

# I AM ABUNDANCE

Live a Life of Possibilities

Ashu Khanna



INDIA • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA



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Other Titles by Ashu Khanna

***I Am Freedom, Live Life with Awareness***

***I Am Love, Live Life with Gratitude***

***I Am Perfection, Live Life Joyfully***



*Om*

*Purnamadah Purnamidam*

*Purant Purnamudachyate*

*Purnasya Purnamadaya*

*Purnameva Vashishyate*

*OM Shanti Shanti Shanti*

*Om*

*That is the whole;*

*this is the whole from whole;*

*the whole becomes manifest*

*Taking away the whole from the whole*

*The whole remains*

*Om Peace, Peace, Peace*



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## *Foreword*



In my executive coaching career I have circled the globe more times than I can count. On American Airlines alone I have logged more than 9.5 million frequent flyer miles! If all this travel has taught me anything, it is that leaders around the world have much in common. Most high-level leaders, regardless of nationality, have Western educations and do business in fluent English. But the rapid globalization of business only partly accounts for their similarities. The leaders I coach – some of the most influential people in the world – are ambitious, hardworking, and brilliant. They rarely suffer from fear and insecurity. Most often, their biggest problem is a titanic ego.

Ashu Khanna's insightful book is a master class in letting go of ego. Each chapter reveals another path to genuine self-reflection and inner contentment. A student of the Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita, she understands how powerfully our thoughts shape our realities – for good or for ill. A misguided inner voice telling us that we're better than other people only create suffering for us and for those around us. Desire for status and position create clutter in our minds, as Ashu writes, blocking our awareness of what's truly happening. Leaders need this clarity to lead well.

And yet our global business culture often emphasizes success and achievement at the expense of humility and honest self-appraisal. I have found that leaders ruled by their egos – who are primarily concerned

about their own success – rarely enjoy it the way they thought they would on their way up the career ladder. Instead, they are ruled by anxieties about how they are valued and perceived. By contrast, the happiest and most effective executives are givers, interested mostly in the progress and fulfillment of the people working for and with them.

When leaders come to me for advice about how to help others succeed, I advise them to start with themselves. Some remarkable leaders have taken this approach with stellar results. Steve Sanger, former chairman and CEO of General Mills comes to mind, as does Michael Dell, founder and CEO of Dell Inc. Allan Mullaly, former President and CEO of Ford Motor Company, took the job when the company was on the verge of bankruptcy and is widely credited with one of the most remarkable corporate turnarounds in history. His leadership style was marked by his willingness to be transparent and admit what he didn't know. He is one of the best leaders I have ever seen (and a model coaching client), which is why it has been such an honor to work alongside him on developing leadership programs.

Ashu also believes in introspection, and she takes a close look at herself in these pages. I admire that. She candidly describes both her successes and her shortcomings, setting an example for her coaching clients to do the same. Like many leaders I know, she was a highly driven professional. Later, she took a break from her career in accounting to have a family. Her struggle to find a professional path forward led her to coaching.

Ashu and I are in many ways mirrors of each other: we are both coaches, though she is a woman, I'm a man, she's from the East, and I'm from the West. We share some fundamental values that inform our coaching practices, among them the empowering notion that no matter what hand of cards fate deals us, we always have a choice about how we play that hand. As Ashu writes, "Every moment is a moment of free will."

Critics of this philosophy sometimes argue that circumstances beyond our control prevent us from acting freely – and this is true. But no matter how hard or constraining the conditions we're in, we still have a choice about how we respond to them. Victor Frankl, the Auschwitz survivor and author of the memoir "Man's Search for Meaning," writes that, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Ashu and I also share a belief in letting go of problems in the past and focusing instead on what you can do better in the future. Some thirty years ago, I coined the term "feedforward" to describe a new kind of performance appraisal. Instead of feedback, which involves reviewing past behavior, I suggest asking for guidance on what to do better in the future. Feedback has value, but it's often uncomfortable for both parties. Bad feedback is hard to get and possibly even harder to give. Good feedback is still a form of evaluation, not a solution for the future.

Another belief we share: the value of daily discipline. Ashu recounts how she developed a daily routine of getting up early to read scriptures and listen to devotional music. My daily rituals are different – I spend time thinking and reflecting, and also answering a series of about 40 questions I wrote for myself that gauge how well I am meeting my life's main priorities. I recommend this "Daily Questions" process to my coaching clients as well.

As I argue in my book "Triggers: Becoming the Person You Want to Be" (with Mark Reiter, Crown, 2015), this kind of structure is a powerful tool for keeping our lives on course (or maintaining inner stability, as Ashu posits). A trigger is any stimulus that reshapes our thoughts and actions. People, events and circumstances are constantly bombarding us, and they affect us more powerfully than we realize. It is easy to think that we're in control when actually the environment is shaping our actions.

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Awareness is crucial if we want to change our behavior for the better – and all but a very few of us could stand to make some changes. It sounds simple, and it is, but that doesn't mean it's easy. As I like to remind coaching clients and audiences at my talks, simple and easy are two very different things. But it's possible, especially with the insights in this book. I recommend keeping it on your nightstand or somewhere you can reach for it every day, to absorb and re-absorb its inspiring lessons.

