

**“Discovering who you
are:**

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Discovering Who You Are Service by Neelam Bakshi

I have spent most of my life in Glasgow, having arrived from Kenya when I was two. Growing up here has been interesting - straddling two cultures, and being someone who yearned for independence of thought. All of this contributed to my journey of discovering who I am.

As a two-year-old, I was popped into the local nursery. On reflection, I think the staff learned their nursery care methods in the 1940s, although I joined in the 1960s. I have no idea what the impact was, and much more serious trauma happened in my home environment with a close bereavement at 4, and worse, starting a couple of years later. The primary school was very culturally and linguistically diverse, with a variety of Asian backgrounds. We were encouraged to learn English as our primary language, and I went from three spoken languages to one. I was much happier with my nose stuck in a book, and somewhat aloof, although I had a couple of close friends. I was a people-watcher, uncomfortable with chatting, playing games, or anything physical. I wanted to know how people tick.

I picked up books on palmistry, numerology, and astrology. I read hands and created charts for fellow pupils and teachers. I switched to a selective, more affluent school and discovered that I wasn't as clever as I thought. But the 11-plus, which would have determined which kind of secondary school we should be sent to, showed that I had a high IQ; otherwise, I might have been placed on race alone. But this was just as comprehensive education was being put in place across Scotland. In my first year at secondary school, pupils had diverse abilities. I shouldn't have known anything about the IQ results, but teachers made comments. It was such a different perspective from how I thought of myself. I'm glad the system changed. Late bloomers like Einstein wouldn't have been allowed to be educated at an intellectually focused school, sent to vocational education as factory fodder instead.

My shyness with people was partially overcome by helping behind the counter and serving customers in the family grocery shop, as many Asian children did. I met people with diverse backgrounds and experiences, chatted with some, and was simply being polite with others, just watching how things worked with different people.

I was an Asian in Scotland, where we knew our place in family structures and society – divided and relegated by sex, visible colour, and age. My power lay in being the oldest amongst my sisters and being clever, which were very much part of the way I survived. I was learning quickly about the sociology and psychology of people, as well as prejudice.

Over the years, I have explored the very difficult and traumatic experiences I had as a child and in later life. They affected how I interacted and what I thought of myself. So there were points when I had a lot of complexes, and as someone who was an analyser and overthinker, the combination was like a vicious circle. I didn't like it much or know how to change it. And it was not for discussion with parents who were first-generation immigrants, working all hours, dealing with overt racism and relative poverty compared to their quality of life in Kenya, and now with children, and lodgers too, to make ends meet. We lived on the top floor of a tenement with no washing machine till the third child, and where the downstairs neighbour would not let me and their little girl play together.

How did I know who I was? Well, I didn't. Was I Indian? Was I British? Was I Scottish? I really had to work through the differences and came to the conclusion that I was all of them, and that it might be context-dependent. In England, I was definitely Scottish. At weddings, I was Indian. And my nationality until I was 14 was indeterminate – a British protected person of Kenya until I was naturalised and got my first British passport. Did I support Rangers or Celtic? I had no idea what to say when my primary school friends asked me that. And they were friends, and there was no reason not to be. They just wanted to know, because they needed to locate me as well.

When the International Flat moved next door to my family, I became a Sharing of Faiths committee member as a teenager. I discovered later that this was partially engineered to get me out of my painful shyness. It worked. So once again, I was meeting people from very diverse backgrounds. It was where Rory and I met. I also met Iain Brown and many others, including Stella Reekie, whose incredible life you have celebrated. These are themes throughout my life – synchronicities, amazing opportunities, and equally daunting challenges. The

International Flat and Sharing of Faiths brought speaking opportunities at meetings and presentations, and the benediction today is one I contributed in the 1970s when we were assembling multi-faith prayers. Meeting Rory brought the challenge of clashing cultures, dealing with difficult family views on both sides, and my self-identifying as a rebel, which was a shock to me and others. It was 50 years ago.

