

## **PROLOGUE Freedom From Suffering**

You are not trapped. No matter how small a chance you see of getting out of your current situation, you have more options, choices and resources than you know right now. Not only that, you can move out of your trappedness while preserving your goodness and even evolve to a greater version of yourself in the process.

I know these are bold statements. I strongly believe them to be true. As you read on, it will make increasing sense to you why the way we've been conditioned to see life is far from the empowering truth. You can take specific steps to end your suffering, if you know where to go within you.

It is all happening inside you – the turmoils, the joys, the limitations, the infinite abundance. There is ultimately no outside. Too much power has been assigned to the outside world that we have lost touch with the vast resources within us. This book will reconnect you to those resources and guide you to utilise them to free you from your suffering.

The age-old question, “Why do we suffer?” has long been at the forefront of people’s minds. As far back in history as we can allow our minds to go, people have always sought ways to cope with human suffering. Religions and philosophical schools of thought have developed out of a need to understand and deal with this fundamental question. Commercial enterprises are centered on offering ways out of suffering; they thrive or fail according to whether they succeed in providing relief from suffering... without diminishing the supply of suffering.

Indeed, human suffering (or rather, the motivation to alleviate suffering) drives our social creativity and productivity. It helps form establishments of faith to manage the perception of suffering and it generates more business activities to keep our planet functioning. Yet it works only on a superficial level. Despite the systems, products and services that are generated, we remain unhappy. Stuck. Trapped in an unfulfilling existence. Because of the apparent okay-ness on a superficial level, the suffering we endure has become more insidious.

Let’s look at what suffering is and isn’t. Suffering is when you find yourself:

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

- In a physical situation that you can't get out of (bodily harm, diseases, being in a position controlled by other people).
- Feeling great emotional pains that won't go away (over events you can't control).
- Being tormented by bad thoughts that are threatening to spiral into madness.
- Having no inspiration to live due to a spiritual deadness in your being.

Of course, it is not always cut-and-dried like this - usually a combination of factors come into play. But the point is that the suffering we experience can take place on any or concurrently on all of these levels of our being.

Right now, you may feel trapped in any of these types of situations:

- Scarcity, lack of resources
- Not fulfilling your potential
- Being in a problematic relationship
- Something you need to do
- Lacking a sense of purpose and meaning
- Afflictions like addictions and depression
- Feeling blocked

Suffering is, therefore, when we perceive that there is no way out of the pain we are going through. It is important to point out that pain itself is *not* suffering – it's the pain of struggling to get out and feeling unable to do so that constitutes suffering. As you will come to appreciate later in the book, pain is useful and even an essential component for growth. That is good news, because it means that we can stop trying to avoid pain and find a true path out of suffering. Pain may be necessary, but suffering is not.

### **The Illusion of Being Trapped**

To end suffering, we must first recognise that we are caught in an illusion of being trapped. You are not as trapped as you believe you are. Your situations may make you feel as though you are trapped, that there's no way out and that you have exhausted all options. But your perception of who you are and what you are capable of may be limited.

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

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We are far more powerful than convention dictates. The resources we have within ourselves to get out of our imprisonment are far more than we normally realise. I challenge you to transcend those limitations, to ask yourself, *how real are they?*

Think of a situation you are in right now. A situation that seems to you as though there is little chance for change and you are unhappy about where you are in it. I am going to challenge you on all levels of your experience of your apparent trappedness.

### **A. Challenging Your Mental Perception**

If your outlook of the situation is limited to being trapped, then your reality can only be one of being trapped. When you expand your perception, you will see that you *do* have space to move and that there are options available to you. I recall the monkey trap analogy which illustrates how monkeys are trapped when they insert their hands through a hole to get to the food behind it. Once they close their fists around the food, they can't pull their hands out of the hole and are trapped. The monkey is doomed, yet in reality it is free, because all it has to do is to let go of the food. A person in suffering is a bit like the monkey trapped in the illusion of being trapped. Sometimes, by widening your perception of where you are, you begin to see through the illusion and a way out. Widening or expanding your perception can take place in a visual sense, or by challenging your beliefs, or by shifting your focus.

### **B. Challenging Your Emotional Stuckness**

Your emotional state is influenced by the situations around you, but you have the power to change your state no matter what the situation is. While there are 'natural' or typical or logical responses to particular situations, we *can* change our response; we are not stuck with *a* response. When you change your emotional state within the same situation, your entire outlook expands and more options become available to you. This is, however, quite different from simply replacing one emotion with another by using your willpower; for instance, by telling yourself that you are happy when you're hurt. Instead, there is a way to open up to a whole spectrum of expansive emotions *through* the experience of pain. It is only by allowing your emotions to naturally evolve from pain that you can truly find emotional freedom, not by artificially manufacturing happy feelings.

### **C. Challenging Your Spiritual Reality**

You are not as helpless as you think you are. You are supported by a greater spirit within the being that you are. Your spiritual self is greater than who you see yourself to be most of the time. With this expanded perception of who you really are, you rest in faith that there is a gift in it for your spiritual growth and that you are taken care of in the greater scheme of things. As a spiritual being, you have far greater powers than you might be aware of in your normal awareness; the stuckness you're experiencing is really no big deal when you see yourself as a spiritual being.

### **D. Challenging Your Physical Helplessness**

Some situations seem to be out of our control, such as situations that involve other people where outcomes appear to be determined by the decisions and actions of others. We may not be able to control what other people do but we can influence what takes place in our world by how we behave and hold ourselves around people. This does not imply manipulating others to bring forth the outcomes we want. Rather, it is about shifting gears from trying to directly manipulate our circumstances to entering the sphere in which we truly have the power to influence our surroundings.

On every level of our being, we can tap into an immense amount of resources to get ourselves out of stuckness. There are many subtle passages into our inner being that I will guide you to take throughout this book, which will lead you on a wondrous path where you can transform a horror-filled world into a world of magical possibilities.

## **The Culture and Conditioning for Suffering**

Perhaps like many others you have pondered on these questions: "Why is there so much suffering in this world? Is this all there is to our existence? Can we change what motivates people, and is it really worth entertaining the idea of us evolving into a more peaceful and abundant world?" And on an individual level: "Why does life have to be so difficult? Do I have to keep struggling forever?"

The way we are used to dealing with suffering has not brought on a more peaceful planet. It is flawed. There's a general need to maintain suffering to profit from it. But that is

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

only the later part of the story. To appreciate why we have come to this point in the first place, we need to understand where the imbalance had come from.

To begin with, we are burdened by mental clutter. This clutter comes from us being bombarded and pulled by many different viewpoints, data, misinformation, lies and misinterpretations. I believe that as much as 80 percent of our mental attention is clutter. If we were to simplify our mental content and lighten its load with crisp, quality content, we would be able to release so much more energy towards reaching our human potential. We would become a more loving, compassionate and peace-loving race.

It seems that the more we seek to understand the workings of life, the more confused we become. As a result, there is a lack of understanding of spirituality. What little we know about spirituality has largely been distorted and misused. Moreover, many people have only a vague intellectual understanding of spiritual concepts rather than a deep understanding that comes from learning experientially. The key is to not add to the confusion but to simplify and clarify the contents of our mind.

