into yourself and you meet life differently, you will no longer settle for the mediocre. You will no longer settle for numbness, even when feeling and full presence brings you



pain. You will be willing to feel the pain so that you can also feel the exquisite joy of aliveness. And you will learn that pain is like fertile soil in which you can grow and harvest many things.

Make no mistake, the battles will continue. Life will not suddenly become easy. But like Neo in “The Matrix” film series, you will learn to read the code behind the illusions and the temptations to blame others that present themselves so that you can interact with life purposefully and powerfully, on your own terms. You will not become bulletproof in the sense that nothing will ever hurt you again, because truly being alive necessitates feeling everything. You will experience wounding, and you will bear scars, but like Michelle, those scars will represent aspects of newfound strength and deeper understanding. You will see them as evidence of a life lived well and richly, as a map of where you have been and all you have learned.

Now, right here, is where you decide what home you will build. Where you begin to connect with your soul and begin to remember its blueprint. It, along with everything else in this world, begins with a choice. Who will I be in this moment, and in every moment that follows?



# INTEGRATION EXERCISES

Now, it’s time for reflection. Below are a series of questions that will help you connect more deeply with what you have just read, and with the additional knowledge and awareness that you hold inside you that’s ready to be seen. Somewhere inside you, your soul has been waiting to talk to you. These questions are designed to help the conversation.

Start by asking yourself one question each day, and take your time with this process. Answers may appear immediately, and they may not. One answer may appear, but may continue to unfold over days, weeks, months, or a whole lifetime. Also, answers from the soul do not look like answers from the brain. You may suddenly think of song lyrics, a book you read in the past, something a friend or lover once told you, or an image you saw spray-painted on a wall 16 years ago. You may go outside and see something that catches your attention in nature. Remember that the soul, while it’s delighted to communicate with you, does not do straight forward Q&A. It will likely take some practice to learn to listen to the language of your soul. Don’t worry. With time and practice, you will become expert at it, because your soul has inexhaustible patience and resources, and it wants nothing more than to connect with you.

Soulmaking is very much like a video game where once you “solve” one level and have one of those satisfying “ah-ha!” moments, another level or series of questions or puzzles presents itself. At times this can feel frustrating or discouraging, but remember the goal is not completion, it is mastery, and that is a lifelong process. Relax, breathe, and let it all unfold.

- 1 What do you believe to be true about life?
- 2 What about life scares you?
- 3 What is imprisoned in you? Concealed? Locked away? What pieces of you feel like they should be kept hidden away because they are not fit for “polite society”?



4 Do you ever feel numb, like you have trouble connecting to your emotions?

When do you notice this?

5 Can you recall an experience or moment in your life when you felt truly free? What was it?

What did it feel like in your body, sound like, smell like? (If you are struggling to connect with bodily sensations, don't worry—if you've learned to numb sensations, it can take time to reconnect with them, but in time you will.)

6 Do you ever over-react or otherwise react inappropriately to circumstances?

Do you notice any patterns about when this occurs?



## CHAPTER TWO: WEEK TWO

### RECOGNIZING WHAT WANTS TO MOVE THROUGH YOU

“Being a CO is hard. Many people can’t handle that job. My brother has been a street cop for 23 years and has faced many dangers, but he said that he wouldn’t work in a prison. I think it takes a special person to get locked behind the walls, outnumbered 100 to one with no weapon.”

– Gary York, an Army veteran who served nearly 29 years as a CO in the Florida State prison system

We’ve now addressed the fundamental choice point—whether to assume a victim mindset or to embrace full accountability, accepting your role in all that is present in your life. We’ve also acknowledged the vision—a world in which prisons are more like monasteries, spaces that support the work of soulmaking. Yet in order for this to be possible, the monks need guides. They need for you to act as a mentor and protector. This isn’t a favor you’re doing them; the relationship you have with those in prison is symbiotic. By acting as monks, those you care for will make you into mentors and protectors. In this lesson, though, we will explore the actual forces within you that will support you to fully realize your role as a Guardian.

As Gary said in the quote above, it does take a special person to be a CO. A person with the motivation to not only help others, but be willing to put themselves in harm’s way to do it. There’s a powerful energy around your work that moves from inside you, a force that compels you to run towards the alarm bells while others would run away. That has you be willing to enter high-pressure situations again and again because of your commitment to your work and to those you serve. But how do you become this person? What is within you, about you, that makes you unique in this way?

What determines who we are at our core is more than just a genetic lottery, or the sum of our experiences as children. Operating underneath it all are invisible patterns that pull on us, tugging, yanking, coaxing us to embody all that is within us. They are our archetypes.

## THE NATURE OF ARCHETYPES

As you’ve no doubt seen in life, there are warriors and there are Warriors. There are mothers and there are Mothers. There are teachers and there are Teachers. There are those who merely fill a role, and there are those who fulfill it. They don’t just have a job or play a part; they live a calling. This calling is an archetypal pattern.

You’re no doubt familiar with some mythology, larger-than-life stories of magic and mystery, tragedy and triumph. They give us a language in which we can express and interpret our experiences. Today, we often equate the word myth with something that is false. But something that “made up” is simply a creation, in the way we might throw a piece of pottery or build a woodshed.

You’ve probably had the experience of reading a novel or seeing a movie where you felt deeply moved. Even though the story was fictional, it connected with something inside you. You experienced an emotional resonance with the characters, or maybe one character in particular. Stories, fables, poetry, mythology...these are all containers we have created to make sense of our experiences, and to share those experiences and the insights we’ve gained from them with one another. Those stories that survive the test of time do so because of their strong resonance, in how powerfully they tap into universal human experiences. Archetypes go hand-in-hand with mythology in that they are a way of relating to deep unseen forces at work in our lives. Like myths, they are a way of connecting with the dimension of the soul.

Professor and comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell described the “hero’s journey,” which is the common path of anyone who receives a calling (and then refuses that calling, but finally accepts it), faces a crisis and is victorious (or may face many crises), and then comes back home a changed person. One of the best-known ancient examples of the hero’s journey is the hero Odysseus in Homer’s epic poem “The Odyssey.” Yet the hero’s journey is also the journey of Luke Skywalker and countless other modern heroes. In fact, in some way, you could say that we’re all called to the hero’s journey. That journey may be a literal calling away from home involving actual travel, but it may also be an inner journey. A journey of soulmaking. A spiritual quest in which we engage with significant challenges and eventually return home to ourselves. The journey from Guard to Guardian is a such a journey.

“We are lived  
by powers we  
pretend to  
understand.”

– W.H. Auden



The hero is an archetype, a word that essentially means an original pattern or prototype. The concept is ancient, and Greek philosopher Plato is acknowledged as the originator of the idea. When you think of a hero, immediately your mind conjures a series of people, whether real-world or fictional. Superman, Indiana Jones, Martin Luther King, Jr., a firefighter, a pilot who lands a disabled plane saving all the passengers. These people are quite different, yet all embody the archetype of the hero.

You can think of an archetype as a pattern that's embedded inside you and that influences you, even though you may be unaware of it or even actively deny it. Archetypes represent our callings to fulfill. They shape our perceptions and interactions with the world around us. They call to us, fueling and directing our deepest desires.

The idea of archetypes is so common that even corporations now use this language. The Hartford, an insurance company, says that each company's brand has an archetype, or a collection of unspoken characteristics that shape how the company connects with their customers. For example, a company with the hero archetype seeks to improve the world, is willing to endure adversity, and is courageous, bold, and honorable. Today, it's even common to see business leaders characterized as hero-leaders or servant-leaders—language that refers to archetypes. Psychologist Carl Jung said, "All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes."

Whether we have the hero archetype or any number of others, engaging fully with our archetypes changes us. When we recognize the archetypes to which we're connected and we learn to embrace them, a sacred and spiritual transformation happens within us at the soul level. We become who we already are—what we describe as remembering. When we remain ignorant of our archetypes or actively resist them, we are resisting our true selves, the selves that long to come forward and be alive in us. In this state of resistance, it is impossible to experience eudaimonia. We spend so much energy denying and suppressing our true selves that we exhaust ourselves and block the life-force energy that yearns to move freely through us. Russell Hamilton worked for nearly 30 years as a CO. Eventually, he was promoted to Sergeant, then figured it was time to retire, but the pull he felt to corrections was too strong. "It didn't take very long to figure out retirement wasn't for me," says Russell. "I went back to work as a Senior Juvenile Correctional Officer at a brand-new facility. I now work for a company that specializes

**"Whether you call someone a hero or a monster is all relative to where the focus of your consciousness may be."**

— Joseph Campbell

in rehabilitation and re-entry for people on probation, trying to get them to think differently about their life so that they change their ways."

You might think of archetypes like dark matter in space—you can't see them, but they exert a kind of gravity on you in a way that your life somehow organizes around them. We feel drawn to some things and not others. Someone with the Teacher archetype is compelled to teach, as someone with a Servant archetype is compelled to serve. Their path, regardless of the specific details, will always lead them in some way towards fulfilling these roles, whether as a career or otherwise. As the poet Rilke describes it, "...we are grasped by what we cannot grasp." Even though we cannot see or touch our archetypes, they are alive inside us.

Psychologist James Hillman describes archetypes as the "fundamental fantasies that animate all life." Hillman described archetypal patterns as blueprints embedded within us. He also described these patterns as our acorn, because the acorn carries inside it the imprint of the oak tree it is destined to become. When the acorn is nurtured, it takes root and grows automatically, without needing any force outside it to direct it. It knows inherently what it is meant to be.

**"The power of imagination makes us infinite."**

— John Muir

French philosopher and professor Henry Corbin described archetypes as part a field of imagination that all humans share. Archetypes live in this world of our imagination, yet it's a mutually created world. Like the hero's journey, archetypes are part of our collective experience of being human.

Like myths, just because something is imagined does not mean that it is false or not a real creation. At one point, Harry Potter, hero of the book series, experiences a space inside (or perhaps

**"I think I was meant to be in this field. It was fun growing up with my father being a Correctional Officer. I remember during the summer I'd go hang out at the jail. Sometimes I would stay the night, sleep on a cot in the back of the office, and just hang out and watch the inmates play basketball."**

— Steve Maynard, a CO with nearly 15 years of experience who now works for GuardianRFID

outside) himself where he visits with his former headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, who has died. Harry asks Dumbledore if the place they are is real, or in his head, to which Dumbledore replies, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on Earth should that not mean it’s real?” In fact, everything that eventually comes to be in “the real world” (like that pottery or that shed) first existed in someone’s imagination. Just as right now, you are beginning to imagine living your work as a Guardian.

## HOW WE LIVE OUR ARCHETYPES

You can think of your archetypes as part of the essence of you, and you can live out that essence in many ways. Someone who has the Servant archetype, for example, isn’t necessarily a police officer. They could be a doctor, mentor, or executive assistant. The guardian, too, is a Servant archetype. Archetypes can also operate separate from vocation. You can be a baker, but connect with your Servant archetype by volunteering at a local food pantry. You can have the Teacher archetype, but work as a stockbroker who tutors his niece in mathematics on the weekends. What is consistent is that when we come into alignment with our blueprint, we actively integrate our archetypes into our lives in some way.

