The Power of Vital Force

FUEL YOUR ENERGY, PURPOSE, AND PERFORMANCE WITH ANCIENT SECRETS OF BREATH AND MEDITATION

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TURN ON YOUR POWER

CHAPTER 1

Energy Is Life

Long before I began my study of the inner world, a rather extreme moment in my early legal career became a pivotal point in my journey of Self. When I was around 24 years old, I went on a field trip to a coroner's office as a way to better prepare myself to handle murder trials. I had never been to one before and arrived there without any expectations. As I was led down the stairs, I noticed lots of what I presumed were covered bodies on either side of me. I didn't think much of it. Then, I arrived in a room, in the center of which was a table supporting the body of a woman who appeared to be eight or nine months pregnant. The coroner began an autopsy with a traditional Y incision. As he continued cutting, examining and measuring each organ, I was perplexed. To me, this woman looked as if she were sleeping.

At one point, the coroner removed the woman's uterus and cut it open to remove the body of a baby boy. He pulled him out by one of the legs and placed him on a scale, saying out loud, "Seven-point-three pounds." Now my brain was really shortcircuiting. Why is he grabbing the baby like that? What is going on with this woman?

The cause of death was a ricocheted bullet that hit her heart and then traveled to the baby's heart. Part of me knew she was dead, as was the baby, but the death wasn't computing in my brain. She looked just like any other pregnant woman. I felt somehow disconnected from the reality that she was not alive. At this point my mind began rolling into a stream of questions around the difference between life and death—not in some eso-teric way, but on a practical level, about what it really means to be alive, to *have life*. All of this woman's organs and the baby's organs were healthy, but she was not living. She just looked to me as if she were sleeping, but clearly any level of movement, consciousness, or vitality was absent. I couldn't help but ask myself, *What is it that makes us alive? What is the difference between being alive and just existing?*

And I couldn't help but begin to ask the same question about myself. *What am I doing with my life? Am I walking around fully alive, or am I somehow asleep?* I thought about how the woman had lived her life before it was gone. I wondered, *Did she really live her life, or did she just go through the motions of it? To what degree was she really alive while she had her life? How alive am I as I walk through my own life?*

Before we go on, I would like you to ask yourself the same question I asked myself: *At this moment, how alive do I feel?* Do you spring out of bed full of life and excitement to see your partner next to you, challenged by the day ahead and grateful to be on this planet orbiting in space, or do you drag yourself out of bed already stressed about the day ahead? The way you answer these questions is a direct measure of the quality of not only your external life but the life within you.

Fuel for Life

The experience at the coroner's office rather unexpectedly triggered a deep line of inquiry about what it really meant for me to be alive. I had it "all" in my life, but somehow I felt there was something lacking. It didn't occur to me at the time, but the quality of our inner life, what's going on in our minds, is directly related to the level of energy that we have. I hadn't realized it, that this energy that keeps us alive and vibrant—what the ancient traditions call "life energy," or vital force—is a fundamental force that we can all easily tap into. It's a simple equation: the more energy you have, the more *alive* you are. Energy is life, and life is energy! The more energy you have, the more positive and expansive your state of mind is and the more you thrive.

I'll fill you in on a big secret: *everything is energy*. We know this from modern physics, and long before that, we knew it from the wisdom of the ancients. Human beings—and all living things, in fact—are made up of physical units of electromagnetic energy. Your cell membranes are designed to conduct electricity. Your heart and brain are electrical systems, and doctors can measure their wave activity using EKG and EEG machines. On the most macro scale, it's electromagnetic energy that determines the movements of the stars and planets. On the most microscopic scale, the tiniest particles, atoms, are made up of protons and electrons that have a positive or negative energetic charge.

If you stop for a moment to think about it, you'll see that energy provides the fuel for everything in life, from plants and animals to iPhones to light bulbs to the human body. It's obvious that everything we do requires energy, from blinking our eyes to walking, talking, thinking, digesting food, or having a creative breakthrough. We require energy to function on every level of our being: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual. The more optimally you want each level to function, the more vital fuel is required. But for the most part, we've never stopped to look at the connection between this energy of life and the quality of our lives. It may sound obvious, but no one has ever taught us, not at home or in school, how to maximize our performance and quality of life by harnessing it.