We are also stuck in perpetual struggles with our emotions - we get stuck in our pain, and in our fight to get out of our pain we become more stuck in it. This is because we are not doing the right things to get out of it. We do not have a basic understanding of emotions, and because of that, it is easy to be overwhelmed by emotional pains.

In the first place, we do not want to know our bodies, and as such, we have an uncomfortable relationship with our bodies. Centuries of distortion in beliefs about our bodies have created a mass of people hating themselves and looking at their bodies with disdain. This deliberate attack on their bodies have damaged their physical, emotional and psychological health. At this level of self-abuse, unless we heal ourselves of this self-abuse and the damages that have resulted from it, there is little hope of us moving forward as a race.

And so, on every level of our being, we are cluttered in our understanding of who we are and disconnected from the great powers that are inherent in each level. Transforming humanity needs to begin by reversing the self-destructive path we have set forth. This is done by firstly gaining a basic understanding of what makes us human and clearing up the clutter in our understanding about life, so that we can better use our resources to live a happy life and to advance spiritually.

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

The good news (and it is a very good one) is that who we are is undamaged by any of the destructions we have created. We cannot destroy who we really are: divine, magnificent beings. Whatever your past has been, the pain and abuses you may have endured, the point of power is *now* – not somewhere in the future when you imagine you may become more deserving or worthy of change. No amount of damage you have suffered or brought on to yourself can make you less deserving or less worthy of stepping into your power *now* and taking powerful steps to change your life for the better.

### **The Gift of Disempowerment**

In my personal life and in working with people, I have come to see painful issues as a potential gift wrapped in yards of ribbon tied in complex knots. The process of untying the ribbon and unwrapping the gift may be difficult and frustrating, but when you get to the gift you will feel that the effort and hardship had been worth it. So when I hear someone asking why they had to be the unlucky one to have this or that problem, I imagine the day when they get to unravel their gift.

I invite you to see your problems as potential gifts, even if you can't see how they can possibly be a blessing at this time. The experience of being in pain and struggles can motivate people to seek doorways into what else is possible in their capacity as human beings and an understanding of who they are spiritually. These doorways begin as rumours and whispers within themselves, which they begin to entertain out of desperation after they've run out of options given their current level of understanding. Out of this search, many will discover capabilities and new worlds they would never have known had they not looked outside of their normal ways of operating in life.

Losses and disappointments can lead to new gains, new opportunities, new beginnings. In the process, you may discover new aspects of yourself, which can positively change the way you relate to yourself, others and the world. In this book, I aim to guide you towards these changes so that you can derive great healings and gifts from your suffering.

Suffering can manifest in the form of depression, self-sabotage, insecurity, fear, relationship problems, failures, health issues and many more. Whatever forms your suffering takes, there is pain involved. You will soon learn that we can use the pain as a source of power. Most methods of healing and personal growth will tell you to get rid of

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

pain or to distant yourself from pain. I have found that the most empowering method of dealing with pain is to generate power from it, thereby turning suffering into a source of empowerment. The third volume of this book will focus on this process which I call “psycho-spiritual alchemy” or “personal alchemy”. Learning the simple techniques of personal alchemy will put the power right back into your hands. Instead of being disempowered, you can ‘welcome’ pain when you know you can extricate power from it.

So take heart, for there is potentially much to be gained from what doesn’t seem to be working in your life. If you’ve been feeling small, weak, helpless and powerless, know that your inner and outer worlds can open up in miraculous ways. From a spiritual perspective, I believe that human beings are meant to grow – we become unhappy when we are stuck, our spirits slowly dying because we aren’t fulfilling our soul purpose of continually growing. Whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation, therein lies an opportunity for growth. Growth does not need to be a long, drawn-out painful process all the time - it can be enjoyable. The exercises in this book can yield profound and lasting effects, and they are also enjoyable to do.

### **Letting Go of Your Grip**

To free yourself from your suffering, you must also let go of what keeps you in suffering. It may sound like an obvious statement, but it can feel impossible to achieve when you’re deeply entrenched in your trappedness. Imagine yourself as the monkey that ‘can’t’ pull its hand out and you’ll get to appreciate how real the trappedness can feel.

Intense and conflicting emotions can blind you to new ways of seeing. Traumas can create no-go areas within your psyche that block you from accessing obvious ways out. Sometimes, it is not as simple as telling someone to “just let it go”. At the right time, when enough healing has occurred and one’s outlook has sufficiently expanded to accommodate new ideas and beliefs, then only can letting-go be done.

Therefore, freeing yourself from suffering is not just a matter of finding strategies for physical actions to undertake. It involves working on the emotional issues that are keeping you stuck in your trappedness. The mental-emotional mass needs to be pulled apart, examined, challenged and transformed to allow the letting-go to happen. Your views and outlook of the world need to expand into a world that offers hope, beauty and

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

inspiration before there is anywhere more attractive for you to move to from that place of suffering.

Gradually, you're able to relax your grip from that place and free yourself. But without doing the work to heal and nurture yourself on all levels of your being, it may not be easy for you to free yourself even when you can. Someone may reach a hand in to pull you out of your stuckness, but you may not want to take the hand. Or you may blind yourself from seeing that hand. The hand can also represent other opportunities that you can take up – or in other words, solutions that offer a possible way out of your situation.

The power to free yourself from suffering is within you. When you can see how you might have been perpetuating being trapped in your situation by holding on to it, you can regain a sense of control that comes from recognising that you also have the power to free yourself from what you've been holding on to. That recognition will spark a certain willingness to consider another option, which begins to open doors to more resources that are within you.

### **Returning to Centeredness-Innocence**

The feelings of being stuck in a cycle of struggling may seem all-too-familiar to you. You may be frustrated about getting into situations that test your resolve and resourcefulness, again and again. Just when it seems you can breathe a sigh of relief when a situation breaks through, you enter into yet another challenging situation. Although breaking through a difficult cycle can make you stronger, it can sometimes make you feel discouraged and tired when it seems that life is so fond of throwing one challenge after another at you.

It might even make you feel that perhaps this is all that life has to offer: endless obstacles. Eventually, you may slip into depression or resort to coping with it through drugs, alcohol or food. Or you may express your anger and confusion in ways that damage your relationships. Coping with the challenges of life isn't easy, and even if your methods of coping aren't bringing you relief in the long run, you *are* trying to cope. So don't be too hard on yourself, no matter how unsuccessfully you might think you've been coping with your life situations. Be gentler and kinder to yourself, it will go a long way in aiding you to find that path that truly takes you out of your suffering.

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

If you are familiar with the state of struggling, what about the other side of it? What does its opposite look like?

The opposite of suffering/ struggling/ being trapped is what I call The Bliss of Innocence. It's the ultimate destination in life and also where we started from. Returning to Innocence is facilitated by being in what I call Aligned Centeredness, a state-of-being that is influenced by a clear mental state, a calm emotional state, physical wellbeing, and spiritual openness. Under these states, when you are releasing your grip on the illusory prison bars, your inner self clicks into alignment and you are 'held' in perfect tension within you, giving you access to your natural source of power. This is your natural state, before pain and suffering had set in.