“At the deepest level of the human heart, there is no simple, singular self. Deep within, there is a gallery of different selves. Each one of these figures expresses a different part of your nature.”

– John O’Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

In the quote at the start of this chapter, Gary said that it takes a “special kind of person” to be a CO. That language signals an archetype. That’s one of the reasons COs often feel a special bond with one another—not only do you share similar experiences, you also have in common a deep calling to do the work you do.

Imagine someone has the Warrior archetype. This doesn’t mean that they’ve been in the military. What characterizes the Warrior archetype is deeper—it’s a desire to protect the essence or the heart of others. In this way, Warriors are also seen as protecting their tribe, homeland, or nation. They are protecting the essence of those groups or structures. William Wallace,

the real-life hero chronicled in the movie *Braveheart*, fought to preserve Scotland’s independence, which was an essential part of the nation’s identity.

An example of a real-life, modern-day Warrior is David Goggins. Goggins grew up with an exceptionally abusive father and as a result he suffered low self-esteem and performed poorly in school. He couldn’t

read, he stuttered, and on top of it, he had asthma. No one, especially Goggins himself, would have guessed him to have the Warrior as one of his archetypes. After dropping out of school, though, Goggins decided to join the Air Force, but was discharged because it was discovered that he had sickle cell trait and therefore could develop sickle cell anemia. Dejected, Goggins became morbidly obese as he worked a series of boring, unfulfilling jobs, including spending night shifts spraying empty restaurants for cockroaches.

One night after work, Goggins was sitting drinking a milkshake when he saw a television ad that showed young men his age training to be Navy SEALs. It looked like torture, but inside Goggins, something sat bolt upright. Suddenly, the idea of becoming a SEAL was a vision he couldn’t shake, because it connected with the most formidable part of his being—the Warrior archetype inside him. Over and over, recruiters told Goggins he didn’t have what it took. He was too dumb and too fat, they told him. Finally, one recruiter decided to give him a shot, telling Goggins he’d have to hit the books hard and lose 106 pounds, all in less than three months, but if he did it, he’d get a shot at becoming a SEAL. It was a massive effort, but because he knew that his goal, no matter how far-fetched it seemed to others, was in total alignment with who he was inside, Goggins committed himself completely. He managed to qualify for Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training. During BUD/S, however, even though he made it through the infamous Hell Week, Goggins contracted pneumonia and was forced to quit. When he recovered, he started BUD/S again, but this time he experienced a fractured kneecap and was again forced to quit. Goggins returned yet again and finally completed BUD/S. He then went on to complete the Army’s Ranger training and then continued on to become an Air Force Tactical Controller—the first person ever to complete all three. After a 20-year military career, he became an ultra-athlete, competing in grueling 100+-mile sporting events to raise money for the families of fallen service members.

It’s easy to see Goggins as a Warrior because he was in the armed forces, but look deeper and you’ll see that this Warrior patterning emerged again and again in multiple ways in his life. First, he connected with this Warrior archetype to protect himself. His own essence, his soul, was drowning in the misery of an unfulfilling life until he fought to claim his true heart. During his training, Goggins became known as a source of inspiration to those around him, helping them connect with their essence and their heart. When he became an ultra-athlete, it was with the goal of raising money to support the families of fallen service members so that these people would have the financial support to pursue education and other avenues of exploration that honored their essence. And as a motivational speaker and writer, Goggins helps to show people a path through which they can recognize and actualize their own deep blueprints.

That is the power of an archetype—if you have it, you will feel its pull no matter what your life circumstances.



## ARCHETYPES AND CONGRUENCE

If David Goggins had ignored that TV commercial for the Navy SEALs, if he'd have just finished his milkshake and gone to bed, his Warrior archetype would not have gone quiet. In fact, the energy of his archetype would have begun to work even harder to get his attention. Maybe his life would have become more miserable. Maybe his car would have broken down outside a Navy recruiting center. Who knows? One thing is for certain—when we ignore our archetypes or they go unrecognized, the force they exert on us can range from uncomfortable and confusing to downright painful. We might question why things don't seem to be working or lining up in our lives, or why everything feels like such a struggle. We might be tempted into victim consciousness, thinking we don't deserve to struggle in this way. Yet our struggle isn't because something is wrong. Our struggle is our archetypes communicating with us that our lives lack congruence. That we're not living the life that is meant for us.

Another way to think about congruence is as alignment. Consider your spine. For most of us, our spine is made of 24 bones. When they're lined up properly, our spine gives us structural support and helps us move. If you've ever experienced a back

injury that causes one or more of these bones to twist or shift out of place, you know the extreme discomfort that can result. Not only do misalignments often cause physical pain, they can cause dysfunction. When your spine is misaligned, you can't have healthy posture, which in turn compresses your internal organs, certain movements become impossible, you can feel numbness and tingling throughout your body, and on. The misalignment of just one vertebra causes multiple challenges throughout your body. The same thing can happen when we're out of alignment with our archetypes. We're working against the energies that want to be expressed through us, and that can be exhausting and painful, even if we're not conscious of what's going on. Think back to chapter 1 and the relief and exhilaration Chamelle felt with she came into alignment with the Guardian archetype. It wasn't that her work as CO suddenly became easy, but it suddenly things made sense. She understood a new way to relate to her work that was more effective and more meaningful, and that gave her greater ease. It relieved the stress and strain of the misalignment.

**"When you can get into an industry or a profession where you can possibly make a difference in somebody's life, that becomes part of your choice, and it certainly was for me."**

—Andy, veteran CO and founder of CO organization One Voice United

Each of us has a variety of archetypes that influence our psyche, some of which influence us more than others. They affect our drives, desires, and motivations, along with what gives us a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and fulfillment. As we'll discuss in a moment, there are several archetypes that work together with the Guardian, contributing their unique gifts and skills to helping the Guardian realize its full essence.

Regardless of what our archetypes are, the same is true for all of us. Our work of soulmaking is not to focus on outcomes and goals, it is to focus on coming into alignment with ourselves. Recognizing our archetypes and how their energy wants to move through us is part of this alignment.

Archetypes don't work only on an individual level. Our archetypes also influence and are influenced by others' archetypes.

## ARCHETYPAL PAIRS

For every archetype you are connected to, others have complimentary archetypes that connect and relate to those archetypes. These archetypal pairs work in relationship with one another. Mother and Child is one example. Archetypal pairs create a kind of balance of life energies.

Another example of a matched pair of archetypes is one that you in your role as a CO know a lot about: the Perpetrator and the Victim. These two archetypes are linked together because one creates and sustains the other.

In 1993, 16-year-old Oshea Israel shot and killed 20-year-old Laramiun Byrd. With this act, Israel came to embody the archetype of Perpetrator, and Mary Johnson, Byrd's mother, became the Victim. Understandably, Johnson hated Israel for what he had done, and this hatred reinforced their connection as Perpetrator and Victim. Then, however, something remarkable happened.

Years after her son's death, Johnson realized she wasn't the only one who had lost a son. Israel's parents had lost their son to incarceration. Johnson decided to form a support group to for mothers who had lost children, whether they'd lost them to violence or to prison. Yet Johnson had a hurdle to overcome. She didn't think she would be able to relate to mothers of Perpetrators unless she attempted to forgive the Perpetrator who killed her own son. She reached out to Israel and asked if she could visit him and he agreed.

When the two saw each other, Israel asked if he could hug Johnson. “As I got up,” she later told journalists, “I felt something rising from the soles of my feet and leaving me.” She began to visit Israel regularly and when he was released after serving 15 years, Johnson approached her landlord and asked if he would overlook Israel’s record and allow him to rent an apartment in her complex. The landlord agreed, and Johnson and Israel ended up as next-door neighbors.

Today, Johnson wears a double-sided locket with a picture of her son on one side and Israel on the other. Johnson and Israel visit churches and prisons, telling people their story and encouraging them to forgive. By acknowledging their archetypal connection and leaning into it rather than running from it, or viewing it as a source of unending pain, Johnson and Israel were able to shift from living in the negative aspects of these archetypes to realizing and embodying their positive and empowering aspects—to allowing the energy of these archetypes to move through them in a beneficial way. Notice they didn’t do this with the goal of changing others’ lives, they did it to come into alignment with themselves. They each felt a call from their soul to do things that seemed wildly irrational—Johnson to ask to visit Israel and him asking to hug her, Johnson releasing her hatred of Israel, and Israel allowing himself to be loved. But by being who they are, listening to their souls and undertaking these actions that seem nonsensical to many of us, the natural result is that they have changed others’ lives through their example. By allowing love to be present in their relationship, they created what we can think of as a field of love that, thanks to limbic resonance, everyone around them can experience, as well.

## THE PRISONER AND THE GUARD/IAN

Just as a Perpetrator creates a Victim, and a Victim identifies someone else as a Perpetrator, a Prisoner is inextricably linked to a Guard—the two are paired archetypes that have been intimately connected since time began. One could be in a literal prison, or they could be in a psychological prison, or both. The character Neo in “The Matrix” movies was in a literal and psychological prison until he chose to do the work of setting himself free. As part of the Unconditional Freedom Project, we are working with those who are in prison to connect with a deep sense of personal freedom, regardless of their surroundings.

In your experience as a CO, the Prisoner is someone who has been locked away to serve time for a crime. They have been deprived of freedom and an assortment of rights that those who are not or have never been imprisoned enjoy. As we mentioned in the last chapter, the Prisoner and the Guard also have much in common. The Prisoner spends most of their day inside walls of concrete. They often become hardened

by the lack of love and compassion behind prison walls, and by a sense of having to constantly protect themselves. Yet underneath it all, neither of you has lost your humanity.

Jerome, who has more than a decade of experience as a CO, who has served as a Marine, and who has family in law enforcement, also has family who have been incarcerated. “One of my uncles who did 17 years told me that, no matter what they’ve done, everyone is human. Don’t look down on anybody. Don’t worry about what they did. I have tried to follow that advice and be that type of officer.” Luis Soto, a retired CO who now teaches classes in criminal justice says, “Just because you’re wearing a uniform doesn’t mean the inmates are going to respect you. In fact, they’re not going to respect you until you show respect for them.” The Guardian recognizes the humanity of those in their care, and sees beyond labels to their innate worthiness and abilities.

As with all archetypes, there is an assortment of abilities common to the Prisoner that we would consider neither good nor bad—it’s all in how they are applied. Movies and episodic shows depict the re-tasking of these kinds of skills and attributes. In the show *Leverage*, a group of former criminals (a so-called hitter, hacker, grifter, thief, and mastermind—sounds like a gang of archetypes, doesn’t it?) work together to use their skills for good. The *Suicide Squad* movies and comics have a similar theme, with people characterized as villains being temporarily released from prison so they can save the world. In both cases, people thought to be “bad guys” have a unique set of skills or attributes that they can use for positive or negative means. Think of the amount of influence a Guard has over a Prisoner’s experiences. They can use this influence negatively, by berating and belittling a Prisoner, or positively, by providing support and encouragement.

