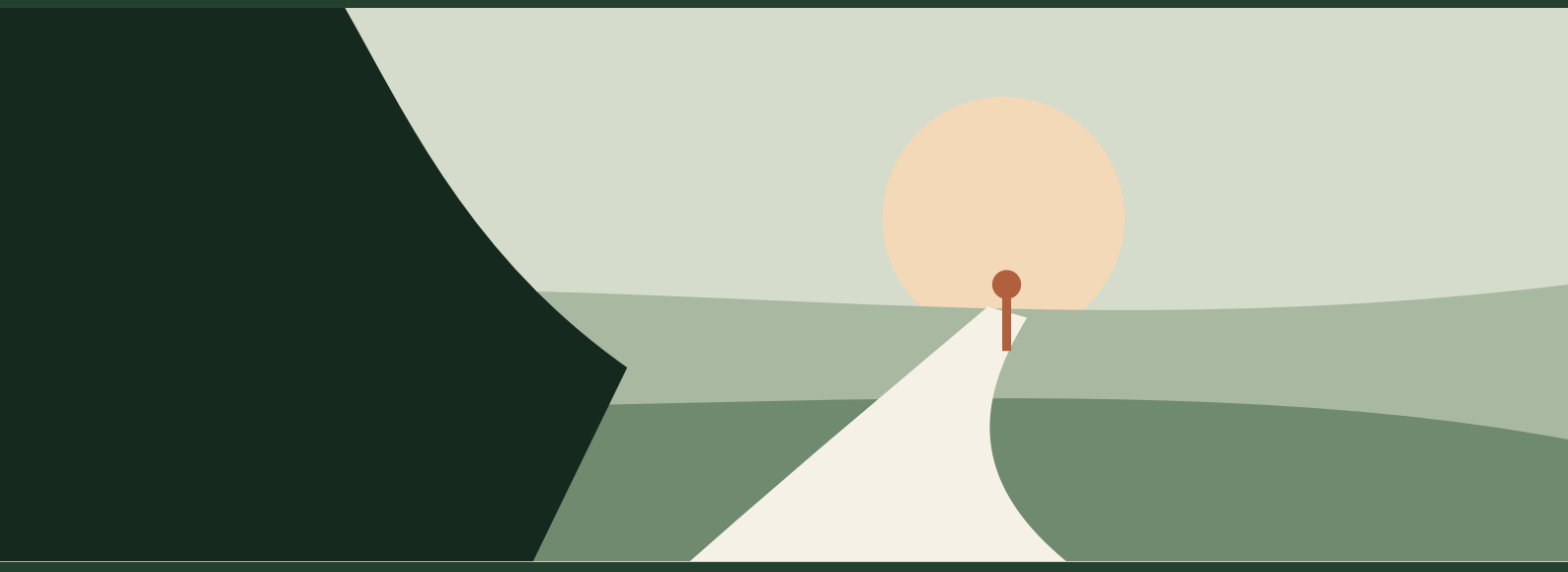
COVER FEATURE

The Courage to Move *Forward*

When attachment, fear and desire begin to hold us back.



> *“Sometimes, the next chapter of our lives begins not with acquiring something new, but with learning what we must no longer allow to control us.”*

BY SANGEETA NATARAJAN

01
The moment we need to pause

Have you ever found yourself wanting to move forward in life, yet feeling strangely held back by something you cannot quite identify?

You have ambitions. You have plans. You know there is so much more you want to accomplish. And yet your time, thoughts and emotional energy seem to be taken up by things that do not bring you any closer to where you want to be.

Perhaps it is a relationship that asks more of you than you can comfortably give. Perhaps it is the constant need for approval, or an attachment to a lifestyle, a possession, an ambition or an expectation. Or perhaps it is simply the fear of changing something that has become familiar.

We rarely notice the moment when something that once made us happy begins to limit our growth. We keep holding on, often without asking why.