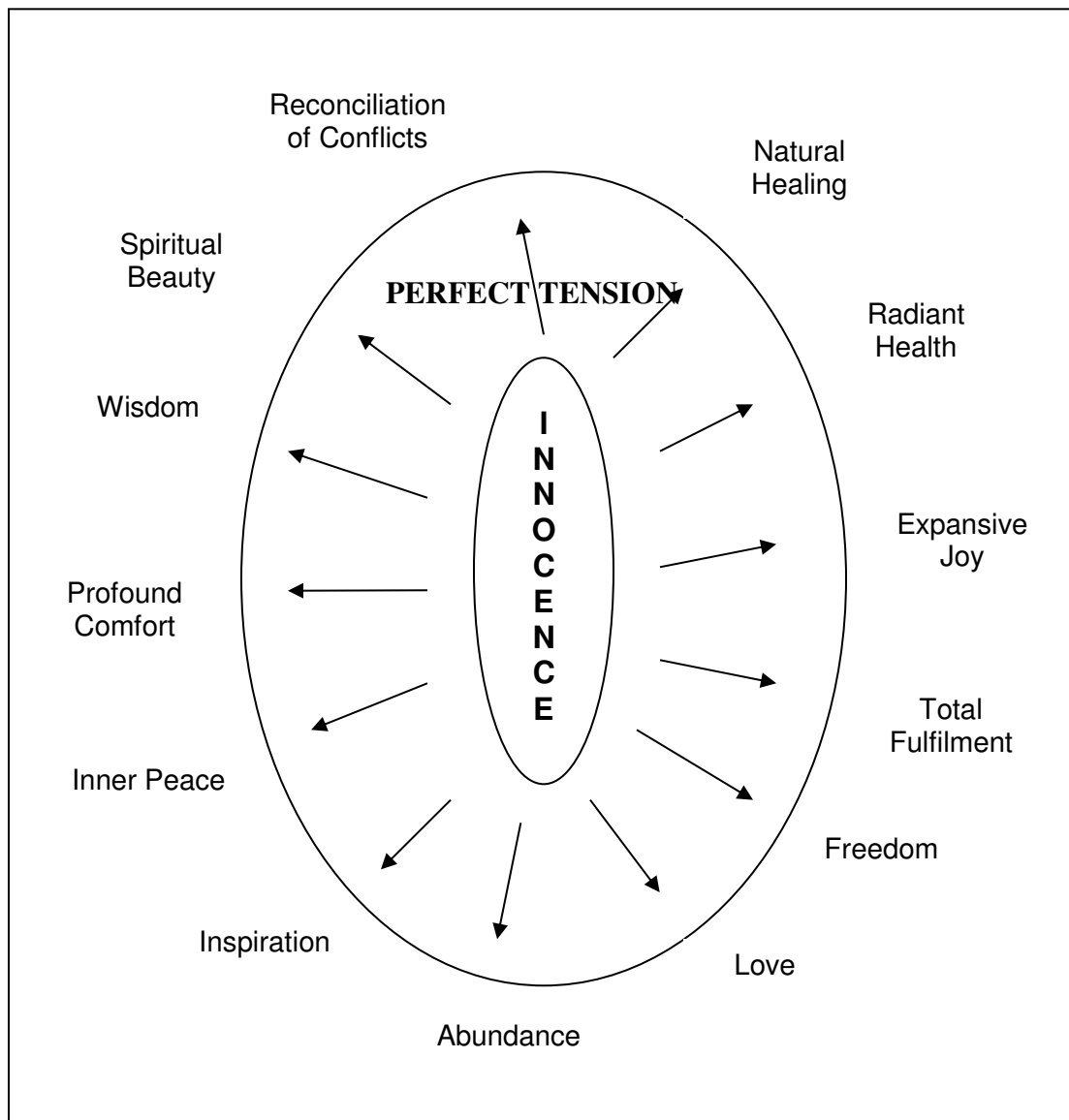
In short, when you're in Aligned Centeredness, a door is opened for you to return to Innocence.

In the state of Innocence, you experience inner peace, spiritual beauty, expansive joy and love, a sense of being totally fulfilled, radiant health, profound comfort, abundance, inspiration and wisdom. Your inner conflicts are reconciled, and your body naturally heals itself. It is a state of perfect balance, peace, power and expansiveness.

# Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH



**Diagram 1: Aligned Centeredness and the State of Innocence**

Therefore, the other side of pain and suffering is all the states illustrated in Diagram 1 which you will naturally connect to when you move back to your center. I offer this to you now as an encouragement that there's a lot of potential joy behind the masks of pain. Sometimes, you may find that only a slight shift in alignment will bring you back to centeredness. It might surprise you to find that the joy, love, abundance and peace you craved for had all along been right inside you, but perhaps your view had been blocked by something in front of you (e.g. pain, mental clutter). As you let go of a long-held

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

belief or need, you relax deeper into yourself, and all of a sudden you fall into perfect alignment with who you are in your purest form: the part of you that knows no pain.

And when you return to Innocence, you will feel as though you have come home. Your home within is the warmest, most comforting home you will ever know. Here, you are free from your suffering. There are many doors that lead you back to this place.

Ultimately, tackling the blocks and obstacles that are in your way so that you return to your spiritual home is the very game of life. It is an exciting game because it promises the greatest gift of all: true freedom.

Whatever stage of healing you are in, it is possible for you to achieve this natural state now by going into meditation. Although you can condition your system to get into this state easily by working on the fitness of all levels of your body, you don't have to wait until you have done more work; you can get a glimpse, a taste, of this delicious glow of peace that is found within you by trusting that it is somewhere inside you. If you're new to meditation, what it means is simply taking time out to slow your thoughts down, put your problems aside for a few minutes, and just let yourself *be*. Closing your eyes, playing relaxing music, or being in nature may help.

How do you know when you have aligned with centeredness? You will notice a quieting of your mind; a soothing of your emotions; a sensation of health and wellbeing; and a feeling of being connected to spirit.

### **The Formula for Self-Liberation**

At this stage, you may still feel confused and overwhelmed as you consider how you will embark on dealing with the issues you have. I have condensed the process of turning suffering into empowerment into a broad formula: the three pillars of Presence, Power, Passion (PPP). The work in this book to free yourself from your cycle of suffering will follow this formula sequentially. Each pillar of the formula contains many layers for exploration and offers plenty of healing opportunities. Ultimately, when you've done some solid work for each pillar, the formula is to be adopted as a mindset or attitude which you carry with you in facing the stresses of life, allowing you to turn each stress that comes to you into something that empowers you.

#### **What This Formula Offers**

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

You will learn to operate fully in your Presence; exercise your Power to create, heal and transform; and experience life with Passion. Most people are so disconnected from any of these pillars that mastering just one of them will have a transformational effect. When all three are mastered, we become true co-creators with the Universe: fearless and inspired.

You will live with optimal awareness and more conscious manifestation of your human experience. This, in turn, will equip you with an ability to respond to challenges with authentic power. It's a joyful and empowering process because you are dipping into your true source of power.

We tend to be unhappy when we're not living with Presence, Power and Passion. When this happens, our bodies get sick, and we become mentally stressed, spiritually dead and creatively starved. When our PPP are strong, we avoid slipping into a downward spiral of negativity. Returning to centeredness becomes easy.

Living with Presence, Power and Passion involves utilising your senses more and immersing yourself fully in your experiences. In other words, to be more alive in your body and build your muscles for utilising what you intrinsically have so that it becomes second nature to you. This will expand your capacity for power and enable you to respond to challenges in ways that will leave you stronger, better, greater than you were before, and thus to utilise every potential for stress to grow.