Energy is the fuel that runs not only our bodies but also our minds and emotions. We vibrate with it. We project it into our words, actions, thoughts, looks, and feelings. This energy of life, this vital force, is *aliveness* itself. To the degree you are tapped into it and accessing it, to that degree you thrive *thrive* meaning you are growing, flourishing, blossoming, and evolving. To the degree that you are depleted of it, to that degree you struggle, become weakened and ineffective, and get stuck.

Let's face it: when you're tired and depleted, when you don't have the energy to get out of bed or you feel overwhelmed by the demands of your day, it really doesn't matter what's going on in your life—the glass is going to look half-empty. You will not feel fully alive and vibrant. Your body, your brain, and your mind are not going to be functioning anywhere close to 100 percent.

We do so much to improve ourselves and our lives. We go to school, get the right job, work hard, read self-help books, attend workshops and seminars, study spiritual practices, go to therapy, experiment with diet and exercise fads, and endlessly tinker with our minds and bodies under the guise of "biohacking." But we never think to tap into the very thing that is the source of our bodies, our minds, and life itself.

The problem we often encounter in our self-improvement efforts is the fact that to make changes in any aspect of our lives requires a certain amount of energy to begin with. The bigger the change you want, the more energy you will need! To change anything—from your diet to your workout habits to your attitude and mind-set to your career-requires resilience, stamina, commitment, initiative, and endurance. All these words are simply descriptions of a state we can characterize as being fully charged with energy. If we don't have energy, we don't have any of these qualities. Instead, when we're low on energy, we use words like stuck, unmotivated, unproductive, ineffective, hesitant, burned out, and overwhelmed. We don't have the energy to get past our old ways of thinking and doing, so the brain keeps defaulting to what's easy and comfortable. What I'm starting to get at here is the idea that the positive qualities and positive states of mind that have served you in your life are connected with a state of *high vital force*, whereas the negative qualities that have caused you to struggle are connected with a state of low vital force.

Our body-mind complex is basically a rechargeable battery. We've taken this for granted, and we haven't learned to use it to improve our lives. We recharge ourselves in the obvious ways—through food, sleep, and exercise, and artificially through the use of stimulants—but we've never learned how to increase our access to the unlimited source of energy within that is keeping us alive in every moment. Let's take a closer look at the critical role that this force of vitality plays on every level of who we are.

Physical Battery

We'll start with the obvious fact that your body runs on energy. You know that energy is a mechanical requirement for the movement of your body. The body is not only chemical but electrical, and energy is what fuels any physical activity, from sitting to walking to blinking to breathing to metabolizing food to building muscle and growing physically. It's what enables your body to engage in all of its internal and external functions.

Most of us have been led to believe that the energy that fuels our system comes from three sources: food, sleep, and exercise. When you eat, it gives you not only calories and nutrients but electrical energy. It provides fuel for your mitochondria, the "brains" of your cells. When you sleep, your body temporarily goes into "rest" mode and replenishes its energy reserves. And when you exercise, the physical activity triggers a release of chemicals that brings a jolt of energy. But notice that there's a limit to how much you can energize yourself with food, sleep, and exercise alone. Eat too much, or eat the wrong foods, and you'll feel more tired and depleted. Sleep too many hours, and you'll be groggy and dull. Exercise too aggressively, and you'll barely have the energy to move. And, of course, if you don't have time to sleep or go to the gym or eat properly, then that much less energy is available to your body to do all it has to do.

In fact, food, sleep, and exercise are not the only way to recharge the system. They're not even the most efficient way. You drink your green juice, you go to the gym and sleep eight

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hours a night, and yet you still feel tired and run down, or maybe just not functioning at your highest capacity. That's because you're not generating enough energy to replenish the whole system, which also includes your *mind*.

Mental Battery

It's not just the body that requires energy to function optimally. Your mind also requires energy to fuel its constant activity. The number of activities the mind performs on a daily basis is even greater than the body. To have any thought requires energy. To perceive, to be alert, to be mindful, to formulate ideas, to make decisions or judgments, to strategize or analyze, to recall information—it's all electrical activity that requires an incredible amount of fuel. We've all experienced the way our cognitive functions fail us when we're tired. When our vital energy is low or not available, our minds stop working properly.

