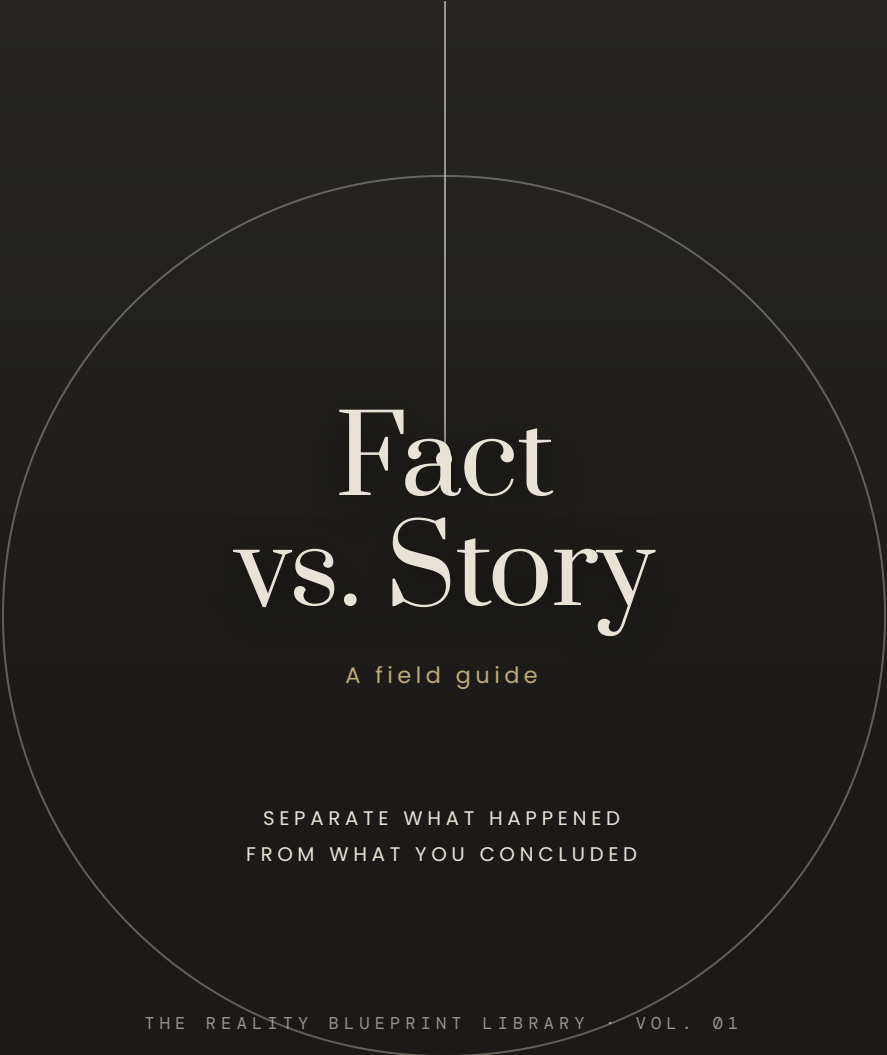


H A D A S S A H



Fact vs. Story

A field guide

SEPARATE WHAT HAPPENED
FROM WHAT YOU CONCLUDED

THE REALITY BLUEPRINT LIBRARY • VOL. 01

H A D A S S A H

Fact vs. Story

A field guide to separating what happened from
what you concluded about it.

THE REALITY BLUEPRINT LIBRARY · VOL. 01

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Fact vs. Story is the first volume of The Reality Blueprint Library, a set of three free guides by Hadassah. It grows out of two recorded lessons, “Fact vs. Story” and “The Automatic Translator,” and turns them into a practical field guide with exercises, worked examples, a seven-day log and worksheets.

The people in the examples are imagined. They were written to show how the method works, and they are not based on any real client. Any resemblance to a particular person is a coincidence.

IMPORTANT

This guide is educational. It is not therapy, counseling, or medical or psychological treatment, and it does not diagnose or treat any condition. It cannot promise any specific result.

If you are dealing with grief, trauma, depression, abuse, an eating disorder or thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out to a qualified professional. If you are in danger or in crisis, contact your local emergency number or a crisis line right away. The section “When this is not the right tool,” near the end of the book, says more.

Research mentioned in these pages is described briefly and in plain language. The Further reading list points to the original sources.

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How to use this guide

A field guide for an ordinary week: the message left unanswered, the old memory that comes back at night.

Each chapter ends with an exercise and a short summary called What to keep. You'll need a notebook, a pen and twenty quiet minutes.

THE 9 CYCLE METHOD

01 Experience → 02 Interpretation → 03 Belief → 04 Attention →
05 Decision → 06 Action → 07 Evidence → 08 Identity → 09
Reality, and reality feeds the next experience.

Everything I teach is built on this loop. Something happens, you give it a meaning, and over time the meaning becomes the life you keep living. This volume works on the first two stations, where the loop begins: what happened, and what you made it mean.

HOW TO READ IT

- **Go in order, and write the exercises down.** Writing slows you down enough to see.
- **Don't fix anything yet.** For most of this book you will only look. Looking is the work.
- **Expect some discomfort, and be gentle with yourself.** If a memory feels too heavy, stop and read "When this is not the right tool" at the back.

After the seven chapters comes The practice: a seven-day log, blank worksheets, and a careful way to revisit three old scenes.

CHAPTER

01

The answer you already have

"Most of what you call what happened is not what happened. It's what you concluded about what happened."

INSIDE · THE READY ANSWER · WHY IT FEELS CERTAIN · TWO
PLACES IN THE MIND · WHAT WE ARE NOT DOING

I want to start with a question, and I want you to answer it from the gut. Don't think it through. Don't make it sound good. Just answer.

“What happened in your past that explains who you are today?”

You probably have an answer ready. One sentence, maybe two. It came quickly, and it came with a feeling of certainty, the way your own phone number does.

Maybe it sounded like one of these:

- “My parents fought all the time, so I learned to keep the peace.”
- “I was the chubby kid, and kids were cruel.”
- “My dad was never proud of me.”
- “We never had money.”
- “I had to grow up fast.”
- “Nobody ever really chose me.”

Whatever yours is, keep it close. We'll use it all through this book.

Why it feels so certain

Notice how fast the answer arrived. You didn't search for it or weigh options. It was simply there, like a file you open every day.

That speed is the first clue. A sentence becomes instant when it has been used many times. You've told it to friends, to partners, and many more times to yourself: in the shower, at two in the morning, on the drive home after a bad day. Each time, it got a little smoother.

It also feels certain because it explains things: why you are the way you are in love, or with money, or with your body. And as far as you can tell, life keeps confirming it. Every time something happens that fits, the sentence gets a little heavier.

None of that makes it false. But none of it makes it a fact, either. Speed, usefulness and repetition are simply what a well-practiced conclusion feels like from the inside.

Two different places

Here is the idea this whole book rests on. It can feel uncomfortable at first. Afterward, for most people, it's a relief.

Most of what you call "what happened" is not what happened. It's what you concluded about what happened.

Those two things live in very different places in your mind. One is a record: a room, a voice, a door closing, a grade on a report card. The other is a verdict: what the room meant, why the door closed, what the grade says about you.