It involves retrieving parts of you that are lost, or which you reject, thereby increasing your overall power. You will learn to consciously create what you want to happen in your life and find out how much power it gives you. And when you feel whole, complete, fully accepting of yourself, and proficient in using your powers, you will experience life with passion.

If the ideas of "presence", "power" and "passion" seem vague, even mysterious, right now, don't worry. As you continue this journey with me, you will solidify your understanding and experience first-hand what it is like to live with Total Presence, Power and Passion.

Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

# VOLUME 1 (PRESENCE)

The Courage  
to See

## **CHAPTER 1 Here, Now And Aware**

The first point of power in freeing yourself from your suffering is to allow full consciousness of what is happening in you. Without that honesty of firmly acknowledging what is there, we remain stuck – a part of us wants change, another part of us is afraid to look at what needs changing, and yet another part is afraid to make changes.

Be present to it. We tend to cringe or draw back when we're confronted with painful situations. Arm yourself with courage and gently nudge yourself closer to it. When you approach pain courageously, you take your power back from it because you are no longer held in fear by it.

But being aware of what is happening isn't all about seeing the pain. Pain is only a small part of what is there. When you are fully present, you also become aware of joyful feelings and see beauty in places that had appeared only dark to you. You tap into the full range of what is available. It is only when we focus on keeping our pains at bay that pain becomes so prominent. When you stop pushing it away, the initial clarity you get may hit you like a slap in the face, but as the fog clears you are able to see the joys as well as the pain. Even the pain becomes a gateway to more joys.

The way we avoid pain is by not being fully present in our body, mind, heart and spirit. In other words, we are not fully aware of what we're thinking, feeling and doing. Over a course of time, we become only weakly connected to ourselves across these levels. The more disconnected we are, the less we're able to manage the difficulties in life – so that when we find ourselves in muddy waters, we do not have our full resources to deal with it, and it becomes our prison.

It is worth cultivating living with Total Presence. It can prevent you from getting into muddy waters in the first place. If you are aware of what you are thinking, feeling and doing, you are less likely to find yourself in "unlucky" situations. You have more control over where your life is heading because you can make clear choices. If you were to examine the choices you've made in the lead-up to this situation you're in, could you see where a lack of presence on your part might have led you to make some ill-informed choices? To start unlocking the doors to more resources, I invite you to step into total responsibility.

## **Total Responsibility**

Before any changes can be achieved, we need to take the step of assuming total responsibility for our lives. This is such an important point, yet many people embark on life-changing endeavours without spending enough time to make sure that they take full responsibility for their lives.

If you start to implement actions to change your life but have a private clause stating that ultimately you're not in control because your mother, aunt, neighbour, teacher, husband, the weather, the economy, the government, the system or God has pulled something unfair on you, that mentality will cancel out whatever efforts you're making. You may find yourself making a small progress but it will feel as though you are taking one step forward and two steps back.

In any difficult situation, it is common for us to feel like a helpless victim, that we're the victim of events beyond our control. We feel angry at the injustices perpetrated against us, the uninvited abuses inflicted on us by others, or the stroke of bad luck that's fallen upon us. A lot of times, under this state, we continue to try to find a way out of the situation, only to find that our efforts yield very little results. We're trapped in a cycle of struggling where it seems that no matter what we do there is no relief.

Trying to tackle a problem while feeling like a victim is like trying to cut down trees using a butter knife. When you carry the attitude of being a victim of your circumstances, it is impossible to tap into your real power, the full range of resources that are available. Being a victim makes you desperate and needy, and this limits your options. In the practical world, it translates to making bad choices and selling yourself out – which may compound your problem and make you feel even more trapped.

But when you can see that the situation was at least in part created by you, that you had a role in creating that situation, *now* you can access real power. It immediately makes you calmer, more resolute, inspired and hopeful. From this place, you are more likely to make better choices, without feeling the need to compromise yourself.

The idea of taking responsibility is often met with resistance. It is common for people to react defensively to this idea when it is suggested to them. Usually, they balk and come up with something like, "Oh, are you saying that it's my fault that this happened?" and quickly shut out any further explanations. They are so outraged by the idea that the mess they are in

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

might not be completely the making of others that they choose to walk away from the discussion.

When things happen that make you feel you're the victim of an injustice, you will probably be incensed when someone tells you that it is your fault. But taking responsibility isn't about assigning blame at all. It's about reflecting on your situation and seeing where you had given your power away, and then this power can become yours again once you see where it is. You might have made some choices that led to the situation, which means that you had some control. Some things you can't control, some you can; if you look at the part that *is* within your control, that is where your power is.

We make mistakes, we make bad decisions that result in mistakes. Be accepting of that. This is the first step in healing the bitterness in you and allowing you to have the openness to forgive others as well as yourself. Blaming someone or something else for your plight isn't going to help improve your situation. Instead, it takes away your power, saps your energy, and isolates you from the people who love you and are there to support you.

Another element of total responsibility is to take responsibility for our present situation. Even though events may be out of our control, the thoughts they give rise to in us, the emotions we feel in response to them, the ways we behave in response to our thoughts and emotions, are in the realm of our control. Meaning, we can do something to change them – through processing our pains, choosing new ways of thinking and behaving, etc.

Taking responsibility means saying, “Yes, others have behaved in ways that are wrong but the thoughts and feelings it triggers are mine, therefore, there is room for me to change the way I feel, think and act.” If you keep blaming others, you will remain stuck in not being able to do anything about how you feel, think and act; it is equivalent to choosing to be stuck in your pain. Once you move past blaming others (and again, it does not mean we turn the blame on ourselves but to own what is within our control to change), we can begin moving out of our suffering.

If you've been abused, beaten up, raped, swindled, cheated, kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured, betrayed, dumped, abandoned, humiliated, set up, accused of something you didn't do, forced to do something against your will, screamed at, attacked, knocked down by a vehicle, injured in an accident, involved in a natural disaster or you've lost someone close to you - you can still change the way you view the events, thereby freeing your heart from being in perpetual pain. This step in freeing yourself from your past will free you from continuing to put yourself in situations that make you feel abused, beaten up, raped, swindled ...

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

For even if those events are far behind you in the past, your mind, heart and spirit are still back there, replaying those events while your physical self is slowly catching up by creating similar events. This is why we hear of the woman who, after her abusive husband had been taken away, found herself in another abusive relationship. Or the businessman who kept “running into” people who would eventually cheat him of his money. Or the family that ran from a war-torn country only to re-create war-like circumstances in a peaceful country.

Let’s look at the woman who was abused by her husband. She was the one who decided to go to her friend’s birthday party where she met her future husband. She was the one who decided to date him. She was the one who decided to marry him. She was the one who decided not to tell anyone that she was getting beaten up. All of which are clues to where she can now go to retrieve her power.

What we are doing here is not to blame the woman. We are simply acknowledging the facts. It is a fact that she made a series of decisions that had brought her to her situation. We are not saying she is to blame. We are sorting out the facts from the whole sticky web of blame. And when we look at the facts as facts, we feel a certain detachment from the issue. With detachment, we can see that yes, the woman had indeed been responsible for where she ended up, and she had made her decisions based on everything she knew at the time. An insight like this can be very empowering to someone who has always seen herself as a helpless victim; all of a sudden, she can stop blaming (which is to continue giving her power away) and recognise herself as being the creator all along.