A busy mind is the biggest vital energy hog of all. It's a monster machine that burns up fuel like there's no tomorrow.

When you say that you're feeling tired and run down, ask yourself what *part* of you is tired. Ninety-nine percent of the time, it's the mind, not the body, that's exhausted. We work the body-mind system during the day, and we refuel the body with food, sleep, and exercise, but it's not enough to recharge the mind. We almost never get a break from mental activity. Even when we're sleeping, the mind is still going, replaying the worries and anxieties of the day.

A busy mind is the biggest vital energy hog of all. We'll be exploring in depth the many ways that a runaway thinking mind drains our energy in Part II. For now, it's enough to know that this computer that we call "mind" is constantly running, and just like any other computer, it runs on battery power. James Kozloski, a well-known computer neuroscientist, states, "The brain consumes a great amount of energy doing nothing." If that's true of every brain to begin with, imagine how much more energy is consumed by a brain that's spinning in doubts, judgments, frustrations, and endless rumination. Your brain consumes more fuel than every other part of your mind-body complex combined! It is engaged at every moment in thinking, thinking, thinking, planning, planning, planning, worrying, worrying, worrying. It doesn't shut up. You can't get it to stop thinking, no matter what you do. The mind is running even when there's no reason for it to be. It's a monster machine that burns up fuel like there's no tomorrow, and it needs to be plugged into a power source on a daily, or at least regular, basis. The more drained you feel in life, the more urgently you need to address what's going on inside your own head. This is the difference between being alive and walking around as if you are asleep in life.

How does your mind operate when you're exhausted? One of the first things that happens is that your perception becomes negative. Then your thoughts become negative. Over time, your beliefs about yourself and others become negative. Your mind goes into stress mode. You become less fluid and adaptable, less willing, more cranky, and often more adamant, fixed, and rigid in your beliefs. The lower your mental energy, the less room you have for the unexpected and the more you want things to be comfortably predictable. You need things to go "your way." You react rather than respond to situations. Your willingness to shift gears and collaborate screeches to a halt.

To challenge your own assumptions and beliefs, to look at things from a new perspective, to *respond* rather than *react* to a situation, requires mental space, some empty room in the mind. Mental space is just another way of saying "available energy." If you are fully charged, you're more patient, willing, agile, cooperative, and available to change your mind and approach as the situation requires. Your mind is more "reasonable." If you're not fully charged, your mind gets stuck in old ways of doing things. That's when you end up in therapy or coaching, spending huge amounts of time, money, and energy trying to change your own stubborn point of view.

A depleted mind has little room to expand and let something new come in. It's like when your laptop's hard drive is full and it becomes slow, unpredictable, and prone to crashes. You move further and further away from operating in a state of presentmoment awareness, in a state of "flow"—the most powerful state of mind that there is. Presence, awareness, mindfulness, flow: these qualities are all a result of high vital force on a mental level. Like computers, when our batteries are charged, we notice that there is less chatter in the mind, without us "trying" to be mindful or present. Naturally and effortlessly, we turn off the thinking mind and turn on the power of our deeper awareness, intuition, insight, and clarity.

If you want your mind to not only get you through the day but reach a state of peak performance, eating healthy, exercising, and sleeping well may not be enough. If you want to be totally focused, alert, sharp, and efficient, you will need a steady, stable fuel supply to the brain. In addition, you'll need to determine what it is that's consuming all your mental battery power. You need to see what programs are running and what files are open in the background of your mind that you don't need at the moment. Then you need to learn how to shut down the unnecessary files that are using up your energy.

The thing to remember is this: it is your mind more than anything else that determines the quality of your life, and it is your energy more than anything else that determines the state of your mind. This connection between mind, energy, and quality of life is one of the most important secrets of the Vedic tradition, and one of the most poorly understood. It's arguably the single most important key to thriving in life. That's why we're going to be talking about the mind so much in this book. If you want to increase your energy or enhance your power and positivity, the first place to look is at your own mind.

Emotional Battery

On any given day, in any given situation, you are experiencing a wide range of emotions, both positive and negative. You may not have stopped to think about it, but to feel these emotions also requires a lot of energy. To have, express, or experience any emotion (yes, even positive!) uses up battery power. Guess what? Negative emotions—as you've probably felt on many occasions—require and use up a *huge* amount of vital power. The more intense the emotion, the more energy it takes to move through it and step out of it. That's why you feel so tired, unmotivated, and stuck when you're depressed, sad, or anxious. All of your energy is going toward processing and "dealing" with that emotion.