Think of an old photograph with a caption written underneath in pen. The photograph shows a girl standing alone at the edge of a playground. The caption says: *Nobody wanted to play with me. I was always on the outside.*

The photograph is what happened. The caption is what you concluded. And if you've read that caption enough times, you stop seeing the photograph at all. You look at the picture and read the caption, and they feel like the same thing.

They aren't. The photograph can't tell you why she was alone that day. It can't tell you whether it happened once or every day for a year. It can't tell you what the other children were thinking, or whether

one of them was also standing alone, just out of frame. The caption answers all of those questions, confidently, in one line.

A sentence, opened

Say your ready answer is this one.

“I’ve always been too much.”

Ask what actually happened, and something like this comes out. In second grade, a teacher wrote “talks too much in class” on a report card. Your mother sometimes sighed and left the room when you cried. At nineteen, a boyfriend said, in the middle of a fight, “You’re so intense.”

Those three moments are real. Some of them may still sting. But notice what the sentence did with them. It pressed three moments, years apart, into one permanent fact about you. It added *always*. It turned a few people’s reactions on a few bad days into a measurement of who you are.

And it quietly carries an instruction: *so be less*.

That instruction is the part that matters most, because you may still be following it. You may be shrinking in meetings, softening every text, apologizing before you ask for anything. Not because of the teacher, or your mother, or the boyfriend. Because of the conclusion.

Why this matters if your life keeps repeating

Your life keeps repeating itself for a reason. And it might not be the reason you think.

Facts stay where they happened. The teacher's comment lives in second grade. The fight lives in one apartment, on one night. But a conclusion travels. It comes with you into the next job, the next relationship, the next room full of new people. It decides what you expect, and what you expect shapes what you notice and what you do.

That is how a new situation can end up feeling exactly like an old one. Sometimes you aren't living the same thing again. You're meeting something new with the same old conclusion.

What we are not doing

Before we go further, two things this work is not.

It isn't about pretending things didn't happen, or that they didn't hurt. If something painful happened, it happened. Every painful fact will stay exactly where it is. I'm not going to shrink the facts, and I'm not going to shrink the pain.

And it isn't about blame. Not blaming you, and not hunting for someone else to blame instead. We are only going to look more carefully at the line between the photograph and the caption. That line is where change becomes possible.

If some discomfort shows up as you read, that's normal. You may be touching a sentence that has held up a lot for a long time. Go slowly.

Your ready answer

1. Write your answer to the question “What happened in your past that explains who you are today?” Use the exact words that came first.
2. Underline every word that a stranger standing in the room could not have seen or heard.
3. Underneath, note how fast the answer came, and how old you feel when you say it.
4. Leave it alone. Don’t rewrite it. We’ll come back to it.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **You already have an answer.** A ready sentence about your past, fast and certain.
- **Fast is not the same as true.** Speed, usefulness and repetition are how a practiced conclusion feels from the inside.
- **Two places.** What happened is a record. What you concluded is a verdict. They feel identical until you separate them.
- **Facts stay, conclusions travel.** The conclusion is what follows you into new situations and makes them feel old.

CHAPTER

02

The camera test

"The camera cannot record never. It records occasions."

INSIDE · WHAT A CAMERA RECORDS · A MOTHER WHO NEVER CAME ·
THE FIVE TELLS OF A STORY · QUICK EXAMPLES

Picture a security camera mounted in the corner of a room. It doesn't sleep. It doesn't take sides. It doesn't love anyone or hold a grudge. It simply records.

What would it capture? Images. Sounds. Who walked in, and who walked out. What was said, word for word. How loud. How long it lasted. Who left first.

And what would it miss? It can't record intention. It can't record what someone felt inside. It can't record why anything happened. And it can't record what any of it meant.

That gives us a ruler. Everything in this book is measured with it.

THE RULER

A fact is whatever a camera would have recorded. **A story** is everything you add on top: the reason, the intention, the meaning, the conclusion about you, about other people, about the world.

The psychologist Albert Ellis described something similar with three letters. **A** is the activating event. **B** is the belief you hold about it. **C** is the consequence: what you feel and what you do. His point was that C comes mostly from B, not straight from A. In our language, the camera records A. The story is B.

A mother who never came

A woman says: "My mother never came to my school performances."

It sounds like a fact. It's simply how she remembers her childhood. So let's run it through the camera test.

What did the camera record? On certain dates, there was an empty chair in the audience. A girl on a stage, looking out at the seats. A performance that ended, and a ride home with someone else.

That is a fact, and a painful one. I want to say that clearly before going on, because nothing in this chapter is meant to make it smaller. A child looking for her mother in an audience and not finding her: that is a real loss, and the camera records it.

Now look at the word *never*. The camera can't record never. It records occasions. Maybe there were eleven performances and her mother missed nine. Maybe she came to one in third grade and the memory didn't survive, because it didn't fit. Maybe she really did miss every single one. Never is a summary, and summaries are made by the mind, not by the camera.

Then there's the part she doesn't always say out loud, but that sits right under the sentence: *because I wasn't important to her*. That isn't a fact. It's an interpretation. The camera can't record the reason.

Her mother might have been working two jobs. She might have been ashamed of something: her clothes, her English, her own short schooling. She might have been depressed. Or she might simply not have made her child a priority. The camera doesn't know. And very often, neither do you.

What you do know is how it landed on you. That part is real, and it matters. But how it landed is a true fact about you. It is not a fact about her reasons.

If she wrote it in two columns, it might look like this.

CAMERA	STORY
On certain dates, the chair where my mother would have sat was empty.	Never.
I looked for her from the stage and didn't find her.	Because I wasn't important to her.
Another girl's mother drove me home.	She didn't care about the things I cared about.
	So don't expect people to show up for you.

Look at the last line on the right. It isn't about school performances at all. It's a rule for the rest of her life, and it was hiding inside a sentence about a school auditorium.

The five tells of a story

Stories are easy to spot once you know what they sound like. They leave tells, the way a poker player does. Here are the five you'll meet most often.

1 • NEVER AND ALWAYS

And their cousins: everyone, nobody, every time, no one ever. These are generalizations. A camera records one Tuesday, then one Saturday, then one birthday. It never records *always*. "He always cancels on me." The camera recorded two cancellations this month and one dinner he arrived early for. When you hear one of these words, ask how many occasions it is summarizing.

2 · BECAUSE

Any reason is a story, even a reasonable one. The camera records what happened. It never records why. "She left early because she was bored with me." The camera saw her pick up her coat at 9:40 and say goodnight. The why is your guess.

3 · MIND READING

"She didn't care." "He was disgusted." "They were laughing at me." Each of these claims to know what was going on inside another person. The camera records faces, words and silences. It can't see inside anyone. Sometimes a reading is very likely right. It's still a reading.

4 · LABELS

"I'm the weird one." "I'm lazy." "I'm bad with money." "He's selfish." A label takes a few moments and stamps a verdict on a whole person. The camera records a person doing something at a particular time: arriving late, forgetting a bill, eating lunch alone. It can't record what kind of person they are.

5 · PREDICTIONS

"It won't work." "He's going to leave." "I'll embarrass myself." The camera only works in the past and the present. Anything about the future is, by definition, a story. That doesn't make a prediction wrong. It just means you can't file it under what happened.

None of these patterns is unusual. Psychologists noticed them long ago, and cognitive therapy, which grew out of Aaron Beck's work starting in the 1960s, gave many of them names still used today: overgeneralization, mind reading, labeling, fortune telling. You don't need the vocabulary. It just helps to know that every mind does this.