It becomes painful only when we get into judgement. If we think, “She did this, therefore she is a bad/stupid person,” then we have simply detached ourselves from blaming her husband to blaming her. Can you now see how people end up hating themselves over a tragedy or loss? They have gone from hating their perpetrators to hating themselves.

Here, I need to address the other extreme of not taking responsibility for our role in creating our situations: the tendency to blame ourselves for *everything* that has happened. When we beat ourselves up for being stupid, weak, nasty, etc, it is just another way of assuming the role of a victim. Locking ourselves into a cycle of guilt and self-flagellation is far from empowering. Examine your role in the creation, accept the facts without judging yourself and feel your grip on your past begin to relax, allowing you to begin on a clean slate where you can now tap into your full power.

Total responsibility means recognising that we are cause, that we hold the power to create and change our lives. To get a clearer picture of what you’re dealing with, it is essential to be

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

aware of all the things you do to hide from your truth. But first, let's take a look at what motivates us to hide the truth from ourselves.

## **The Drive to Blur It Up**

Facing the truth of what you are dealing with, or where your life has taken you, can be scary for many people. The tendency to blur things up, hoping that the problem will go away on its own, is so common that the strategy we choose to escape from the reality of our situations can often develop into yet another set of problems. But the more you allow yourself to see what is going on for you, the more power you have to end your suffering.

Here are some of the fears that drive us to escape from facing our truth:

### **Fear of Losing Something or Someone**

There's a tendency for people to cling on to less-than-desirable situations because they are worried about the possibility of losing something or someone should they "rock the boat". People can stay in denial for years, putting up with how unhappy they feel deep down. The thing is, in many situations, those who finally come to do something about it will find that the outcome is nothing like what they had feared. They had spent those years locking themselves into a limited scenario because they couldn't imagine what other possible outcomes there might be. In many cases, denying our unhappiness will lead to self-destructive patterns of behaviour.

### **Fear of Being Stuck in Your Painful Truth**

Beneath this fear is a belief that things won't get better. Or that if you were to acknowledge how you are really feeling about your situation, what if you can't do anything to change it? In your mind, it is better to deny your truth than to allow yourself to feel the pain of it. You don't see any real options so you tolerate the situation. It may be painful but you're kind of used to it, so it's bearable. Bringing it up to your full awareness might make it unbearable, so why go there? Perhaps you're hoping that things will improve on their own, holding on to a small chance that you can by-pass the stage of acknowledging your pain. In the meantime, you will do anything you can to keep a lid on your truth rearing its ugly head. Again, this is breeding ground for self-destruction.

### **Fear of Being Wrong**

Sometimes, we avoid seeing our truth because we're not ready to accept that our beliefs are being challenged. Facing the fact that we are wrong or mistaken about something can be so uncomfortable that our ego (which is so afraid to be proven wrong) is driven to defend this thing which we have invested so much into, come rain or shine. We may become unyielding

and inflexible, even in the face of mounting evidence of the contrary. This way of operating limits us and prevents us from recognising what else is possible, and hence, it traps us in our suffering.

### **Fear of Being Judged or Criticised**

If you take the fear of being wrong to the next stage, it is often a fear of what people would say or think of you if they were to know you've been proven wrong. Perhaps you're afraid that others might judge you for having made a mistake, especially if you have an emotional history of having 'failed' before in the same area. The thought of somebody finding out is embarrassing. Maybe you were warned against something but you didn't listen to the warning. As a result, you now have an embarrassing need to hide what is really going on for you – not just from others but also from yourself. Yet, the pain of being wrong is likely to be brief, but what comes out of it is your power to choose again. By denying your truth, you deny yourself the chance to step into a happier place.

### **Fear of Pity or Worry from Others**

Maybe you want to uphold your image as somebody who's got it all covered. Everything is "working well" in your life. Your parents are happy with your achievements, your spouse and children enjoy a comfortable, stable life, and your friends admire or even envy your apparent success. You fear all this will change and people will regard you differently. You don't want your parents to worry about you, nor your friends to feel sorry for you. This is the inevitable outcome you imagine should you tell the truth to yourself.

All these fears come down to one thing: the fear of change. Fear of change is the glue that keeps you stuck in your cycle of struggles. As a reminder, suffering is when you're trying but feel unable to get out of an unhappy situation. Listen, even if you're avoiding your truth about a situation, you are still struggling inwardly in your efforts to deny what is really there. Just because you aren't taking action to change, you are still locked in a state of suffering. You are gripping onto the bars of your prison cell even though the door may be unlocked.

Now that you've seen some of the motivating factors that drive us to hide from our truth, let's look at some of the common ways in which we tend to blur the truth.

## **Defensive Behaviours**

Fear of change makes you resist the movement of change. This resistance is often reflected in certain behavioural displays which I call "defensive behaviours". They can show up at any

stage of your journey in the process of change, so it is useful to go through this list periodically to check yourself as an additional exercise of self-awareness. People adopt defensive behaviours to avoid facing the truth, or the pain of seeing what is there.

## **#1 Control Tactics**

Change, whether it is in opening your eyes to your truth for the first time or taking a concrete step to change your situation, can bring with it a sense of losing control. Some of the ways in which people attempt to wrestle back some sense of control are:

- (a) **Needing to know.** You can't bear not knowing. Uncertainty makes you frustrated and mad. You want to know what the result is going to be, when it's going to happen, and you want a guarantee of it all. This allows you to feel more in control of your situation. Your need to know extends to every little issue around you – from what will be on the lunch menu to how many chairs will there be in the conference room.
- (b) **Asking too many questions.** You drive people up the wall with your incessant questioning. Why this, why that. Like a four-year-old child who's trying to make sense of the world by asking questions, you are trying to get a firm footing in an unfamiliar world. Sometimes, it's not that you're really interested in the answers, it's the act of asking questions that gives you an immediate sense of control, and others will experience you to be firing questions non-stop at them just for the sake of asking.
- (c) **Being nosey.** This is a combination of the first two behaviours: needing to know and asking too many questions. You ask questions that pry into other people's private lives. This behaviour has the added function of distracting you from your own 'story' by allowing you to revel in someone else's story. What you are looking for is the energy of gossip and scandal, or simply a new, remarkable fact, to set a contrast to your own life, which by comparison is less commanding of your attention in this moment.

## **#2 The 'Yeah-But' Mentality**

If you're afraid to move forward with change, you'd be forever looking for excuses to keep yourself where you are. Some interesting behaviours can arise from this:

- (a) **Can't stay in the positive.** The territory of change, even if it's positive changes, somehow feels uncomfortable to you. You tend to sabotage early successes, and give up by running straight back to where you started. Along the way, you justify your change of direction by giving yourself all kinds of excuses of why the new is not better than the old.

