

“*No More Layers* offers a beautiful, well-lit and accessible pathway to discovering our true nature. A must-read for anyone looking for deep and lasting fulfillment.”

— Marci Shimoff, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Happy for No Reason*

NO MORE LAYERS

*Discover Your
Inner Power and
Reclaim True
Freedom From
the Inside Out*



MARTINE
COHEN

NO MORE LAYERS

Praise for No More Layers

“In order to live a life of true success, you need to uncover who you really are and live from that place of your real self, not your personality self. That is when you’ll find ease, joy, and peace. Once you read this life-changing book and discover how to shed the old layers that don’t serve you, true success will be yours.”

— **Debra Poneman, bestselling author and founder
of Yes to Success and Ageless Seminars**

“*No More Layers* offers a beautiful, well-lit and accessible pathway to discovering our true nature. Martine Cohen’s journey is extremely relatable and her revelations are universal. A must-read for anyone looking for deep and lasting fulfillment.”

— **Marci Shimoff, #1 *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Happy for No Reason***

“A thought-provoking examination of the true nature of the Self. This is a great book for anyone who is ready to emerge from beneath their ‘layers’ and embody who they came here to be.”

— Dr. Sue Morter, bestselling author of *The Energy Codes*

“Martine Cohen’s *No More Layers* is a deeply personal exploration of what it means to be human. The book reads like the best kind of adventure story, and I encourage you to go on that adventure of transformation for yourself.”

—Gay Hendricks, PhD, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *The Big Leap*

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*Discover Your Inner Power and
Reclaim True Freedom
from the Inside Out*

MARTINE COHEN



WORLDCHANGERS
MEDIA

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*To Benjamin and Jessica, my two miracles
who inspire me every day to be the best version of myself*

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NO MORE LAYERS

Introduction

*“Free from unconscious thoughts, protective layers, and limiting beliefs,
we can each accomplish what we have been put here on earth to do.”*

In the aftermath of a traumatic car accident that left me with a serious concussion, my awareness of who I was changed dramatically. Before the accident that led me on this journey, I believed that I had to be one thing or the other: intellectual or intuitive, grounded or spiritual, professional or playful. But as I delved deeper into myself, I began to witness my own layers for the very first time. Layers, as will be discussed in more depth throughout this book, are what I call those limiting beliefs, fears, brain constructs, and identities that we become confined to, controlled by, and ultimately believe defines who we are.

During my recovery, I discovered and went through my own *No More Layers* journey. I grew to understand that it was never an “either or” proposition, and that none of us need be anything else except who we are, what we choose, and what is truly right for us. The balance of deep and approachable, playful and profound, intellectual and intuitive, is a space I now happily live in, and one that is accessible to all of you.

In the years since my own transformational journey, I would come to realize that my journey was not meant to just serve me. There was

a higher purpose, and ultimately one that led me on to yet another journey, that of helping others. I came to know and trust that what I experienced could, and would, help people.

I have seen it in the private sessions I have with clients, as they gain the courage to delve within, make breakthroughs, and heal past traumas. I have witnessed it in my small group and speaking engagements, as people open up, shift their mindset, and awaken their awareness to consciously choose their path in life. I see it in my own children, as they move into their next phase of life as self-aware human beings who have the strength to remain grounded and the tools to remain deeply authentic. I have been led to this work to help as many people as possible step into their power and live a freer, more fulfilling life. I am deeply honored to show you the way.

How this Book Came to Be

Truth be told, I never set out to write a book. In fact, I never considered that I would write a book until my clients started urging me to do so. They saw that a book could help others benefit from similar shifts and insights to those they were experiencing in our sessions. I hesitated to sit down to work on it for a long time, and then one day something inside of me shifted. It was a visceral feeling that called me to take the challenge and begin writing. I could see the transformational shifts my clients were experiencing, and I knew they were right. It was time. A written version of this work could reach many more people and serve as a guide along the journey, one that they could experience, refer to, and share with others. From that moment on, the ideas within this book began to take shape.

I started by setting my intention for my writing. I knew that I wanted to share a unique and enriching personal journey that would encourage and invite exploration, awareness, and growth. It was important for me to create a book that could meet you, the reader, right where you are, and be what you need most in that moment. Most of all, I wanted to create a safe space for awareness and insight, without it

becoming overwhelming, though the subject matter itself goes deep. It wasn't a simple process, but I was deeply committed to it, and so I embarked on this labor of love.

