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Entering the Unknown, One Step at a Time

In reaching for this book, some part of you may already be recognizing a need to do something different in your life. Perhaps you've experienced violation in the past and continue to feel surrounded by damaging relationships. You're bored at a job and don't know how to find inspiration. You're aching to feel a baby's chubby thighs grip your hip but haven't conceived, or even met a partner. You're experiencing stomach pain and suspect that you need more than a diagnosis. You're considering divorce. You're committed to growing awareness, but you find New Age spirituality disappointing. You've lost a sense of who you are beyond being a mother. After years of great psychotherapy, you feel stuck and talking is no longer enough.

In all of the above, there's usually a sense that something is off and there's got to be another way. A transition moment regarding relationships, work, finances, parenting, or health is on the horizon. The energy of your own potential is inviting you into the unknown.

If you are someone who gets to pause before making a choice to transform your life, count your blessings. There are many people who don't have such a luxury, who are thrust into the unknown by life's circumstances.

If you are struggling with something like cancer, chronic illness, years of infertility, the sudden loss of a beloved, or financial collapse,

you are already immersed in the unknown. Essentially, you're balancing on the razor's edge between survival and extreme jeopardy in an immediately physical, emotional, or perhaps spiritual way. It's true your reality doesn't offer you the same kind of choice as the person who gets to take a big in-breath before deciding to awaken. You know that God laughs when you make plans, you recognize that control is an illusion, and you've been stripped bare. This can feel like a violation, and perhaps you're feeling raw inside this naked truth *all the time*.

For all those facing challenges from health to money to inexplicable loss, my heart is with you. The truth is, the unknown is waking you up by pulling you into the mystery through what's happening in your daily life. I recognize that hot aching fear might be burning a hole in your stomach. I'm so sorry for your pain, and my words mean nothing. I wish I could wave a magic wand and make your life easier, but I can't. I respect that you might need to get really furious. Shout. Cry. Grieve. I realize this may take awhile.

I don't know why life has dealt you these cards, and I'm not going to try to find answers from the past to make sense of it. Does naming your challenge "karma" really help when you get your fifth migraine in two weeks and your four-year-old wants you to get out of bed and play? If it does, I support you. But if it just makes you feel more helpless and hopeless, then I suggest letting go of the need to know why you arrived at this place. Instead, I invite you to learn how to connect with and navigate through the unknown that surrounds you.

From False Positivity to a Healing Journey

In my experience, Western culture connects happiness with successful achievement. In adulthood, we begin to understand that success isn't always possible. Life is filled with ups and downs, unpredictable and sometimes glorious triumphs, and soul-shattering experiences

of pain and loss—all reflecting an undeniable element of unknown mystery.

Many of us turn to spirituality for help in riding the highs and lows of existence. Some people find meaning through attending church, temple, or mosque while others don't feel so safe inside organized religion. I'm someone who—despite an affinity for my Jewish culture—isn't at home in a temple but feels deeply connected to spirituality. For me, the definition of *spiritual* does not necessitate a belief in God but does include a hunger for meaning: an urge to connect with something bigger than ourselves, which can happen through art, work, dance, prayer, cooking, conversation, meditation, parenting, hugging trees, or practicing gratitude. While traveling with my father as a teenager, I had a spiritual awakening that initiated over fifteen years of training and practice with individuals, groups, and small businesses. But just after discovering spirituality, I bumped into some beliefs that didn't jibe with my life experience, a feeling that has only been confirmed over the years.

For a long time, I've noticed how some spiritual beliefs equate achieving a certain positive outcome with healing. The idea that individuals can learn a particular lesson and free themselves from tangible illnesses. The notion that inner work plus positive thought is the road to manifesting exact dreams. The view that reality is a reflection of thought and so bad things can be avoided by changing thought. I've observed that in our humanness, we're trying to make some deals with the unknown mystery of life who some call God: I'll be spiritual and get to be in control. I'll be spiritual and get what I want from life. I'll be spiritual and safe from pain and hardship.

I'm not saying these beliefs are wrong or bad, just that I consistently encounter people for whom these beliefs aren't working. People still lose jobs. Cancer appears out of nowhere. Chronic illness doesn't end. Meeting a great partner isn't happening. Women have miscarriages or can't conceive babies. People are engaging in many different wellness modalities—physical, emotional, spiritual—but they aren't receiving the healing they want. And often, because people can't

control the outcomes of these situations, they end up feeling like they've done something wrong. Some of these beliefs perpetuate this idea so that people feel victimized by the very sources claiming to help them.

