

THE FOUR REALMS

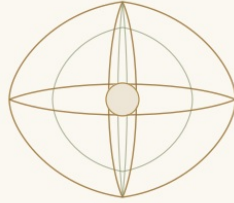
A Holistic Path to Curiosity and Change

MIKE PALMER • HOLISTIC COACHING

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INTRODUCTION

Why We Hold On to Old Stories

*"The body remembers what the mind
has learned to forget."*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

Why We Hold On to Old Stories

I didn't come to this work as a theory. I came to it through my own periods of anxiety and depression, and through learning to work with what I was carrying in a different way — through the four steps you're about to read, and a handful of concepts that helped me understand what was happening inside me.

Most of us carry something we haven't fully put down. A relationship that ended badly. A diagnosis. A parent who let us down. A year that changed everything. We know the facts of it — we could tell you exactly what happened, in order, without missing a beat.

But knowing the story isn't the same as being free of it.

Some of us don't even know what the story is. Some of us have become so numb or dissociated that we're experiencing life in an altered state — going through the motions, showing up, functioning, all while disconnected from what's actually happening underneath. If that's you, this isn't a book that requires you to already know what you're carrying. Just a willingness to get curious about it.

You've probably noticed this in your own life. You “know” you should let something go, and you still can't. You've talked about it, maybe even talked about it in therapy, and it still shows up — in your body, in your relationships, in the way you brace for bad news before it comes.

Please consider that the nervous system is based on survival. Any threat to the nervous system is a threat to survival, so the nervous system has to suppress or repress that threat, and that energy commonly gets stuck in the body — later presenting itself as a symptom.

This book isn't about digging up every hard thing that's ever

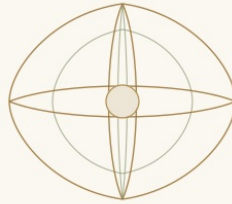
happened to you. It's about something simpler: getting curious about what's already right there — the pain, the pattern, the thing you keep circling back to — instead of trying to explain it away or push it down. What if we gave it a higher purpose you haven't considered before?

Curiosity is the tool. Not analysis, not judgment — just an honest, open question, asked without needing a tidy answer right away.

Over the next few chapters, we'll walk through a handful of ideas I use with almost every client I work with. Then we'll get into the four realms — the actual framework I use in sessions to help someone move from *stuck* to *changed*. Each chapter ends with a few questions. Sit with them. You don't have to answer them perfectly, or even out loud.

Questions to sit with:

- What's one thing in your life you want to change the most?
- What would happen if that one change occurred?
- How old were you the first time you had a shaming experience?
- What happened?
- What would it take to become curious about the story, instead of hoping it will go away?



CHAPTER ONE

What Is the Ego

*“We spend a lifetime defending a self
we never chose to become.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

What Is the Ego

Can we consider that our ego and ego parts are necessary for this literal existence? Is our ego the part of us that proves, defends, identifies, and attaches to things? Is it possible the ego was created for survival and gratification?

The word “ego” gets thrown around a lot, usually as an insult. “He's got a big ego.” “Check your ego at the door.” So most people walk into this word already thinking it means something bad — arrogance, vanity, someone who thinks too much of themselves.

That's not what I mean when I use it, and it's not what I want you to think of as you read this chapter.

Your ego is NOT your enemy. It's the part of you that formed to protect you — built out of every moment you needed to defend, explain, perform, or armor yourself to stay safe. It's not vanity. It's survival wearing a mask of confidence, or control, or perfectionism, or whatever shape kept you safest growing up. Your ego was necessary for your survival.

Think about the shaming experience you may have already sat with from the last chapter — that moment, whatever age you were, when something in you first learned “I am not okay as I am.” The ego is what got built in response to that moment. It's the version of you that decided: *I'll never let that happen again*. So it started managing, defending, proving, hiding — whatever it took.

That's why the ego shows up as the voice that needs to be right. The one that can't just apologize without explaining itself. The one that compares, competes, deflects, or shuts down the second something feels like a threat to how you see yourself. It's not because you're a difficult person. It's because some part of you learned, a long time ago, that being seen and heard

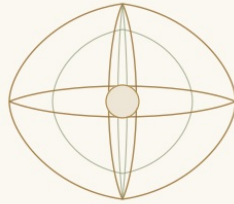
clearly wasn't safe.