And then something fascinating happened. While I had created an outline, it seemed like the book had a mind of its own. While I had intended to write this book in a way that would create an experience for my readers, what I didn't realize was that it would become an entire experience for me as well. I sat in a quiet space, readied myself, got out of my own way, and the information started flowing in. I wasn't thinking and writing in the way I had imagined it would happen. I was accessing universal wisdom and downloading the contents for a particular chapter, sometimes faster than I could type or dictate. Inspiration would strike whenever it would strike. At times I would be exhausted writing at 1:00 a.m. and yet my creative juices were flowing. I knew it was a process I needed to respect. On two separate occasions, the content itself led to the addition of new chapters, ones I had never envisaged would be part of this book. Writing this book has been one of the most authentic experiences I have ever lived. Putting all of myself aside, being of service to something greater than myself, and fully trusting the process before me has been enlightening, inspiring, sacred, and beautifully humbling. I feel blessed to be able to bring it all to you.

How This Book is Structured

I've written this book as a transformative journey for you and a transmission of a deeper reality. As you go through it, you will begin to discover the innate wisdom, resilience, and untapped potential that is uniquely, divinely yours to claim. This book is meant to guide you through the vast terrain of your own thoughts, emotions, and layers, to the seat of your personal power: your true self and essence. It's here to offer you an experience and is structured much in the way a journey would be. The chapters walk you one into the next, serving as stepping stones along your path. They are meant to allow you the opportunity

to experience your own personal transformation. As you read through them, my heartfelt hope is that they will help walk you down your own extraordinary path of self-discovery.

As you embark, I ask that you trust yourself to venture inward and follow the flow. I know it's not an easy ask. We are much more comfortable with familiar ground, as it satisfies our need for control. But I'm asking you to be in the moment, trust the creative process, relinquish a little of that need for control, and replace it with openness and curiosity. Allow yourself to venture into the realm of awareness that will open up for you, as the richness of the experience is in the journey itself.

I have intentionally written this book so as to allow you the space to experience this journey in your own way. *No More Layers* is more of an experience and a shift than a structured step-by-step methodology. Nevertheless, my intention is to do my best to meet you where you are. Just as there are different learners, there are also different readers. For those of you who would prefer to have some additional concrete pointers along this road, I chose to include a chapter that breaks down the *No More Layers* process into three foundational pillars, which you can always refer back to as you continue to advance in this work. The Three Pillars are helpful in getting you ready to shift your mindset, explore your layers, and make empowered choices. If it is your preference, I invite you to read Chapter Fifteen at any time along the way, but if you can hold off and follow the flow of the journey this book leads you on, I would encourage you to do so.

You will also notice that there are epigraphs at the start of each chapter, and also within various sections of the chapters in Part II. All quotes are pulled from my own teachings and writings, which is why you won't see author attributions. They are meant to direct and focus your attention to the material at hand, and also to give you "bite-sized" content to post on your social media if you choose to share your own journey through your layers. (Just be sure to add the hashtag #nomorelayers to any posts you make!)

How to Experience This Book

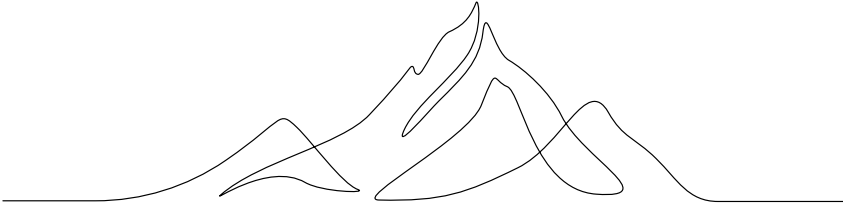
This book is not intended to be devoured in one sitting. As you read through the chapters and explore who you are in relationship to yourself and to others, you will encounter inspiring stories, transformative concepts, and practical exercises. Give yourself the time to sit with each chapter, take the opportunity to journal, question, and be with each chapter's prompts. Feel free to go back and re-read things whenever it might be helpful, as you further explore and integrate the concepts. Whatever comes up for you in this process, honor and validate it. Remain open to all the opportunities and possibilities that lie ahead as you immerse yourself in the experience of getting to know yourself better from the inside out. Stay brave, intentional, and curious.