CO Kyle says that among the prisoners in his care, it was common for them to self-harm. “I found that I was often able to talk them out of harming themselves. I’d get called in, I’d clear everyone out of the way and I’d say ‘Hey, dude, let’s talk about it.’ So, he’d know I was there





to solve the problem, not to make it worse. He knew I was going to treat him with dignity and we were going to figure it out. I understood that we were not friends, but we could still talk man-to-man, because those inmates really just wanted somebody to listen to them, and nine times out of 10, that would be enough to talk them down. It may be that something specific happened, but in most cases, it's just the mental stress of being in prison that gets to them."

Some of the Prisoner archetype's skills can include survival intuition, adaptability, negotiation, strategic thinking, problem solving, indomitable will, and determination. You may have a few others to add that you've encountered in your work. Again, notice that none of these is inherently good or bad. They can each be tasked in service of the greater good, or towards more nefarious goals. They can be deployed in ways that are self-serving, or in ways that serve the Self.

The Guard keeps the Prisoner contained. The Guard ensures that the Prisoner serves their sentence and, if they're to be released, lives to see that day. By contrast, the Guardian archetype is tasked with much more. According to archetypal expert Susanna Barlow, people with the Guardian archetype seek to support others and want to feel that their work is of real value to those in need. They are happy to function as one part within a larger organization, but are happiest when they are respected for the invaluable services they perform. Guardians are loyal and protective. One of their superpowers is the ability to set aside their emotions in moments when clear and rational decision-making is required, especially when the stakes are high. Guardians are willing to put themselves in harm's way to protect others from someone who has the potential to cause great harm because of their actions, and to block someone from spaces where they don't belong.

Additionally, and powerfully, the Guardian sees the truth about the Prisoner—that regardless of what they may have done in their lives and the fact of their incarceration, their essence remains intact. Their true heart, their soul, and their blueprint remain unchanged. They see and embrace the Prisoner's worthiness, because in our essence we all are worthy.

Yet for CO Brian, his day-to-day work experience was quite different. "When I first started, officers had a say. If there was a classification hearing, when the inmate was going to be considered for lower security, they would bring us in and asked for our opinion. The same used to be true for disciplinary or

"Were it not for the leaping and twinkling of the soul, man would rot away in his greatest passion, idleness."

– Carl Jung

parole hearings. Our opinions mattered. We don't do that anymore. We are just warehousing. I became jaded by the system when I realized we're not about correcting; we're about making sure they don't get out until they're supposed to. We hold them until their sentence is done and try to make sure that no one gets killed. When one inmate tries to kill another or injure another inmate, we get in the middle and stop it and usually neither one of them dies. Whether it's an assault, a medical emergency, a fire, or a riot we are the first, last, and only responders behind those walls." In Brian's later experience, Guards were not recognized for the significant value they can add to the prison environment. Instead, they were tasked with keeping prison residents detained and alive—that's all. It's not that these tasks are insignificant, it's that—as you know—COs are capable of much more. Just as the Prisoner has an array of qualities and skills that can be used thoughtfully and for great good, so too does the Guard.

When the Guard is able to connect with the full resources of their archetype, they become the Guardian, and they encourage and support the Prisoner in their own soulmaking task of becoming truly free. By invoking the essence-protecting qualities of the Warrior, the Guardian clears and holds space for the Prisoner to connect with their own heart, their true essence. By tending to the soul-based needs of the Prisoner, the Guardian also invokes the Servant archetype. It is only in the doing of this work that the Guard becomes the Guardian. In this way, working together, the Prisoner and the Guardian help one another realize their full potential.

"You have to ask, Where's the real problem? Is it the inmates? Or is it the job? It's the job. But that's good news, because that you can control. That you can change."

– Brian, long-time CO and national director of CO organization One Voice United

## THE GATE: FROM GUARD TO GUARDIAN

In ancient times, a daimon was thought of as a spirit assigned to be with us throughout our lives. Socrates described a daimon as a gift from God, or the gods. Psychologist Rollo May writes that the daimon, "is the urge in every being to affirm itself, assert itself, perpetuate and increase itself." The daimon is an energy that pushes and pulls us to engage with life fully and richly. We can think of daimonic energy as life-force energy, or as the energy of creation. It can be stressful, precisely because it's trying to get us to move. To do something, already!



“A woman has her Juno, just as a man has his Genius; they are names for the sacred power, the divine spark we each of us have in us. My Juno can’t ‘get into’ me, it is already my deepest self.”

– Ursula K. Le Guin, Lavinia

that could explode at any moment. This is the suppression of daimonic energy. Whether we’re channeling the “angels” of our nature or the “demons” has to do with whether we’re allowing this vital energy to flow through us, or we’re suppressing or ignoring it.

## GENIUS

Daimonic energy is also associated with the concept of genius. Today, we equate genius with a high level of a certain type of intelligence, such as scientific or mathematical ability. Many describe Albert Einstein, Neil deGrasse Tyson, or Steve Jobs as geniuses. Athletes such as LeBron James or Tom Brady also are sometimes praised for athletic genius. We use the word “ingenious” as an adjective to describe something or someone possessing creative or inventive brilliance. But the original meaning of the word was a bit different. Genius wasn’t a gift granted only to a few; we all had a genius.

Your archetypes are the form this energy will take. When David Goggins connected with his Warrior archetype, then allowed and even invited daimonic energy to move through him, he became a legend. Again, this was not without a massive amount of hard work and struggle. Goggins had to see what he wanted and grab for it with both hands and wrestle with it over and over. To this day, he continues to grow into even more of himself and continually test his limits. That is part of his Warrior ethos, only at this point he has transformed into the peaceful Warrior, who instead of engaging in any form of outer combat, seeks to master his internal world.

Daimonic energy can feel all-consuming. It’s that creative energy that has writers and painters working away long into the night to act on their inspiration, and coax something from the world of imagination into this reality. It’s the energy that can overtake us during sex, when we’re in a fit of a rage, or the rapture of praise as we listen to a gospel choir.

When we suppress this energy, it can turn into hostility, aggression, cruelty, and violence. The same energy we can use to create can also destroy. That’s the link with the word “demon,” which is often thought of as an evil force. When we ignore daimonic energy—the energy of our soul—it can take on this “demonic” aspect. Think of how the confinement of prison can create an atmosphere that sometimes feels like a powder keg

As psychologist Steven Diamond explains, “Consciousness is the hard-won consequence of insight, and the irreplaceable key to discerning and constructively interacting with the daimonic.” Soulmaking is about recognizing the unique set of attributes, skills, and motivations that are deep inside you and learning to live in a way that emphasizes them. Soulmaking is the act of becoming fully aware of our essence, and of engaging our daimon to amplify that essence.

This is how, when a Guard experiences this alignment, you become a Guardian.

## INTEGRATION EXERCISES

- 1 What did you want to be when you grew up? What about life felt most engaging and interesting? What types of play felt most energizing and rewarding?
- 2 If you enjoy books, movies, or other popular media, what types of stories capture your attention most? What types of characters do you find yourself rooting for, and against?
- 3 When are the times you feel the most you. What are you doing? Who are you speaking with? How are you engaging with life?
- 4 What have you noticed is decidedly not you? What creates a feeling of discord or static, discomfort or disease? When does it feel like things are just off?
- 5 Where in the world around you do you see your desires and values most reflected? What people or places resonate with you, sparking a feeling as if something inside you wakes up and wants to engage with them? If you don’t have that experience in the world around you, what about your dreams? If you have recurring dreams that you’re flying, for example, is there ever a time in the waking world when you have a similar sense of freedom?



# CHAPTER THREE: WEEK THREE

## MAKING SPACE—CLEARING OUT PROJECTIONS AND PAST EXPERIENCES

“My mom didn’t want me to go into law enforcement. She said once you get behind those gates, you’re locked up, too.”

– Michelle, who worked in Florida law enforcement as a CO and in other roles for more than 15 years

Being a CO is more than a job, it’s a calling. It’s one way that the archetype of the Guardian, with its hallmarks of service and empowering others, can play out in someone’s life. As you begin to acknowledge the presence of this archetype in your life, to embrace your blueprint, it will begin to flourish, and you’ll feel enlivened and empowered as you see yourself come alive in your role as a Guardian.

Several times, we’ve used the analogy of a soul blueprint and of building your home. Now that you’re connecting with your blueprint, it’s time for the next stage of building, which entails clearing space for construction, including acknowledging and releasing what’s been present in your life, especially with regard to your role as a CO, up to this point.

It can be difficult to think that your life and your career could look another way. How are you supposed to imagine this experience of life where COs and those who are incarcerated respect one another and their roles, when just about everything you’ve experienced up to now has looked nothing like that? How can you believe that another way is possible, especially if you’ve never seen it?

In the last chapter, we looked at the idea of recognizing your own drives through the lens of someone who wanted to clean out their garage. If you’ve ever cleaned a garage, a closet, or anywhere else there’s accumulated

“As humans, we’re reading books every day to try to figure out how to be someone else. What we don’t do is go inside, turn ourselves inside out, and read our own story. You have to look inside to find out what you really want.”

– David Goggins

mess, you know that the first step is taking everything off the shelves and sifting through it so you can determine what you want to keep and what you want to get rid of. This makes the mess appear even bigger. You’re standing there, up to your knees in all the junk you’ve accumulated, thinking “This looks even worse! Maybe I should have just left all of this stuff where it was.” But once everything’s unpacked and out there in front of you, you notice something miraculous. The shelves are completely clean! You’ve got a clean slate. Now you can begin to imagine something different. But first, you’ve got to go through that messy but necessary ritual of clearing the shelves.

## THE CHALLENGE OF CONFINEMENT

The first stage of clearing is acknowledging what’s already there. In your case, it’s taking a non-critical but honest look at everything you’ve experienced up to now.

Previously, we discussed the idea that COs and incarcerated individuals have much in common, largely due to the circumstances they share. After all, day after day, week after week, year after year, you’re confined to a similar space. Sure, you get days off here and there, but most of your time, you experience the pressure and stress of confinement, even when you’re not working. Chances are, your work has a serious impact on your psyche—on how you experience life and how you relate to others.

CO Michelle struggled for years with the pressures of her surroundings. “I was so upset, I was ready to walk off and leave these inmates by themselves. I really did need the job for my family, though, so I had to toughen up and get to a point where I could just go in and detach from my emotions enough to do the job. Doing that made me kind of mean and hardened my heart. I started treating the inmates poorly. I have to say, I did not like my job for the first 10 years.” At one point, Michelle had a seizure that doctors told her was likely due to stress.

“We joke in corrections that we hate people. It’s not that. It’s just we’ve seen the worst, so it’s difficult to have trust and want to be in crowds and be available to people emotionally. I’ve seen some of the physical aspects of myself, weight gain, weight loss, fatigue, and things others have gone through because this industry is very taxing on us.”