- (b) Countering with the negative. When someone congratulates you on your progress, you dismiss what you have achieved and focus on what is still undesirable. “Yeah, but I still don’t have this-or-that,” you say. Writing off any good progress allows you to convince yourself that change isn’t working.
- (c) Negativity. You see the world through a negative lens; everything is given a negative twist. It’s as though you’re giving yourself evidence that there’s no way out and thus any attempt to change would be futile. It allows you to stay in suffering.
- (d) Fixated on what’s bad. You tend to complain about any imperfection you see in your surroundings. This way, you can tell yourself that the conditions aren’t right, or the environment isn’t conducive for you to be making changes now. More excuses for why you can’t move into changes yet.
- (e) Rejecting or dismissing good news. You are determined not to acknowledge anything that is positive because doing so would mean an end to your excuses. It helps you stay in suffering. If anyone shares something positive, you would react by dismissing it (sometimes inwardly, but your body language would be revealing). This kind of behaviour is utterly frustrating to those around you.

### **#3 Controlling Behaviours**

Like Control Tactics, these behaviours are attempts to regain a sense of control over something that seems to be out of your control. By controlling other people around you, it gives you a feeling of having power over others to compensate for feeling powerless to control your own life. This kind of power is what I call “false power” because it does not come from the source of where your true power lies. It may be instantly gratifying but does not cover up your insecurity for long.

- (a). Bossy. You tend to assign yourself the role of teacher, mentor, leader, boss, organiser, the wise one, the more experienced, the one who “knows better”. By bossing others around, it gives you the illusion that you are in control.
- (b) Judgemental. You focus on what’s wrong about others by passing judgements. Not only does it allow you to feel that you aren’t as badly off as others, it also counters the uncertainty you’re feeling by giving you a sense that you do have a grip on what is happening.

- (c) Manipulative. You may be driven to act out in manipulative ways through guilt-tripping, passive-aggression, emotional blackmailing, etc. Underlying these behaviours is a desperation to be ‘saved’ from having to deal with your painful truth – the belief that someone else will give you what you need to make addressing your situation redundant.

#### **#4 Fear Of Responsibility**

Sometimes, the idea of taking responsibility for our own healing can intimidate us into taking a passive role. We may look at it as too much work. Faced with this daunting prospect, people go in search of individuals who can magically make their problems disappear. An attitude that “other people should do it for me” can lead to giving away our power because we don’t recognise the true power that we have.

- (a) “Give me the answers.” If you view dealing with your issues as too much work, you may expect others to hand over a solution to you on a silver platter. A solution may or may not come to you but if you don’t give your situation a hard look, you may deprive yourself of recognising a solution when it’s right in front of you. Only when you acknowledge the problem can you be open to solutions.
- (b) “Heal me.” Some people are addicted to receiving healing in a totally passive way. There are many gifted healers who can help you on your journey to bring more balance into your life, but their healings should complement, not replace, your own work. Healers can help you gain more insights about yourself but ultimately nobody knows you more than you know yourself. It is one thing to be guided and supported on your journey, and another to rely completely on someone else to make you whole again.
- (c) “Where’s the magic pill?” Most of us have at one point or another dreamt of coming across a magic pill that will take away all our problems. The truth is that it takes persistence, courage, faith and patience over a period of time to gradually open up our worlds and free ourselves from our struggles. Although we may sometimes experience the breakthrough as a dramatic change, most of the time the change is subtle and progressive. I believe that there is no short-cut to finding our true freedom; the work to unravel the knots in our psyche and to let go of our grip on our imaginary prison often takes time and effort. But every step of the journey can bring you joy which you can celebrate along the way.

#### **#5 Fear Of Losing Out**

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

If you see the world as a place where resources are limited, you may tend to grab hold of everything that's available around you. Since there is not enough to go around, you don't want to be short-changed. There's a sense of competitiveness to 'score' the most out of any given opportunity. Deep down, you are worried that you're about to lose the 'security' of your comfort zone (your prison). This latent insecurity can give rise to these behaviours:

- (a) Greediness. You feel driven to take more than you need. If you see someone acquiring something you don't have, you feel you must also have it or you will "lose out". Having "less than" feels uncomfortable to you; it makes you feel shortchanged, or that you've gotten the short end of the stick. You feel you must not lose out on getting the most and the best.
  
- (b) Bitterness and Resentment. You feel that the world is out to get you. You are constantly trying to keep score of what you're giving against what you're receiving in your relationships. Every expression is a transaction for which you must be repaid in full. People around you might have remarked that you are mean with your resources, that you are unwilling to share without expecting something back. You may have a habit of setting other people up to justify how you feel; you're on the lookout for someone screwing you up and will explode at the first signs of 'betrayal'. Deep down, you are bitter about how you have ended up here and thus, you resent having to do the work to get out of it.

### **#6 Rebellious Behaviours**

Sometimes, people act out their resistance to change in quite a literal way – by rebelling against the structure they are in. The discomfort they feel in moving towards change may compel them to behave in ways that interfere with the process.

- (a) Rejecting boundaries or rules. In a setting where certain rules and boundaries have been imposed to enable change to happen (for instance, if you've checked yourself into an addiction clinic, or you've signed on to a counselling programme to help improve your marriage), you may break certain rules or cross those boundaries when you feel uncomfortable during the process. This can happen even when you yourself have imposed those rules and boundaries for yourself.
  
- (b) Creating discord or chaos. Another way of interfering with the process of change is by breaking up the flow of change through creating an atmosphere of confusion in your environment. As long as there is confusion, your process has been interrupted, put on

hold. It also gives you back a sense of power – by controlling your environment, you give yourself the illusion of being in control of what is going on inside you.

- (c) Creating negative attention. At times, people do things to bring attention to themselves in a negative way, because they can't bring themselves to say that they want help. The conflict between the part of them that wants help and the part that is scared to ask for help will drive them to cry out for help in a destructive way that causes others to notice them.

### **#7 Over-Dramatisation**

When you over-dramatise events, you allow yourself to feel like a victim. You may respond to what someone says or does by making it personal and blowing it out of proportion. You can then wallow in self-pity as you create a bigger and bigger drama that highlights the tragedy and pathos you imagine yourself to be in. “Woe is me” is the theme behind this kind of behaviour. By creating a juicy drama starring you in the lead role, you take yourself further and further away from your place of power where you can begin to take steps towards change. If you find yourself caught up in over-dramatising, ask yourself what's a more realistic reality. Whittle down the story details until you get to the simple core facts where you can assume a position of power again.

### **#8 Chaos, Unpredictability and Anxiety**

Some people create a highly-chaotic lifestyle that is lacking in routine, structure and predictability as a way to distract themselves from their deeper feelings. Whilst they may complain about their lack of time, their perpetually growing list of things to do, the never-ending dramas that unfold in their lives, these kinds of discomfort is preferable to the discomfort of giving up the chaos and facing what is really going on inside them. In fact, the by-product of anxiety from living such chaotic lives is often a form of addiction itself – where the person can engage all her resources in dealing with the anxiety and continue to avoid facing deeper issues.

### **#9 Misplaced Humour**

One way of hiding our truth from ourselves is by laughing it off. Whilst humour can be very supportive during the healing process, it can also be used to disguise how we're really feeling inside. If you find yourself making a joke out of everything, ask yourself if it is because you want to convince yourself that nothing needs changing. How might you be using humour to dilute your truth?

### **#10 Numbing Your Pain**

The process of change can be very uncomfortable, and with the availability of pain-killers in the forms of medication, drugs and alcohol, it can be very tempting to want to reach out for these substances to numb our discomfort. This defensive behaviour commonly progresses to a cycle of addiction, which is a prison by itself (chapter 16 further addresses the issue of addiction).