But your emotions don't just use up energy. They can also generate and increase energy. Positive emotions give us a surge of vitality in the form of enthusiasm, joy, gratitude, love, contentment, and excitement. However, to experience the positive emotion, we need some energy to begin with. It's hard to feel happy, grateful, or excited when you're exhausted, isn't it? To laugh and live and love requires energy. If we're running low on energy, the most beautiful thing goes unnoticed or the most amazing gift can't be appreciated. Without sufficient energy, you are existing rather than really being alive—*alive* meaning able to experience the full range of human capacity, feeling, and emotion. Love, joy, happiness, gratitude, and enjoying and being present in whatever you're doing in life all require energy. When you have enough energy to be able to experience these emotions, you also get to enjoy the increase of energy that these emotions bring. It's a virtuous circle.

We need a fully charged battery to move through all of life's emotions without getting stuck in them. We'll learn in Part II how emotions wreak havoc on our energy levels and how low energy gets us more stuck in those emotions that don't serve us, sometimes for years. The more we get trapped in our negative emotions, the bigger the energy leakage and the greater the strain on the entire system.

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Spiritual Battery

We also require energy to operate on a spiritual level. I'm not talking about religion; I'm talking about feeling connected to the whole, having a sense of fulfillment, meaning, and purpose in your life. I'm talking about not just living on autopilot. For many of us, the best moments of our lives are when we feel really connected to life and the people around us. This sense of connection and interconnection is what I'm calling "spirituality."

When we're depleted of energy, we notice that even the people we love the most and the things that matter to us the most seem to be a burden. We get caught up in the demands and busyness of life, we put all of our focus on the physical and material, and we quickly lose the sense of valuing what really matters. It takes energy to find meaning or purpose in anything we do. When we *do* experience a moment of connection and meaning, it brings a huge surge of energy, which makes us even more fulfilled and connected. It's another virtuous circle!

Creative and Sexual Battery

Your creative energy, which includes your sexual energy and also goes beyond it, is your passion in life. In order to create and innovate, you need big energy. When energy is low, you're less inspired and passionate. You're more "in the box." You need to have more than a bare minimum of energy in your system in order to be able to appreciate music, art, literature, theater, and film, let alone create it. It doesn't matter how creative or talented you are; if your battery gets down to 10 or 20 percent, the well of inspiration is going to run dry. Whether your creative activity is sex, art, music, tech innovating, or creative thinking, low energy means that originality, excitement, and moments of breakthrough are low.

Heck, you even need a certain amount of energy just to recognize and express your sexuality or to engage in sex. If you're tired, no matter how much you want sex or how attracted you are to the person in front of you, you're going to find yourself saying, "Not tonight, honey."

As you are reading this, there's a good chance that your energy system is running close to empty and that it's impacting everything else in your life.

As you can see, your body-mind complex, on every level, is essentially a rechargeable battery. The happiest, most successful people have the most abundant energy for life—and the most abundant energy *of* life. They know how to conserve and recharge their batteries. Nikola Tesla said that everything is energy, frequency, and vibration—tap into this force of life, and you can change everything. It's not just how cars and computers operate; it's how *you* operate. You've never been taught how to recharge your batteries, aside from the very basics of food and sleep. That's all that most of us know, but as we'll learn, there are much easier and more powerful ways.

Running on Empty

As you are reading this, there's a good chance that your energy system is running close to empty and that it's impacting everything else in your life. When you are exhausted, tired, stressed out, impatient, dull, unmotivated, distracted, or burned out, your brain is sending you a clear message: YOU ARE OUT OF FUEL! Your battery is dangerously low.

The one thing I've observed over the past 30 years in my work is that most people spend the majority of their lives living in a state of personal energy crisis. They are stuck in permanent survival mode with barely enough fuel to make it through the day. That's like hoping your smartphone will last for another eight hours when your battery is at 10 percent and there's no charger in sight. You can get by this way for a short period of time, but you will eventually burn out. We add caffeine, stimulants, and adrenaline on top of a depleted system to keep us going for a little bit longer. It might even feel like real energy, but in the long run, it's only depleting your inner energy reserves even more. Before long, your system will crash.