As you step into the great adventure of life, my hope is that this book will help you tap into the adventurer in you, gain the awareness of your own layers, the curiosity to explore them, the courage to release them, and the deep understanding of who you truly are. Once you're aligned with your true self, and you know what that feels like, you'll be able to return there and live from an empowered place within you, experiencing the deep joy and contentment that comes with the awareness and authenticity of choosing how you experience everything that comes before you.

Lastly, I want you to know that this book will not tell you who to be, how to be or what to do. Nor does it offer a step-by-step plan you must follow. Instead, it's an invitation for you to embark on your very own journey of discovery and to experience your own paradigm shift. One that will bring you into the awareness of who you truly are, and where your inner power resides, beyond all your layers. I offer to be your guide through this journey, providing you with insights and tools along the way as you begin to live your life with *No More Layers*.

With so much love,

Martine



Part I

ADVENTURE

My Origin Story

*“We are born worthy, capable, authentically ourselves, and spiritual.
We just need to discover all of the resources that are within us.”*

When I was seven years old, I nearly drowned. This was my first encounter with a near-death experience, and my first brush with the power of prayer and visualization, which is something I would only later come to realize is innate in each of us.

My family and I were on vacation in Atlantic City. I didn't know how to swim, and yet somehow, I found myself in a swimming pool with a newfound friend. It probably wasn't the smartest thing to do, but I was trying to be careful. Before I knew it, however, I had gone deeper into the pool and lost my footing. I started to drown.

I could feel myself starting to sink, and I didn't know what to do. Funnily enough, as I think back, I wasn't yelling or screaming. I just went deep inside myself and started to pray. To this day, I cannot tell you intellectually what made me do that. It was instinctive. Something else inside me rose up and took charge at that moment. With my entire being, I visualized myself being saved. What was really strange about this situation was that I had never been taught about prayer or

visualization, and yet I pictured the way in which I would be saved exactly as it happened. I visualized an older boy—a teenager, I suppose—carrying me out of the water and putting me to the side of the pool.

The next thing I remember is being placed on the side of the pool ... by just that teenager. He looked like the one I had pictured, and he had just saved my life. I was shaken up and didn't quite understand what had happened, but I wasn't struggling for breath anymore and was ever so grateful to be alive. I was shocked for sure, but what struck me the most was that—in defiance of all logic—I had actually been saved in the exact way I had visualized.

It was my first encounter with something where I could potentially have died; I had felt myself slowly slipping away. And yet, I had been saved. Although I didn't quite understand the significance at that age, it was my first conscious encounter with spirituality and what some might call a near-death experience. While I certainly was not able to process it fully at the time, it is an experience that has stayed with me to this day. As it turns out, the power of visualization and prayer had been within me all along. Though we may not know how to access it, we all have it. In my case, I was able to call upon it when the situation became a life or death one, as if a higher wisdom within me took over and knew exactly what to do. I believe the critical nature of the situation allowed me to access something I didn't know existed.

As a young child growing up, I was very attuned to the spiritual energy of the people around me. I felt it inside of me. No one I knew around me spoke of self-exploration. Rather it seemed adults would often say and do the opposite of what they meant, and I could sense when they weren't being authentic. I felt that they were afraid to show their true selves, and this, in turn, made me afraid to show my true self. Perhaps the adults knew something I didn't; perhaps it wasn't safe to explore the unfamiliar terrain of the inner self and spirituality; perhaps we are meant to go through life disconnected from these unknown parts. Everyone else had their eyes closed, too.

But my grandfather was different. He was very spiritual, and as I reached my early teens, we would have wonderful conversations about souls, our connection to a higher power, and energetic channels. While fascinating and deeply enriching, I had yet to really connect the dots. I never associated our discussions with what had happened when I was seven years old, and with the way in which I was saved. I had put it behind me and would only reflect on it again years later.

I continued working hard, putting my best foot forward, trying to fulfill others' expectations of me as well as those I had of myself. I never considered myself to be ambitious, but I probably was. I was hungry for life experiences. I love to learn, feel a sense of accomplishment, gain knowledge, and give of myself. I have a teaching diploma, studied law, graduated with two degrees, began my career in a national firm, and became licensed in two different legal jurisdictions. And yet, at the time, there was always this voice inside of me, one I didn't quite understand and couldn't define. It would nudge me every so often, as if to awaken me to something more, and yet I didn't know what to do with it. It didn't seem like others around me had that voice—or if they did, it wasn't something they ever talked about. And so, most of the time, I tried to quiet the voice, hoping it would go away. But it never did.

