

CARE FOR YOURSELF
SO YOU CAN CARE FOR OTHERS

FILL YOUR OWN CUP

A blue teacup is shown from a low angle, partially filled with a golden liquid. A stream of the same liquid is pouring into the cup from above, creating a dynamic splash and several small bubbles. The background is a solid, bright yellow.

SANGEETA MAHESHWARI

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So You Can Care for Others*

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S O U L S C R I B E

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A Letter to You, Before We Begin

Dear Friend,

If you have opened this book, something in you desires to shift. Perhaps you cannot quite name it yet. Perhaps it is only a tiredness, or an ache that visits you in the still hours — *is this all there is?* You may have a life that looks full from the outside and still feel a strange emptiness on the inside. You may have spent years filling everyone else's cup so faithfully that you never noticed your own had begun to run dry.

I want you to know, right at the start, that there is nothing wrong with you. You are not broken, or ungrateful, or selfish for feeling this way. You are a warm, giving person who has poured yourself out for a long time — and who is now being gently called home to yourself.

I have written this book for the young person worn down by comparison and pressure — online and offline — who has begun to measure their worth against everyone else's highlights. It is for the person rebuilding after a breakup or a loss, and for the carer in a relationship, holding someone else's well-being alongside their own. I am thinking, too, of the one on a career break, wondering who they are between roles, and of the one whose health has faltered and redrawn their days without asking. And I am writing, just as surely, for the parent and empty-nester whose children have grown and gone, who stands in a suddenly quiet house, wondering who they are now that they are needed less — as I am for the one who has just stepped

away from a long career and found, in place of the longed-for freedom, an unexpected emptiness. It is for the one who invariably remembers everyone else's needs and forgets their own, and for the busy one in the middle of a full and capable life who still feels strangely hollow at day's end. If you recognise yourself anywhere in those lines, you are exactly who I wrote this for.

And let me say plainly what this book is *not*, so you can set the guilt down before we even begin. Filling your own cup is not about becoming selfish, or hard, or turning away from the people who need you. It is the very opposite: having something left to give them — a fuller, warmer you, in place of the tired remnants scraped from the bottom of an empty vessel. This book will not ask you to care less. It will simply make sure that the one who has cared so much for so long is at last cared for, too.

In all these years, I have learnt one thing above all. Lasting change never comes from being lectured or fixed. It comes from trust. From feeling safe enough to lower your guard, to be honest about what hurts, and then, hand in hand and at your own pace, to grow.

So that is what this book is: my hand in yours. We will not rush. I will not hand you a list of things you need to change. Instead, we will look together — kindly, truthfully — at how your cup emptied, at the worth that was always yours, and at the practices that will fill and fuel you again. And slowly, you will feel it: the return of joy, of energy, of purpose—the return of you.

You may wonder whether you have the time for this, or even the right — is it even worth it? — with so many people still leaning on you, so much still to be done. I understand that worry; I have felt it myself. But consider this: the most loving gift you can give to the people you care for is not one more exhausted yes. It is a steadier, warmer you — present, rested and genuinely here.

Far from being stolen from your family or your work, the hours you spend filling your own cup are precisely what will let you keep giving, with grace rather than resentment, through all the seasons still ahead. So set the worry down, just for the length of this book, and let yourself receive something for a change.

You have given so much, so beautifully, for so long.

This book is where you begin, at last, to give some of it to yourself.

With love,

Sangeeta

A Question, Before We Walk

Before we set off together, can you tell me something?

A cup can be full — brimming, even overflowing — and still leave its owner empty. Full of duties. Full of deadlines. Full of other people's needs, other people's errands, other people's dreams. From the outside, such a cup looks abundant. But fullness is not the same as nourishment. A cup can be heavy with everything except the very things that feed the one holding it.

So, before we take a single step, is your cup full? And — full of what?

We are not looking for tidy answers, just a pause, to take honest stock of where you are today — not where you think you should be; simply where you are. That is what this whole book is quietly working towards: that by the time you turn its last page, your cup is full of what genuinely feeds you. Everything between here and there is simply the walk.

If it helps, finish these lines before you go on:

My cup is full of....

What I wish it held more of....

And keep this page, dear friend. At the very end of our journey, in the closing *My Cup* pages, we will return to it together — and you will see, in your own hand, just how far you have walked.

