



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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ISSUE

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The Light in the Darkness

The process of becoming a better person requires more than simply choosing the light. We must also recognize the darkness in each of us. We ignore the darkness at our peril.

The darkness has always been here along with the light. It is our inheritance.

It is our heritage. It is our fate. It is our bane. It has *always* been this way, the signs of the darkness strewn like bones throughout our history.

Lake Turkana lies in northern Kenya, extending like a knife blade south from the Ethiopian border. Today, the lake exists in an arid environment, but 10,000 years ago, the climate was lush and full of life. Humans were attracted to the lake and the food that it held.

On a bright morning, over ten millennia ago, a hunter-gatherer group made its way along the shore line of the lake. Perhaps they were moving from one location to another, following the seasonal ebb and flow of food. Perhaps they were from outside this area, attracted to the lake for the bounty it held. Whatever the reason, *men, women, and children were alert*. The lake brought many animals to its shore, predators and prey alike, and the group was wary, scanning inland as they moved down the shore.

The attack was sudden. From the brush along the lake, the darkness came. Armed with arrows, spears, and clubs, another group of humans descended on their prey. There was no mercy. When they were finished, 27 men, women, and children lay massacred. The attackers, triumphant that they had repelled these interlopers, celebrated their victory. They did what they had to do. It was right.

It was necessary. **It was just.** They left the bodies where they lay and slowly, over time, the lake covered them. *But the darkness still had work to do.*



Oland is a large island off of the eastern coast of Sweden in the Baltic Sea. Fifteen hundred years ago, it was dotted with several dozen "borgs" or ring forts. Each borg was the home of a particular extended family group or tribe. The Roman Empire had just fallen and times were tumultuous. Because of this, each borg was surrounded by a stone wall 15 feet high. During the day, the people of the tribe could go about their business, fishing, tending sheep, and farming. But at night, or in times of danger, *they could retreat inside the security of the borg, protected by its walls.*

This borg, located on an ocean strand now called Sandby, was typical, albeit relatively newly built. Sandby Borg's walls sheltered 53 houses, stores of food, and of course, it's hundreds of inhabitants. Until the events of a spring night over 1500 years ago changed **everything**.

*We don't know exactly what happened. We only know the results. On that spring night so long ago, in a scene out of Game of Thrones, every inhabitant in Sandby Borg was massacred in their homes and left to rot. There was no burial and *this was not a raid* since all of their valuables were left intact. Those responsible, again, celebrated their victory. As they walked away from the corpses and the bloodstained ground *they no doubt felt that they did what they had to do*. It was right and necessary. **It was just.** The sea winds slowly drifted sand over the victims. The darkness had again done its work.*



Photo: Daniel Lindskog

That work continues today. **It appears that there is no end to the instability in the world.** On a global scale, it feels as though we are living in a giant house of cards that could implode with the slightest breeze. It seems to be everywhere you look. From cataclysmic natural disasters to terrifying terrorist attacks, from perilous political hot spots threatening nuclear standoffs to frightening economic uncertainty, from the constant fight-or-flee

messages of our 24-hour news cycle to our highly controversial president, **chaos seems endemic.**

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There seems to be no safety, no sanctuary. Children in schools, worshipers in churches and mosques, and even pedestrians walking down the street have all been touched by the darkness. It does seem as if things are falling apart and *anarchy has been loosed upon the world.*

There's a part of me that wants to shove my head as far down in the sand as it will go and pretend that none of this is happening. I want to enfold my family in a blanket of naivety and turn my back on the greater world. Then there is the other part of me - the rescuer, the Joan of Arc - that wants to **ride directly into battle and vanquish those who would harm the innocents.** They are those who live in the darkness, invested only in expanding their own self-interests at the expense of everything and everyone else. It's as though the most important thing - ***the sanctity of human life*** - has been lost in the rush to gain, to destroy, and to win.

For me, the emotional straw that broke the camel's back was the recent bombings in

Syria and the impact it has had on the innocent victims.

As I viewed the pictures of the massive destruction, of the dead women and children, and read the stories of the now homeless victims, I **raged against the darkness**. I cried for these families' *inconceivable losses* and for the *human potential* that was cut horribly short in the abrupt ending of these lives.

Yet, as I cried, a part of me *wondered* about the reaction I was having. To fear or fight evil, or to mourn its effects, are natural human emotional responses. The reaction I was having seemed extreme. I was filled with hot anger and deep sadness as if it had been **my family** who had suffered these atrocities.