There was a struggle within me: do I follow the adventurous, spiritual side of me, or do I follow the path of my logical brain? My soul had a thirst for deep life and human experience. After all, isn't the soul having a wide array of human experiences in a body the purpose of life? I believe that it is—and for those of you already going through spiritual growth, you know that the soul never settles down, though rest assured its energy can be reframed and channeled.

The journey of growth does not flow smoothly. I avoided fully acknowledging the possibility of my spiritual gifts because I didn't know where they would lead. How could I reconcile being a lawyer with my spirituality, with that flame that burned so strongly inside of me? Today, some of my friends jokingly refer to me as “the spiritual

lawyer.” It makes me smile, and it reminds me of a time when I thought I couldn’t be both. I’m so grateful to have discovered that I can simply be who I am, with all of my different facets. But back then, before I reached the balance I now feel, my rational brain was very strong and the fear of my spirituality, of the intangible, would kick in whenever I felt like there had to be something more. Whenever I felt that pull, I tried to control it, hoping it would slow down. No matter how hard I tried to stop the flow, it kept coming back. My brain was trying to keep me safe and grounded, while my higher self, my soul, wanted to soar and experience it all. I knew one day I’d have to address it head-on, but for a long time, I simply kept juggling between the two.

If you’re a seeker of clarity, spirituality, and understanding, then you know what it’s like to feel part of you pulled in one direction, while your logical, sensible, safety-first brain pulls you in another. You may even have experienced the cycle of trying and failing, struggling and pushing, reaching and achieving, and then finding out that it didn’t make you as content or satisfied as you thought it would. You can see what you’re chasing just on the horizon, but no matter how hard you grasp for it, it remains out of reach. Through it all, there are parts of your inner self that remain inaccessible to you, despite any personal development, self-actualization, or mindfulness you may practice.

Intuitively you may sense that there is an easier way, but, as was true for me, you just don’t know how to access it.

Long before the accident that radically changed my life, I had an awareness that there must be more flow in life, but I didn’t know how to reach it. In many ways, it was like walking into a room with less-than-optimal vision. What I hadn’t realized at the time was that every decision I made was, in part, predicated on a need to create perceived certainty and safety. Somewhere in my deeper knowing, it was clear that this need for protection was interfering with ultimate growth and authenticity. But I still got up each morning to keep doing the same thing, always trying to push aside my inner reality. I had the keys to

gain access to authenticity, flow, and the freedom that is gained from acknowledging my truest, deepest self, but I was too afraid to open the door to the wealth of resources within me.

Doorway into the Self

What is that door? What are these barriers that stand between each of us and the flow we can sense but cannot reach?

These are your layers.

Layers are what lie between the external, constructed identity you constantly strive to live up to, and your true, internal self. Layers are the subconscious, internal rules we have defined for ourselves so that we can keep ourselves safe. Keeping safe, however, also keeps us static and prevents us from growing.

Layers are formed from the messages we received in childhood, the lessons we unconsciously clung to in order to survive in a new and, for some, confusing or chaotic world. Maybe the layer you learned as a young child was “Girls don’t act so bossy,” or “If I cry and try to reach for comfort, I’m making my parents angry because I’m so needy.” Maybe your layer from adolescence was “If I’m beautiful, I’ll get positive attention,” or perhaps it was “Getting the best grades is the only way I can prove my worth.”

From each of these lessons, a layer is gleaned. Those layers solidify over time and limit you, until you become aware of them and begin to peel them away. And until you do this, your layers will continue to prevent you from seeing who you truly are, and from knowing yourself. Until this process happens, all the discomfort—this sense of formless despair and disconnection from your true self and inner innate power—will continue to persist, too.

All of us have layers.

Before becoming aware of my layers, before knowing I could change my own story, and before life literally hit me on the head and

made me finally pay attention, I believed that *I was my brain and my brain was me*. Just like an athlete who defines themselves by their wins or measures their success by their stats, I defined myself by my brain. Looking back, I truly believed *I was my brain*; and I never questioned it. Although I'd received what I now know was an invitation to the awareness of my own inner being, until I started to open the doors to my own layers, I didn't know then what this was all about, or how to approach it. At the time, not only did I work as a lawyer, but I *was* a lawyer. That's what I understood myself to be. I had no idea how much more there was to discover within me.