Not everything that once made us happy will contribute to our future happiness. Not everything we desire will help us fulfil our life's purpose. And not everything we have become attached to deserves the same influence over our decisions forever.

Perhaps growing up is also about learning when to hold on, when to change, and when to let go.

02
When attachment begins to influence our choices

Human beings naturally form attachments. We connect emotionally to people, places, possessions, achievements and experiences, and we invest our hopes and identities in them. These connections can bring immense joy and meaning. But there is a difference between valuing something and becoming excessively dependent on it.

In Indian philosophical thought, the word **moh** describes an attachment that clouds our understanding and sways our judgement. The problem is rarely the object of our attachment. It is the undue importance we begin to give it.

> *Picture Mira, who has spent six years building a promising career. Somewhere along the way, recognition stopped being a reward and became the point: every decision now begins with how it will protect her status. Or Leila, who loves her partner so deeply that her own plans, interests and friendships have quietly shrunk to fit around his. Or Sam, who keeps chasing a desire he knows is pulling him away from his responsibilities and long-term goals.*

In each case, something that may once have been meaningful has begun to exert an influence out of proportion to its place in life. We must learn to recognise that shift.

> *There is a difference between something being part of your life and allowing it to take over your life.*

01 PAUSE

What am I holding on to?

03 When love, belonging and ambition become overwhelming

Think how many of our decisions are made out of fear of losing something. We stay silent because we fear disappointing someone. We compromise our aspirations because we fear losing a relationship. We keep pursuing an ambition because we have invested years in it, even though our interests have changed. We may even sacrifice our peace of mind to keep up an image of happiness.

> *Daniel keeps saying yes to plans he does not want and a path he stopped believing in two years ago. Nothing is dramatically wrong. He simply cannot picture who he would be if he stopped.*

Why do we do this? Often because our emotional attachments become tangled up with our sense of security, and we begin to believe our happiness depends on keeping everything exactly as it is. But people change. Circumstances change. Our priorities evolve.

A healthy relationship should allow people to grow. An ambition should give direction to our lives, not consume them. Belonging should not require us to surrender our individuality.

This does not mean abandoning relationships when difficulties arise, or walking away when responsibilities become demanding. Some relationships deserve patience and repair. Some ambitions need perseverance through hard periods. The real question is whether our commitment

is helping us grow, or whether our attachment has made us unable to see what needs to change.

> *We must learn to distinguish between commitment that strengthens us and dependence that diminishes us.*

04
The invisible pressure of wanting more

For today's generation, the challenge has another dimension. The next experience, achievement or thrill is always within reach, and social media keeps showing us other people's successes, relationships, travels and celebrations.

> *You open your phone for a minute, and look up much later with a faint sense that everyone else is further along.*

We see what others have and begin to wonder what is missing from our own lives. We want to experience more, achieve more, earn more, be recognised more. There is nothing wrong with ambition; it can give our lives direction and purpose. But when the wish for more becomes endless, we lose the ability to appreciate what we already have, and we rarely stop to ask whether what we chase is meaningful.

> *Are we choosing our ambitions consciously, or simply responding to what the world celebrates?*
>
> *Are we building a life that reflects our values, or one that constantly seeks validation?*
>
> *Are we enjoying our experiences, or are we becoming dependent on the next source of excitement?*

These are not questions about giving up ambition. They are questions about directing it wisely. A fulfilling life is not measured by how much we accumulate, but also by how consciously we choose what deserves our time and energy.

02 PAUSE

What is it costing me?

05

When fear takes away the courage to change

One of the greatest obstacles to progress is not always a lack of ability or opportunity. Sometimes it is fear: of failure, of rejection, of losing someone, of being judged, of starting again. And sometimes, of discovering that moving forward means making difficult changes.