– Greg, a CO who has served as a Master key control Sergeant, member of a Special Operations Response Team, corrections counselor, among other roles

You know your job is challenging, and yet you've probably created some kind of structure to help yourself deal with it day-to-day. Maybe that structure involves numbing and shutting down, maybe it involves acting out (in ways healthy or unhealthy), maybe something else, or a combination. Even if you've developed some coping mechanisms or an operating structure that isn't especially healthy, it's gotten you to this point, and so in some ways it has worked. There's no need to feel you've done something wrong or to spend time being hard on yourself; as humans, in every moment, we're all using the resources we have at hand to devise solutions to challenges. No less, no more. Given more resources, we have more options. This work is about expanding your awareness of the resources in life that are available to you, which are broader and richer than you've been aware of to this point.

## EMBRACING WHAT IS

Before we continue, there's a point that must be acknowledged. Speaking of the future and of what might be is in some ways a dangerous game. When we become too focused on an imagined future, we forego the satisfaction and even the joy of being in our lives exactly as they are right now. When we speak of the Guardian archetype and what's possible, keep in mind that we're talking about a new way of being that's enabled by recognizing what is true right now, at this very minute.

These skills, this nobility, this honor, this heart, this strength, this compassion are already inside you. What we're working on now is clearing out obstacles to the full realization of who you are. In many ways, throughout this process life on the outside won't appear different. The prison system, your direct supervisor, or anyone else, won't change overnight because of this shift. What will change is how you relate to all of it. In that way, what is true in this future we speak of is already true now, waiting to be recognized and engaged with in a new way.

When you acknowledge all of the painful experiences and ways of relating to your work you have known to this point, it's also not about judging those things as bad or wrong or saying they shouldn't have happened. Instead, it's about observing them all so that you can relate openly and honestly with what is. No more stuffing things away in boxes. No more hiding your "junk" from family and friends.

Think again about the idea of victim consciousness. It's easy to perceive yourself to be a victim of all that's happened. Here, you are choosing another way to look at what you've experienced. Imagine that when you were born, someone placed over your eyes a pair of glasses where the lenses allowed only a very small view of the world. You could only see what was directly in front of you, and then, only a tiny bit of it. This happened at such a young age you aren't even aware that you're wearing these glasses. Then, one day, you're out for a walk and come upon a lake. As you bend down to look into the lake, the water is so clear and pure that for the first time, you see your true reflection, glasses and all. Confused, you reach up towards your eyes and touch the glasses, then remove them. At first, you may be overwhelmed with your new, expanded vision, and feel an urge to put the glasses back on, but slowly, as you look around, you take in the beauty that's all around you, and you realize this beauty was there all along, it was just that your view was obscured. When we choose to remove our victim glasses, we become open to the full, lush beauty of the vast resources both inside and around us. Again, it can be an adjustment to take all this in, and to accept the responsibility and accountability for how powerful we truly are, but in doing so we open up worlds of possibility that before were invisible to us.

As Armor Down founder Ben King noted, when we open to the ability to be with all that is, we access more thoughtful and effective tools for dealing with situations, along with the clear sight to know when and how to use them. We cannot do this from a consciousness that is entirely self-absorbed. Nor can we do this from a consciousness that is not at all concerned with our self. If you tend to focus entirely on others and their needs and experiences, again, you lose the full picture. When we focus on noticing all that is, that includes our own thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

This work is not meant to disconnect you from your pain, but rather to help you understand and embrace it so that you can make use of the gifts and guidance it offers. You have felt pain around your work

**"I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be. If you follow your bliss, doors will open for you that wouldn't have opened for anyone else."**  
– Joseph Campbell





because you care. Because you love. That is beautiful and worthwhile. And it's that love that we want to hold onto and amplify. Your pain is one of your greatest guides, because it represents your purpose. When we learn to integrate our pain into our lives, we can then show others how to do the same. Joseph Campbell referred to taking on our own pain as part of the hero's journey. Instead of "slaying the dragon" of our pain, we're meant to befriend it. In so doing, we swallow our pain—not suppressing it, but ingesting and metabolizing it. In this way, by fully coming to understand it and developing a relationship with it, it becomes something that fuels and directs us. Campbell wrote, "The demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life's pain, the greater life's reply."

Through this process of remembering your true self, you won't stop feeling pain. In fact in some ways and at some times, your pain will be magnified. Seeing the anger, despair, and fear all around you will continue to hurt because you will continue to love, and to love even more. The pain will not disappear, but you will relate to it differently, as part of your purpose and as something that empowers you as a Guardian.

If you've found ways to dull or numb the pain you've felt, it's time to reconnect with these uncomfortable feelings. Remember that when you suppress what you feel, no matter what those feelings are, you suppress life. And that daimonic energy will start to take the demonic form, affecting your health and your wellbeing, and causing you to act out of alignment with your essence.

Through this work, what will change is how you relate to the suffering that you see every day. Instead of becoming angry or feeling the need to shut down and numb, or to act out, you will engage with all you experience from your Guardian self.

Part of this process is learning how to see your pain as your power—as the source of the substance that will not only fuel your work in this world, but help you feel a sense of place and belonging here, as well as purpose. An early step in seeing pain this way is learning to sift through your pain for the treasures that lie there.

## SIFTING THROUGH PAIN

When you stand before your building site and see everything that lies before you—all of your prior experiences, you don't just go in with a bulldozer and push it all aside. If you don't first sift through what's there, what you re-build is destined to look a whole lot like what was there before.

You can think of this process like an archeological dig. When an archeologist goes to a site and begins to sift through the dirt and debris, plenty of it will simply be accumulated junk that's not worth keeping.

Yet there will also be treasures deeply hidden. One of the ways archeologists determine where they're likely to find these treasures is by locating clues, such as evidence of old structures. Within our own hearts and minds, pain is one of our clues to buried treasure.

Everything we experience in life, whether we deem it positive or negative, carries the potential for learning. Until we acquire this intended knowledge, we'll continue to experience these learning opportunities over and over. In prison, for example, you're presented again and again with opportunities to learn how your words and actions impact others within this specialized environment of confinement, interacting with people from whom love has mostly, or entirely, been withheld. Until you open to seeing these opportunities for what they are and receiving their lessons, you are likely to experience them similarly, over and over.

Pain—and the fear, anxiety, disgust, and so on that can characterize it—is like a flashing neon sign that shouts, "Lesson!" But pain isn't just associated with negative feelings.

The first time you held your newborn child, when a parent said, "I'm proud of you," when a spouse said, "I love you," or when a prison resident said, "Thank you for treating me with dignity," these experiences, too, can feel painful. It's the piercing sensation of exquisite beauty. It's like when you've been out in the cold for a long time and your fingers and toes have numbed, then you step in front of the glow of a warm fire and the blood rushes in. It hurts. So much so that you might have to fight the urge to move away from these experiences instead of fully taking them in. The challenge is in staying with painful experiences, whether positive or negative, to receive what they have to offer.

We believe that God, in any way we understand God, intends for us to experience joy and freedom. It would hold, then, that we have within us the ability to be joyous and free anywhere. When Michelle, the CO quoted earlier, recognized this ability within herself, her entire relationship with her work, which she had experienced as extremely stressful, shifted. She changed how she related to the work. She saw negative situations not as those to shut down and run from, but as those where love was needed. She stopped resisting the joy and freedom that have the potential to be recognized in every moment.

There's a saying we embrace, which is that the poison is often the medicine. What can seem like a wound can also be the source of tremendous growth and personal power. The Japanese have a special art called kintsugi, which translates to "golden joinery." It involves taking pottery that's been cracked

**"Pain is the biggest power of love."**

– Stephen King

or broken and repairing it with a lacquer that's dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Precious materials applied to the cracks in this way do not hide, but emphasize them, and indeed create an entirely new piece of art. By employing kintsugi, the artist emphasizes that the break is not a mistake or in any way unfortunate, but rather is simply part of the history of the piece, which has now become something new. In this way, cracks, though unintentional, are celebrated and appreciated. We can learn to view and work with the cracks in our lives similarly, applying gold to our broken places instead of attempting to hide them.

For Michelle, the fear and anxiety she experienced showed her where she was engaging in victim consciousness, and when she accepted that realization, she was able to shift her perspective. From that point on, the way she experienced her role as CO changed. Her circumstances stayed the same, but now life energy flowed through her freely and she connected with her essence and her passion to serve others. She began to experience eudaimonia.

When you're standing there and someone is yelling in your face, it's absurd to imagine feeling joyful. But is it? If you can pan out and switch to that moviegoer mode, observing what's happening, seeing that there is pain present that this person is expressing, you can also see that this is an indication that the soul is at work. That the soul is wanting to engage with daimonic energy—the energy of life—but the atmosphere of confinement has restricted its expression, so it's coming out in its demonic form. The question, then, becomes how can you create more freedom in this situation? How can you provide a setting in which this person feels they can express that energy constructively? Often through an act so outwardly simple as listening with no agenda other than to truly hear, we can open a massive amount of space for the fruitful flow of energy.

This is how we learn to sift through pain to see the opportunities for soul-centered action and interaction that nurtures. In the same way we identify these treasures for others, we must learn to identify them for ourselves. And so now we are back to acknowledging our pain.

Our pain is. That is all. It does not define you, but it does indicate some critical things about you, including where you are challenged to give or to receive love.

**"Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."**

— C.S. Lewis

Going forward, you can begin to perceive pain this way, and when you encounter it in yourself or others, ask, What is painful about this moment? What is the role of love in this moment? Where is love needed that I can provide it? Think of the incarcerated individual who is struggling to deal with the fact that he is missing his daughter's fifth birthday. Or, Where is love being offered that I am struggling to receive it? Think of your own daughter wanting to connect with you after your shift by telling you about her day at school.

Notice how, either way, your connection to love both deepens and broadens when you can be present with pain. In addition to being present with pain, another way to clear the debris is to open to the possibilities for greater freedom that exist within confinement.

## REIMAGINING CONFINEMENT

CO Brian says, "Family and friends will tell me I'm not the same person I was when I started the job. I could see the change now when I leave the store. If I go into a restaurant, once I sit down and look around, I realized I have positioned myself so nothing can come behind me. You don't trust people like you used to. You start to believe everybody's trying to con you, inmates and management. We don't talk to our families about what we see and what we have to do on some days. It's devastating."

Look at the building site before you and take in this devastation as it appears in your own life. Take it in. But remember, too, that within that devastation lies treasure.

Just as restriction and confinement can be devastating, they can also be enriching. When we embrace what is, we find that life presents us with unending paradox, where multiple things that seem contradictory can all be true. When we judge a situation, we take a side, choosing only one possibility and cutting off the other. Confinement is devastating. If we forego judgement and take that wider view, all that confinement can be devastating, and it can also be enriching. Both things can be true. And so our choice becomes evident. Which experience will you have? Which will you seek to enable for others?

Just like the confined space and shape of a cup enables us to receive water from a faucet or a river so we can drink it, any kind of structure that creates a boundary or constricts what's available to us can actually be helpful. We can see this limitation as a tool or an opportunity. In fact, social psychologists say that one of the reasons so many people are unhappy these days is that we experience far too much choice. We're overwhelmed by possibilities. While possibility is a wonderful thing, if we're attuned more to what's outside us than what's inside us, it can confound our efforts to connect with our own true essence. Instead, we focus on what we should do, want, or choose according to others' ideas and opinions.



