

Contradictions On Becoming

guidance, consequences and rebuilding.



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MAR 14, 2026

After long periods of time

while falling in and out of line with such order.

I have learned how to be open to the guidance that finds me.

To hear its voice.

A large part of my path has been through teachers who may not even know they were my teachers, artists, writers, thinkers , that share thoughts and work that find me at the right time and unlock something, or reorient me.

There is a particular feeling that comes when I know I am receiving a specific kind of guidance. Whatever label you want to give it. I have studied so many traditions. My early seeker years in my twenties were defined by Carlos Castaneda, Paulo Coelho, the entheogenic revolution, shamanic practices — then came pagan concepts, feminine mystery schools, other esoteric traditions, and in recent years, Ifá, Santería, Palo (only what is academically known from a outsider standpoint).

I am not initiated into anything.

I have just chosen to learn. From a very young age, this kind of work has always found its way into my life, even though within my Catholic background it was frowned upon. No matter how far I moved off the

path, one doorway would always plant itself before me to bring me back to this road.

In my early years, I just wanted to consume. I had no idea about things like cultural appropriation, and the long legacy of “discovering” other cultures’ ideas and exploiting them.

And I still struggle, at times, to know what is appropriate to step into if it’s not part of my personal lineage.

Now, I will say that opportunities for learning have always found their way to me — and one could argue that’s a natural sign, an invitation by some greater intelligence or force, to step through the door.

Or did it only find me because I was around during a time when there was a counterculture surge in New York of New Agers extracting shamanic and indigenous practices and presenting them to communities of countercultural privilege?

I’m not sure of the answer, or where my ethical stance fully lives. But trust that these are things I am still sitting with.

I will say this: I have had the great privilege of being part of different types of ceremonies over the years — sweat lodge, ayahuasca, shamanic journeying, self-initiations guided by a spiritual mentor and teacher I had for many years.

I’ve always been aware of the veil and the other aspects of reality. Even when I wasn’t clear in my younger years on the exact details or methods —

I KNEW it existed.

And no matter how far I trail into regular life, the door always presents itself again on my path.



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Here's the thing. I came up during the rise of these traditions having a resurgence in online spaces, while simultaneously being introduced to the ethical considerations of the impact white culture has had on abusing access to and influence over these ideas. I can map out the cultural archetypes that formed and morphed through those years, and the split of paths those ideas took —

pre-COVID New Age ideas, to post-COVID, the offshoot of the right on spirituality, the offshoot of the left on spirituality.

My head swirls at all the concepts and ideas that have been exploited and overexposed in the zeitgeist, certain terms that began losing their original meaning by becoming bargaining chips of the culture.

I say this critique knowing that I unknowingly played a role in perpetuating that too. Youthful ignorance, and that feeling in your twenties like you're discovering breakthrough concepts for the first time.

Like some unbridled pioneer.

Even with the best intent, there was no capacity to see the weight of responsibility one was carrying by stepping into those paths.

Note: I firmly believe — whether you are a cynic or not — that when you step into certain ideas and traditions, it has a ripple effect. Ignorance is not a valid excuse. There will always be consequences for the use and misuse of things, whether you believe you are in the wrong or not.

And I say that from living on both sides of it. My intentions have, to the best of my memory, always been pure — but that doesn't mean I've never caused unintended harm.



My solitude over the last few years has been a mix of many things. Processing the grief of betrayals that have absolutely marked my life — defined by before that betrayal and after that betrayal.

It fundamentally changed me in certain ways.

Some spiritual paths would consider it a type of initiation.

The laypeople of the world would call it life, naivety, and the consequences of being a sucker (which I was for many, many years of my life.)

I think all are true at the same time.

There are certain events that had to happen to wake me up. Maybe they didn't need to go down exactly like that, but they were the result of my choices and the choices of those I was connected with.

That's the thing — I firmly believe that when we engage our lives with others, our lessons, paths, and identities begin to interplay. It's not just about the self anymore. You are playing out your own evolution alongside the evolution of those you're connecting with. There are laws, responsibilities, and certain causes and effects that come with that. That is part of the contract of being and becoming.