***Dr Marshall Goldsmith***  
***Author & Executive Coach***  
***World's No.1 Leadership Thinker***

## *Preface*



The ancient scriptures have been my guiding light as they respond to the eternal quest of mankind on answers to questions like, ‘who am I’, ‘what is life’ and ‘how to live life’.

The Universal Life force energy or Prana or Qi is the **pure energy that exists in all living things and keeps them alive**. According to Science, energy can neither be created nor destroyed but it can be transformed from one form to another. The Higher Self, our core, is a manifestation of the Life Force or Universal Love (I have chosen to call it Universal Love because I experience the energy as loving and expansive). It is eternal, universal and does not change. We have been gifted with the consciousness to live with awareness and transform. So, when we become aware of our reality as a manifestation of Universal Love, we can consciously transform and unleash our potential, to live life to the fullest.

We experience the Higher Self as the Ego and the Inner Voice. Our ego creates a persona of separateness when we feel fearful for our existence or our identity is threatened. Our inner voice guides us on how to navigate unknowns and what is the right thing to do in different situations and roles. The play of life is designed for us to turn within and listen deeply to discern between the ego and voice of truth. When we live in alignment with our inner voice, we can unleash our potential, grow into an inspired leader and be happy.

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I have a great life, filled with love, comforts and happiness. However, like many, I took my life for granted. It was only after an unfortunate incident in December of 2001, that I realised the need to value my life. I experimented with different careers and explored relentlessly to find a way to feel good about myself. This search triggered me to seek deeper answers and freedom from daily stresses and discontentment.

The search for freedom took me to a small town in UK, where I met my mentor coach in April 2006. She helped me realise that I was trapped in a vicious cycle of victimhood. While, I had taken some significant decisions independently by trusting my inner voice, I was not conscious of that power within me. Then, I understood the power and role of my inner voice and, committed to live true to myself.

We are all inherently talented. I am gifted with the ability to understand and express the wisdom of ancient scriptures in a contemporary manner. Also, I am highly perceptive and can observe and identify patterns about the science of life. To live true, I have questioned myself in every situation and slowed down to understand myself. By living authentically, I have been able to let go of past hurt and loosen the hold of the ego. This has helped me make space for the Universal Love to flow and serve humanity to make a difference.

Each experience and inquiry has helped me discover insights to take leaps of faith and unleash my potential. Life is designed perfectly. Every situation and relationship is designed to act as a catalyst for us to help us with the process of self discovery. We are gifted with curiosity and creativity and when we turn these attributes inwards, we can find our inner light and shine.

In my books, I have shared my journey of search for answers, to discovering my purpose, and above all, owning to my power as a perfect manifestation of the Universal Love. Furthermore, I have distilled the wisdom of the ancient scriptures in a simple manner to

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inspire others to live life to the fullest. I urge the reader to pause and contemplate to discover their truth, embrace the leader within and design a life of success and joy.

The book, *'I Am...Life Is...'* is about recognizing that life is simple and beautiful and we complicate it with our clutter of thoughts. We make a drama out of life, whereas life is a sport to be played all out and enjoyed. Compassion, love, happiness are our true expression. To live true, I have expanded my perspectives to embrace life holistically and live gracefully.





# 1

## *Drama of Life*



*“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”*

— Shakespeare

Life is perfect; our perception of imperfection create a web of illusions and veil our inner self. We come into this world with a unique combination of appearance, skills and talents. Yet, we form a personal judgment of imperfection by comparing ourselves to others. This feeling of incompleteness is not our intrinsic nature, and hence, our inner self pushes us to free ourselves.

We get so attached to our perceptions, that our life becomes an emotional drama, like a TV series with new scenarios, new relationships, new challenges. We keep waiting for someone or something to fill the hole in our heart. We create a story of victimhood, and take refuge under each other's imperfections to feel perfect. Also, we work hard to compete relentlessly, collect things and build relationships. We get so occupied in our ambition that we lose sight of our happiness. In our acquisition of education, job, house, family and other things, our life starts getting controlled by our circumstances and thus, our freedom and happiness get buried in our worries. I have always enjoyed challenging myself. Over time, it became an obsession to seek out new ways to stretch and grow. While, it supported me to harness my potential, it also made me restless because I kept hoping that the next

big thing would make me feel successful. It took me time to let go of my insistence to feel successful, and simply enjoy my adventure spirit.

My head was filled with drama about my relationships, my career and myself. In my story, I was the victim who had no identity or freedom, and who had been persecuted by the world. I was unwilling to even consider that I could be playing the predator or that I was not a victim. I kept searching for ways to feel acknowledged and successful because my self-esteem was caught in this vicious cycle of 'I will feel successful and free when...'. When I questioned to understand my definition of success and freedom, did I realise that our inner self is always free, I had to shed my drama to access my core.

Our life mirrors what we hold within. I projected my anger and anxiety onto my relationships and sometimes, I behaved like a victim and, sometimes like a bully. To manage my relationships, I started by taking responsibility for my emotions and choices. To be authentic, I stepped off being aggressive and trying to be in control and judgmental. And, in relationships, where I felt dominated, I took the risk to speak up to get past feelings of rejection or silently moved on. The main shift that occurred was that I started owning my freedom and was no longer just stuck in the past.