Yet, what's the alternative? Wanting to achieve happiness by fulfilling dreams is a normal human endeavor. I don't want to give that up. Do you? At the same time, trying to manipulate reality with control can create challenges. Because when reality doesn't look the way we want, in our humanness we may just bury our head in the sand. Today people are questioning the price we've paid—literally—for losing sight of reality in the search for happiness. Moving through the world in denial hasn't really helped most people. Climate change, shrinking environmental resources, and failing economies reveal ongoing global unrest. Especially now, when reality around us is uncertain, we need everyone here with eyes wide open, strong and ready to face current challenges. We need to grow another level of self-reliance so we can sustain ourselves no matter what.

Beyond Control to a Meaningful Unknown

In my healing practice, I offer a different kind of spirituality. A spirituality that moves underneath positive or negative circumstances to help individuals develop internal resources they can access any time. A spirituality that applauds fiery questioning. A spirituality that cultivates personal truth to grow authenticity. A spirituality that accepts pain alongside joy as an equally important—though not equally comfortable—way of finding balance. A spirituality that forgives mistakes in order to learn. A spirituality that shows people how to trust and have faith even when what they think, believe, or sometimes experience makes no sense. Ultimately, facilitating exploration becomes a doorway for people to awaken consciousness and discover their own spiritual connection.

Developing an authentic spiritual connection begins with letting go of using spirituality to feel safe by maintaining control. This

doesn't mean giving up traditions that are meaningful to you. Rather, I'm inviting you to loosen your attachment to practicing spirituality as a way to achieve a certain outcome. The key word here is *loosen*. Letting go does not have to mean giving up choice or relinquishing goals. But holding on to a desired outcome with a death grip leaves little room to connect with the unknown mystery of life.

Our desire for control rests on a human need to feel secure and to affirm life. The reality is that control is an illusion. Despite iPhones and Google Calendars, there's no way to truly predict what's around the next corner. We may or may not know small things, like what's happening tonight, or big things, like if we will meet a soul mate, survive cancer, or get pregnant. Nobody knows the exact minute of death. Even if the road taken is familiar, something unexpected can always happen. The unknown is a tangible force that permeates daily life.

Not knowing can feel uncomfortable and can lead to many machinations to avoid facing the truth of what it means to really not know. Instead of relying on control and denial to resist feeling vulnerable (and scared) in facing the unknown, you're invited to develop a conscious relationship with the unknown through daily life. From there, letting go becomes a practice of navigating life in partnership with the unknown to generate meaning.

Spirituality as a Way of Life

Drawing from life experience, spiritual teachers, earth-based training, women's spirituality, and fifteen years as an energy practitioner, I connect the practical with the spiritual to help people find a point of balance between reality and the unknown mystery. Practical Spirituality holds that healing is a journey as much as a destination. If you can let go of control—which is really an illusion, after all—and engage in a conscious relationship with the unknown in daily life, along the way you'll cultivate healing no matter what reality appears on the doorstep.

Furthermore, when you take a leap of faith, the unknown does not leave you stranded and alone but instead responds in the context of daily life with synchronistic events that expand learning. On this journey of meaning, daily life becomes the training ground to transform. Sometimes loss and disappointment happens; sometimes dreams materialize. In the process, you grow your own healing gifts—authenticity, inner authority, trust, faith, peace, gratitude—that have the power to sustain you anywhere because they aren't based on achievement; they're rooted inside.

Instead of perceiving the unknown reality as a big hairy monster in the closet inspiring fear, denial, and blame, you can reframe not knowing into something powerful and also beautiful. You can approach the unknown carefully, even strategically, with respect while embracing its vast and infinite potential. You can learn how to not only trust the unknown but also have fun while growing a relationship there. Along the way to making friends with the unknown, you can take a developmental leap that redefines healing from a positive result to a source of balance practiced in the context of daily life. By entering into a relationship, you give up control but learn how to navigate the unknown.

Your journey begins with choosing one area of life to focus on throughout this book. As you move through each chapter with this focus in mind, eight teachers—fear, awareness, choice, body, intuition, energy, intention, and surrender—facilitate your relationship with the unknown. Each chapter also contains questions, practices, and stories to further your learning and help you identify your unique healing gifts. To illustrate how synchronicity—meaningful events—informs a relationship with the unknown, I invite each teacher to guide and inform me through daily life happenings. I chronicle my experience throughout the book. In this way, I am with you in navigating the unknown.