I continued people-watching with numerology, added Tarot, and started exploring more formal assessment as part of studying psychology at university, with different perspectives on people, personality, and abnormal psychology (when things seem to go wrong), and the emergence of positive psychology (which starts from people flourishing). Long-term illness had me leave university early. I was able to convert summer work into a year's temporary work and then into a permanent post. The workplace and the people supported me through marriage, pregnancy, and the start of raising our daughter. How wonderful to have been working in John Smith's Booksellers that year rather than some of the large department stores I'd toiled in.

I was able to explore the world and more "ways of being" through books. I looked at more unusual approaches of examining human being such as archetypes (which Carl Jung evolved from his work with Tarot); I could never get into the Enneagram as I seemed to be a mixture, until this week, when a quick test brought out "Reformer", a much nicer label than "Rebel". And my interest in spirituality, alongside multi-faith work and energy work, was rekindled, then took a back seat as I moved into more stable, staid work as a civil servant.

I learned about the book "The Gift of Not Belonging" by Dr. Rami Kaminski last year. It talks about "otroverts" – people who are introverted by nature and can cope at the front, and they recharge away from people. It explains why various personality tests didn't give me clarity, and why I was able to take to politics and being in the headlines – positively and negatively – when I became the first Asian woman elected as a councillor in Scotland while still a civil servant. Some of it was great and fun, and I was accepted and supported. Some of it was dire. There were racist incidents from people that I didn't expect, and there were quite a lot of put-downs from people I didn't expect. And what I discovered was that it wasn't a party-political thing; it was because some

people were just nasty. On the day after I was elected, I spent some time “talking to myself” to get a mindset shift from being an activist without power to accepting that I was now a councillor, on the other side of the fence. I told myself, *“I have the right to be here, and I have equal status because we were all elected by an electorate,”* and that’s what I had done too.

Being a councillor for Glasgow, with its history of immigration and poverty, and specialising in equality issues, brought insights into the lives of people in complex circumstances, as well as into the experience of conducting surgeries. I spoke with people about their experiences and needs sensitively and with a focus on resolution. I gained skills in public speaking, chairing, building professional relationships, and governance. It also led me into recruitment, which latterly became an area of focus and expertise, and where, again, it’s about analysing people in terms of skills, experience, qualities, and behaviour. My trade union experience led me into judicial work on employment and disability tribunals, where we can add honesty, credibility, and reliability into the mix.

I have encountered thousands of people through different work environments. Despite believing that all people are of equal value, I have had to evaluate and decide what kind of people they are in ways that impact their life chances – for work, for training certificates, for judicial decisions, and more. And I’ve learnt that my preconceptions, or labels, affect this.

During our marriage, Rory and I have experienced this positively as well. Some work difficulties arose for Rory, and it became the right time to explore what I’d previously labelled as oddness or eccentricity. Rory received official confirmation that he had high-functioning autism or Asperger’s Syndrome. It created a new version of his present and his past as he reviewed his life through this label. We collected books on autism, and he wrote a blog and a chapter for a book. He was able to reframe failures as successes, taking into account the interpersonal and processing challenges faced by people with autism. It was like a teenage identity crisis, except he was nearly 60. About 6 months ago, he suddenly asked if I had considered whether I might have ADHD. I had never thought of myself as neurodivergent, and I started to read Dr. Gabor Mate’s book “Scattered Minds”. With every paragraph it became

clearer and clearer that hat was mine to wear too. It explained much about the state of paperwork in our home, unfinished books and projects, and a mind that didn't stop and operated with many tabs open at once, just like every technical device I own. I haven't bothered with a formal diagnosis. It explains things, and I've developed strategies for most things except tidiness and timekeeping.