The layers we use to protect and insulate ourselves from the world are the same things that stand in the way of our authenticity. Let me say that again because it's absolutely crucial to understand this before you can move forward: that feeling you have, the feeling of yearning, of wanting something more, but being unable to define what it is, let alone how to reach it, comes from your deepest self. It's who you are when you strip away all of the layers you or those around you have built. You're not sure what your higher self is seeking, or you may even be unsure why you need so desperately to find it, but you can no longer ignore that feeling, no matter what you do, how high you reach, or what you achieve. This is a sign that you're ready to start opening the doors to uncover your layers and gain access to your true, authentic, self-designed life.

The Search for Authentic Purpose

Working as an attorney, strategies consultant, mentor, and guiding my clients through the process of identifying and removing their own layers, I find that many of the people who work with me are at the top of their game in a wide array of fields. Professionally, they have achieved their goals and earned their wealth or well-deserved accolades, and yet deep inside they have a sense of hollowness. A sense of, "Is this what

success is supposed to feel like? There must be something more.”

Many, if not all, of my clients reach out to me when they’re grappling with a seemingly impossible situation. No matter what it is—career, relationships, family, or some other external thing—they haven’t found a way around what was blocking them, and the frustration, discontent, and distress continue to steadily grow. Although many of them find me after trying various tools, from the brain-based to the esoteric, they can’t access the peace, balance, and real fulfillment they’re searching for. They keep yearning for more, for different. All of them have one key thing in common: the belief that this external obstacle or situation is the true cause of their discomfort and that if it were to shift, be resolved, everything else would fall into place and their deeper yearning would finally be quelled. I’m here to tell you that it won’t.

There is so much more; a deeper, more authentic truth waiting to be discovered and honored within you, and there are many more layers you are yet to uncover. I know this not only because of the people I have worked with and the profound shifts I have seen them make, but also because this process—the removing of layers—happened to me in an earth-shattering and life-altering way.

Before that moment, every time my higher self spoke to me, though I did hear it, I wasn’t sufficiently paying attention. I tuned it out by working harder, doing more, protecting myself, and striving to be better. Still, it kept persisting. I could feel a pull within me. When I couldn’t hear it whispering, it shouted. And when I didn’t hear the shouting, it hit me over the head, literally. While I had been content for so very long with who I thought I was, that was all about to change. I would soon be shaken to my core and stripped of every layer that kept the true me hidden.

Unbeknownst to me, I was about to embark on a whole new journey, leaving nothing more to interfere with my path to accessing a wholly purpose-driven life of pure potentiality.

The Concussion

“It is often within traumatic events—when we experience a literal or metaphorical brush with death—that a drastic life shift has the potential to take place.”

I was driving down the street on my way to run an errand and about to merge onto the highway when my whole world changed in a horrifying crunch of glass and metal.

A speeding car collided with mine, crashing into the driver’s side. I had no chance to avoid it or swerve away. I lost consciousness.

As I came back to awareness, I could hear myself thanking God that I had survived. I could hear myself in conversation, but it wasn’t me, or at least it didn’t feel like it. It was as if I was hovering over the scene, having been inserted into the tail end of a conversation I was witnessing. Paramedics were talking to me, asking me questions. Trying my best to respond, I spoke as loudly as I could, and they barely heard me. They kept asking me, again and again, what I could feel, where the pain was, all kinds of questions. I mustered all of my might, but still, only whispers came out. They moved me carefully out of my crumpled van and put me in an ambulance.

Laying on the stretcher, my thoughts immediately went to my

children. I don't know how I managed—it felt like the brain equivalent of a mother's sudden burst of strength, lifting a car off of their child in a moment of extreme duress—but I somehow got my phone and sent a text. My children were at school and would need to be picked up. "I don't want them to worry or be scared, they just need to be picked up." To this day, I'm not sure if that was a thought or a mother's instinct. Despite what had just happened, I deeply knew I was a mother. My instincts had kicked in, despite everything else no longer functioning properly.

The EMTs checked me for injuries. They rushed me to the hospital—I couldn't tell you which one. All I knew was that when the tests were performed, the doctors said I had no reflexes at all on my left side, and my left eye had a significantly diminished range of movement. Everything hurt, and yet in a way I couldn't even fully feel the pain. I just felt blurry. Not visually blurry, but mentally. My brain was clouded in a tumble of confusion.

It was a severe concussion.