PART ONE

The Empty Cup

AWARENESS

*Before anything can change,
we must be willing to see — gently — what is.*

The Ache Nobody Talks About

“Pain, Dis-ease and Aches are messages to us from our body of being out of balance.”

It is a Sunday evening. The house is clean, the week is sorted, and out of an old habit, your hand reaches to lay an extra place at the table — for a loved one who now lives in another city. You catch yourself and set the plate back in the cupboard. The phone is quiet. The evening stretches ahead of you, unclaimed, and instead of relief, you feel a small panic you cannot explain. There is nothing wrong, and yet something is missing. There is the craving to fill the silence with food, a drink, a sweet something from the fridge — or to keep busy, to stay a step ahead of the thoughts that remind you of what was. That panic is not weakness, nor is it ingratitude. It is the ache, knocking softly — and in pausing to notice it, you have just been brave enough to hear it.

There is an ache that so many people carry, and so few will ever speak of. It does not always come from tragedy. Often it arrives in the most unremarkable moment — standing in a tidy kitchen, scrolling through a full phone, sitting in a house that has everything it needs — when a voice inside asks, Why do I feel so empty?

Dis-ease is a state of disharmony. For some, it arrives early — at sixteen or twenty-two, scrolling at midnight through the bright

lives of hundreds of online friends, feeling lonelier than you would ever dare to post. Sometimes, it comes in the middle of a busy, capable life in your thirties, forties or even fifties — a good job, people around you, a calendar with no empty squares — you are busy providing for your loved ones — and still, at day's end, something inside feels hollow and unmet. For others, it comes when the children leave. For years, your days had a shape made of other people's needs, and then the house falls still, and you are left holding a question you never had time to ask. Or it comes when a relationship ends, and you find yourself making tea for one, wondering who you are without the *we* your days were built around. Or perhaps you have just retired from an active career and feel a strange flatness where all the busyness used to be. Or you have been a carer for a family member, and now there is a void where your role used to be — and you are left spent, and adrift.

We are taught to be ashamed of this feeling. We look at our blessings and think, *I have no right to be unhappy*. So, we push the ache down, smile, and carry on. But what you resist, persists; a feeling that is hidden does not heal; it only grows heavier in the dark.

So let us do the brave act and face it. Not to wallow — to understand. Because that ache is not your enemy, it is a messenger. The most loving part of you is knocking on the door, asking you to slow down, to soften, to listen — saying: *something in here has been neglected for too long, and it is time to come home*.

The ache rarely announces itself in words. It speaks through the body first — a tiredness that sleep does not touch, a tightness in the chest, a restlessness that follows you from room to room. We are quick to silence these signals and slow to listen, yet the body, faithful and honest, says plainly what the busy mind will not: *something here is out of balance*.

I have watched this recognition cross a hundred faces in my workshops. I ask one simple question — *when did you last do something purely for your own joy?* — and the room goes still. Capable, accomplished people, who can run a household, a business, or a department without blinking, sit with their pens hovering over the page, unable to answer. It is not that they have no answer. It is that no one has asked them in years, least of all themselves. There is no shame in that silence, only an invitation in it. The ache you have been outrunning is, in truth, the beginning of the way home.

Try This

Find ten quiet minutes and write two honest lines. Begin with *when do I feel most hollow — perhaps a Sunday evening, or the hour after the house empties?* Then trace what is usually happening around you just before the feeling arrives.

Finish this sentence without editing yourself:
Lately, I have been longing for...

Well Done -- You have just done something most people avoid for years.

YOU HAVE FACED IT

Carry This With You

The ache is not a fault to be fixed; it is a messenger to be heard — and the moment you pause to listen, you have .already begun to come home

You Are Not Broken — You Are Depleted

“You can’t pour from an empty cup. Remember to keep filling it with self-nourishment.”

It is nine in the evening. All day, you have done everything well — the calls returned, school runs and meals sorted, the problems quietly solved for everyone but yourself. Now you sink onto the sofa and find there is simply nothing left in you. Someone you love asks for one more small favour, and you snap — and then you lie awake, feeling restless and uneasy, certain you are failing. You are not failing, and a short temper is not your nature. You are a cup that has been pouring out all day, with almost nothing poured back in.