### **#11 Over-Analysing and Intellectualising**

We can analyse ourselves until the cows come home without moving forward in our growth. Intellectual activities are 'safer' compared to feeling our feelings. As long as we're addressing our situations from an intellectual level, it doesn't seem all that threatening. But to acknowledge our truth, we need to acknowledge how we're feeling; otherwise, we're not really seeing our truth. And we can spend many years getting strong insights into ourselves but making little progress in healing our emotions.

### **#12 Keeping Busy**

People can spend many years avoiding looking at their issues by keeping themselves very busy. As long as we are busy, we're distracted from facing what we need to address. Work is commonly used to make us feel as though we have no time left to engage in other activities, including self-reflection. If you use work as a distraction from facing your feelings, you may have difficulty sitting still and taking leisurely breaks – anything that can bring your feelings to your awareness.

## **Removing the Veil**

Before you embark on activating your Presence, be willing to assume total responsibility for how your life has turned out. What this means is, you must stop all activities that push that responsibility away, including complaining, whinging (a more twisted form of complaining), blaming, bitching, denying and being defensive.

What is your truth? What is there? Take stock of where you are – the consequences, as a result of your actions. Look at the hurts and damages you might have caused others. Are you satisfied with your job? Are your relationships balanced? Are you satisfied in your roles in life? Take a brutal look at your life; only then can you make changes to improve it.

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

Is your waistline getting thicker because you've been leading a sedentary lifestyle? Are you slowly dying of boredom in your relationship? Are you finding it more and more difficult to motivate yourself to get to work? Are your friends telling you that you're drinking too much? Has your son been complaining that you don't pay attention to him? Have you been broke for years?

Go through every area of your life and write down the things that make you feel uncomfortable to look at. These are the things that require you to make changes to but you're feeling resistant to take action. Don't include the things which you feel ready to take action on. We're looking to bring to your attention the ways in which you resist confronting a painful truth - the veil you put in front of you to hide what needs your attention.

Write down a list of all the things that you do to hide your truth – the things which you know you ought to take a good look at because they are making you feel less than totally comfortable. What tactics do you employ to hide your truth? Do you over-indulge in food, internet, sex, alcohol, pills, buying or sleeping? Do you overwork and avoid recreation? Do you spend a lot of time talking about other people – complaining, bitching, gossiping, dramatising their problems? What can you identify with from the list of defensive behaviours? Write down your tactics of avoidance.

Commit to stopping your tactics. Once you stop, the veil will come down, allowing you to see what you're trying to hide. If you insist on keeping the veil up, know that your truth will find a way of making itself known to you eventually, in a way that will best get your attention: loud, dramatic and scary. It will not be subtle. Examples are critical illnesses, painful relationship breakups, and being deported from a country.

Stay with the discomfort of not knowing. Stop asking questions. Don't go into negativity. Stop being bossy and judgemental. Take half of what you normally take if you're afraid of losing out. Put a stop to over-dramatisation. Don't make a joke out of everything. Stop numbing yourself and address your addiction. Stop intellectualising. Be less busy. Whatever your defensive behaviour is, stop doing it and allow the discomfort to be there.

Make use of your position of power and control now, to decide to look at whatever it is that you've been avoiding. Once you have taken this step, the pain can be healed, new directions can be set, and more chances of finding happiness can be found.

## **The Space of Vulnerability**

You are now in a space of openness, of vulnerability. This is a place devoid of cover-ups – you're seeing and feeling the truth of what's there. Although you may feel weak, powerless and unsafe in this place, it is a place of power. In this space, a huge amount of potential power is poised to burst forth.

This vulnerability is what you have been fighting so hard to avoid – i.e. to be present to the discomfort of uncertainty, insecurity, loss of control. By taking the step to be present to it, you have begun to release your grip on the bars of your prison, and it can feel as though you're falling, with no guarantee of safety except for your faith and trust.

The thing to hold in your mind is, while you are feeling vulnerable and weak, you also know that the feeling of weakness is an illusion, because it holds a tremendous amount of power. How do you remain in the space of vulnerability while acknowledging that the discomforts you feel in this space are potential sources of your power? The mind cannot grasp this paradoxical construct. It requires you to make an about-turn, call its bluff and step up above it, while you remain vulnerable. Just continue to be present to it, and allow it. Resist the temptation to escape from this space of vulnerability.

The longer you can stay in the space of vulnerability, the more you can build your tolerance for pain. Having a higher threshold for pain doesn't mean that you must remain in pain; it means that you are less likely to run away from yourself at the first signs of stress. People with a low threshold for pain are prone to emotional and mental breakdowns, and adopting destructive self-avoidant ways of coping with their stress. They have a weak foundation and are more likely to sway from their center; when life hits them hard, they are easily knocked off-center. Building your tolerance for pain enables you to stay with pain long enough to move through it and emerge out of it liberated. You learn to stare pain in the eye and take your power back. In time, it grounds you and makes you more stable internally. This, in turn, strengthens your foundation and allows you to move back to centeredness more frequently, easily, and for longer stretches of time.

At this point, I encourage you to practise staying in the space of vulnerability by closing your eyes and taking a few long, slow breaths. Allow whatever feelings, sensations and thoughts to emerge as you relax your resistance. Tell yourself that you are completely vulnerable to whatever is going on inside you. In this moment, you are not acting out your defenses; in the absence of cover-ups, you allow your naked truth to be revealed. Just stay with it. Allow it. Resist any temptation to blur it up. Be totally present to whatever is there. Keep allowing it.

## Flowing Through The Void

*Creating Miracles Out Of Struggles By Activating Presence, Power and Passion*

BY AMYRA MAH

When you stop resisting, you allow the feelings and sensations to move in their natural directions. Don't try to control it. Just allow it.

Sometimes, just by allowing yourself to stay in the space of vulnerability will move you out of being trapped. The sheer acceptance of what-is can be so powerful that it immediately opens your eyes to another level of truth. You may see doors where there appeared to be none, and the emotions that kept you stuck may dissolve. Just by being totally present to what you're experiencing right now can give you a way out.

If being vulnerable and present to your pain just makes you feel as though nothing has shifted, only that you've become more aware of the intensity of your pain, don't despair. It is only the beginning, albeit a crucial step, in the process of getting out of your suffering. As you turn the pages in the rest of the book, you will find yourself moving further and further away from your prison.