Your energy levels have a profound effect on the way you think, the way you feel, and the way you act, which, in turn, affects the way you move through the world and experience your life. Everything you do is infused with energy, and the state of your life will reflect the state of your energy. If you're alive and vibrant, then your life, your relationships, your business will be dynamic, radiant, and exciting. But if you're dull and drained, life becomes lukewarm. If I were to state the most precious lesson I have learned through the years, it's that where you are not thriving in life, there is always a lack of energy . . . always.

There was a time in your life when you had more energy than you knew what to do with. If you observe any child, you'll remember how much energy and vitality you had when *you* were young. Take a look at a child's face: it's full of mojo. You can see it in children's eyes, in their smiles, and hear it in their infectious laughter. You can feel it in the bounce of their movements. You know from experience that the amount of vital energy a child has—the amount of energy YOU once had—is far greater than any adult in the room. One child has enough power to wipe out all the adults in the family. You can hear the power of this innate energy in the simple, effortless gurgle of a baby that fills an entire room. The scream of a little kid is powerful enough to bring the house down! Just imagine what you could do in your life with this kind of raw power.

Toddlers barely eat more than mashed carrots and milk, and they certainly don't walk 10,000 steps a day. They don't have drugs, protein shakes, Red Bull, or Starbucks—just plenty of rest and an abundance of this power called "source energy," or vital force. Once upon a time, we all had this power. You don't need a scientist to prove this to you. You know what I'm talking about because you have personally experienced it. You were born with all the qualities that you require to be super successful in every aspect of your life. You entered this world as a bundle of joy, enthusiasm, confidence, resilience, agility, positivity, love, acceptance, power, energy, alertness, awareness, determination, and much more. You were made up more of vitality and energy than body mass. It's a great irony that we've built multibillion-dollar industries around self-help, spirituality, therapy, and leadership development, filled with tools, books, workshops, and programs on how to cultivate the very qualities that we were born with. All of this can be boiled down to one simple key: vital force. Learn to tap into the innate power of life within you and you are home free.

A child's mind shows us what it looks like to be in a state of high vital energy on a mental level. Think back again to the way you were as a child. Any child in their natural state is full of energy. (Children who are forced to endure extreme experiences of trauma or neglect, of course, often end up with a very different set of conditions that restrict this natural vitality very early on in life. What we're talking about here is the natural state of being that every child, without exception, comes into the world with.) When you were young and full of energy, you had so much more mental agility and resilience. You could screw up horribly and then move on in a matter of moments. When you were young, your mind was filled not with fears and regrets but with a sense of freedom, expansiveness, and positivity that was most likely exponentially greater than what you experience today as an adult. You weren't stewing over yesterday or worrying about tomorrow; you were in the present moment. Your mind was unstuck, free. Even when you felt sad or angry, you could let go of those upset feelings in a matter of moments. You were full of love and positivity, bursting with creativity and enthusiasm. You didn't doubt yourself, and you weren't afraid of failing or getting rejected. Your natural state was confidence, joy, and wonder. This state of mind-the child's mind, or what we could also call a "beginner's mind"is a direct by-product of high vital force. The opposite is also

true: a vibrant, fully charged system is the natural result of a mind that's in the present moment.

It's a great irony that we've built multibilliondollar industries around self-help, spirituality, therapy, and leadership development, filled with tools, books, workshops, and programs on how to cultivate the very qualities that we were born with.

The qualities of a child's mind, a powered-up mind that is, life, energy, positivity, confidence, joy, awareness, resilience—all become synonymous with what I'm calling "energized." Tired, depressed, pissed off, doubting, insecure, fearful, and ineffective are just different ways of saying "depleted of energy." The intensity of the emotion indicates the level of battery charge or depletion. Clinical depression is a fully drained battery, while being head over heels in love is a fully charged battery. In between is *I'm okay. Things are fine. Same old, same old.* There's a clear link between your energy level and your ability to attract and create the life you want for yourself. Life's challenges are solved when the mind is adaptive and resilient, which is directly related to the level of energy you have. You are resilient when there's energy. When there's no energy, you get stuck.