Science also shows that, ironically, when we have fewer options, we tend to be happier with what we do choose. And we also tend to be more creative with what we make. Think of the game Scrabble. If we simply had access to unlimited letter tiles and could make any words we wanted, there would be no challenge, and so there would be no fun. Instead, the restriction of having access to only a certain selection of letters, along with whatever words are currently on the board that you can build from, forces you to become more engaged and creative, and the result is that when you create something that works, it's exciting, joyful, and satisfying.

You can think of your blueprint the same way. In some ways, it limits what you can do in your life to experience eudaimonia because you must act in accordance with your own unique plan. Yet at the same time, within that plan, there are endless ways to embody and express the essence of who you are.

## ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT IS

Most likely, you haven't been given the tools or training necessary to make your work as a CO a eudaemonic experience. For example, as Brian expressed in chapter 2, being seen as someone in charge of warehousing the incarcerated rather than playing an active role in the quality and outcomes of people's experience is frustrating and even painful. This lack of provision of resources that would help you experience your work as a Guardian is part of the debris spread out before you, and perhaps is a source of pain and frustration for you, as well. Let's acknowledge that. Again, you don't need to do so with judgment or blame. This is simply about looking at it and saying, "I see you." To this point, it's likely that just about everything related to your work has been framed as a potential problem rather than an opportunity for learning and growth for both you and those in your care. If that angers or irritates you, that's a good thing. It means you care. It means you are deeply connected to your work. As psychologist Rollo May explains, the opposite of love is not hatred, but apathy. Apathy indicates a disengagement. Where there is irritation, frustration, even rage, there is passion. There is life energy. And like clay on a potter's wheel, we can shape that energy by deciding how we wish to engage with and express it.

At this point you may be wondering, How can I make a difference? If I am only one, operating inside a system, how can I change my experience? When the road ahead is obscured by such problem-centered thinking, it's easy to feel a sense of ineffectiveness or paralysis about our situation. You see that what you're directed to do in some cases, perhaps many, is not only ineffective, in some respects it's nonsensical. There is not rehabilitation, there is storage. Instead of being given the opportunity to work together with those who are incarcerated to support their experience so that it may have some benefit for them, you are in many cases tasked and given resources only to ensure that they behave according

to the rules, and to subdue them should they become unruly and push back. We may even perceive this arrangement to be noble—that the CO is following orders and carrying out their duty in an honorable way. And yet what you see and experience in the day-to-day does not support this perception. Deep inside you know this is not the way. That things can be done more effectively when you engage your compassion and your humanity. Your essence tells you that the way you're being directed to do your job is not the noble way.

In *Iron John: A Book About Men*, author and poet Robert Bly describes how in our modern industrial era men, especially, (though this idea applies across gender) have been told it is their role to subdue nature. The belief is that nature is somehow disruptive and dangerous, that humans are separate from nature, and the role of protectors is to dominate and control nature for the good of society. If we believe that our ability to access the noble states of love, freedom, power, and connection are contingent on carrying this out, we will do it at any cost. This becomes a source of pain because some part of us knows that these actions are out of alignment not only with the nature outside us, but with our own internal nature, and that in fact the two are deeply linked. We know domination of a human being's nature, too, is not the way.

In many cases, those who are incarcerated are viewed somehow as some lesser form of human, as part of wild savage nature, to be controlled and subdued. If you as a CO are put in the position of enforcing this ethos, through your actions to subdue wild nature you become distanced from your own connection with nature. Separation from nature is the definition of human suffering. We cannot be separated from the nature outside of us without also being separated from the nature within us. We cannot seek to separate others from nature without causing pain for ourselves. It is completely understandable that, put in this untenable position, you would become angry or depressed, and turn to anything that would help dull the pain of this disconnect.

Yet in spite of this common directive to subdue nature, many COs seek another way. Gary, who served as a CO for nearly three decades, recognized the importance of preserving the humanity of those he worked with. "I was really good with interpersonal communications and treated the prisoners as people no matter the crime. I presented tasks in a way that allowed them to feel human. I wasn't just another



RoboCop barking orders. A lot of people think that if you say ‘Thank you’ to an inmate you have belittled yourself. Well, if the inmate just cleaned up the whole dorm, I was going to say thank you for doing a good job. They appreciated that acknowledgement of their humanity.” In this way, Gary, like so many COs, sought another way to carry out his duty. Rather than trying to dominate, subdue, and control, he provided recognition and support. He provided love.

This mirrors an approach practiced by some healthcare practitioners. In Western medicine, the more common approach to healthcare is to focus on disease control. A disease or disorder is identified and attacked, usually using medications or surgeries. Other practitioners, especially in Eastern modalities, take a different approach. Instead of focusing exclusively on the disease or disorder, the practitioner looks for the health. They identify what in the body is working, but needs more resources to be successful. For example, they may focus on supporting the immune system by prescribing healthful foods, drinks, or herbs, increased sleep, or anything else that can remove the barriers and challenges preventing the immune system doing its job effectively. In his way, Gary was identifying and supporting the health.

When we support the health, we ask, What’s working here? What’s positive that we want to encourage? You can also ask these questions when you look within yourself.

Instead of focusing on dominating or eradicating the disease, health practitioners center their attention on the inherent intelligence already at work. They recognize that there is an organizing structure and a natural order at work that they can let go into. Specifically, the body’s constant drive and ability to heal itself. Instead of trying to force a change, they provide loving and attentive support to the natural healing mechanisms already at work. They participate in healing. They co-create it. And to do so they employ responsiveness more than dominance.

As psychologist Bill Plotkin writes, “We foster wholeness in ourselves when we contribute to the wholeness of

something greater than ourselves. ... When we’re centered in the consciousness of our Nurturing Adult, we’re able to accept everything about other people. We understand—or attempt to understand—each characteristic, trait, or state of others as a coherent feature of those individuals, part of what makes them who they are. Naturally, some human traits—such as violence, hatred, or greed—are deeply troubling, but we sense how such characteristics are expressions of others’ current conditions.” Again, this is reminiscent of how CO Gary describes the way he interacted with those in his care.

When asked why it’s common for people driving past prisons to look away, a sheriff at the Mendocino County Jail replied, “I think the shame people feel when they look away is that in their guts they know that there is a process of human rehabilitation that is supposed to be happening in prison and it is not.”

Part of it may also be that prisons house the unrecognized shadow of our collective society. Sarah Kerr, a ritual healing practitioner who specializes in death and grief, says many ancient societies have a tradition of scapegoating—of pushing people to the margins on whom they project their own shadow so they don’t have to confront what is inside them. Someone who has committed a transgression, real or perceived, is cast out and then we turn away from them. We don’t want to look too closely at someone who we think of as a criminal because they may look more familiar to us than we care to acknowledge. It is this lack of identification with our own shadow qualities—the recognition that under certain circumstances we, too, could find ourselves behind prison walls—that keeps us from having compassion for others.

Many COs, however, being up close and personal with these scapegoats know different. As Bill Plotkin says, they can sense the conditions that have contributed to the present circumstances of those in prison. Because of this, COs hold some of the greatest potential in our culture for change. Kyle, a former CO in Arizona, says, “Sometimes I would see these inmates and wonder what they must have experienced to get to this place. Sometimes it just broke my heart to see these people who had no support system at all, nobody to reach out to. And now they’re probably in the worst place they could possibly be. Don’t get me wrong—I knew they were inmates. But I’m not a judge, and at a certain point I had to stop thinking about what they were in there for.”

Keith Hellwig, who worked as a CO for 36 years, says, “As a Correctional Officer, you’re dealing with people whose existence the general public doesn’t even want to acknowledge. I’ve dealt with many serial

“If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life.”

– Abraham Maslow





“Healing is a different type of pain. It’s the pain of becoming aware of the power of one’s strength and weakness, of one’s capacity to love or do damage to oneself and to others, and of how the most challenging person to control in life is ultimately yourself.”

– Caroline Myss

potential, and it is their treasures society needs the most. Indeed, it is your treasures society needs the most, because just as we marginalize prison residents, you, too, are marginalized by association. We need your gifts.

We believe that when you change the relationship COs have with those in prison, you change the relationship people in prison have with the world. When you change the relationship people in prison have with the world, you change the relationship prisons have with the world. Journalist and author Sydney J. Harris wrote, “Most people are mirrors, reflecting the moods and emotions of the times; few are windows, bringing light to bear on the dark corners where troubles fester. The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.” Your task is similar.

For Guards to function as Guardians—to become the priests in the monastery—it is incumbent upon you to attend to your own awakening with integrity. That is no small responsibility, and no small undertaking. That is the path of the Leader.

## RECOGNIZING THE CONSEQUENCES

Acknowledging what is includes recognizing that everything has consequences. They are a natural outcome of our interactions with others. We often use phrases such as, “You’ll have to deal with the

killers and serial rapists, but as a Correctional Officer you can’t think of them as just a killer or a rapist. That isn’t their whole identity, and you have to think of them as complete individuals. I remember escorting Jeffrey Dahmer to a facility and still feeling a strong sense of duty to protect him. You have to treat these felons as people. Throughout my career, I’ve tried to treat everyone the way I would want to be treated if I were incarcerated. I considered them humans above everything else—because that’s what they are. These prisoners, no matter what they’ve done, still have people who love them. They’re still somebody’s son, daughter, somebody’s nephew, or somebody’s father or mother.”

As we’ve observed in our own work, the people who society marginalizes carry within them the most unlocked

consequences,” implying that consequences are negative. In reality, they are neutral—they are simply a result. The consequence of Oshea Israel’s killing of Laramiun Byrd was a prison sentence. Another consequence was a long-term, loving relationship with Laramiun’s mother, Mary Johnson. This was not an outcome Oshea Israel could have scripted, controlled, or predicted. We can easily look at Oshea Israel’s choice to pull that trigger as wrong or bad, and yet he and Mary Johnson have gone on to inspire love and forgiveness in countless others. When we acknowledge that, again, the web in which all of our lives is woven is vast beyond our perception, we begin to release judgements of good and bad. There are actions and consequences, and there is a math to it all beyond our immediate understanding.

Your own actions are a tapping on that web, sending vibrations out into directions you cannot see. Some of the consequences of your actions will be relatively predictable, but many will not, and you will never witness or be aware of these consequences.

As you move forward in this work, know that the most and the best any of us can do is to be in congruence within ourselves. To remember our essence. To allow life energy to animate us as we embody our blueprint. If we do these things, we can release the rest to the greater structure, one far more vast than we can comprehend, that is at work. We can trust that the consequences of our actions will fit the grand equation in whatever way they’re intended.

## INTEGRATION EXERCISE

- 1 When you “empty your shelves” and look into the piles surrounding you, what is there that is valuable and that you want to keep? To nurture? To build on?
- 2 What are you ready to discard?
- 3 When you sift through the stuff, where do you come upon pain? What is the potential treasure in this pain? In what ways is love speaking to you through this pain?
- 4 What “poison” have you had to ingest? How can you imagine that this poison could also be some of your greatest medicine?
- 5 What health do you see around you? What is working that you can support? What about within you?