Quick examples

Here are seven sentences people say every day. The middle column holds what a camera might have recorded. The right column holds what was added.

WHAT YOU SAY	CAMERA	STORY
"He ignored me at the party."	He talked with me once, by the door, for a few minutes. He spent most of the night in the kitchen.	Ignored. On purpose. Because I'm boring.
"My boss hates my work."	She returned the report with fourteen comments and wrote "redo section 3."	Hates. My work, all of it.
"Nobody ever helps me."	I asked for help twice this year. Once, two friends came. Once, nobody was free.	Nobody. Ever.
"I always ruin my relationships."	Three relationships ended in eight years. I ended two of them.	Always. Ruin. It was all me.
"They were laughing at me."	Two coworkers laughed as I walked past their desks.	At me.
"I'm so lazy."	I didn't go to the gym this week. I worked fifty-two hours.	Lazy, as a kind of person.
"I was the weird one."	I read at lunch. I wasn't invited to two birthday parties in fifth grade. A boy called me a freak once.	The weird one. Was, and still am.

Notice the Camera column: small, specific, a bit boring. That boredom is useful. It's the only ground solid enough to stand on. The Story column is where the heat is, the sting and the shame and the certainty. It's also where every conclusion about who you are lives.

“But some stories are obviously true”

Yes. If a man slams a door, raises his voice and turns red, “he was angry” is a reasonable reading. You don’t need to pretend you have no idea what was going on.

The point is not to doubt everything until you’re lost in fog. The point is to always know which column you’re standing in. You can write it like this:

Camera: raised voice, slammed the door, red face. **Story:** he was angry (very likely). **Story:** at me, because I’m a burden (much less certain).

Even when the first reading is almost surely right, the second one often isn’t. The camera might show that he was angry. It doesn’t show what that says about you. We’ll come back to stories that are true, or partly true, in Chapter 6.

The tell hunt

1. Write down five sentences you said or thought this week about yourself, someone else or your life. Use the exact words.
2. Circle every tell: never and always (and their cousins), because, mind reading, labels, predictions.
3. Under each sentence, write one line the camera would have recorded instead.
4. Count the tells. Don't judge the number. Just notice it.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **The ruler.** A fact is what a camera would have recorded. A story is everything added on top.
- **Five tells.** Never and always, because, mind reading, labels, predictions.
- **How it landed is real.** It's a true fact about you, not a fact about someone else's reasons.
- **Know your column.** Some readings are very likely right. You still want to know which side of the line they sit on.

CHAPTER

03

Why nobody taught you this

"In school, you learned how to tell a noun from a verb. Nobody taught you to tell an event from its meaning."

INSIDE · NOUNS AND VERBS · A CHILD NEEDS AN EXPLANATION ·
WHY "IT'S ME" PROTECTS · THE DRAFT · GIVING THE PEN BACK

If this distinction is so useful, why does it feel new? Why did you reach adulthood unable to tell, at a glance, the difference between what happened and what you made it mean?

Mostly because nobody taught you. In school, you learned to tell a noun from a verb. You learned fractions, the water cycle, the capital of Australia. Nobody taught you to tell an event from its meaning, and most of the adults around you couldn't do it either.

Language doesn't help. "He abandoned us" is built exactly like "He moved to Ohio." Nothing in the grammar warns you that one is a record and the other is a verdict.

A child needs an explanation

There is a deeper reason, too, and it starts in childhood.

When you're small, you don't have the tools to separate fact from story. You don't know about bills and bosses and marriages. You don't know that adults carry their own childhoods around with them. You don't know that a closed door can mean a hundred different things.

But a child needs an explanation anyway. Any explanation. Not knowing why something is happening is unbearable when you're small, because you depend completely on the people around you. If something feels wrong and you don't know why, the world becomes unpredictable, and unpredictable is frightening.

So the mind reaches for the closest explanation it can find. And for a child, the closest explanation is almost always the same one.

“Something is wrong with me.”

THE MOST AVAILABLE EXPLANATION

Why “it’s me” protects

This is the part that surprises people. In a strange way, that explanation protects.

Picture a six-year-old lying in bed while her parents argue behind a closed door. She can’t know about the debt, or the job her father just lost, or the way her mother’s own mother used to shout. She has her room, the noise through the wall, and herself.

If the problem is out there, in the adults, then the people she depends on are not safe, and there is nothing she can do. That thought is far too big for a six-year-old to hold.

But if the problem is her, then there is something she can do. She can be quieter. She can be better. She can be helpful, or funny, or perfect, or invisible. “It’s me” turns a situation she has no control over into one she can work on. Oddly enough, it’s the hopeful explanation.

That is why so many adult stories have the same shape underneath. A few common versions:

WHAT THE CHILD CONCLUDED	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE AT 30
“If I’m good enough, they’ll stay.”	The overachiever who can’t rest, and feels guilty on a Sunday afternoon.
“My feelings cause trouble.”	The woman who says “I’m fine” and almost means it.
“I have to handle everything myself.”	The friend who helps everyone and never asks for anything.
“I’m too much.”	The person who edits herself before every sentence.
“If I keep everyone happy, nothing bad will happen.”	The one who apologizes when someone else bumps into her.

Each of these was a strategy. Each one worked, at least partly, back then. It got a child through a house she couldn't leave.

You may still be carrying the draft

So the story you're running today was first written by a small mind trying to survive. It was trying to make sense of something it didn't have the information to understand, and it did the best it could.

Think of it as a first draft. Written fast, in crayon, on a bad night. Then filed away and never reopened. And somehow, over the years, the draft became the official biography.

As an adult, you may still be carrying that draft as if it were the final version of yourself.

The adult you has information the child never had. You know now that people leave rooms for reasons that have nothing to do with you. You know that parents can love a child and still be unable to show up. You know that a teacher's comment on one report card is one adult's opinion on one afternoon. The draft was written without any of that.

The story you created was not a flaw in your character. It was an intelligent solution from a mind that needed meaning.

FROM LESSON 01

Hold on to that. You need meaning. I need meaning. Every person does. A mind that makes meaning out of pain is doing exactly what minds are for.

This is not blame, in either direction

When people first see this, a second story sometimes jumps in quickly: “So it was their fault, not mine.” Sometimes the adults did fail you. Sometimes what they did was wrong, and you can say so plainly. Nothing here asks you to defend them.

But the work in this book isn’t to move the blame from your shoulders to theirs. Blame keeps you standing in the same old scene, looking at it from a new angle, still frozen inside it. The work is to see more of what the camera recorded, and to notice how much of the right column you wrote when you were very young.

Giving the pen back

So what we’re doing here is not correcting you. You were not wrong to make meaning. We are giving the pen back to you.

You can’t change the photograph. What happened, happened. But you can reread the caption with everything you know now, and ask whether it’s the only caption that fits the picture. In time, you can write a new one. Not a prettier caption: a truer one. We’ll get there in Chapter 6.

The child's explanation

1. Take your ready answer from Chapter 1, or another sentence you often say about yourself.
2. How old were you when you first concluded this? If you don't know, guess.
3. What could that child not know? About the adults, their lives, money, illness, history.
4. What did the explanation protect you from?
5. What did it make you do then? What does it still make you do?

