

JAN DESAI'S



COMPASS ROSE

A Roadmap to an Authentic Life

Get Your Bearings and Stay on Course to the Life of Your Dreams

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Getting Out of Your Own Way

Often, it is the stories we tell ourselves - an unrealistic perspective - that stops us from moving forward into our best and healthiest authentic life. How to change that is what this issue is all about.



"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way." So begins the epic novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens. For all of us, that quote could be one of the most powerful teachings we will ever internalize as we consciously choose how to meet whatever events are unfolding in the present moment.

One of our children was recently diagnosed with developmental delays. She is one of the most loving, delightful, beautiful, and creative beings I've ever experienced – a bit of a Tinkerbell in human clothing. But she struggles with some of the most basic, day-to-day behaviors and it makes life challenging for her. Sitting still. Holding a pencil. Incessantly talking "baby talk" while sucking her thumb. She shies away from looking into your eyes whenever she has something to say.

Her emotional meltdowns are seismic and her feelings are hurt at the drop of a hat. She cries incessantly. And God forbid I dress her in anything that is scratchy or harsh on her skin. It's as though I've doused her with kerosene and set her on fire.

My adult children also had learning challenges – dyslexia and ADHD. And back then, it made life so challenging. You see, there wasn't the proliferation of information and support available to assist families in creating an atmosphere of possibility for these kidlets. It was all about medicating them to minimize their chaotic footprint.



Intellectual standards were lowered (in my opinion to ease them through the system) and they were always seen as problem kids rather than looking at them through the eyes of unrealized potential. Yet, we made it. They

survived their school years and have grown into wise, insightful, and productive human beings. Through their own compassion and understanding of the challenges they faced, they have an uncanny ability to meet others without expectations. There is a softness and grace in the way that they approach life that is wonderful to see and amazing to experience.

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None of us are ever promised an easy ride in life. Yet I have to tell you, with all of the medical challenges we faced with our youngest warrior princess' complex congenital heart disease and subsequent heart transplant, I truly believed I'd get a "free pass" with our other three munchkins. When I spoke to God about having these kids in my mid-fifties, I expressed my desire to be able to parent "easy" kids. I wanted to have it be less complicated this time around.

What a crazy request. Because this is what I know for sure: we always get what we need, not what we want, whether we are ready to accept it or not.

I share all of this because I know how many of you feel overwhelmed and discouraged by what life is delivering right now. Whether you are facing health challenges, financial setbacks, marriage troubles, personal stress, plights with your children, or any other perceived crises or trauma, you (like me) at times may find yourself kicking and screaming about how unfair life can be.

But I have to challenge you – just as I do myself. Is it really unfair?

Human beings are a wonderful bundle of contradictions. We are naturally shortsighted when it comes to dealing with the realities of life. We're really good at dealing with the here and now, the stuff that needs to get done today. However, the farther out we go from today, our realistic planning gets more and more hazy. We know what needs doing now. We're fairly certain about next week. We're



pretty sure about next month. When it comes to next year, we honestly have no clue. Sure, we make plans and we tell ourselves stories about where we'll be and what we'll be doing. But, let's be honest. Those long-range plans are nothing more than hopes, and we all know what springs eternal in the human breast.

All of this means that none of us know what's in store. We're future blind. We can't see the big picture. We can only really see the present. So, because we can only connect the dots in retrospect, what is happening in the present can seem incredibly unfair, arbitrary, and cruel. The truth is that what's happening now for any of us is none of those things. What, up close, seems awful can actually be necessary and beneficial when viewed as a part of the bigger picture. Our tears are salty for a reason. They are often the seasoning of a well-lived life.

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Yesterday, as I came into the occupational therapist's waiting room, I initially was, once again, confronted by what seemed to be chaos. The room was filled with toddlers to teenagers, all differently-abled. There was screaming, crying, drooling, defiance, and every other type of disruptive behavior on display - and not just in the toddlers. I experienced frustrated mothers trying to juggle their "special" children with unaffected siblings. I could sense their overwhelm and recognized the level of exhaustion in their faces and in the weariness in their postures.

Then I remembered that these parents are a tangible reminder to us all of the integrity it takes to meet mountains of upheaval every day with faith, trust, and unconditional love, not only for their children but also for themselves.

Of course they lose it. They are not perfect. Their burdens are heavy. Yet, I can sense the compassion. I can see the love. I feel the respect each of them has for the people they love, the people who are an integral part of their journey. There is no room for self-pity. There is no place for anger.

While our children are being seen by the therapists, these parents come alive with the stories of their children. We connect deeply. We sense in one another the need for community, for support, and for understanding. And it feels wonderful.

I don't care who you are. From the least to the most enlightened among us, life will do what it is meant to do. It will flow. It will evolve.

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It will deliver fires and floods, births and deaths, and windfalls and setbacks. It is a powerful river and, at times, it will burst its banks. It is nothing more than our staunch belief that this raging river of life should behave like a sluggish stream that is the source of all of our suffering.

It's our stubbornness that makes us believe that what is delivered to our doorstep is wrong. It is our inability to see the big picture that makes us feel we don't deserve the pain of the present moment. It is the false belief that somehow we've paid our dues and should be having some other experience than the one that we are having that will lead to our own personal breakdown and destruction.



