

# Personal and Planetary Wellness

Addressing Climate Change, Health, and Social Justice Challenges

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ISBN: 1547278080

ISBN-13: 978-1547278084

## DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to Sidbarth, my unborn nephew.  
It is also for every child in the world, of every species. We will create a secure future for you. We must.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Diane and Margaret were my intrepid editors, advisors, and proofreaders for this book – any errors are mine alone.

There is no way this book would have been assembled so expeditiously without their dedication and persistence.

Thank you to you both for your invaluable suggestions and feedback, your supportive energy, and undying love for me and for our shared devotion to a safer and happier world. Margaret, who is my mom and (an)altruist at Alchemus

Prime, wrote some of the wellness essays in her beautiful and nurturing voice. I am grateful to the scientists and researchers whose shoulders we stand on as we explore their findings and aim to communicate them in simpler terms.

It is a privilege to pursue my questions and cultivate ways for living well personally and for the planet.

I am thankful to Moshe, who told me, a few years ago, to write and share my thoughts - I have not stopped since!

Most of all, I am thankful to Ma Nature for her inspiration, which drives all my work, turning it into play.

## NOTES:

I created all the diagrams and took all the pictures in this book, except for my photo on the back cover, which Ike

Shin captured. The front cover photo represents the Alchemus Prime Diamond Model and one of our slogans:

**connect, create, transform, sustain.** We connect with ourselves and nature (through meditation and time spent outside); create and implement new habits, such as what we eat (using design thinking); transform our behavior and our very selves (applying behavioral sciences), like a caterpillar turns into a butterfly; and sustain those earth-friendly changes over time (using lessons from nature via the discipline of biomimicry).



# Introduction

I am a seeker. The status quo never satisfies me. I want a world that is safer, healthier, and more equitable. Don't you? In my search for answers, I have often found amazing insights and often, profound questions. This book contains a collection of 70 essays out of over 250 I've written in the last two and a half years that exemplify my seeking. The essays focus on how to engage with our loved ones, colleagues, nature, and ourselves in ways that create harmony. Each essay begins with either a piece of research or a direct experience, and aims to distill insights and principles for how we might become better leaders in a constantly changing, sometimes depressing, and sometimes scary world. These essays started off as blogs and have been reformatted and updated for this book.

For me, the elephants in the room with regard to our current society are climate change and lifestyle diseases. I look around and see people who are suffering, a global society that is precarious in its politics, and animals and plants under constant assault from our activities. It turns out that climate change and our illnesses are intricately related through our daily actions: what we eat, how we transport ourselves, and many other decisions we make as active and sometimes passive consumers. In a time of disenchanting politics, it's more urgent than ever to focus on what each of us can do to make a direct positive impact on human society, a safer future for our children and theirs, our forests, oceans, grasslands, other ecosystems, the climate, and public health.

Social justice is a third elephant in the global room. It is a thread that ties together what we are seeing in terms of ill health and environmental damage. All too often, negative health and environmental impacts happen to the poor, minorities, and disadvantaged people, and to animals that cannot defend themselves. Just as Gandhi resisted the British by empowering locals to make their own clothes, people everywhere can resist the oppression of animals, the poor, children, women, people of color, LGBTQ communities, and other oppressed groups by making small, targeted changes in their daily routines. In this book, I explore how to address these issues in practical ways.

This book gives you tips on how to:

- As an individual, contribute to your own wellness and that of the Earth, starting with one action at a time;
- Be a leader and role model in your own home or workplace for wellness, efficiency, and creativity;
- Become more mindful and aware of yourself, people around you, and nature; and
- Be more confident and better aligned with your values as an authentic leader.