Alongside this I have had an almost incredible personal development journey arising from curiosity, long-term childhood abuse and trauma and the need to get out of its hooks which seemed to be in every part of me, eating away on the inside, without me appreciating the impact even as it took away my joy, my ability to feel pleasure about anything, my self-confidence, my lucidity, my ability to function well. I saw a psychiatrist, psychologist, and psychotherapist, all of whom scratched only the surface. Fifteen years later, events related to my council work retriggered me and brought everything to the surface. Synchronicity brought me into the sphere of some immensely supportive people, including a couple of university lecturers, my doctor, and eventually also a psychiatrist who was a world expert in Bioenergetics, a somatic body therapy, from whom I learned what true unconditional positive regard felt like as a client. I had a super manager in the civil service who was supportive and coped with me needing to work in odd ways as more emotional and bodily impacts surfaced and affected my mood and sleep. It was hard work for me and for Rory, supporting me through all of this.

It was rare for people to talk about those experiences, so I didn't, until 30 years ago, on the day I disclosed my experiences in the 100-strong Labour Group in the Council as we were to vote on funding the Zero Tolerance work in Strathclyde about violence towards women. I did not disclose to my parents until partway through therapy that lasted three years and helped, and I discussed it very publicly on the radio, where I already had a profile. It was an arena where I became an odd sort of role model – showing women that it was possible to be a survivor, successful, and still be working through the impacts.

Discovering NLP and other modalities took me further. There is a quote attributed to Carl Jung, "You are not what happened to you. You are who you choose to become." I thought I would never get to the point where I am now, and many courses and methods later, in my 60s, I can

truthfully say, “This was in the past and who I am is informed by what happened, but not controlled by it.”

Alongside all of this, I'd been on a spiritual path and had adopted Shiva as my personal God because I was born on Shivratri, when Hindus celebrate Shiva. I'd started to develop more sensitivity and skills as an energy worker – starting with the Silva Method and Reiki, and working with NLP, hypnosis, and many other modalities over the last 30 years. I began to learn from Landmark and NLP how much our speaking and body language were part of our being and communication, and that changing them could make real shifts. I discovered the notion “models of the world,” which had a revolutionary impact on my thinking. One model (the “Logical Levels model” by Robert Dilts) distinguishes behaviour, values, identity, and spiritual self. I shifted from saying or thinking “You are stupid “ or “You are sexist” to leaving identity intact, and focusing on behaviour which we generally believe can be changed and is under our control, saying instead, “that was a stupid thing to do” or “that was a sexist statement”. It changed the way I trained - people had a different model of the world from me. Right and wrong didn't fit in these conversations. I also learned how we represent the world, and suddenly my behaviour around colour made sense.

While at a Sound and Voice workshop, I took a travelling watercolour palette. At the start of those three days, I was painting thick, dark, heavy colours. It looked like bars on a window. By the end of that weekend, I was painting flowers in pastel colours with amusing titles. I took some of that artwork to show my therapist at the time, and it was just amazing to see the lightness of hand coming through.

I discovered that a tree I painted reflected how I felt physically, in that it was weaker on one side. As I've grown older and as disabilities developed, that is the side that has had the physical issues. I discovered for myself that self-expression shows things you are not consciously aware of.

A couple of years later, I took my first certified NLP training, and I went in wearing a lot of black. I had a couple of coloured jackets with me. By the end of those seven days, I'd gone out to buy some brightly coloured scarves, which I wore with a red jacket. My mood had lightened

considerably. I found out there is a whole subject area on the “Psychology of Applied Colour”.

Through both NLP and energy work, I discovered that things I thought were hardwired and couldn't be changed actually could change. There's more software than hardware in how we are constructed, and I experienced or saw such shifts in others. In one of my NLP courses, I remember a woman who was able to dispose of her spectacles at the end of the Breakthrough session we were training in. I kept in touch with her, and that change lasted, but you can't do it on order, so it's not scientifically provable. As Arthur C. Clarke said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

NLP also reintroduced the notion of “parts of me” or “subpersonalities,” which I first came across by accident. I went on a course I thought was about visualisation, taught by the very well-known teacher, the late Shakti Gawain. We did lots of things, including “Voice Dialogue” processes developed by Hal and Sidra Stone, in which different “parts” are enabled to speak and discuss what they need. I was able to see and hear that people were constructed very differently. One woman packed very lightly. She could move flat overnight because all she needed fitted in a rucksack. It takes me months to clear a room because I'm a hoarder – an ADHD trait. I didn't know there were people like her.