Painful experiences can leave us insecure. Repeated disappointments weaken our confidence. An unhealthy environment can gradually make us doubt our own abilities. When these feelings dominate, we postpone opportunities, question our capabilities and hesitate over what once inspired us. Our minds fill with what could go wrong, leaving little room for what could go right.

We must remember that fear is a human response, not a life instruction. It deserves to be understood, but it should not automatically be obeyed. Sometimes we need to gather the courage to change. At other times we need to seek support, rebuild our confidence and give ourselves time. Either way, we must not let pain, insecurity or fear permanently define the boundaries of our lives.

> *A difficult past should inform our decisions, not imprison our future.*

06
Life demands transitions, not just achievements

Perhaps the most overlooked part of growth is recognising when a transition is necessary. We tend to think of progress as addition: a better job, a bigger opportunity, more recognition, more possessions, more experiences. But genuine progress also asks what we need to leave behind.

LEAVING BEHIND		MOVING TOWARD
Constantly seeking approval	→	Self-confidence
Emotional dependence	→	Emotional maturity
Pleasing everyone	→	Respecting our own values
Chasing every desire	→	Meaningful ambitions
Fearing change	→	Willingness to learn and adapt
Success as possessions	→	Meaning in our contribution

These transitions do not happen overnight. They need awareness, patience and a willingness to question our own habits. Sometimes the hardest person to challenge is ourselves. We grow comfortable with familiar patterns and defend our choices, because accepting the need for change is uncomfortable. But growth requires intellectual honesty: asking whether the way we live today is helping us create the future we genuinely want.

03 PAUSE

What could I become if I released its undue influence?

07
Three moments of honest reflection

Before moving further, take a little time to examine your own life.

A MOMENT WITH YOURSELF

No right answers. Just honest ones.

01

What am I holding on to?

A relationship, an expectation, a desire, an achievement or a fear? Do I hold on because it genuinely enriches my life, or because I have become accustomed to its presence?

02

What is it costing me?

Is it taking away my time, concentration, courage, self-respect or opportunities for growth?

03

What could change if I released its undue influence?

What possibilities might open up if I made decisions with greater clarity, confidence and commitment to my life's purpose?

You do not need to find immediate answers. The purpose of reflection is not to judge ourselves. It is to understand ourselves more honestly. And sometimes, that understanding is the beginning of change.

Making room for the person we are becoming

Life is a continuous process of learning and becoming. The person we were ten years ago may not share the aspirations, understanding or priorities we have today. Our experiences should expand our understanding, not restrict it. Our relationships should allow us to mature. Our ambitions should encourage us to contribute. And our desires should not grow so dominant that they hide our responsibilities towards ourselves and others.

There is no shame in changing direction when earlier choices no longer reflect what we now understand. No weakness in recognising that an attachment has become excessive. No failure in beginning again after disappointment.

But letting go is not always about walking away. Sometimes it is about changing our expectations, setting boundaries, correcting our behaviour or learning to relate to something differently. The wisdom lies in recognising what needs to change, and in remaining open to growth without becoming prisoners of our past choices.

08
The freedom to move forward

We spend so much of our lives learning how to acquire, achieve, possess and preserve. Perhaps we should also learn the wisdom of releasing.

Not everything we love must be held tightly. Not everything we desire must be pursued. Not every expectation must be fulfilled. And not every choice we once made must remain our choice forever.

There comes a time to separate our life's direction from the excessive influence of attachments, cravings, insecurities and fears that no longer contribute to our growth. We preserve what is meaningful, nurture what is healthy, fulfil our responsibilities, and have the courage to reconsider what is holding us back.

Because life is not simply about reaching a destination. It is also about the person we become along the way.

> *The real freedom to move forward begins when we stop allowing what we fear losing to decide what we are capable of becoming.*

And perhaps that is one of life's most important transitions: learning to hold on with love, live with purpose, and let go with understanding.

— SANGEETA NATARAJAN



Mira, Leila, Sam and Daniel are illustrative composites, not real people.