The evidence covered in this book spans the last few years and includes:

- What each and every individual can do about climate change, by taking charge of daily actions such as diet and exercise.
- How to improve your health using three tactics: what you put into your body, how you move your body, and how you relate to other living beings.
- How you can connect with nature in ways that improve health, spark boundless creativity, and support increased productivity.
- How to be a leader in your current life, professionally and personally through mindfulness and heightened awareness and active overcoming of social injustice.
- How diets that contain high amounts of meat and dairy worsen climate instability, water pollution and scarcity, deforestation, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, animal cruelty, poverty, and in turn, our own health, leading to lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

Each chapter offers a set of perspectives on a particular aspect of personal and planetary wellness. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the framework I have been developing, which I call Personal and Planetary Wellness. It contains the ways in which our daily choices affect our own bodies and longevity, as well as global resources such as water, food, forests, wildlife, and more.

In Chapter 2, Margaret, a medical doctor and (an)altruist at Alchemus Prime, and I explore the evidence for how the foods we choose to eat can either make us very ill, or prevent or

reverse lifestyle diseases such as cancer, diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, without drugs. Chapter 3 explores the myriad connections between what we eat, and how it contributes to or reduces climate change. Some of the medical education themes Margaret addresses in Chapter 2 are broadened in Chapter 4 into a discussion of how we might improve the entire education system to better nurture people and protect the Earth.

In Chapter 5, I discuss racism and social justice based on my personal experiences as a woman of Indian descent who was born and raised in Fiji, spending half of her life in California falling in love with the cultural diversity in the San Francisco Bay Area, and working on climate change and wellness issues. I also explore social justice in prison, from a genetic perspective, and against animals.

Chapter 6 contains explorations of the benefits meditation provides, which extend far beyond stress-reduction. There are benefits to productivity, longevity, brain function, and much more. I discuss different meditation techniques and how to apply them in the workplace and in our personal time.

Chapters 7 and 8 explore innovation. In Chapter 7, I delve into biomimicry, a discipline that focuses on learning and applying the wisdom of nature's processes, designs, and solutions. Biomimicry can teach us so much about how we design systems to engage people at work, how to become more mindful, how we integrate solutions for better results, and so much more. Chapter 8 contains essays about design thinking, a process for fostering systematic creativity in problem solving. I examine design thinking and its value, how to scale it, and how to integrate it with other methods, including behavioral science techniques, to achieve more effective results for personal and professional challenges.

Chapter 9 focuses on behavior change, which is my specialty and passion. I walk through different steps we can take to be better motivated, stop procrastinating, and create more alignment between our values, thoughts, goals, and actions. In Chapter 10, I apply behavioral science principles to climate change and sustainability issues, highlighting how changing our own actions can bring us quick and effective solutions as we fight climate change.



I conclude with Chapter 11, which investigates integrity in leadership. This chapter contains essays that dig deeply into the true self, and how to lead in ways that maintain the core of who we are, by aligning values, thoughts, and actions, as we aim to do at Alchemus Prime. In my professional and personal experience, I have found that nothing of value can be created or sustained without integrity, so I end with the most important value I know.

In sum, these short essays offer guidance in what I hope is accessible language, each with a reflection at the end that prompts you to think a little more deeply about how you can be a stronger force for change. You could read this book from start to finish, or pick any essay at will and see where it takes you – see the Table of Contents for essay titles. Check out the Glossary for any terms that are unclear to you. Use the Chapter Notes if you'd like to learn more about any of the topics I mention – they contain links to peer-reviewed research papers, various types of scientific and policy reports, videos, and news articles.

Most importantly, this book is not just for reading; it's a call to action. If you really care about climate change, lifestyle diseases, and social justice, and how they are affecting you and your family, but aren't sure what exactly you can do about it, this book is for you.

Lastly, I can't promise you that reading this book will be comfortable. You may encounter feelings of defensiveness, incredulity, doubt, skepticism, and more, and I urge you to persist in getting answers to your questions, asking more questions, and understanding why your actions matter so much. Once you discover the power of your daily choices, you may want to explore how you might differently choose the consequences you want to support. One choice in particular makes the biggest difference: what we eat. Read this book to find out why.