WHAT TO KEEP

- **Nobody taught you.** School teaches nouns and verbs, not events and meanings.
- **A child needs an explanation.** "Something is wrong with me" is the most available one, and it protects: if the problem is me, at least I can do something.
- **It was intelligent.** Your story was the best answer a small mind could find, not a flaw in your character.
- **The draft is not the final version.** You may still be carrying it. The pen is yours now.

CHAPTER

04

The automatic translator

"Interpretation arrives before awareness, which is why a conclusion feels like perception instead of opinion."

INSIDE · SIX HOURS OF SILENCE · A PREDICTION MACHINE · THE
WORD HOUSE · THREE QUESTIONS · HALF A SECOND

If the story is only a layer on top of the facts, why does it feel so real?

When the thought *nobody cares about me* shows up, it doesn't feel like an opinion. It feels like something you saw, the way you see that it's raining. Why?

Because there is a translator working inside you all the time. It turns events into meanings, and it's too fast and too automatic for you to catch it working. By the time you're aware of anything, the translation is already done.

Six hours

You send a message to a friend. A normal one, maybe a little longer than usual, maybe a little more open. You see that she's read it.

One hour. Three. Six. No reply.

Before you even have time to think "she's probably busy," something has already happened in your body. A tightness in your chest. A small drop in your stomach. A feeling of *I did something wrong*. An urge to scroll back up and reread what you sent.

So you reread it. You find the sentence that might have sounded needy. You notice she posted a story an hour ago, which means she was on her phone, which means...

By the end of the afternoon, you have a complete conclusion with a strong feeling attached, and you never decided to make it. It arrived ready.

A prediction machine

This is, as far as we can tell, how brains work. Researchers who study perception, such as the philosopher Andy Clark and the neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett, describe the brain less as a camera and more as a prediction machine. It doesn't wait for reality to arrive and only then interpret it. It uses the past to predict what is happening now, and fills in the gaps on its own.

Most of that work happens below the level of your awareness. What reaches you at the end is the finished product: the feeling and the certainty, already packaged.

You never see the factory. You never see the process. You only receive a box.

FROM LESSON 02

That's why it feels like perception. A box arrives at the door, and the box says: *she's upset with you*. You don't need the neuroscience to use this book. It just helps to know the translator isn't a metaphor invented to make you feel better. It's close to how many researchers describe ordinary perception: a best guess, built from the past, delivered as if it were plain fact.

Can you not read this?

house

Look at that word and try not to read it. You can't. The reading happens on its own. Nobody has to decide, "Now I'm going to decode these letters." It doesn't ask permission.

Emotional interpretation works the same way. You don't decide, "Now I'll conclude that she's ignoring me." The conclusion simply happens, the way reading happens. And because it arrives without effort, you assume it's reality.

But there's one important difference. The word *house* means roughly the same thing to everyone who reads it. "She read it and didn't reply" does not. To one person, it means she's busy. To another, it means she hates me. To a third, it means good, now I don't have to answer anything tonight either.

The message is identical. The fact is identical. The translator is what changes.

Where your translator learned

So what was your translator trained on? Mostly on your earliest experiences. The scenes you lived when you were small. The way silence felt in your house. What happened after you made a mistake. Whether people came back when they left.

That is why your translation feels obvious to you. You've lived inside it your whole life. It's like an accent: everyone else can hear yours, and to you it just sounds like talking.

It also explains something that confuses many people. Two sisters raised in the same house can translate the same event in completely different ways. Their translators were trained in the same rooms, but not on the same scenes, and not at the same age.

Three questions to catch it

You can't switch the translator off. You can catch it in the act. Here are three questions. Use them on a recent moment when you had a strong reaction: hurt, anger, shame, the fear of being rejected.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

1. **What did the camera record?** Only images, sounds and actions. What was said, word for word. What was done.
2. **What did I conclude?** Complete the sentence "This means that..." and write down whatever comes first. Don't edit it.
3. **Is this conclusion familiar?** Have I felt this before? With other people, in other places, years ago?

The third question is the one I love most. When people answer it honestly, most discover the same thing: the conclusion is old. It wasn't really a response to this situation. It was already sitting there, waiting, and it got fitted onto this situation because the situation was close enough.

The translator can receive a brand new context and hand back an old translation. That is what I mean by automatic translation. The sentences change, the people change, the setting changes, and the final meaning is always similar.

Or, as I've put it before: sometimes you're not experiencing the same reality again. You're responding to a new situation with the same old beliefs.

Two moments, translated

“Can we talk tomorrow at 10?”

A message from your manager at 5:47 p.m. No context. **Camera:** those six words, that time, no greeting. **Conclusion:** this means I’m in trouble, I did something wrong and I’m about to find out what.

Familiar? Yes. It’s the feeling of being called to the principal’s office. It’s your father saying “we need to talk” in that voice.

Seeing that won’t tell you what the meeting is about. It might be a new project. It might be bad news. But you walk in knowing which part of your dread belongs to tomorrow’s meeting and which part is twenty years old.

“He came home and went straight to the bedroom.”

Camera: your partner walked in at 7:15, said “hey,” didn’t kiss you, and closed the bedroom door. **Conclusion:** this means he’s pulling away from me. **Familiar?** Very. It’s the same drop you felt as a girl when your mother went quiet for days and you never knew why.

Maybe he is pulling away. Maybe his day was terrible. The old translation picks one answer instantly. The three questions hand you back the other possibilities, and the simple option of asking him.

Half a second

Here is a small phrase to practice. It sounds like almost nothing. It isn’t.

Instead of “She ignored me,” say: *I am interpreting that she ignored me.*

Instead of “I’m not enough,” say: *My translator is telling me I’m not enough.*

The facts haven’t changed. The feeling may not change either, at least not at first. But the phrase opens about half a second of space between you and your conclusion. And that half second is where your choice lives.

Psychologists have studied moves like this one. Ethan Kross, who researches what he calls self-distancing, has found that small shifts in how you talk to yourself, such as using your own name instead of “I,” can help people step back from strong emotions. You don’t need a technique with a name. You need a gap, and this phrase makes one.

What this is not

I need to be clear here, because this is where many people get confused.

This is not thinking positive. I’m not asking you to swap a negative translation for a pretty one. “She ignored me” turned into “she’s just so busy, and she loves me so much” is still a translation. If you don’t believe it, it slides right off.

I’m only asking you to notice that translation exists. That’s all. Noticing comes first, and everything else in this book depends on it.

This is also why I don’t throw out affirmations. Words can point you in a direction, and that has value. But a new sentence becomes believable when there is evidence for it, and you can’t see evidence clearly while an old translator is narrating every scene. Seeing the translation is how you make room for new evidence to count.

Catch the translator

1. Choose a recent moment when you had a strong reaction: hurt, anger, shame, fear of rejection.
2. In writing, answer the three questions. What did the camera record? What did I conclude ("This means that...")? Is this conclusion familiar?
3. This week, three times, in the moment a strong reaction shows up, ask the three questions again and say: *I am interpreting that...* Don't fix anything. Just notice.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **Interpretation arrives first.** The brain predicts from the past and hands you a finished box, so a conclusion feels like perception, not opinion.
- **Same fact, different translators.** Yours was trained on your earliest scenes, which is why its translation feels obvious.
- **Three questions.** What did the camera record? What did I conclude? Is this conclusion familiar?
- **Half a second.** "I am interpreting that..." makes room for choice. It's noticing, not positive thinking.