## CHAPTER FOUR: WEEK FOUR

### THE TOLL OF TRAUMA

“Corrections officers need help and support because they’re dying on the inside, but they won’t ask anybody for help.”

- Greg, a CO who has served as a Master key control Sergeant, member of a Special Operations Response Team, corrections counselor, among other roles

COs and incarcerated individuals are inextricably and powerfully linked in a dance of your own becoming. There’s an old saying that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. In many ways, that teacher cannot become a teacher until someone assumes the mantle of the student, and the student can’t fully embody that role until someone steps forward and embraces the identity of teacher. We might say that when the prison resident is ready to accept the mantle of monk, the Guardian will appear, and when the guard is ready to step into their wholeness as a Guard, the prison resident will blossom into the monk.

Yet as we’ve acknowledged, the path is neither easy nor clear. That is purposeful, because it is the journey that shapes us. Recall our discussion of the hero’s journey in chapter 2. The purpose of the journey is not to reach a final destination, but to experience the journey and grow in the process. To interact with seemingly insurmountable challenges and in so doing connect with our deepest selves, including the drives, motivations, and skills that are hidden within us and long to be recognized and engaged.

Along this journey, one of the skillsets we’re invited to develop is the ability to interact with pain and trauma in a generative way. Classically, we are taught that pain, suffering, agony—all of these things are bad and should be avoided at all costs, yet if you wish to experience a life in a way worth living, a life alive with connection, engagement, and meaning, this isn’t possible. Instead of spending our precious energy trying to suppress trauma, we can learn to engage with it in a way that it can serve us.

## HOW TRAUMA CAN SERVE US

Once, there was a young prince who was beloved by his parents. They loved him so much that they decided they would do everything they could to shelter him from the suffering of the world, and so they kept him confined to the palace grounds. The boy grew into a man, he married a beautiful, loving woman and fathered a child. Yet the man who would one day be king couldn’t escape the persistent feeling that he was missing out on something. He couldn’t explain it, but in spite of all he had, he felt a sense of emptiness inside. So, one day, he decided to set forth from the palace and explore the countryside, and he was shocked by what he saw. People suffering from hunger, from illness, perpetrating crimes against one another... He was both heartbroken and baffled by all of this pain. What could be the purpose of all of this suffering? He searched for the greatest teachers he could find, he fasted and endured other austerities, all in search of the meaning of life. Yet still, it eluded him. So, he decided he would try something different—he would sit down under a tree and meditate until the answer revealed itself to him. For 49 days he sat under the tree, and while he sat, he was assaulted by insecurity, anxiety, fear, and desire, yet he stayed where he was, still and at peace. Finally, he experienced a sensation he’d never felt before, a sense of connectedness with absolutely everything in the world. Every being, every plant, every beam of light and dark shadow—he was one with them all. When the man opened his eyes, he was transformed. The prince, once named Siddhartha, had become the Buddha, a name that means “he who is awake.”

Yet what awareness or knowledge did the Buddha awaken to? Did he discover a way to numb or subvert pain so that he would never have to experience suffering? In fact, he discovered the opposite. The Buddha discovered that it is our resistance to pain, and not the pain itself, that causes suffering. When we can be present with all that is in life, including pain, instead of trying to suppress or run from it, we alleviate suffering. Instead, how we typically experience pain is to react as if it is wrong. That pain shouldn’t exist. That it’s not fair that we should experience pain. What the Buddha realized is that pain is as joy is. Each is essential to a life fully lived, and to deny or rage against pain is to limit joy, and to resist life itself.

## HOW TRAUMA BUILDS RESILIENCE

You’ve likely heard the saying, “That which doesn’t kill me only makes me stronger.” This can be true, yet unfortunately most of us never learn how to transform our trauma into resilience. Left to our own devices, we think that if we merely survive, we’ll somehow thrive, so we try and just get through it. We try



and endure our pain and stuff it down, believing the victory is simply waking up again the next day. All the while, we become more and more distant and disconnected from our true essence.

Perhaps you have been told by others, overtly or passively, that the way to deal with trauma is to not deal with it. Maybe you saw this in your family growing up—that one or another of your parents would deal with pain, sorrow, or grief by trying to suppress or ignore it. Perhaps a supervisor told you to shut yourself off to what you'd be seeing inside prison walls. To somehow try and not be affected by it. That vulnerability is weakness, and guards can never be weak. “They teach us to leave it at the gate,” says former CO Michael. The result, as warden Charles describes it, is that “You almost become non-human, robotic, emotionless.”

As clinical psychologist Daniel Kriegman describes, when we deal with pain and trauma by suppressing it, it's like creating a clogged pipe. Instead, we need to learn to interact with our pain in ways that let it keep moving, or it will block the flow of everything. There was an old commercial for Drano that showed the inside of a pipe where a clog was lodged. When water was poured into the pipe, it stopped at the clog. Nothing could get past it. When we suppress our emotions, we create this kind of blockage inside ourselves, and nothing can get past it. Not even joy. We begin to feel cut off from our ability to feel much of anything at all. And this not only cuts us off from ourselves, it isolates us from others, as well.

As humans, as we described earlier, our brains are designed for connection. We long to experience limbic resonance, in which we can synch up with others, feel seen and acknowledged by them, experience empathy, and so on. When we have these blockages in our system, that blockage caused by trauma and pain becomes our focus. As we fixate on our suffering, we turn away from others, and that lack of connection and the experience of resonance with others causes more suffering. It causes a deep hunger inside us that we don't know how to feed. When we feel it, because we don't know what it is or how to deal with it healthfully, we try and numb it through substances, television, social media, video games, food...anything that offers some semblance of comfort. Yet these things leave us craving more, because they don't resolve the true source of our deep hunger—our need for connection.

Then, eventually, something snaps. The pressure against the blockage is too strong, and we break down. We may consider taking our own lives, we may overdose, we may fly into a violent rage. These are all manifestations of the daimonic or life force energy inside of us yearning to move, trying to create a force strong enough to flush out that blockage. When daimonic energy is suppressed, it can be expressed in

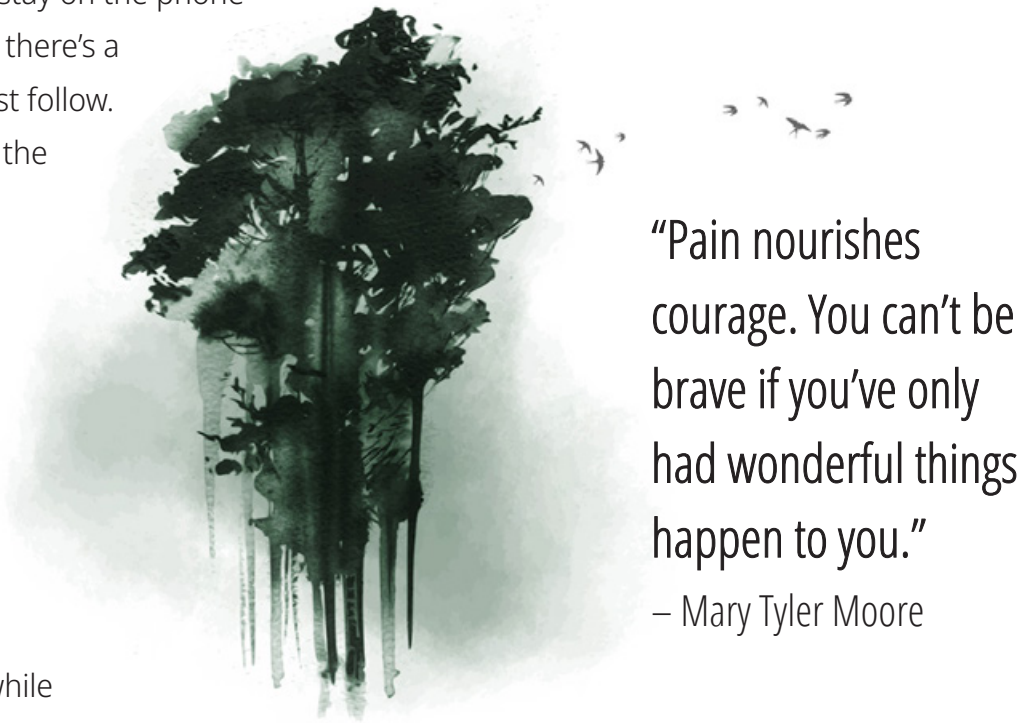
**“Officers can never  
be weak. Inmates can  
never be weak.  
It’s its own world.”**

— Brian, head of a medical  
evaluation unit

outbursts. This is neither good nor bad, it simply is. It is simply life force energy longing to move through us freely once again. Perhaps you've experienced this in a lesser way. Maybe you had a rough day when a prison resident was getting under your skin, when you felt irritated with your partner, when a friend said something that made you angry and you did something to “blow off steam.” You went out and played basketball, hit the gym, blasted music in your car, went out dancing, or took part in some other activity that allowed you to move your energy. This is a healthy way of dealing with trauma, because what you were doing was allowing that daimonic energy to flow through you rather than fester.

After working as a CO, Michelle went on to work in the communications department for a sheriff's office. “I received a call about a young man who killed himself. His friend found him, then his mom showed up on the scene. You have to stay on the phone until a deputy gets there, and there's a professional protocol you must follow. I'm on the phone, listening to the screaming, the crying, to the mother that just found her child. I would listen with tears rolling down my face. Then when I hung up, I would go outside and cry or scream because it's hard not to be compassionate. It's hard not to be human.” Even though she had to follow a protocol while she was on the phone, as soon as she had a chance, instinctively Michelle allowed herself to let that energy of trauma, of empathy, and of humanity flow through her. She literally gave voice to her pain.

As Daniel Kriegman explains, we are actually designed not only to deal with traumatic events, but to use these events to become stronger and more resilient. Years ago, scientists in Arizona created an experiment where they constructed a “biodome” that housed everything necessary to sustain life, then lived inside it for two years and studied the patterns of nature inside it. There were a few problems, though, including the fact that for some reason, the trees had trouble growing. It befuddled the scientists. There was nutritious soil, ample light... Then, they realized what was missing—wind. The “perfect” environment had no wind, and without the pressure created by wind, prompting the trees to



strengthen to withstand it, they didn't become strong enough to thrive even in a windless environment. Their core—their heartwood—was too weak for them to thrive. Trauma and pain are the wind that strengthens our heartwood.