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The more aware you are of what you are dealing with, the more power it will give you to transform your life. To maximise your awareness, you need to maximise your presence in all your bodily levels – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. This means that your consciousness must trickle into and inhabit all these levels of you. Being present in all these bodies will maximise your Presence, the first pillar for transforming pain into joy.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

### PROLOGUE Freedom From Suffering

- The Illusion of Being Trapped
- The Culture and Conditioning for Suffering
- The Gift of Disempowerment
- Letting Go of Your Grip
- Returning to Centeredness-Innocence
- The Formula for Self-Liberation

## VOLUME 1 (PRESENCE): THE COURAGE TO SEE

### CHAPTER 1 Here, Now And Aware

- Total Responsibility
- The Drive to Blur It Up
- Defensive Behaviours
- Removing the Veil
- The Space of Vulnerability

### CHAPTER 2 Honing The Vehicle

- Edging Closer to Yourself
- Dissociation, the Fear of Being Present
- Synergy between the Four Bodies
- True Holistic Fitness
- The Many Pathways to Freedom
- The Concept of Pliability

### CHAPTER 3 The Physical Experience

- A Gateway to Wisdom
- Our Relationship with the Body
- Importance of Inhabiting Our Body
- Moving Your Body
- Seven Fears that Stop You from Moving
- Body Bliss
- Striking a Balance
- Personal Grooming and Appearance
- Radiant Health

### CHAPTER 4 The Gift Of Emotions

- Accepting the Emotional Body
- Understanding Emotions
- Spectrum of Emotions
- Releasing Emotional Pains
- The Concept of Duality
- The Morphing of Prison Walls

Opening Up Constrictive Emotions  
Inward and Outward Expansion  
Elements of Fire and Ice  
The Unfolding of Healing through Reconciliation  
Healing with Another Person

## CHAPTER 5 The Power Of Thoughts

Components of the Mental Body  
Strengthening the Mental Powers  
Clearing Out Mental Clutter  
Processing Mental Anguish  
Opening Up into Empowering Thoughts  
Disorganised Vs Clear, Structured Thinking  
Thought-Forms Becoming an Entity  
Increasing the Perceived Size of Your World  
Making an Ally out of Your Inner Critic  
Stories We Tell Ourselves  
How Our Behaviours Reinforce Our Stories  
Transforming Disempowerment into Empowerment  
Healing the Child's Unfinished Business  
Making Meaning through Symbols and Associations  
The Story of Outrage Against Injustice  
Healing the Past

## CHAPTER 6 The Spiritual Self

Defining Spirituality and Its Role  
Spiritual Growth and Freedom  
The Shaping of the Vibrational Body  
Depressing Vs Uplifting Environments  
The Value of Metaphor in Healing  
Cleansing and Strengthening Your Aura  
Spatial Awareness  
Finding Your Inner Spiritual Space  
Sacred Self  
Expansion of Consciousness  
Divine Guidance and Collective Wisdom  
Signs and Synchronicities  
Empowering Models of Life  
Freedom to Choose Again  
You As Sole Creator  
Karma

## CHAPTER 7 Living With Total Presence

A Truly Holistic Lifestyle  
Impact Of Trauma and Recovery  
Accidents  
Medical Procedures  
Physical Attacks  
Relationship Breakups

Death of a Loved One  
Psychological Abuse  
Psychic Attacks  
Verbal Attacks  
Horrorifying Experiences  
A Moment of Being Free  
Sleep, Rest and Leisure  
Bringing All Your Attention to the Present  
Multisensory Experiences  
Full Immersion  
Sensuousness

## VOLUME 2 (POWER): THE TRUE WARRIOR-GODDESS FACE

### CHAPTER 8 Exploring Power

Change and Transformation  
Taking Ownership of Your Power  
Retrieving Lost Qualities  
Holding Your Power  
Power Center and Pliability  
False Power Vs Authentic Power  
The Only Way Out is Through  
Masculine Vs Feminine Powers  
Aspects of Personal Power  
Working with Power Aspects  
Freedom Vs Boundary  
Walking in Full Presence

### CHAPTER 9 Gathering The Tools

Concept of Renewal  
Breath, Body Movement, Imagination  
The Power of Breath  
Breathwork  
Outbreath and Inbreath  
Breath and Healing  
Gap of Empowerment  
Breath of God  
The Power of Body Movement  
Degree of Expression  
Movement Meditation  
Anchoring through Movement  
Using the Belly as Access  
Combining Movement and Breath  
Power Center and Movement  
Contract and Release  
The Power Of Imagination  
Bridging The Knowing and The Existing  
Combining Movement and Breath with Imagination  
The Power of Three

## CHAPTER 10 Shadows And Skeletons

- The Secret Life of Hiding
- The Quest for Self-Love
- Shadows of Self
- Identifying and Embracing Your Shadows
- Projection and Judgement
- Skeletons in the Closet
- Types of Skeletons
- Healing Your Skeletons
- Confession
- Amendments
- Self-Forgiveness
- Retrieving Your Energies

## CHAPTER 11 The Powers Of Externalisation And Internalisation

- The Body as Microcosm of the World
- Using Externalisation to Process Pain
- Using Internalisation to Transform Yourself
- Changing Your Circumstances
- Changing Circumstances Involving Others
- Working With Relationship Triggers
- Journalling and Artistic Expression
- Sacred Mantras
- The Role of Music in Healing
- Using Pathos to Purge Pathos
- The Music of Silence
- Role of Technology in Personal Growth
- Brainwave Technology
- Multimedia For Healing

## CHAPTER 12 Creating An Empowered Life

- Self-Actualisation
- Self-Knowledge
- Outlook Optimisation
- Sealing Your Power with a Declaration
- Releasing Blocks and Resistance
- The Art of Manifestation
- Secret Principles of Manifestation
- Preparing for Manifestation
- Desire Vs Inspiration
- How Possible Is It?
- Inner Vs Outer Worlds
- The Secrets to Abundance
- Manifestation Ritual

## VOLUME 3 (PASSION): AWAKENING TO INNOCENCE

### CHAPTER 13 The Juice Of Life

- Clearing the Fog
- Immersing in Liquid Love
- Stretching Yourself Mentally, Emotionally, Spiritually
- Having An Inspiring Vision
- Positive Mental Stimulation
- Active Movement of Energies
- Fire Of Desire
- Ecstatic Connection with Divine Spirit

### CHAPTER 14 Transmuting Pains With Alchemy

- The Practice of Alchemy
- Components of Alchemy
- Pain As Fuel
- 3 Methods of Extracting Power from Pain
- The Basic Technique of Alchemy
- The Immersive Technique of Alchemy
- The Alchemisation of Pain
- Igniting Passion with the Power of Pain
- Letting Go of Agenda
- Principles of Healing
- The Power of Non-Action
- Becoming a Master of Alchemy
- Developing Your Style of Practice
- Ethics and Principles
- Structuring Your Practice

### CHAPTER 15 Doing The Deep Work

- Between You and Yourself
- Our Core Fears
- Healing the Damaging Effects of Core Fears
- Freeing Yourself from Core Fears
- Traumatic Blueprints
- Framing the Spatial Dynamics
- Types of Blueprint
- Architecture of Relationships and Success
- Creating a New Blueprint

### CHAPTER 16 Transforming The Prisons Of Hell

- Depression
- Panic and Anxiety
- Body Image
- Eating Disorders
- Addictions
- Self-Harming
- Obsession
- Insecurity

The Sickness of Control

## CHAPTER 17 Expressing Your Beauty And Worth

- Crafting Your Personal Identity
- Personal Presentation
- Dislodging Yourself From Fear
- Creating a Nurturing Environment
- Work Place and Culture
- Organisations With Personality (OWP)
- Culture of Personal Fulfilment
- Performing with Passion
- Stepping Out in Service

## CHAPTER 18 Staying In The Place Of Goodness

- Pain Addiction
- The Original Fear
- Deep Surrender
- Living with Total Presence, Power, Passion
- A Clean Slate
- Framed Vs Fluid
- Constant Self-Renewal
- Addicted to Life

## EPILOGUE

- A New Age Of Synthesis

## APPENDIX 1

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