That sofa scene has an office twin. Think of the newest hire who slowly became the reliable one — first in, last out, praised in every meeting for coping so well — until the praise itself became the cage, because *who admits to drowning while everyone is applauding the swimming?* For all that applause, their cup is no fuller than yours. It has simply been pouring at a different desk.

Beyoncé spent years as exactly this kind of cup. She has spoken openly about having been a serial people-pleaser — someone who would hold things in and tough them out, tending to everyone around her while, by her own telling, the pressure took its toll on her physical and mental well-being. And she has

spoken, too, about breaking that cycle deliberately: learning to say no, and guarding her time and her boundaries fiercely, because no one else was going to guard them for her. If the most celebrated performer of her generation could run dry from pouring out, then your empty cup is no private failing — it is what happens to anyone who keeps giving without replenishing with self-care.

So, imagine that cup. A beautiful cup that has spent its whole life pouring out. Tea for one person, water for another, comfort here, encouragement there — pour, pour, pour. From the outside, it looks perfectly fine. But inside, invisibly, it has run dry. And a dry cup is not a broken cup. There is nothing to throw away and nothing to repair. It needs only one thing: to be filled again — this time with vitality, love and joy for you.

This is the single most important reframe in this whole book, so let it land. What you are feeling is not a flaw in your character. It is *depletion*. You have given and given — to children, to parents, to partners, to work, to friends, to everyone who needed you — and somewhere along the way you stopped refilling the one cup you cannot give away: your own.

We rarely notice it happening. There is no single dramatic day. It is a slow leak — a hundred small *yeses*, a thousand unseen sacrifices, years of putting yourself last on a list that never ended. Until one day the cup pours, and nothing comes out, and we blame ourselves: *what is wrong with me?*

Depletion is sly precisely because it is gradual. If your cup emptied all at once, you would notice and protest; instead, it goes down a teaspoon at a time until the new normal feels like the only normal. You adjust. You call your exhaustion “*just how life is,*” and you assume everyone feels this hollow and hides it better than you do. Naming it as depletion — not failure, not ingratitude, not a flaw stitched into your character — is the first turn of the key. A flaw would mean something is *wrong* with

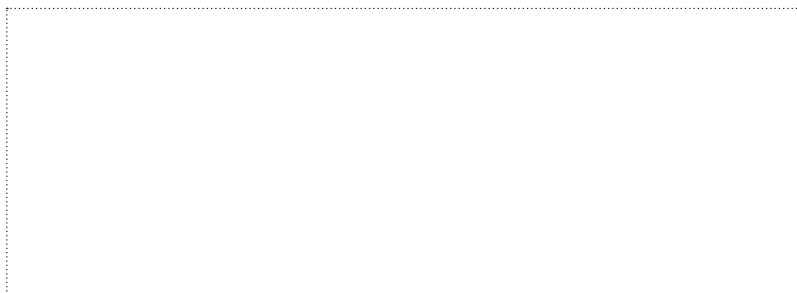
you. Depletion only means something is *missing* in you, and that missing can be restored.

That is the good news at the heart of everything that follows. What is tired can be rested; what has run dry can be made to flow again. The rest of this book is about learning how to fill your own cup effectively — and how to keep it full and flowing abundantly.

Someone once told me — her hands around a mug of tea long gone cold — that she could not remember when she had last felt genuinely rested. Not the heavy collapse after a long day, but real rest. She had stopped expecting it; she had long since decided that even wanting it was indulgent. When I suggested her tiredness was information, not weakness — that an empty cup is no verdict on her worth — she wept. In all her years as the strong one, no one had ever told her she was allowed to be tired.

Try This

Picture your own cup right now. Is it overflowing, half-full, or running dry? Draw it or describe it in a line.



List three things you regularly pour out. Then ask:
What do I pour in?

What I pour out	What I pour in

Say this aloud, even if you don't fully believe it yet:

I AM NOT BROKEN

I AM DEPLETED.

AND WHAT IS EMPTY CAN BE FILLED.

Carry This With You

What may seem like a flaw in your character is, almost always, just the sound an empty cup makes.

This is where your preview ends.

The book continues with Chapter 3, The Things That Cannot Fill You, and walks on through six parts and thirty short chapters, each ending with one small thing to try.

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