CHAPTER

05

The two columns

"Be rigorous. If it's not an image, a sound or an observable action, it goes on the story side."

INSIDE · THE METHOD, STEP BY STEP · THE RULES · A FATHER WHO
MOVED OUT · SIX WORKED EXAMPLES

This chapter is the center of the book. Everything before it explains why the exercise works. Everything after it builds on it.

Grab a sheet of paper or open a blank document. Give yourself about twenty minutes.

The method, step by step

1. **Make two columns.** On the left, write Camera. On the right, write Story.
2. **Choose a sentence.** Pick something you often say about yourself or your life. The ones that come out in arguments, or late at night, are usually the best. "My father abandoned me." "I was always the weird one." "Nobody ever chose me." "I had to figure everything out alone."
3. **Write it at the top, exactly as you say it.** Don't tidy it up.
4. **Break it into pieces.** For each piece, ask one question: would a camera have recorded this?
5. **Fill the Camera column** with what could be seen, heard or done. Ages, dates, places, numbers, words actually spoken.
6. **Fill the Story column** with everything else: reasons, intentions, generalizations, meanings, conclusions about you, about them, about life.
7. **Read both columns slowly.** Notice the size of each one.
8. **Change nothing yet.**

The rules

Be rigorous. The exercise only works if you're strict about the left column.

SIX RULES AND ONE PERMISSION

- If it's not an image, a sound or an observable action, it goes in Story.
- Never, always, everyone, nobody: Story. In Camera, write the occasions you actually remember, and count them if you can.
- Any "because": Story.
- Anything about what someone else felt, wanted or meant: Story.
- Any label for a whole person, including you: Story.
- Anything about the future: Story.
- If you don't know what the camera recorded, write "I don't remember" in the Camera column. That's honest, and it's allowed.

WHERE DO FEELINGS GO?

Your feelings are real. But a camera can't record them, so they don't go on the left. Write them on a line of their own under the two columns: *How it landed: humiliated, scared, alone*. That line isn't a claim about anyone else. It's a true fact about you, and it deserves its own place.

A worked example

“My father abandoned me.”

CAMERA	STORY
My father moved out when I was 7.	He abandoned me.
He called a few times during the first year.	He decided to leave me.
Then the calls stopped.	He didn't love me.
I saw him twice before I turned 15.	I wasn't enough for him to stay.
	Men always leave.
	Anyone I love is going to leave me.

Notice the difference, especially in size.

The Camera column is short and dry, and it's painful on its own. A father moved out. A seven-year-old waited for calls that stopped coming. Nothing in this exercise makes that smaller.

The Story column is long and full of conclusions. And look at the path it takes. It starts with him (he abandoned me), moves to her (I wasn't enough), and ends as a law about the whole world (men always leave, anyone I love will leave).

That last line is where the orders she still follows today actually live. A woman carrying “anyone I love is going to leave me” might test every partner to see if he'll stay. She might leave first, so she never has to be left. She might choose men who are already halfway out the door, because at least that feels familiar. I call this the Abandonment Loop, and none of it comes from the left column. All of it comes from the right.

If you're like most people, when you do this with your own sentence, the Camera column will come out tiny and the Story column will come out packed. A sentence you'd have sworn was a fact turns out to be three or four interpretations stacked on top of each other.

That doesn't mean you've been lying your whole life. It means interpretation is so fast and so automatic that it disguises itself as fact.

Six worked examples

The method works the same way in every area of life. Here are six illustrative examples. Read them slowly, and try to guess the columns before you look.

LOVE

“He always pulls away when things get serious.”

CAMERA	STORY
In March, I said “I love you.” He said “you too” and changed the subject.	Always.
In May, he didn’t invite me to his sister’s wedding.	He pulls away, on purpose.
Last Thursday he canceled dinner and suggested Saturday instead.	When things get serious, he runs.
	He doesn’t really want me. I’ll be left.

What changes when you see both. Three moments, months apart, maybe with three different reasons. One of them, canceling but offering Saturday, is a step toward her, and the story had filed it as a

step away. The camera also hands her a real question: “I noticed I wasn’t at the wedding. Can we talk about that?” The story only gave her a verdict, and a reason to start testing him.

FAMILY

“My mother criticizes everything I do.”

CAMERA	STORY
On Sunday she said, “You’re wearing that?”	Everything.
She asked twice whether I had paid the electric bill.	She criticizes.
She said the chicken needed more salt.	She thinks I can’t manage my own life.
	I’ll never be good enough for her.

What changes. Three comments in one afternoon. They sting, and they’re worth taking seriously. But “everything” can’t be talked about or changed. Three specific comments can: she can tell her mother the remarks about her clothes hurt, and let the salt go. She might also notice another reading that fits the camera just as well. In some families, worry speaks in the voice of criticism, and asking twice about a bill can be a clumsy way of saying “I’m scared for you.”

FRIENDSHIP

“My friends forgot my birthday. Nobody cares.”

CAMERA	STORY
I have five close friends.	Forgot.
Two sent a message before noon.	Nobody cares.
One called at 9 p.m.	I’m always the one who remembers.
Two didn’t say anything that day. The group chat was quiet.	I don’t really matter to them.

What changes. Three of five reached out. Two didn’t, and that’s a real disappointment. But “nobody” erased three people who showed up, and a day that was partly lovely got filed as proof that she doesn’t matter. Filing like that, repeated for years, is how an identity gets built.

WORK

“I got passed over again. They’ll never promote me.”

CAMERA	STORY
On Tuesday, the promotion went to Daniel.	Again. Never.
My manager said, “Your time will come.”	They don’t value me.
My review said I need “more visibility with leadership.”	I’m invisible here.
I haven’t asked what the criteria were.	It’s always harder for me.

What changes. The camera holds two things the story had hidden: a specific note from her review, and a question she has never asked. Neither guarantees anything, but she can act on both next week. She can't act on "they don't value me." Notice, too, how neatly this story fits two of the five loops I teach: the Invisible Loop ("Nobody really sees me") and the Unfair Loop ("It's always harder for me").

BODY

“I looked disgusting in those photos.”

CAMERA	STORY
There are twelve photos from the wedding.	Disgusting.
In three, my stomach shows above the waistband of the dress.	Everyone noticed.
In one, my eyes are half closed.	I can't wear dresses.
My cousin posted two of them.	I have to fix myself before I go anywhere.

What changes. “Disgusting” is not an image. It’s a verdict, and a cruel one. The camera recorded a body in a dress, in twelve frames, at a wedding she went to and danced at. The story wrote a sentence that will keep her home from the next one. Seeing both doesn’t require her to love the photos. It shows her the cruelty didn’t come from the camera.

A gentle note: if thoughts about food, weight or your body take up much of your day, please read “When this is not the right tool” at the back. You deserve real support with that, not only a worksheet.

MONEY

“I’m terrible with money. I’ll always be broke.”

CAMERA	STORY
I have \$640 in checking and \$2,300 on my credit card.	Terrible with money.
I paid two bills late this year.	Always. Broke, as in who I am.
I have never made a monthly budget.	People like me don’t get ahead.
Growing up, my parents argued about money most months.	Money is something that happens to you.