But back to my solitude. Certain initiation points hit you in life. This last one wasn't my first — in fact, the one that happened in my late twenties makes for an even messier story. But this last one hit me in my late thirties. It altered me forever. I was forced to inhabit all of myself.

I refused, and still refuse, to repeat certain patterns. So I had to get clear on what I was avoiding, what blocks I was carrying, what was keeping me cycling through the same loops — and what was keeping me from becoming the person I wanted to be, while learning the discernment of the lessons I was being guided toward. Based on your background, insert whatever guiding force resonates — god, universal intelligence, spirit guides, ancestors leading me down the path, the possible influence of Orisha during my times of learning and honoring them, within the confines of what's appropriate.

Personally, I believe in all of it. I do not expect other people to share what I believe, and I understand that my connection to that facet of life is challenging for some who carry religious trauma — as I certainly did for many years with Catholicism. It took me a long time to say the word “God” or “Jesus” without a visceral reaction I can only describe as internalized shame and unprocessed grief.

So, during the last initiation

— descent to the underworld, dark night of the soul,

/////attach whatever spiritual term that’s been so overused my head starts to hurt and I lose track of its meaning /////

And that has more to do with the way my brain connects everything. I move through the world rearranging ideas and conversations like I’m trying to solve some puzzle. Most of my frustrations are about my own exhaustion with my brain or process rather than with others — because in some way, shape or form, I’ve been guilty of most things. Even if others took them several degrees further than I ever would, I know where it innately stems from in each of us. It’s a thin line between villain and hero. I understand the hypocrisy in my judgments. I too have the capacity for both.

That is not lost on me.

A big part of this journey has been going back and finding answers to certain things in my life — really taking a hard look at certain patterns and tendencies. I do try to move through the world with integrity, but if you grow up with a poor sense of self, bad boundaries, and lots of learned trauma responses, you are going to be responsible for a significant part of your own suffering too.

There’s been a lot of facing and learning myself, less about the specific traumatic moments and more about the ways in which they altered my

personality, kept me hiding from actually knowing myself, and kept me from understanding what I need.

And then learning how to stay centered in that while building any kind of connection with others. Because you can know yourself all you want, but if you lose that the moment you start to engage or merge with others — well, cue the shit show of trauma stories playing out with new players.

So I step out a lot slower now. I'm very intentional.

I know at this stage in my life I have to be honest and transparent about where I'm at, what I'm learning, and how I'm navigating healthier choices — and how to show up appropriately with others.

Knowing I'm in this heavy phase of change, it's not right to throw myself into a big arena of people. I'll get flooded and shut down immediately. It causes so much confusion for myself and others.

But I can, very intentionally, step out into the world with selected, trusted people — be honest and vulnerable, do that dance of being in the world without losing myself or altering someone else's course by not being clear on what I feel or need.

I think one of the most grounded things we can do is stay very selective about our lives until we have the capacity to know and advocate for ourselves. That only began for me somewhere between 37 and 40. So I'm still at the very beginning stages.



RULES FOR BEING HUMAN

You will receive a body

There are no mistakes,

only lessons

Lessons will be repeated until they are learned

'There' is not better than 'here'

Others are merely mirrors

What you make of your life is entirely up to you

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Recently, I finally got around to reading Allan Kardec's books on Spiritism. And do you know what law impacted me the most?

The Law of Self-Preservation.

That law has been largely absent from my life. I know that in moments of danger or extreme crisis the instinct kicks in — but looking back, I realize it was never one of my fundamental building blocks.

And when I look back on the chaos that caused me —

That's the thing about moving through life through the lens of esoteric ideas and spiritual practices. I could solely blame others.

Or I can see both stories.

The human story — what he said, she said, societal laws and rules.

And the macro view: If I'm responsible for my life and my own evolution, if everything is some lesson for my becoming —

What am I missing? Where am I being tested?

And I'm realizing it all tracked back to the Law of Self-Preservation. A lot of the other laws came naturally to me, but the most fundamental human survival one is what has eluded me my whole life.

And what happens when that's the case? You become repeatedly victimized.

Not to say that other people don't hold responsibility for what they've done.