The pain I experienced during this time was more than physical, it was profound, almost existential. The way the head hurts when the brain is concussed is not the way any other part of the body hurts. It's not like an ache or a sprain or a broken bone, but rather as if all of your nerve endings are inflamed. It's functional pain, and since our brain is never dormant and always working, the pain is constant. Only the intensity fluctuated. Every stimulus was painful. I could hardly tolerate lights or sounds, and I couldn't communicate well. It felt as if there was a dark, opaque veil between me and everything else in the world.

I can remember the first week, staring at my son as he talked to me about hockey. I worked so hard to follow what he'd been saying, and while I understood each word individually, by the end of the sentence, the meaning of it all had vanished. Understanding language was like trying to hold water and having it run between my fingers, spilling out onto the ground. My brain wasn't working for me, and I could not

longer filter the world as I had before the accident, as who I thought I was, as Martine.

In the weeks that followed, which felt like very long months, a diagnosis of post-concussive syndrome meant that my recovery was taking much longer than expected. I was told I would know within a year what damage would be permanent and what would heal, but until then, it was all up in the air. “Wait, what?” I panicked. “I have to wait a whole year?!” The news from my neurologist absolutely terrified me. “It’s a wait-and-see situation,” he said. It turns out that there’s not much that can be done for the brain in these cases.

At this point in my journey, the most frightening thing wasn’t actually the concussion, the pain, the confusion, or even the sensitivity to light and sound. It was the sinking feeling that there wasn’t anything I could do, no list of tasks to perform, nothing extra of myself to give, no clarity on how to “solve” this. As someone who had been in control all of my life (or so I’d believed), this terrified me down to the very core of my being. It was uncharted territory.

My Injured Brain

The brain is profoundly finicky, sensitive, and unpredictable. There’s no straightforward pathway to healing an injured brain, and, in my case, there were no non-invasive or surgical options. “Make sure to gradually use your brain,” the neurologist told me helpfully, “but not too much. Don’t overwork yourself. We’ll have to see what functionality comes back.”

I felt like a circus performer on a tightrope. What did that even mean? I wondered. Was I ever going to get better? Would I regress, and would the damage be permanent? Is this just the way it was going to be from now on?

My identity, the sense of who I thought I was, was slipping away, and, with that, the prospect of living disconnected from myself for the rest of

my life was the most terrifying of all. Had I just lost everything?

My brain didn't have the information, let alone the capacity to help itself. It felt petrifying. My biggest nightmare was having regrets, or in other words, finding out I had not done something that could have helped me. Being at that crossroads and not knowing where to go, I couldn't bear to reach that one-year mark and hear my doctor say, "You have residual damage." If there was something I could have done and didn't, I couldn't have borne that.

Our thoughts are ours to evaluate and choose. While my brain was concussed and I couldn't formulate many thoughts at that point, I had a recurring one. One that felt more like a fact than a thought. I don't know who I am anymore. What will become of me? What I didn't fully realize at the time was that we have the power to choose which thoughts to keep and which to discard. And thoughts, while triggered by facts, are only one of many interpretations of a fact.

For those who don't know me, I'm a bath girl, bubbles and all. For as long as I can remember, it's always been one of my preferred ways to recharge and check in with myself. One night, as if by rote, I remembered baths, so I drew myself one. Immersing myself in the warm, soothing water should have been familiar and comforting, and yet it wasn't. I had never felt this afraid in my entire life. That being said, I also didn't get out of the bath. I stayed, and let my fear fill me. I didn't push it away, deny it, or fight it. I just let it be right there with me that night in my bath.

My concussed, dysfunctional brain wasn't in any position to fight this fear. It could not "protect" me through its usual methods of distraction and denial, as any eager or overactive brain normally would. It couldn't offer resistance to the feeling of fear, block it, or suppress it. In that moment, the fear was so intense and my brain so concussed that it couldn't offer any thoughts to counter or diminish the fear. It just allowed it to be. I felt the fear and got to experience it full-on, with no filter, no accompanying thoughts, and therefore no interpretations.

For me, this was the beginning of everything else that followed. It allowed space for a path I had never fully embarked on until that moment. It was the silver lining. In hindsight, it was the blessing of a dysfunctional brain. With the numbness, the automation taken away, in that space of loss, I was left with nothing more, and nothing less, than my self. I witnessed myself in the darkness, being at what felt like rock bottom, experiencing the tenuous and uncertain recovery ahead of me. Staying with myself while still lying in the cooling bathwater, an awareness came over me. It wasn't groundbreaking, it was more a line of questioning that began with this magical opening:

Without my brain, who am I?