What changes. The camera column has numbers, and numbers can move. There is nothing you can do with a label like “terrible with money” on a Tuesday. “I have never made a budget” is a sentence you can act on tonight. And the last line on the left matters: it may be where her translator learned that money means fighting, and that looking at it closely is dangerous.

Across all six examples, the same things show up. The Story column is bigger. It contains the order: pull away, test him, stay home, don’t ask, don’t look. And the Camera column, small as it is, almost always contains something you can actually do.

Your own two columns

1. Choose the sentence you say most often about your life.
Write it at the top of a page.
2. Draw the two columns and fill them, following the rules.
3. Write the “How it landed” line underneath.
4. Circle the line in the Story column that gives you an order.
Write that order in one sentence: “So I must...” or “So I never...”
5. Then do the same with two more sentences you tend to repeat. Blank sheets are waiting for you in The practice.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **Two columns, one question.** Would a camera have recorded this? If it's not an image, a sound or an observable action, it goes in Story.
- **Look at the size.** The Camera column is usually small and painful. The Story column is packed.
- **The orders live on the right.** The rules you still follow are almost always in the Story column.
- **Feelings get their own line.** How it landed is a true fact about you.

CHAPTER

06

When the story is true

"Separating the facts from the story doesn't mean the story is false. Some conclusions may even be true and painful."

INSIDE · THREE KINDS OF CONCLUSIONS · NOT LYING, NOT
FANTASY, NOT FORCED POSITIVITY · THE TEST OF EQUAL TRUTH ·
GOING GENTLY

Now an important warning, because I know how the mind works. Right about now, part of you may be thinking: so all my stories are false? I've been making it all up?

No.

Separating the facts from the story doesn't mean the story is false. It means you can finally see that it *is* a story, and a story can be checked.

Three kinds of conclusions

When you look closely, the conclusions in your right column tend to fall into three groups.

Some are true, and painful. "My father didn't make me a priority." Maybe he didn't. If he moved away, stopped calling and saw you twice in eight years, that conclusion fits the camera very well. Nobody needs you to pretend otherwise.

Some are partly true. "She missed my performances because work mattered more to her than I did." Part of that may be right: on those evenings, she chose work, or had to. "More than I did" is a much bigger claim, and the camera can't see it.

Some are one explanation among several. "She didn't reply because she's angry with me." Maybe. Or she's busy, or tired, or hasn't figured out what to say yet.

At first, the goal isn't to sort every conclusion into the right group. The goal is only to see that there are two columns. Sorting comes later, slowly, and some things may never be fully sorted. That's all right.

When the story about them is true

Here is something worth knowing. Even when a conclusion about another person is true, there's usually a second conclusion hiding behind it, and that one is about you.

"He didn't prioritize me" may be true. "So I'm not worth prioritizing" is a separate sentence, and it doesn't follow from the first. A parent's failure to show up is real information about that parent: their limits, their choices, the wars they were fighting. It is not a measurement of your worth.

And if something was done to you that was wrong, it was wrong. Separating fact from story is never a way to excuse harm, or to turn something cruel into "a lesson you needed." You did not cause, attract or deserve the harm other people did to you.

If what happened was harmful, the camera shows that too. In that case, the work isn't to reinterpret it. It's to get support, and the last pages of this book say where to look.

What reinterpretation is, and isn't

Soon you'll start looking for other interpretations of what happened. First, be clear on what that means, because it's easy to get wrong.

REINTERPRETATION IS

Not lying. You don't erase anything from the Camera column. Every painful fact stays.

Not fantasy. You don't add events the camera didn't record. "Deep down, she was proud of me" only counts if something on the left supports it.

Not forced positivity. "Everything happens for a reason, and it made me stronger" may feel true one day. Said too early, it's usually a way of skipping the pain.

It is finding another interpretation that is equally true to the camera.

Equally true means it fits every line of the left column at least as well as the old story does. It doesn't need anything the camera didn't see. It doesn't ask you to feel good. It only asks you to admit that it fits.

Psychologists have a name for something close to this. James Gross, who studies emotion regulation, calls it cognitive reappraisal: changing the meaning you give a situation, which changes how it affects you. It is one of the most studied ways people manage emotion, and it is different from pushing a feeling down.

The test of equal truth

Here is how to look for another interpretation, one step at a time.

1. **Cover the Story column.** Read only the Camera column, slowly, as if you'd never seen it before.

2. **Bring in other witnesses.** Imagine three different people watching the same footage: a friend who is kind and also honest, someone who knew the other person's life well, and you, at seventy. What would each of them say happened?
3. **Write at least two other interpretations.** Don't judge them yet. Some will feel silly. Write them anyway.
4. **Test each one against the camera.** Does it explain every line on the left? Does it need anything the camera didn't record? If it needs extra events, it's fantasy. Cross it out.
5. **Check for sugar.** Is it just the old story turned positive, with nothing on the left to support it? Cross that out too.
6. **Keep what remains.** You don't have to believe it. You only have to see that it fits as well as the old story does.

An example

Let's go back to the woman whose mother didn't come to her school performances.

"My mother never came to my school performances."

Camera: on most performance dates, the chair was empty. **Old story:** I wasn't important to her.

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION	DOES IT FIT THE CAMERA?
She worked evenings and couldn't leave.	Fits. It needs nothing the camera didn't see.
School events were hard for her: shame, language, her own memories of school.	Fits.
Nobody ever came to hers, so she didn't understand how much it mattered.	Fits.
She didn't make me a priority back then.	Fits. Honest, and still about her choices, not about my worth.
She was secretly there, standing at the back.	Doesn't fit. The camera shows no such thing. Fantasy.
It all happened so I would become independent.	Sugar. Nothing on the left supports it.

Look at what happened. The old story had one sentence doing all the work. Now she holds four that fit the camera equally well. One of them isn't flattering to her mother at all. That's fine. It isn't supposed to be flattering. It's supposed to be true.

And none of the four states "I wasn't important" as a fact about her. The empty chair is still there. The pain is still there. But the verdict no longer has the room to itself.

Be gentle with yourself

When you do this with your own sentences, you may feel resistance. A voice saying, *but it's true*. A sudden tiredness. The urge to close the book and go do the dishes.

That's normal. A story that explained your whole life doesn't step aside in an afternoon, and it shouldn't have to. You can hold both columns and decide nothing. Be curious rather than strict. You are

not on trial here, and neither is anyone in your story.

EXERCISE 6.1

15 MINUTES

Equally true

1. Take one sentence you opened in Chapter 5. Cover the Story column and read only the Camera column.
2. Write three other interpretations.
3. Mark each one: **E** for equally true to the camera, **F** for fantasy, **S** for sugar.
4. Keep the E's. Read them once a day for three days. You don't have to believe them.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **Not false, but checkable.** Some conclusions are true and painful, some partly true, some one explanation among many.
- **A true story about them is not a verdict on you.** Their limits are not a measurement of your worth.
- **Reinterpretation** is not lying, not fantasy, not forced positivity. It is another interpretation, equally true to the camera.
- **Go gently.** You can hold both columns without deciding anything.

CHAPTER

07

Founding scenes

*"The translator can receive a new context and
give back an old translation."*

INSIDE · SCENES THAT STILL GIVE ORDERS · MEMORY REBUILDS ·
FINDING YOURS · A GENTLE AUDIT · WHEN TO STOP

Some conclusions were made once, a long time ago, and then obeyed for years. I call the moments where they were made founding scenes.