We can develop a deeper relationship with our inner self by gaining knowledge of the inner self and through regular contemplation. I had been attending discourses on Vedic scriptures since mid-2004. I started working as a coach in 2006. As a coach, to effectively give space to another to unfold, I had to shed my drama and anchor internally. When I noticed that the foundation of coaching is rooted in spirituality, I invested time in studying the Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. I also read books from other religions to understand their core. All religions urge us to discover our truth as a manifestation of Universal Love, through different practices and rituals.

Changing ingrained habits is not easy. It was challenging to stay silent or not react with anger and anxiety. I kept practising and of course, there were hits and misses, however, the overall score remained positive. It was empowering to see that I could actually live a life of choice and fulfilment. This gave me the courage to step out as an author and pen down my insights. Some of the articles got published in reputable media. And, later the collection came together as my first book, *I Am Freedom*.

We are masters at creating drama in our life. I vividly remember the time just before the launch of my book '*I Am Freedom*'. I went into a tizzy by meeting PR agencies, bookstores, authors and more. I was so keen for the book to be successful and receive fame and recognition that I agonized for weeks. Totally confused, I asked Swami Advaitananda of Chinmaya Mission what should I do with the book. Swamiji laughed and remarked, "Why are you even thinking, just do what you set out to do". It was simple and obvious, yet I had lost sight of my purpose. I had written the book to make a difference by sharing my journey, so I sent a few copies of my book to family, friends and colleagues.

We have the capacity to make a difference when we let go of our drama and stay focused on our vision. I felt really good when a friend shared that her mother read the book everyday to feel inspired and reconnect with her inner self while she was going through depression. A few of my clients bought nearly 100 copies each to gift to friends and family. They felt that insights from the deepest philosophy of the scriptures have been written in such a simplified manner, that it was easy to digest and apply. I have shared my journey of transformation authentically to inspire people that it is possible to be happy and free while living in this chaotic society, amongst relationships and conflicts.

We mourn about 'what-if' scenarios and resist change till our tolerance is ready to snap. We entangle ourselves in our fears and obsess

till the line between reality and imagination blurs. I was coaching a senior executive from a multinational bank who had slowed down on taking risks. I asked her, “what is the worst that can happen if you take a risk and it goes south? Do you actually feel that you cannot not get any other job.’ She was so aghast that she immediately responded, “of course not”. That instinctive response reignited her self-worth and passion. Through the next few conversations, we worked through presence and strategy to expand her influence across the region. She made a huge effort on herself and connected with colleagues across the organization, such that she got promoted within 6 months.

*Every moment is a moment of self discovery.* I have moved countries with small children, changed homes and jobs, made new friends and engaged with people from different nationalities. When I moved to Hong Kong, I was a new mom, and it was my first time living overseas. I braved up and adapted to the new culture and life. I resumed work after a year and I had to quickly step up professionally to learn the tax laws of Hong Kong and South East Asia. Few years later, we moved to Singapore, where a year later I had another son. I had to start afresh professionally because I encountered leaders who openly expressed their biases against me as an expat mom. This triggered a need to find a profession or career that would give me the flexibility to manage transitions. I worked briefly with a couple of organizations and attended courses to explore my passions. I had to stay positive and open to failure to keep moving forward. So, while the transitions were challenging, it was also exciting to step out of my box and try new jobs, work with new colleagues, set up home in new countries, meet new friends, travel around and learn different skills.

Like Nature, our life too has patterns and is designed for us to transform and unleash our potential. When we live in alignment with the laws of nature and accept the changes around us, it becomes easier to navigate uncertainties. Between 2012-14, I went through a phase of dramatic change personally and professionally. My father’s health

started slowing down, my kids needed more attention since they were in middle and senior school, my work grew and got busier and we decided to renovate an office and home and more. I was feeling so stretched that I was praying for a break. Well, I had to let go of my desire for status quo and accept that change is inevitable.

We all face similar scenarios with respect to health, relationships, education and money, among others. Of course, each of our circumstances and experiences are unique. As I worked with more and more people I saw that everyone had problems in relationships, everyone was seeking to be understood and everyone wanted to be happy. That's life! Also, I realised that life had changed, people and relationships had changed and above all, I had transformed and was actually ready for the next adventure. To stop feeling like a victim and disentangle myself from the drama, I looked for ways to anchor my emotions such that I could view life objectively and holistically, like a *witness*.

Seasons are a part of nature's cycle. When we adapt with ease to the transience, we can enjoy life. Whereas, when we complain and get stuck in wishful thinking, life gets hard. By anchoring internally with the inner self, we can live authentically and harness opportunities to experience life the fullest.

*“To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.”*

— George Santayana

***Points to reflect***

- *Life is perfect, our perceptions create drama in our life.*
- *Our life mirrors what we hold within.*
- *Over analysis creates paralysis, take action to live true.*
- *Seasons are a part of nature's cycle. Live life like a witness.*