So, as I look at my children and each of their incredibly powerful individual experiences, I ask myself, "Is life completely random or are there specific lessons that each of us can learn from every experience that life delivers?"

I believe that my children are each embodied angels who are here to teach me to experience exactly everything that I am experiencing. They are my greatest teachers

and I am moved by the generosity of their spirit and that they are willing to do this dance called life with me, knowing the challenges we all face and strive to overcome during this lifetime.

And that, my dear tribe, is exactly what I saw in each of the eyes of those children at occupational therapy. I witnessed an innocence that masked a deep knowledge of why they were here. Old souls willingly housed in dense bodies holding out their hands to those who have agreed to journey alongside them this lifetime.



And so I stepped outside and wept for all I saw, and for what I remembered.

Through every perceived roadblock I've come up against, I can tell you that by the end of the journey - regardless of the outcome (even if it is devastating) - I have integrated deep gratitude for the experience, for the personal

growth, and the wisdom that was delivered. Was it easy? Absolutely not. Was the difficult journey necessary for my ultimate becoming? Emphatically yes!

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I don't want to diminish your challenges. But sometimes we need a swift kick and a sharp reminder of our own blessings, and a deeper look at why we are facing what we are facing. And then we need to get out of the way of transformation and evolution knowing at the deepest level that whatever we are facing is moving us into the greatest life, armed with experiences and qualities that will allow us to ultimately be the changemakers and conscious custodians we signed up to be.

So this week, I wish to send you a lifeline of how to get out of your own way when life seems its most challenging:

1. **Perspective:** Get out of your head and out of your own problems. Sitting in the waiting room and participating in our daughter's therapy alongside other parents is a tangible example of how blessed we are to be facing

the “manageable challenges” she faces. Can it be frustrating? Yes. Is it the end of the world? Absolutely not. It’s a clarion call for me to let go of my own expectations for my kids and who they are here to be and accept their own path and love them for their own individuality and gifts.



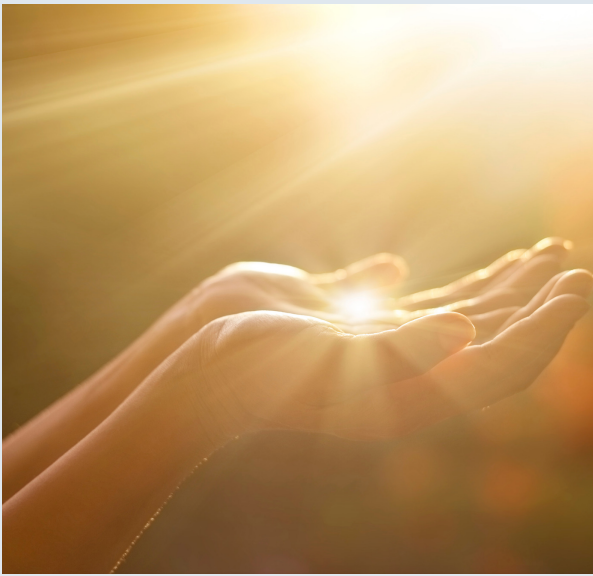
2. Curiosity: Volunteer to make other’s lives better. Take one hour per week and volunteer at a hospital, a homeless shelter, a school for children with special needs. Take a week and travel to a destination where people can barely make ends meet...who don’t have clean water, sanitation, a roof over their heads, or basic medical care. You will come back transformed and grateful. You will quickly begin to see your life for the blessing it is – not the hell on earth you believe it to be.

3. Emotional Honesty: Give yourself time to feel the grief and then let it go. Don’t deny yourself the emotional outlet you require when challenge takes up residence in your life. Cry your tears. Scream out your frustration. Talk about the death of the dreams you believed were your destiny. And once the flood of emotion is spent, shelve the self-pity and move on with life. Take the long view. We receive exactly what we need to become the powerful, loving beings of light we have come to be. Own it. Live it.

4. Gratitude: Express gratitude for the blessings that this situation, challenge, or crises are birthing within you. Realize that you can't see the big picture. You don't know the whole story. You are only capable of being in the present moment. As stuck and as awful as that may feel right now, remember that it is simply a moment - one that is a part of a lifetime of moments, some seemingly good, others seemingly bad, but each one a blessing.

5. Unconditional Support: Align with the highest power. None of us are called to walk this path of life alone. I could not navigate my way out of any of the challenges I’ve had to face without my relationship with a universal presence that is omnipresent and unconditionally loving. There are moments when in my deepest weakness, I have had to

place the burden down and asked a higher power to carry it for me until I have the strength to pick it up again. I've never been turned away. I've never been told that the burdens are too heavy or overwhelming. I've only ever been met with a tangible presence of omniscient love and an immediate easing of my worries, emotions, and fears.



With a clear head and an open heart, I can truly state that not one of the perceived devastating challenges I face can compare to what these other brave, selfless moms and dads wake up to face every single day. Some of us will face the unthinkable and come out on the other side stronger. Others will crumble under the pressure and heartache they face. Every experience we face is doing one of two things: We are either diminishing the darkness

and elevating ourselves and those around us into the light, or we are allowing the darkness to solidify our belief that we are somehow victims in an unfair game.

As I am surrounded by a growing tribe of the beautifully imperfect, I am honored to hold the compass rose for us all and remind every one of the ultimate truth as we find and journey to our own true north. Because... *these are the best of times!*

Until next time,



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