A founding scene is a specific moment, often small, usually from childhood or adolescence, where you concluded something about yourself or about the world. The scene ended. The conclusion didn't. It still gives orders today.

What they look like

Founding scenes are rarely dramatic. That's part of why they're hard to find. From the outside, they often look too small to have shaped anyone. A few illustrative examples:

THE SCENE	WHAT WAS CONCLUDED	THE ORDER TODAY
You showed your father a drawing. He kept watching TV.	My things bother people.	Don't share your work until it's perfect. Or at all.
At a classmate's party, nobody sat next to you at the table.	I'm not someone people choose.	Don't put yourself forward. Wait to be picked.
You cried at dinner and someone said, "Stop being so dramatic."	My feelings are too much.	Hide what you feel. Say "I'm fine."
Whenever you asked for something, the answer was "We can't afford it."	Wanting things causes trouble.	Don't want. Don't ask. Feel guilty when you spend.
Your family moved three times before you turned twelve.	Everything good ends.	Don't get attached. Leave before it hurts.

None of these scenes is a catastrophe. But a child can build a whole operating manual out of one afternoon, and then keep running it for thirty years without ever reading it again.

Some founding scenes are not small at all. Some involve abuse, violence or loss. Those scenes deserve a different setting than a book, and I'll say more about that below.

Your memory is not a camera either

There's a complication here, and it's worth knowing about.

Memory doesn't work like a video file you play back. Each time you remember something, your mind rebuilds it, and the rebuilding is shaped by what you already believe and by the words you use. In a well-known 1974 study, Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer showed people a film of a car accident, then asked how fast the cars were going when they "smashed into" or "hit" each other. The verb changed people's speed estimates. A week later, people who had heard "smashed" were more likely to say they had seen broken glass, though there was none in the film.

This does not mean your painful memories are invented. If something hurt you, it hurt you. What it means is that details drift over the years, and they tend to drift toward the story. A memory you've told for decades as "I was always alone" may slowly lose the afternoon someone sat with you.

So when you fill the Camera column for an old scene, be humble. Write what you clearly remember. Where you aren't sure, write "I don't remember." And don't go digging for memories you don't have. Work only with what is already there.

How to find yours

You probably already know at least one founding scene. If not, there are three ways back.

Follow an order back. Start with something you do today without thinking. *I never ask for help. I always have a backup plan. I go quiet when someone is angry.* Then ask: when did I learn this was the rule?

Follow a feeling back. This is the third question from Chapter 4. When a reaction feels familiar, ask: when is the first time I remember feeling exactly this?

Follow your ready answer back. The sentence you wrote in Chapter 1 almost always points at one or two specific scenes. Which moment do you see when you say it?

Make a short list. Then choose three. For your first audit, choose the lightest one, not the heaviest.

The audit, step by step

This is a careful exercise. Do one scene per sitting, on three different days. Never all three at once.

BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ I have thirty to forty minutes free, and some privacy.
- ☐ It isn't late at night, and I'm not on an empty stomach.
- ☐ I have something steadying nearby: a warm drink, a blanket, my feet on the floor.
- ☐ I've decided what I'll do afterward: a walk, a shower, a call with someone kind.
- ☐ I'm starting with the lightest scene on my list.

STOP HERE IF

Stop the exercise, put the guide away, and reach out to a qualified professional if:

- the scene involves abuse, violence, assault, or anything that still feels dangerous to remember;
- your body reacts strongly and doesn't settle: a racing heart, shaking, numbness, feeling far away;
- the memory keeps coming back for hours afterward, or disturbs your sleep;
- you feel hopeless, or have any thoughts of harming yourself.

Stopping is not failing. It means this scene deserves a trained person beside you, and so do you. See "When this is not the right tool" near the end of this book.

THE EIGHT STEPS

1. **Name the scene** in a few words, like a title. "The drawing and the TV, age six."
2. **Camera only.** Where were you? Who was there? What was said, word for word, and what was done? Keep it short. "I don't remember" is allowed.
3. **What did I conclude then?** Complete the sentence "This means that..." in the child's words, not the adult's.
4. **What order does it still give me?** "So I must..." or "So I never..."
5. **Where does it show up now?** Write two or three recent moments when you followed that order.
6. **What could the child not know?** About the adults, their lives, money, illness, history, what was happening in the next room.

7. **Another interpretation, equally true to the camera.** Use the test from Chapter 6. No fantasy, no sugar.
8. **Close gently.** Put the pen down. Look around the room and name five things you can see. Drink some water. If you'd like, write one sentence to the child you were.

An illustrative audit

Here is what a finished audit might look like. Imagine a woman in her thirties who has been rewriting her website for eight months without launching it.

STEP	WHAT SHE WROTE
The scene	The report card, age eleven.
Camera	I brought home a report card with four A's and one B. My father looked at it, pointed at the B and said, "What happened here?" He handed it back and returned to his newspaper.
What I concluded	This means only perfect counts. Good isn't enough to be seen.
The order today	Don't show anything until it's flawless.
Where it shows up	The website, eight months unlaunched. The cover letter I rewrote eleven times. I never share drafts at work.
What the child couldn't know	How his own father spoke to him. That he might have thought pointing at problems was how you help. Whether he was proud and didn't know how to say it.
Equally true	My father was a man who noticed problems first, in everything, including his own life. His question was about a letter on a page. It wasn't a verdict on me.

Notice that the last line isn't sweet. It doesn't claim he was secretly proud. It simply fits the camera as well as the old conclusion did, and it gives the old order a little less authority over her Tuesday.

Choose your three scenes

1. Using the three ways back, list every founding scene that comes to mind. Titles only, no details.
2. Next to each title, write the order it still gives you.
3. Choose three. Number them from lightest to heaviest.
4. When you're ready, use the worksheet in The practice, one scene per day.

WHAT TO KEEP

- **Founding scenes** are moments where a conclusion was formed that still gives orders today.
- **They are often small.** That's exactly why they're easy to miss.
- **Memory rebuilds.** Write what you clearly remember, and allow "I don't remember."
- **One scene at a time.** Lightest first, on different days, with a plan for afterward.
- **Know when to stop.** Some scenes need a trained person beside you.

APPENDIX

The practice

A seven-day log, blank two-column sheets, and a worksheet for your three founding scenes. Print these pages or copy them into a notebook. Write by hand if you can.

Understanding the two columns takes an afternoon. Making them a reflex takes practice. These pages are for the practice.

The seven-day log

Fill one page a day for seven days. Each day has its own prompt: messages, faces, what you say about yourself, predictions, feeling left out, quick judgments and, last, a review. Each page has four fields: **Camera**, **Story**, **another interpretation that is equally true** (blank is fine if none comes yet) and **what I noticed**. Ten minutes is enough. If you miss a day, don't start over. Just continue.

After the log come blank two-column sheets for any sentence you want to open, and a worksheet for the three founding scenes from Chapter 7.

After the seven days

This book covers the first two stations of the loop, experience and interpretation. The other two volumes of The Reality Blueprint Library pick up from here. *The Five Loops* (Vol. 02) shows how a story becomes a loop, and the five stories that keep life repeating. *The Evidence Log* (Vol. 03) is a 30-day workbook for building the self-concept you keep postponing. Both are free, like this one.