Richard Tedeschi, a psychologist and researcher at UNC Charlotte was looking for his next project. “Who do I want to know more about?” he asked himself. His answer: People who are wise. His question: How did they get that way? He realized he'd seen a lot of wisdom among people who'd endured great challenges, so he and fellow UNC psychologist-researcher Lawrence Calhoun undertook a project where they interviewed 600 people who'd experienced serious trauma—they'd lost a spouse or survived a severe injury that left them paralyzed, for instance. In their research, a pattern emerged. Over and over again, the interviewees said that while they wished the experience hadn't happened, in some ways it had changed them for the better. The team isolated five key areas where people noted improvements: they appreciated life more, they were aware of more possibilities in life, their relationships were better, they felt more spiritual fulfillment, and overall, they felt stronger. As a result of their research, Tedeschi and Calhoun coined the term “post-traumatic growth” to describe how people can actually become stronger as a result of trauma. According to their research, as many as 90 percent of people who've experienced serious trauma say that at least one aspect of their life is better as a result of their experience. In a study of Vietnam War veterans who'd been captured, 61 percent said they'd benefitted in some way from the experience. Every superhero has an origin story—some series of experiences that were challenging or even devastating, but that helped them to connect with the deep reservoir of strength inside them. To overcome those experiences required them to call on every resource inside them, but once those resources were engaged, they were forever changed into the fullest, richest version of themselves.

Daniel Kriegman says, “Traumatic experience is intertwined with our mortal lives. In a life fully lived, agony is inevitable. Yet chronic suffering is not at all inevitable. ... We are designed to face the painful aspects of our existence and find some way to rise above them. Indeed, once activated, post-traumatic growth can be used in the service of creating a life centered in eudaimonia.”

As life begins to flow within us, we can start to feel the emotions that have been trapped. And when we begin to release trauma, one of the most common feelings we experience is grief.

“A good half of the art  
of living is resilience.”  
– Alain de Botton

## MAKING SPACE FOR GRIEF

It's likely that to this point, among the emotions both you and those in your care have been suppressing is grief. As you begin to acknowledge and release trauma, it's very likely that feelings of grief and mourning for what has been will arise. This is natural and normal, though it may not feel natural and normal for you if you've been told over and over you have to “be strong.” As we reframe what strength really is, remember that we become stronger when we stay with what is—when we refrain from trying to suppress or run from it. Like the tree standing strong, you can experience grief as something as normal and natural as the wind, and as a force that when we're present with it, strengthens us.

As much as possible, allow any grief that arises through this acknowledgement of trauma to flow through you. If you're in the habit of suppressing it, it may feel foreign and uncomfortable to let your grief move through you. When we've starved or suppressed our emotions for some time, when we begin to feel again, when we begin to thaw, it can be painful. It's like the blood rushing back into frostbitten fingers and limbs—it can hurt at first to experience this warmth of feeling returning and rushing through you. But this blood and this warmth are restoring your vitality and your aliveness.

“Grief does not  
change you...  
It reveals you.”  
– John Green

Going through this experience of being present with and allowing your own grief not only helps this energy move through you but will help you recognize when those in your care are experiencing grief, as well. Walking this path, first, prepares you to support them as their own grief arises. You'll also be better equipped to be a present and supportive spouse, parent, and friend.

Another aspect of grief that you may feel rising up within you is over the loss of what seems like it has been taken from you: the ability to show love and compassion and to be vulnerable and to express your true self. As CO Andy describes it, “The one thing that's stolen most from Corrections Officers is their ability to be vulnerable. You can't really experience love unless you allow yourself to be completely vulnerable to it and what comes with it—the hurt, the joy, and everything that can be part of a much more amazing experience. It's a travesty really.”

“Out of suffering have  
emerged the strongest souls;  
the most massive characters  
are seared with scars.”  
– Khalil Gibran



This concept of loss is a source of pain that must be acknowledged, as well. Yet as you acknowledge it, remember that your true heart, your essence, has not actually been taken from you. It has been hidden. Covered up. The fact that this is a source of pain and grief actually demonstrates and underscores that you are still connected to your care and your compassion. That you have not lost the ability for love and connection. That is the treasure in the pain—the discovery that your drive to show love is so strong that it has persisted in spite of all the obstacles you've experienced to this point.

In this process, you can acknowledge the pain of the perception that your essence was lost. That you may have felt beyond the reach of loved ones and even yourself. At the same time, you can allow yourself to experience joy over the dawning awareness that who you are can never actually be taken from you. You were there all along, and your essence remains untouched by the trauma within and around you.

## THE TRAUMA OF SHARED SUFFERING

You have experienced trauma, and so, too, have those in your care. In fact, much of your relationship to this point has likely been a union based largely in shared suffering. As you make the choice to move beyond the realm of suffering and victimhood into an experience of life in which you understand and embrace your own tremendous capacity to shape all of your experiences, it's necessary to fully acknowledge what has been.

Think of it as a type of closure. It's not that you are meant to forget what you and those you care for have experienced. Instead, you are choosing to release the trauma of how you've been experiencing past events to the history. You are burying it in the soil not to hide it, but so that it can become part of the rich loam and fertilizer that will nourish your future. When we acknowledge trauma and heartfully release it, we welcome all that has been, including and especially that which has caused us pain, because it has brought us to where we are, and it will help to inform where we are going. We are not grateful for the pain, but for the knowledge and awareness we can extract from it.

**“Pain makes me grow.  
Growing is what I want.  
Therefore, for me,  
pain is pleasure.”**

— Arnold Schwarzenegger

## ACKNOWLEDGING TRAUMA AMONG INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

We're not going to try and tell you what you already know—after all, who knows better than you what prison residents experience on a day-to-day basis? This section isn't meant to tell you anything new, rather we seek to be present with you in acknowledging the horrors that many, perhaps most, who experience incarceration endure. In this way, we are sharing with you the burden of this awareness, as you have had to carry it by yourself for far too long. Indeed, the responsibility of what those who are incarcerated experience belongs to all of society, and we wish to honor and accept our part and our role in that.

Incarceration takes from individuals the status of productive members of society. Because of this, incarcerated individuals can experience a loss of a sense of purpose in life. As you've no doubt seen, incarcerated individuals can feel a loss of identity and sense of self. Their skills, talents, intelligence, go unacknowledged, causing a further sense of separation from their essence and their soul. There is also the trauma of separation from their families—missing out on milestones such as birthdays, graduations, funerals, and other observances, and being unable to help them in times of need. On top of it, there is the ongoing stress of physical confinement and the fear of violence.

We acknowledge that the act of withholding love, compassion, and connection from anyone suppresses that which wants to come alive within each of us. That it creates active blocks and barriers to one's ability to connect with and express their soul. In this way, we as a society have created and enabled environments that willfully suppress those living in prisons' abilities to experience life in any way other than what they have already experienced. To dream into being any other reality than that which actively holds them down each day.

At the same time, we wish to acknowledge prison residents' ability to use this pain and this struggle as the force that will inspire within them to discover their own greatest strengths. That within these suppressive circumstances, they alone shape how they interact with life. This is the work of the imprisoned, to experience prison from the standpoint of the penitent, or the monk. Though their environment may be unjust and inhumane, we do not label them as victims of their circumstances. At the same time that we work to transition prisons into monasteries, we work to support those who are imprisoned to find the beauty inextricably present in all conditions.

**“Tears shed for another person are not a sign of weakness. They are a sign of a pure heart.”**

— José N. Harris

The incarcerated individual's reality is one you see outside you every day. Now, let's turn inside, to what you experience within your own heart.

## ACKNOWLEDGING TRAUMA AMONG COS

"What you see in corrections is this slow-rolling rock that continues to crawl over you and you don't even notice it," describes CO Greg. "It's an everyday, continual level of stress. It's a constant struggle to stay mentally sharp. It wears you down over time until you're just beaten. The support isn't there, and the people on the outside don't understand."

Similar to those in your care, COs experience a unique brand of stress. In addition to a low-level, ongoing threat of violence—those spikes when suppressed daimonic energy lunges forth, to which you must always remain vigilant—there are the terrifying moments when the dreaded actually occurs. As CO Andy describes it, "You walk in on your first day and are immediately on this very intense, high state of constant alertness. When you grow up on the streets, like I did, that's a familiar feeling, but it comes and goes. You can leave that situation. But in prison, you can't, and it eats away at you mentally and physically. You can't decompress." CO Brian says, "We have months on end of mundane routines doing the same thing every day. Then one day you come in and, five minutes after your shift begins, there's a shank at your throat..."

These are the obvious stresses—the threat of violence those of us on the outside conjure when we think of prison, or that we see in popular media. But there's also the stress of the grind. The sheer exhaustion. How your brain's ability to focus and stay alert wears thin due to ongoing stress and sleep deprivation. As CO Betsy Miller describes it, "There were a lot of COs working double shifts, four or five days in a row. Working excessive shifts led to significant emotional instability for COs. You could tell by how they treated the prison residents, often being overly aggressive. I found myself often getting irritable with my family from lack of sleep." In such circumstances, working long shifts with little to no chance for recovering, how can you be expected to cope long-term with the peaks and valleys of ongoing hyper-vigilance and moments of actual terrifying trauma?

As a result, your trauma travels with you. As a human being, someone who genuinely loves and cares for others, it's impossible to leave it all at work, as much as you try. CO Greg says, "When we go home at

**"The darker the night,  
the brighter the stars,  
the deeper the grief,  
the closer is God!"**

— Fyodor Dostoevsky

the end of the day, our loved ones ask how our day was. And just about every person inside these walls responds with, 'Fine.' We're trying to protect the people we love from what we've seen and heard. They're asking because they care and love us, but we don't want to talk about it. That friction builds up and eventually that connection is going to stop being there. Then, 10 years into our career, nobody asks how we're doing anymore." CO Chamelle agrees, adding, "This job is hard not just for the COs, but their families, too, and that often makes the COs feel even more stress because we know they are suffering."

What you see and experience every day, being locked up behind bars, surrounded by dense cinderblock walls, can leave you feeling less than human. As many COs describe, it can seem as if you're constantly carrying the weight of that world on your shoulders—this knowing and witnessing of the suffering that occurs in prison—and that who you are deep inside you has been somehow corrupted.



**"I didn't know how to release the stuff I kept dreaming about. ...[Y]ou're watching a human being die in front of your eyes...and there's nothing you can do. Even though he's an inmate, he's still human; you're still human."**

— CO Michael, who has known nearly 20 other COs who died by suicide, and who nearly took his own life

We won't belabor descriptions of your everyday experiences. After all, no one knows better than you. What we wish to do is acknowledge the trauma. To witness it. For too long, you've been told or intuited that what you hold inside you is too ugly to be shared, and that you must carry it on your own, without comment and without complaint. But this is a strategy destined to fail, because again, life energy can only be suppressed for so long before it finds a way to express itself. You are not meant to become a casualty of suppression and suffering.

There's an ancient Japanese story about a devout monk who made a practice to leave the monastery regularly to meditate, and thus work to purify himself. One day, as the bustling sounds of the city below rose up



to his ears, he found he was unable to focus on his meditation, so he decided to make the arduous climb to the shrine at the top of the mountain. It took him all day, but the absolute silence was worth it, and as the monk returned to the monastery, he vowed that he would return to the shrine every day until he was purified of all the ills of humanity. As he walked, he passed villagers in the mountains who beseeched him for help, but he kept walking because of a taboo on unclean people. Those in poverty or otherwise suffering, he and the other monks knew, could pollute you with the dark energy around them. The days passed and the monk travelled back and forth to the shrine, back and forth, all the while ignoring the suffering around him.