But if the goal is to find meaning and lessons in this life — to explore the fundamental principles of evolving and becoming, to break the cycle (human survival / evolution), to break the spell (pagan and magical concepts), to heal the ancestral line (ancestral spiritual practices), to become integrated and self-actualized (psychology, Jung)

then I have to identify what's been missing that allowed this to keep playing out. My part in things.

Which has been the basis for the last several years of my life. Therapy, EMDR, Internal Family Systems, testing to understand my particular mental framework. You name it, I've gone down that road.

The one road I didn't travel until recently was speaking up for myself. Saying the quiet part that upsets the room. Starting to learn the Law of Self-Preservation.

Sometimes healing is really messy. Those times sometimes require limited interaction with others — I am trying to rebuild, but I'm aware of my impact on others now, so I can't be reckless. Because here's my thing: I can own my part in anything. I have worked through so much of my shame. And if something is a big enough issue that needs to be addressed, I've started the practice of going directly to those people rather than turning it into some public humiliation ritual or drama.

I'm far from perfect. I am regularly uncovering new areas where there is still more work to do. So messy. So vulnerable. Some days my whole body feels like an open wound, if I'm honest.

And any way I move through the world now is filtered through: Who am I? What do I need? How do I have healthier conversations?

I have no desire to go back to my old way of doing things. If this version of me is too much, too sensitive, too honest — it's fine. We don't all need to be connected. We can be cool, but I know what being in my life asks of others.

I can be in the world with others, even advocate for them, and not need them to understand me anymore.

The beauty of some of the worst moments of my life is that when you get pushed to a breaking point, you either crumble or a part of you transforms. I won't say I'm colder or shut down — I'm actually the softest version of myself I've ever been, when met with the same emotional safety. I just don't break in the face of chaos anymore, and I run less.

There's no bad blood. I'm just done with the old cycle. I'm not even going to say the other person is wrong — our process is just different.



Here's where it gets complicated.

I have studied all sorts of New Thought, spiritual, metaphysical, and esoteric ideas for many years. I have learned to see through many lessons, and I've more than once dealt with the consequences of moving too fast without being grounded or stable.

I know what it is to walk with feet in both worlds — the worldly life, and the unseen.

This is nothing special. I'm not special. Anyone with dedication, will, integrity, time, and patience can develop the same things — we just all have our own blueprints.

There is a comfort you have to develop with moving between different types of sight and levels of cognition.

I can sit and watch a scene unfold and view it through a human reality lens — or an astrological lens, archetypal, Jungian, Hermetic. Pick a tradition. I've gone through periods where I practiced looking at situations from many vantage points.

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Why grounding matters

Without certain safeguards or grounding, you can easily slip into a loss of connection with reality. People these days call it spiritual psychosis.

Most traditions speak of this in some form. It's real, it's hard to navigate, and even though it is an issue of spirit and mind doesn't mean that very human, medical things aren't happening at the same time.

I have my own long personal history with this. That is the trade-off of the seeker — there is no one-size-fits-all, and this life comes with risks.

You can lose your mind.

The other side of that is you learn agency. You've been to the brink and navigated yourself back.

And that comes with a level of self-knowing that no one who has not been there could possibly understand.

On the surface I know I give off certain impressions — I can be shy, easily overwhelmed, very introverted. My energy isn't always steady. I tend to move through periods of optimism and resilience, and then periods of battling my darker side and a very fear-based lens that comes with it.

But what most people underestimate about me is my ability to say the true thing even if that makes people uncomfortable, to bounce back after really extreme events, to always find a way to develop and grow inside a situation.

Those are stripes I've earned. Through certain trials. That can't be faked.

I'm not here to look at anyone else's path and measure how we each handled what was thrown at us. But I know mine. I know how I navigated it. I know whether I stuck to my own personal codes.

There are certain ways society measures people and worth.

Those are not how I measure value in my life.

There are many things about me and my life that others might feel entitled to look down on. It's certainly easier to make quick assumptions

about me than to go through the dance of actually finding out who I am, without projecting.

But I measure my life in the ability to grow and transform — to seek knowledge, to play my role, to create something new in this world, and to impact and guide others where it's appropriate.

While — and here's the hardest one for me — connecting with others. Having community. Dealing with the messy parts of life and learning to navigate it without shutting down.

Learning how to know what I want and need, and most importantly, whether I'm in alignment with and living out my purpose.