If you'd like to see which pattern shows up most in your own life, there's a short free quiz called "Which loop keeps repeating in your life?" at <https://iamhadassah.pages.dev#quiz>. And if you'd rather hear this material than read it, the free lesson "Fact vs. Story" is at <https://iamhadassah.pages.dev#lesson>.

And if, after all this, you'd like to work on your own loop with me directly, there's a note about that on the last page.

Day 01

MESSAGES AND SILENCES

A message, a call or a silence from today. What did the camera record, and what did you add?

Times, words and read receipts are camera. What they meant is story.

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 02

FACES AND TONES

Choose a moment when someone's face, tone or few words stayed with you.

The camera records an expression. It can't record what was behind it.

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 03

WHAT I SAY ABOUT MYSELF

Catch one sentence you said about yourself today, out loud or in your head.

Look for labels: lazy, too much, bad at, “the kind of person who.”

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 04

PREDICTIONS

Write down something you expect to go badly. The camera hasn't recorded it yet.

In the Camera column, write only what has actually happened so far.

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 05

LEFT OUT

Find a moment when you felt left out, unseen or not chosen.

Count people, times and minutes. "Nobody" and "never" are not counts.

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 06

BODY, MONEY, WORK

Pick one quick judgment you made today about your body, your money or your work.

Numbers, mirrors and emails are camera. Verdicts are story.

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED

Day 07

REVIEW

Read your last six pages. Which conclusion showed up more than once?

Run the strongest moment once more. Is this conclusion familiar?

CAMERA

STORY

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION THAT IS EQUALLY TRUE

WHAT I NOTICED THIS WEEK

Two columns · sheet A

The sentence I keep repeating:

CAMERA	STORY

How it landed:

The order it gives me, and what changes when I see both columns:

Two columns · sheet B

The sentence I keep repeating:

CAMERA	STORY

How it landed:

The order it gives me, and what changes when I see both columns:

Founding scenes worksheet

Three pages, one for each scene you chose in Exercise 7.1. Fill one page per sitting, on three different days, starting with the lightest scene. The full eight steps are in Chapter 7. Each page holds the core of them.

BEFORE EACH SCENE

- ☐ I have thirty to forty minutes free, and some privacy.
- ☐ It isn't late at night, and I'm not on an empty stomach.
- ☐ I have something steadying nearby.
- ☐ I know what I'll do afterward.
- ☐ I'm willing to stop at any point.

STOP HERE IF

The scene involves abuse, violence or assault. Your body reacts strongly and doesn't settle. The memory keeps returning for hours or disturbs your sleep. You feel hopeless, or have any thoughts of harming yourself. In any of these cases, put the worksheet away and reach out to a qualified professional. Stopping is not failing.

AFTER EACH SCENE

Put the pen down. Name five things you can see in the room. Drink some water. Do the thing you planned. If you'd like, write one sentence to the child you were, on the back of the page or anywhere you choose.

Scene 1

FOUNDING SCENES · THE LIGHTEST

Name the scene in a few words, like a title.

CAMERA ONLY: WHERE, WHO, WHAT WAS SAID AND DONE

WHAT I CONCLUDED THEN ("THIS MEANS THAT...") AND THE ORDER
IT STILL GIVES ME

WHERE IT SHOWS UP NOW

WHAT THE CHILD COULD NOT KNOW

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION, EQUALLY TRUE TO THE CAMERA

Scene 2

FOUNDING SCENES · THE MIDDLE

Name the scene in a few words, like a title.

CAMERA ONLY: WHERE, WHO, WHAT WAS SAID AND DONE

WHAT I CONCLUDED THEN ("THIS MEANS THAT...") AND THE ORDER
IT STILL GIVES ME

WHERE IT SHOWS UP NOW

WHAT THE CHILD COULD NOT KNOW

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION, EQUALLY TRUE TO THE CAMERA

Scene 3

FOUNDING SCENES · THE HEAVIEST

Name the scene in a few words, like a title.

CAMERA ONLY: WHERE, WHO, WHAT WAS SAID AND DONE

WHAT I CONCLUDED THEN ("THIS MEANS THAT...") AND THE ORDER
IT STILL GIVES ME

WHERE IT SHOWS UP NOW

WHAT THE CHILD COULD NOT KNOW

ANOTHER INTERPRETATION, EQUALLY TRUE TO THE CAMERA

When this is not the right tool

This guide is for everyday interpretations: the unanswered message, the comment at dinner, the old sentence about who you are. It works best when your life is basically safe.

Some things need more than a book. Please reach out to a qualified professional, such as a licensed therapist, counselor or doctor, if you are living with:

- grief that feels like it's swallowing you, or isn't easing with time;
- trauma, including memories of abuse, violence or assault;
- depression: weeks of feeling empty, hopeless or unable to get through the day;
- abuse that is happening now, at home or in a relationship;
- an eating disorder, or thoughts about food and your body that take over your days;
- thoughts of harming yourself, or of not wanting to be alive.

If you are in danger or in crisis right now, contact your local emergency number or a crisis line. In the United States and Canada, you can call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans answer at 116 123. Elsewhere, findahelpline.com lists free, confidential lines by country.

If someone is hurting you, this is not a situation to reinterpret. Your safety comes first. The camera test is never a reason to stay somewhere you're being harmed.

Asking for help is not a sign that this work failed, or that you did. It's the skill this whole book is about: seeing what is actually happening, and responding to it with care. If you're already in therapy, you might bring your two-column sheets to a session.

Further reading

If you'd like to go deeper, these books and papers are good places to start. Each is described in a line.

1. Barrett, L. F. (2017). *How emotions are made: The secret life of the brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. A neuroscientist's account of emotions as something the brain constructs, using past experience to predict and make sense of the present.
2. Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. International Universities Press. A foundational book of cognitive therapy, on how automatic thoughts and habitual errors in thinking shape how we feel.
3. Burns, D. D. (1980). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*. William Morrow. A popular, practical introduction to cognitive therapy, with a well-known list of thinking patterns such as overgeneralization, mind reading and labeling.
4. Clark, A. (2016). *Surfing uncertainty: Prediction, action, and the embodied mind*. Oxford University Press. A philosopher's detailed account of the brain as a prediction machine.
5. Ellis, A. (1962). *Reason and emotion in psychotherapy*. Lyle Stuart. Introduces the ABC model: an activating event, the belief about it, and the emotional consequence.
6. Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), 271-299. An overview of how people regulate emotion, including cognitive reappraisal.
7. Kross, E. (2021). *Chatter: The voice in our head, why it matters, and how to harness it*. Crown. On the inner voice, and on self-distancing as a way to step back from it.
8. Loftus, E. F., & Palmer, J. C. (1974). Reconstruction of automobile destruction: An example of the interaction between language and memory. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 13(5), 585-589. The "smashed" versus "hit" study on how wording reshapes memory.
9. Loftus, E. F. (1979). *Eyewitness testimony*. Harvard University Press. A readable book on why memory is reconstructed rather than replayed.

NEXT STEP

Work on your loop with me, I:I

This book gives you the method. In mentorship, we use it on your life. It's one-to-one with me, online and in English, and it's by application only.

You apply, and I read every application. Then we have a short call to see if it's a fit. Then we map your loop together, from the founding scenes to the stories you tell today, and work on it session by session.

APPLY FOR MENTORSHIP