How was it that my brain wasn't very functional and yet I was able to observe myself and have awareness of myself? It was almost as if this was happening from beyond a body and brain perspective. And if this wasn't my brain, then who or what was processing these feelings and witnessing them? And who or what was doing all of this questioning? These questions gave me a strange sense of hope, and a surge of energy flowed through me. It was new, and yet strangely familiar.

Could it be that I was reconnecting from within? That there was more to me even without a functional brain?

These questions brought me face-to-face with a newfound sense of clarity and curiosity. In that moment of understanding, I saw that I had been living my life through a lens—viewing the world through the unquestioned belief that I was primarily my brain and my brain was me. For the first time, I sensed that was not the truth.

This revelation was shocking to me. I was so sure that any limiting beliefs I had were addressed many years before my accident. I had previously believed that any discomfort or stress experienced in life was because I wasn't trying hard enough or giving enough of myself. I just needed to aim higher, go further, and my brain would work that out for me as it always had. But suddenly everything had changed, and there was no longer anything my brain could do for me.

I had passed through a truly devastating, life-changing experience, and yet I was still here. As a result of my concussion, not being able to focus on the outside world, I was forced to look within more deeply. It was then that I began to discover how many more inaccurate beliefs I still possessed.

In time, I came to understand and name those beliefs: those were my layers. At first, I could only witness them, but eventually, I could learn to evaluate them, test them against the truth of my soul, and eventually learn to remove them if they no longer fit me. All of this would come later, as I healed. But this was the first moment of true awareness that there was something deeper within me, something I'd always been defined and affected by but had never truly seen.

The World of Layers

I use the term “layers” for these beliefs and opinions because that’s what they are: layers that stand in the way of accessing your true self. Layers are often formed at some point in our early lives based on the subconscious response to the messages we receive and internalize. Once upon a time, my layers had been put in place in order to protect me, show me a direction, or help me to follow a certain pattern to keep me on a specific path, but clearly, they were no longer serving me. In fact, like training wheels that have been kept on far too long, these layers were getting in the way by hindering my growth, learning, and confidence.

I never would have stopped to consider them, much less witness them, if the accident had not stopped me in my tracks and made me question everything I had once believed to be true and held so dear about who I really was. But now I could see them, acknowledge them, and feel that they were separating me from my higher self, all under the guise of being helpful.

It’s important to understand that layers are neither good nor bad, they just are. Many of my clients—who are accustomed to approaching

their lives in a very analytical, linear, progress-focused way—regularly have a difficult time with this concept. My clients are often very successful in their fields, responsible for making many key decisions, and they hold themselves to a very high standard. Any perceived flaw, imperfection, or weakness is something to be avoided at all cost, not explored, let alone embraced.

Like many of us in the professional world, my clients are juggling many things at once, and are looking to get on with it, fix what’s “wrong,” and start feeling better. But while you can aim to change the outside world, if you don’t begin with a search within, real change cannot take place, nor can it be sustained. The process of searching within entails accepting your layers just as they are. Not bad, or damaged, or flawed. Just layers.

Layers are simply an indication that your past self was trying to survive. They are protective mechanisms, formed as a result of many external stimuli, from parents to culture to society, but the core reason behind all of them is the same: your brain perceives a threat as a reality, and it forms a layer to try and keep you safe from that threat. The layer becomes the bookmark tucked in place in the story of your life: an easy-to-reference decision-making tool that bypasses your higher self in favor of a reference point where similar situations can simply be handled the same way. At no point in the process are we ever consulted. We just react, but we don’t act. We don’t choose.

Every layer we have is a signal from our past selves and an opportunity to do something different, but we moved past it and accepted it as if it were an integral part of the book. How strange would it be to consult the reference book of *you* and take the bookmark as guidance for how to live your life? Would we not want to be in control of our own lives, rather than surrender our decision-making power to some layer that was created years or even decades ago, and may no longer apply to our lives? When we are offered a moment to observe our layers rather than rush through life without stopping to consider why we do

the things we do, profound insights await us. When we stop to look at the book of our own lives, taking time to consider what's actually written on our pages, and what's merely been tucked in on a scrap of paper, the contrast becomes obvious. But we can't change it unless we stop to look at it first.