Then one day, months after he'd begun his travels to the mountain shrine, as the sun sank over the horizon and the air cooled, a sound came to the monk on the wind. The cries of a woman. "Help me. Please help me," he heard. Only this time, the monk was not able to ignore the sound of suffering. He tried to walk on, but somehow found himself turning in the direction of the cries. He came upon a woman outside a modest home, on her knees, crying. The monk knelt next to her. "Please," he said, "why do you cry so? What is it that you need? Food? Are you ill?"

"No," the woman said. "My mother just died, and I need help to bury her or her spirit will be forever imprisoned within her flesh."

The monk froze, for the taboo of touching the dead was the worst kind of pollution. If he helped the woman, he may never achieve true purification in this life or the next. But as he looked at the woman, he felt a warmth inside him that would not be denied. "Alright," he nodded, "I will help you." And together, he and the woman ritually washed and prepared the old mother's body, then carefully buried it. The monk, himself, placed a cherry blossom atop the fresh mound of soil as an offering to the woman's spirit and a blessing for safe passage to the next realm.

The woman fell to her knees in gratitude, but the monk did not feel worthy of her praise. After all, he was now polluted. "Please," he said, casting his eyes away from her. In his shame, he turned and finished his walk down to the monastery.

When he arrived, strangely, all of the monks were assembled in the great hall. The monk learned that a great seer had arrived that afternoon and was preparing to bestow blessings on the most holy among them. The monk hid in the back of the hall behind a pillar as the seer scanned the faces of those present.

**"Be a lamp, or a  
lifeboat, or a ladder.  
Help someone's soul  
heal. Walk out of your  
house like a shepherd."**

– Rumi

"You," she finally announced, pointing at the monk. "Please, come here." The monk knew he was found out. She had seen straight through to the darkness inside him and meant to make a spectacle of him. Slowly, he approached her. "Put out your hand," the seer instructed, and the monk did as he was told, expecting at any moment for her to take out a reed and begin to lash him for daring to re-enter the monastery in such a state.

Instead, she reached out and took her hand in hers, then leaned forward and gently whispered into his ear a blessing so sacred that it cannot be repeated. Tears filled the monk's eyes as instead of shame, something else rose up inside him.

The next day, instead of making the pilgrimage to the shrine to work on his purification, the monk walked into the village, seeking out anyone he could find who was in need, and doing his best to help them. Beholding this, the other monks were aghast. How could he do this to himself? Yet because the monk had found true purity—the untouchable essence that resided unwavering inside him—he did not fear the sorrow and suffering of others, because he knew that it could not change him. The monk did not try and explain this to his brethren, for he knew that it was only by walking their own path and discovering their own purity that the other monks would understand.

We acknowledge that some part of you has suffered deeply, and we understand that this is precisely because you care. Because your heart, your essence, are not in alignment with a system that dehumanizes. That you hurt when others hurt. That you cannot resist the call to compassion and care, regardless of how others might judge you or how society may turn its back on you. We acknowledge the incredible nobility of your actions and intention and the love and service and loyalty that fuel them.

## THE POSSIBILITY

Myths and fables are powerful tools because they not only impart lessons and insights, like the tale of the monk they also help us glimpse possibility. While what will actually come to be in our own life is a story yet to be known, myths show us something akin to what our own lives can look like. They inspire and stoke the fires of imagination.

Even though the vision we hold for our lives will probably not look exactly like what we imagine, by allowing ourselves to create or connect with a vision in the first place, to dream is an affirmation of the possible. It shows that we believe in ourselves, and that we're starting to put some trust in ourselves and in life that if we show up, if we contribute our energy and attention, that our deepest gifts will in fact be revealed.



You've probably already glimpsed possibility in your day-to-day work. The individual who tips you off to potential trouble. The prison resident or fellow CO who thanks you for listening to them. Even simply having a conversation with a prison resident about the upcoming playoffs. Simple moments of humanity shared are among the most subtle but powerful portents of possibility.

Then there are the glimpses of possibility becoming reality. At some prisons, new approaches are being taken that engage residents in true rehabilitative activities. In Maine, for instance, incarcerated individuals learn to grow vegetables and cook healthy meals for themselves from scratch. In New York, some new prisons are being designed to provide a physical atmosphere that enlivens instead of punishes. In pockets of North Dakota and Oregon, prisons are being restyled to incorporate education and skill-building programs and provide warmer, more comfortable living facilities for residents. You are not doing this imagining, this envisioning, alone. There are others out there who are lending their energy, insights, and gifts to change the system.

Yet for you this transformation may seem far away. It often feels lonely when you're alone on the vanguard, trying to bring into being a world that others don't yet see. This is part of the work of the Guardian, as well—being the vision-bearer for a world in which those who are incarcerated are embraced and supported, and those who care for them appreciated and honored.

CO Andy says, "I've had a lot of good experiences. On my last day at the prison, roughly 10 guys met me at the door and were basically like, 'Hey, good luck to you.' There aren't a lot of handshakes and hugs that go on in prison. That was as close as I could get to feeling like I had done a fair job at coaching where I can, mentoring, and trying to be an example." And yet Andy's path to this point was not easy,

and was often obscured by the struggle around him, which he internalized. "I treated others badly in the first part of my life," Andy says. "When it came to abusing myself with alcohol and everything else, it took the hand of God to get me out of it. When you're given a pass like that, you are not letting that go. I believe I am now in a place one could only dream of, with a family that loves and supports me unconditionally, that knows everything there is to know about me and still accepts me. I meditate. I pray. I have a strong faith. I can walk through a doorway and have complete faith that it's the right doorway spiritually, physically, and mentally."

Early in Andy's life and his career, he felt off track. Misguided. And yet he was never actually off his path. It was simply that all of the twists and turns made it impossible to see what was ahead. Similarly, you, too, are on your path. In this very moment, you are exactly where you are supposed to be. Take a second and glimpse the possibility all around you, right now, in this moment. It may come to you as a memory, a thought, a body sensation. It doesn't matter what form it takes, just let it come and simply observe it. Right now, there is no need to do any more than that.

## HOW DISAPPOINTMENT COMPOUNDS TRAUMA

There is a disappointment you expose yourself to in working with those incarcerated, particularly when you are offering yourself to try and help someone along their own transformation. People can take two steps forward, and one step back. Sometimes three steps back. Sometimes it's two steps forward and all you see afterwards are backward steps. These are heartbreaking, particularly when you've invested yourself.

One of the paradoxes of life is that possibility seems like a future event, but in actuality, it lives in the present, in this very moment. In your work as a Guardian, you don't need to concern yourself with what happens tomorrow, the next month, or the next year with a prison resident, or with yourself. Visions of the future can help to fuel and motivate us, but we want to hold them lightly, because the future will never be exactly as we hope or plan. And if we limit the future to the confines of our vision, no matter how grand, in a way we're also restricting what can be.

"The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love, which includes not only others but ourselves as well."

– Elisabeth Kubler-Ross



“Unconditional love really exists in each of us. It is part of our deep inner being.”

– Ram Dass

Also, when we create rigid goals, we risk disappointment. And when we feel disappointed, we are fixated on one potential outcome and missing all others. When we fixate, we begin to create a blockage.

Growing up, as very young children we learn to look to those around us, usually our primary caregivers, first, and then other adults, to confirm our worthiness and the correctness of our behavior. We judge our properness and our goodness by their responses. Do they smile or frown? Are we rewarded or punished? These experiences create the narrow guardrails within which we act going forward. We’re judged for whether our test garners

an A or a D, and we thereby internalize the idea that the result of our work is the measure of our worth. That our presence and our effort are only meaningful if they engender a certain outcome.

You’ve probably had an experience by now where you’ve invested time and attention in someone—be they a loved one, a colleague, an incarcerated individual or someone else—hoping or even assuming that if you behave in the “right” way, they will speak or act in the way you want. And so, you’ve probably also experienced the frustration of this approach as things didn’t go the way you’d planned. We are not formulas. People have their experiences, motivations, and paths and so you may have done everything “right” according to some set of calculations, but others still can respond in a way that disappoints you. This makes you feel unworthy, or ineffective. Possibility fades as you fixate on how your narrow-desired outcome did not come to pass. Once again, you find yourself facing confinement, this time in the walls of your own mind as you judge yourself. From this space, you’re likely to judge others harshly, as well.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “The one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life.” One of the tasks of the Guardian is to unlearn the transactional, conditional way of relating to others that most of us learned growing up. It is not the role of the Prisoner to give back to you, or to validate or provide feedback on your performance. It’s true that you will see changes all around you, at work at home, and elsewhere as you embody your true self. Yet as much as possible try to unlink what you see and experience from any form of assessment or validation on “how you’re doing.”

The goal is to see unconditionally—to look beyond illusions to see who others are in their deep, true essence. It’s a difficult task for most of us because again, most of us have never experienced truly unconditional love or generosity. The challenge is not to learn how to see unconditionally, because this

is a knowledge you already have that is being suppressed. The challenge is to notice where the barriers to expressing this natural state exist, and to gently remove them, or better yet, simply allow them to dissolve. To let yourself see the best in people.

The purpose of your work is not the product. It is not what happens as a result of your work. The purpose of your work is to do the work. To do the work is to be who you are. To embody your genius. Then let go of the outcome. By embracing the Guardian inside you and bringing your full self to life, you fulfill your purpose.

Releasing both the past trauma you have experienced and the future that may be, the only question you need to ask at any given time is this: What is possible now, in this moment?

## INTEGRATION EXERCISES

- 1 Take some time to read again the acknowledgment of trauma for incarcerated individuals, then allow yourself a few quiet moments to sit in stillness. There is no agenda for this time other than to be. If discomfort or grief arises, that is okay. You can allow it to be and to move through you without judgment. Think of the grief as an affirmation of your love and your aliveness.
- 2 Take some time to read again the acknowledgment of trauma for COs, then allow yourself a few quiet moments to sit in stillness. There is no agenda for this time other than to be. If discomfort or grief arises, that is okay. You can allow it to be and to move through you without judgment. Again, think of the grief as an affirmation of your love and your aliveness.
- 3 Where in your life have you feared or felt the sensation of being polluted or otherwise tainted or broken?
- 4 What moments of possibility have you experienced as a CO?
- 5 What do you sense is possible as a Guardian? Try not to limit yourself to what you think is logically possible, but listen to all of your senses, including your body, to feel into what is possible, no matter how nonsensical or unlikely it may seem. Remember to hold even possibility lightly, like a small bird, so that you do not unintentionally limit what may come to be.



This is an excerpt from a larger Guards to Guardians program we are working on. The full program will contain 7-8 more chapters and offer more tools to continue the path you have already begun.

Thank you for participating in the pilot phase of this program. It is very dear to us. We believe it is officers like you who are the keys to restoring our prison system to the healthy, thriving institution it is meant to be.

We warmly welcome any feedback you have as we edit and refine this program and offer it to what we hope to be thousands of officers around the country.