How to have the balance of being in connection with others, while knowing my own needs and truths, and holding strong enough boundaries that I'm not absorbed into others and lose my own agency.

That is hard. To come together with someone — or in the case of community, many people — and guide myself through my own truths while showing up as fully as I can for those in my world, while honoring their needs and truth.

I know what this next chapter of my life is about. I will make many mistakes, I'm sure. The goal isn't to be perfect — for me it's just the willingness to take an honest look, notice the patterns, and course correct when I don't live up to the person I'm growing into.

I seek knowledge. I push myself to transform. And to be here on the terms that are in line for my soul.

Because yes — this place is dark and messy and hard — and at the end of the day, I need to find a way to be here, connected, while being appropriately considerate of my effect on others.



If you aren't in your body, someone else is.
The systems of this world have everything
to gain from your disembodiment.

Stay near to yourself.
Listen to your body.

B L A C K L I T U R G I E S

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Friday the 13th

Last night was Friday the 13th. I went to a friend's show and it was great. To say he is immensely talented is a bit of an understatement, and I deeply appreciate anyone on this path — and the very particular creative brain this road requires. As with many creatives with depth and value, he also has to navigate (from what I can gather) moving through a world with certain gifts that society will destroy in you unless you sell off a part of your soul and play their game. To be gifted, to have a particular level of inner integrity and to keep that in this world , wellthat creates an intense mix of many things. The vulnerability that kind of artistry demands. To find a way to take the worst, darkest aspects of life and turn them into something transcendent. To take a moment from ones life and immortalize it into a lesson filled with its own energy and resonance. I believe holds deep value. Honestly, I think if that was more of a currency in this world, we as a whole would be in a totally different place in this life.

But in true life-lesson fashion, a simple night out is never just a simple night out.

I get flooded by old memories and trauma. Given my luck, this was the first time it happened this severely in a very long time. Sometimes it happens and all I can do is sit there and touch my fingers to keep from disappearing into my mind — put on a smile that, if you look close enough, is masking some sort of facial tremor. Catch me at the wrong second and I can barely process what someone is saying, often followed by my inability to say anything without stumbling over my words or going half mute.

Listen, I have thick enough skin at this point, the amount of moments like these especially the last few years has been endless. But, whats my option, suck it up and keep finding a way through it or what....I have no option but to course correct and try again.

I'm flooded with things from the past that feel synonymous with the present moment, except I don't usually realize what's happening until

hours later. In the moment I'm just trying to stay calm, appear normal, socialize — but it's really just a mix of dissociation and PTSD.

I've done a lot of work to be out in the world again. I'm not sure what the full answer is, I don't need to be self sacrificed for public approval anymore. I've wasted too much of my life staying in spaces that were never right for me. And yet moving through this is going to require a level of openness and humility that is disorienting at times. Not to mention that level of understanding that required by those close to me is a lot. Most people are struggling to survive their own situations, navigating people are hard enough, let alone someone that comes with a very specific set of instructions, that even they don't know all the words to the manual yet.



Filmy Friday , a portrait of Ali by Sang Han ⓘ

I'm turning 41 in a few weeks. And it's taken until this year to realize: I can bond and connect with others. Given the right environment — just being myself, and consistently showing up through the awkward shit.

The days of folding to keep a situation comfortable are just not in me anymore. I've wasted years in a prison of my own mind and lack of agency. I have no desire to spend a minute longer there.

To my past

— since memories still follow me into new spaces — I will talk and take responsibility for my role in anything. But I can't keep moving through life like an apology letter, guessing which ghost is behind which face. So I'm saying this out in the world as much as possible now: I'm an open book, and willing to clear up anything. But I can't play guessing games, and neither can my ghosts.

Just because we are no longer together in this world. There's no bad blood, just old hurt I'm working through. And if someone is still out there needing closure or clarity, I am always open to that. Personally, I've worked really hard to get to my own closure in situations but I know sometimes that isn't just up to me. I have done everything I can to close out the path and clean up my side of the road — but I can't read minds.

I know at some point soon I will open a door, and my past won't be staring back from behind a new face. My ghosts will find someone new to haunt. Until then, I move forward in the present, one step at a time.