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Over the next few days, Syria and my reaction to the events there were constantly on my mind. I had the opportunity to closely examine what was driving my response. Here's what I discovered:

My greatest fear and my greatest anger are driven by the feeling of being powerless. It is one of my core woundings. When any

event, either personal or global, comes too close to this wound, reminding me of my own potential to be powerless, *I react by either striking out or pulling away*. Like I said, I can either be an ostrich with my head in the sand or Joan of Arc.



So, my reaction to Syria makes sense. Any injustice, any atrocity, by definition hinges on one person or one group being powerless to prevent the harm that is about to impact them. The parents and children of the dead and injured civilians in Syria were absolutely powerless to prevent the darkness from descending on their loved ones. In a very real sense, the victims outside Damascus, Homs, and Douma are the brothers and sisters of the victims on the shore of Lake Turkana and Sandby Borg. *They were all powerless to prevent the harm that befell them*, brought about in each case by attackers who felt that their violence was justified.

Yet, I also realized that my overreaction to

powerlessness was, with a horrible irony, making *my* family victims, too. When my internal resources are depleted because I'm not getting enough rest, I'm not eating properly, or I'm neglecting my spiritual practice, I am *far* more prone to overreact to whatever is blowing through my reality. And when I do, *the fallout of that emotional explosion descends on those that I love most.*



The antidote to powerlessness is control, so when my wounding is activated, I can fall back to being a *dictator* in our own home, *believing that I know best.* I forget to trust that my family members are on **their own unique journey** towards a breathtaking destination of their choosing. Instead, I try to micromanage their lives in an attempt to make *myself* feel more secure. My self-justified attempt to reduce their natural autonomy is nothing more than a power grab. They become powerless in the face of my attempted control. I reduce them to enlarge myself.

Similarly, my fear of powerlessness can make me feel that there isn't enough for me. I can wrongly look at money, safety, and love as a zero-sum game. If someone **else** has love, money, or safety, *then they must have gotten it at my expense.* This gives birth to jealousy within me. Of course, this is ridiculous, but *at the moment* it can seem like the most **rational, insightful, and satisfying of thoughts.** It drives me to envy their success and I can even feel a triumphant sense of schadenfreude if they should stumble. Is it such a long distance between the sense of pleasure in seeing misfortune to actively causing misfortune?

My fear can also cause me to reside in judgment, believing that *my way is the best way.* I can think that I carry greater wisdom or insight than others and this can *drive compassion from my heart.* If someone should fail, then, of course, **they** brought that failure upon themselves, or **they** were in some way flawed or less than me, so *they didn't deserve success.* I can lessen them, reduce their humanity, and in that way protect myself against my own secret fears of failure. Is it such a long distance between **believing** that someone is less worthy and deserves failure to **actively denying** them opportunities?

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judgement.

Am I evil?

No. *I am human, and like every human that has ever existed, I carry both light and darkness inside of me.* The darkness comes from the wound that I try to protect like a secret black treasure. When I forget about the wound, when I forget the impulsive reactions that arise from my attempts to *guard the wound and keep it safe*, when I forget that **everyone** carries some type of wound within them, then I take my internal darkness and externalize it, *giving it form and substance in the world.*

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This is why we, as a species, use our fear as justification to make others afraid. It's why we use our feelings of powerlessness to take power from others. It's why we allow judgment and envy to rob us of compassion and empathy so that we victimize others before we can be the victim.

To avoid the monster, we become the monster. This is the true face of the darkness

that stirred at Lake Turkana, Sandby Borg, Syria and in more places that can ever be counted. It is banal. It is afraid. It can be prevented.

I am one woman on a planet of 7.6 billion. Do I have a greater purpose? Is there anything that I can do that makes a difference?

The answer is a resounding YES! Every day I consciously choose the light within me and I choose to recognize the light in those around me. I make a conscious choice to recognize that even though I have a core wounding, I am responsible to be aware of it, do what I must to heal it, and be conscious of my reactions to its activation.

I do know that I am capable of being an aggressor and a target of aggression. I am both the victims of Lake Turkana, Sandby Borg and Syria, as well as their killers. *We all are.*



We are all a part of an integral web of connection. The connection is founded on our common humanity. We are all parents and children, brothers and sisters, and regardless of where we are from, we all have the same cares and concerns. We are all *capable* of being the predator or the prey. *This is the common truth of our species and the sooner that we recognize this truth and accept it, the sooner we can move AWAY from atrocities and INTO acceptance.*

In the meantime, pray, give money, donate your time – *make whatever difference you can make* – one that is in alignment with your highest love and light. We are most definitely each other's keepers. We are a part of a *flawed and beautifully imperfect family* that expands beyond the arbitrary boundaries of race, religion, age, nationality, or gender.

We all carry the light and the darkness within us and we ignore that fact at our common peril.

Until next week,



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