Remember the conversation I had witnessed as I was regaining consciousness? The one where I could hear myself thanking God that I had survived? To this day, I believe that witnessing this conversation was a gift from above. It truly saved me from what could have been much deeper emotional and spiritual angst. It afforded me a deep inner knowing from the get-go that there was a positive and greater purpose behind all of this. It's what initially carried and sustained me. It ultimately led me to the path of inquiry, facing my fears, discovering my layers, and finally finding myself. I became the observer, a role I didn't even know existed. This observer role allowed me to begin questioning almost freely. What was really happening? Who was doing the observing, and how was I aware of it? Even though I felt the darkness, with no idea what its ultimate purpose could be, I finally knew there was one. In time, I would come to discover it, step by step, layer by layer.

The Questions in the Darkness

It seems we only begin to question when we're uncomfortable, and we're only uncomfortable when something shakes us up so much that there is nothing else to do but question.

This is why rock-bottom, catastrophic, and earth-shaking experiences so often have such a profound impact. While many people do experience a certain amount of life-changing clarity as a result of catastrophic incidents, we should not need to experience a traumatic event to gain insight, let alone literally be hit on the head, as I was.

It is, however, often within traumatic events—when we experience a literal or metaphorical brush with death—that a drastic life shift has

the potential to take place. In these moments, the things we have done intentionally and subconsciously to distract, redirect, or numb ourselves are stripped away, and we cannot ignore them any longer. These experiences are profound, and usually intellectually and scientifically unexplainable. You reach a point where you are facing yourself at your clearest, most intimate being—the real you underneath all of the layers. And when you get those first peeks into the real you, you start realizing that the choices you thought were set for you aren't as limiting or constraining as you had once thought them to be. You start finding ways to change what you used to think was unchangeable, and a shift of some fundamental aspect of your being takes place. This is you uncovering and removing your layers. And as this unfolds, you begin to have a deep understanding of yourself.

The first step to becoming reacquainted with the real, authentic you and living a life of joy, peace, and purpose is becoming aware that you even have layers. We all do. Once you get to know your layers and realize the extent to which they have been affecting you without your knowledge or even permission, you can choose whether to keep them in place or remove them.

The impulse for many of my driven, high-achieving, successful clients is to optimize. They want to “fix” things and get back on track. But without first becoming aware of their layers, they can change whatever they like about their external environment and still not come close to addressing the source of their discomfort. The true “fixing” comes from the inside out, and it begins with the exploration and questioning of our layers.

The deeper the layer, the more we believe that it must be an absolutely integral part of who we are. Just like a bookmark tucked into place and, over time, assumed to be an integral part of the book, a layer kept in place continually reinforces the belief that we need the protection it was created to provide, whether that continues to be true or not. Rather than acknowledging the layer for what it is, removing the

bookmark and writing a new story about our experience (thereby consciously choosing a new outcome), we keep returning to that same limiting bookmark, relying on it. We become that bookmark. We become that layer.

But what if the bookmark was never placed there to begin with? What then would you believe makes you *you*? Would it be something else, something more? The moment you begin to ask these questions is also the moment you begin to realize that the layer could never have been you to begin with. And if that layer is not you, then what is? It's a complex question to ask and to answer, but it is the question each of us must examine if we truly want to connect from within. We owe ourselves that answer. Without it, we will go through our lives never fully knowing who we are.

You deserve to know about your layers because you're the one who has been living with them. Granted the way you show up in the world also affects other people, but it all starts from within you through a process of getting to know what your layers are, what might have caused them to be put in place, and whether that protection is still required or essential.

The Path Forward

In the following chapters, I hope to lead you to understand more about layers. Together we will explore creative tools and techniques to help identify your layers and truly hear their messages. I will guide you through the creation of your very own inner boardroom, a safe and inviting space within which you can explore your inner landscape and layers, gain insights and awareness, and exercise your freedom to choose how to address them.

Once you remove your layers, and finally have a clear view into who you truly are, it becomes so much easier to choose a path that is authentic, meaningful, fulfilling, and purposeful. The way you show up to life will change too. Free from the protective thoughts, beliefs,

Chapter Two: The Concussion

default mechanisms, and shields you once thought you needed, you can accomplish what you have been put here on earth to do.

This shift in awareness will change your life and relationships, no concussion (or other crisis) required! Once you know who you are, you will never want to be anyone else.

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