To my future life

— I'm still shedding a lot of old things and learning new ways of moving through the world. But I am so very far from who I once was. I do know there's a little universe where who I am fits, I think I just have to build it. I think we all just have to get to the point of understanding we aren't for everyone. That is ok.

What it's like to move on from the dark.

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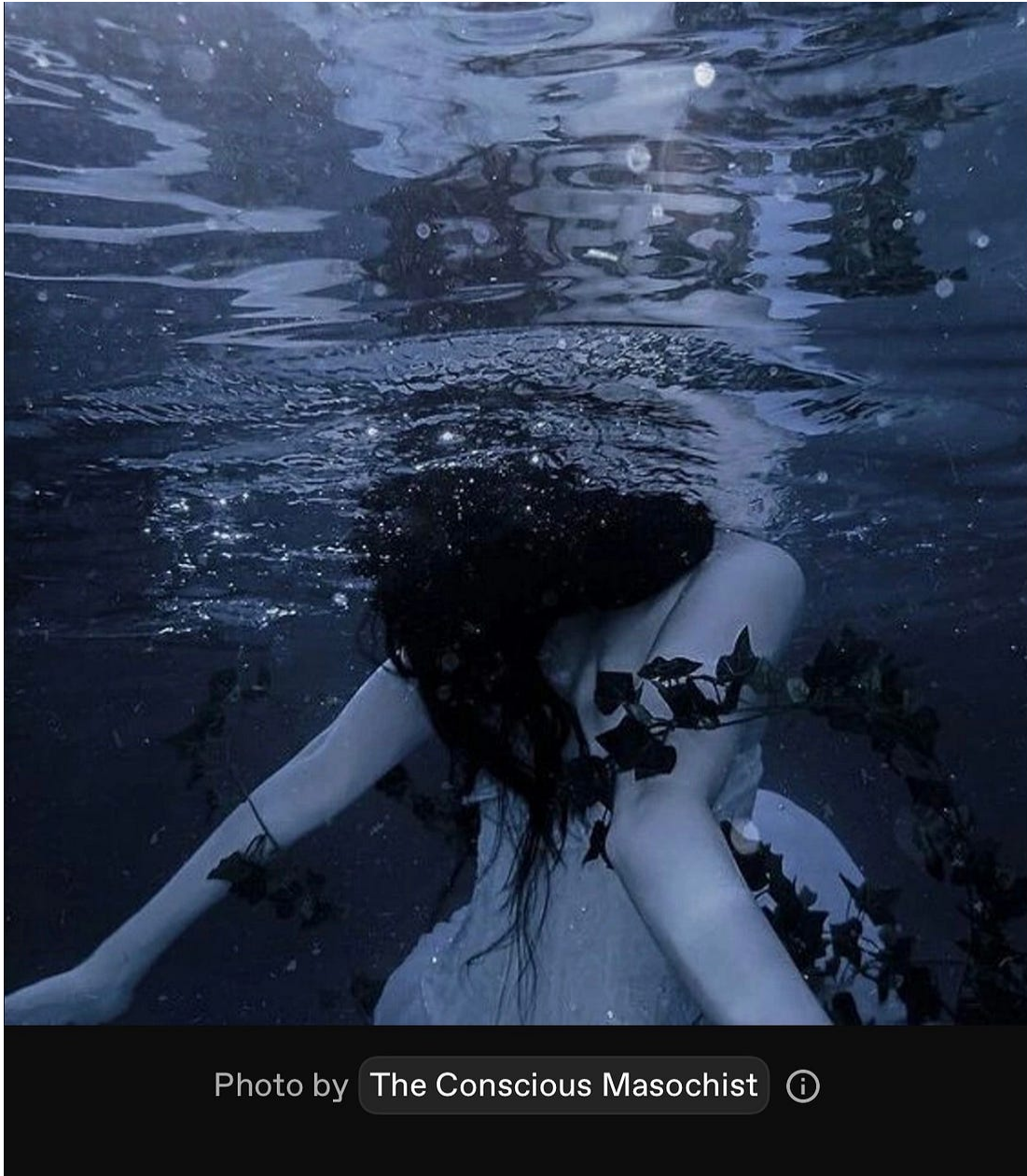


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