There are other systems, too, that you might come across. The first one I came across was one you may recall if you're older - the Numskulls from the Dandy or the Beano. Little men that lived inside a man's head, and one was in charge of making it all work. There are therapy models with one of those, including a “Head Engineer”.

In “Many Minds, One Self”, Richard Schwartz, the developer of Internal Family Systems, and Robert Falconer challenge the notion that we each have one mind from which emanate various thoughts, emotions, images, etc. They suggest it is an illusion because the mind is naturally multiple, containing an inner family of sub-personalities, and each of us also contains an undamaged healing essence—“the Self”, which virtually every spiritual and shamanic tradition has discovered.

My journey was one of trying to heal. I was healing my psyche and discovering that I had parts, I wasn't a single or fixed way, and there

were many ways of intervening, as well as many more ways in which my body and unconscious might be sending signals to me. For years, I couldn't remember my dreams. Now I can, and I have a dream notebook.

I moved from being someone who started in sciences to discovering where science didn't work for me, but energetic methods made a difference. From homeopathic treatment, which resolved a long-standing issue requiring daily medication for 15 years, to using language, visualisation, and specific energy processes to play with mood, pain, fatigue, and even, recently, a structural issue with a toe – part of the cluster of issues affecting my mobility. I even surprised my dentist by using tapping and sleeping through root canal treatment.

My current left side weakness and disabilities can't be resolved medically. This gives me absolute free rein to explore complementary and alternative health, and I am blessed to have had the journey of exploring healing and energy work, and to be part of a weekly healers' group, which supports me as we look at reducing impacts in the future. And the energy work has intertwined with increasing spiritual awareness. And clarity that I am a "light-worker". It doesn't apply just to energy-workers. It encompasses anyone who brings more light into the world, even if only by sowing seeds of light that blossom later.

The spiritual awakening began with a couple of experiences in childhood and in my teens. As an adult, I had a vision of being held, loving, and safe by Lord Shiva, as a child. An extraordinary and very comforting experience for someone with my childhood and years of feeling unsafe. I became interested in the Akashic Records – the energetic records of all that has happened, another connection linking Hinduism, Jung, and some New Age thinking. I found a teacher who was beginning to teach online and included case-study practical work, with some monitoring and assessment built in. I earned certification in 2010 as an Akashic Reader. More recently, I have been training and working with different frequencies of light healing, as well as meditations that take me deep into the light, where self seems to disappear. And in the last 6 months, there has been a leap. Once again, a teacher has appeared, but I did not expect my journey to take this turn.

Throughout my life, I have looked at personality, identity, parts, different minds, labels, impact of trauma on me and others – mind, body, characteristics, behaviour. I had the chance to consider individual impacts, family, cultural, and societal factors in how we develop and identify, as well as the effects of environment, nature, and nurture, with four biological sisters. And also the malleability of all of these. Identity, personality, mind, and even body are not me. The classic question then arises. Who is the I that is observing the I that is watching me? And if the answer is I am that, what is *that*?

So now I am exploring “being” from the perspective of Advaita or non-duality, but in a very practical way. Fortunately, it was an area Rory was interested in before we met, so I take it as another synchronicity that we can talk about it together. The teacher who showed up is acknowledged as a Mahavatar of Shiva, God/or Creation itself in human form, and the same Creation that manifests as different deities. His name is Haidakhand Babaji. He appeared in human form as a young man and lived from 1970 to 1984, and there is a lot of material, such as films, recordings, books, and statements from devotees, many of whom lived in the Ashrams with him and are still alive. His story is somewhat unusual even amongst Avatars and Mahavatars of whom there are many in Indian tradition. He has an international following. And I came across him for the first time late last year.

If you'd asked me, I would not have said I was looking for a spiritual guide, and it feels like he found me. It's new for me; there are resonances and delicate steps in exploring further, discovering more about my spiritual self and who I am becoming.

I'm finishing with a quote from Albert Einstein.

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.”