So what happened to this innate power of yours? Where did it go? That's a bit of a misleading question, because the truth is that you are surrounded by it at all times; you're swimming in an ocean of the innate energy of life. It was never taken away from you. It's just been depleted over time, for reasons that we will discuss in detail, but that doesn't mean you can't refuel to full capacity again. Vital energy is a renewable resource—you just have to learn how to connect to it, replenish it, and keep from depleting it again.

If the science is important to you, don't worry. We'll begin to explore this in the coming chapters. But for now, I want you to begin by taking the time to actively notice what happens to your health, your ability to be focused and present, your performance at work, and the quality of your relationships when you're in a state of high versus low energy. This is important. Your own experience will act as a trusted guide as you explore deeper levels of your own innate life force.

Tapping the Source

To really supercharge our mind-body complex and therefore our lives, we need to tap into a limitless source of energy, one that's bigger than supplements and exercise regimes. We are floating at every moment in a field of this power called "life force," vital force, *Shakti*—what we might think of as "source energy." It's a field, a force of positivity itself. We just don't know how to tap into it, and we haven't really discovered what drains it. If we could figure that out, then whatever we're doing, we could do it better, stronger, and faster. We would not only do what we have to do but also everything that we *want* to do.

This innate source of energy, the positivity that we are born with, is within us and all around us. There are simple ways to tap into it. This is where the ancient Vedic tradition of India and its thousands of years of wisdom and practice will act as our guide. The West gave the world electricity, the light bulb, the energy to power the activities of our external world. The East taught us how to light up our own inner world, giving us tools to ignite and sustain the electricity within.

The ancient Vedic tradition is what I like to call the original positive psychology. It offers thousands of powerful tools to harness our life energy to manage our minds, emotions, and spirit.

In this book, we'll examine three powerful methodologies to directly tap into the power of source energy, intelligence, and positivity.

- 1. Breath and its connection to our thoughts and emotions—a way to effortlessly reduce stress and to be dynamic in life with a mind that is calm, present, and joyful.
- 2. "Effortless meditation" and its impact on letting go of trauma and old thought patterns—to help us live from a state of positivity, clarity, and high energy.
- 3. Mind-set shifts—to become aware of how we're operating and begin to rewire our minds.

We will explore how these three methodologies not only give us energy but also become the platform from which we co-create the vision, dreams, and life we want.

The West gave the world electricity, the light bulb, the energy to power the activities of our external world. The East taught us how to light up our own inner world.

Please keep in mind that the work we're doing here is not about self-improvement, it's about self-realization. People often make the mistake of classifying my work as a kind of self-help, which it is not. The whole concept of self-help suggests that there's something to fix, that something is wrong with the way we are. What I believe—and what the Vedic tradition teaches—is that we weren't born flawed. We were born complete: powerful, connected, joyful, vibrant, and creative. Our positivity is our essence, and that never leaves us. As we made the journey into and through adulthood, life's challenges, losses, and setbacks drained our energy and drew a veil over the perfection of who we really are. The more exhausted we get, the further we move away from our center and the power we were born with. But that veil is just a cover. It can be removed. I'd like you to just consider the idea that you were born with the very qualities you want in life. This is the great cosmic joke: We spend a lifetime of effort and resources in order to fix and improve ourselves, only to discover we've had what we wanted all along. What we don't realize is that this source energy is the way to reboot our entire system. When we do, then we naturally, easily, and effortlessly regain those qualities that we had as children—those qualities that we so need to navigate through the chaos and the challenges of life.

The goal of every self-help and spiritual technique is to get you back to that place, back to those qualities. I believe that the best answer lies in enhancing the vital energy that you were born with. That's all you need to do! Then the energy naturally goes where it's needed, and it manifests in the things that you want to cultivate in yourself and create in your life. It's a very natural and organic process—which is why you will hear me so often use the word *effortless*. In this book, you'll learn to connect and tap into that energy, and also how to harness it so that you release what holds you back. Even holding things back takes energy! The only difference is that you're using the energy against yourself instead of channeling it constructively. It takes a lot of energy to hesitate, to hold yourself back, to resist and avoid. This same energy could be used to propel you forward.

To dream big, you need big energy. To live big, you need big energy. This is the effortless road to transforming any aspect of your life. It's the easier way. Plug into source power, connect to it, and co-create the life you want and deserve.