Here's the shift I want to offer you: the ego isn't something to destroy or “get rid of.” You can't kill the part of you that kept you alive. What you can do is get curious about it — start noticing when it shows up, and ask what it's actually trying to protect.

When you catch yourself getting defensive, or needing to be right, or performing instead of just being — that's not a character flaw. That's your ego doing its job, the only way it knows how. The work isn't to shame it into silence. It's to thank it for trying to protect, and gently ask what's the higher purpose this “ego reaction” is trying to teach me.

Questions to sit with:

- When you judge yourself, is that your mother's voice or your father's voice you hear?
- When do you notice yourself needing to be right, in control, or seen a certain way?
- What's the difference between who you are and who you think you are?
- Why would anyone want you as a life partner?
- Did you notice the parts of you that needed to prove and defend in the previous question?



CHAPTER TWO

Emotional Needs

*“What we couldn't ask for as children,
we still can't as adults.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

Emotional Needs

Underneath almost every reaction, every argument, every silence that goes on too long, there's a need that isn't being met. Not a want — a need. To be heard. To be valued. To feel safe. To matter to someone. To be chosen.

Most of us were never taught to name these needs, let alone ask for them directly. In fact, many of us weren't even invited to consider that we had emotional needs at all — not by anyone who modeled asking for them, and not by anyone who noticed when they went unmet. So we adapted. We learned to meet our emotional needs indirectly, by taking care of everyone else's — by parenting our parents, managing other people's moods, putting their needs ahead of our own so that the household, or the relationship, or the room stayed calm enough for us to feel safe in it. We became the ones who noticed what others needed before they said it, while our own needs went unnoticed, even by us.

That pattern doesn't just fade with age. It follows us into adult relationships, where we keep prioritizing everyone else's comfort over our own, and it quietly builds a reservoir of anger, shame, and resentment — anger at never being asked what we needed, shame for having needs at all, and resentment toward the very people we keep taking care of, even though we're the ones who chose to keep doing it. It leaks out sideways — as irritability, as withdrawal, as over-explaining, as needing everyone around us to be okay so that we can feel okay.

This is where the ego and our emotional needs start working together. The ego proves, defends, and attaches — but it's doing that in service of something underneath it: a need that's asking to be met. When someone doesn't text back and you spiral, it's rarely really about the text. It's about a need for reassurance that got triggered. When you can't let a disagreement go, it's

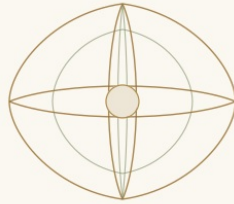
rarely really about who's right. It's about a need to be respected, or heard, or not dismissed the way you were dismissed before.

Most emotional needs were formed early, in relationship with the people who raised you. If you had to earn love through achievement, you likely carry a need to prove your worth. If your feelings were dismissed or minimized, you likely carry a need to have your experience validated. These needs aren't weaknesses. They're information — a map of what was missing, and what still matters to you now.

The work isn't to stop having needs. You're not going to “outgrow” needing connection, safety, or to be seen. The work is learning to recognize the need underneath the reaction, and then finding honest ways to meet it — through yourself, through the people you trust, through the relationships you're building now — instead of unconsciously demanding it from people who were never going to be able to give it to you, or exhausting yourself trying to earn it by taking care of everyone but yourself.

Questions to sit with:

- Are you aware of your emotional needs?
- How did you get your emotional needs met at 10 years old (5th grade)?
- Growing up, which of your emotional needs went unmet most consistently?
- Do I know how to get my own needs met interdependently when I don't feel valued or safe from an external source?
- What would it look like to meet that need for yourself, rather than waiting for someone else to?



CHAPTER THREE

The Nervous System Regulated vs. Dysregulated

*“You cannot think your way out of a body
that doesn't feel safe.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

The Nervous System: Regulated vs. Dysregulated

You don't need a science background to understand this chapter, and that's on purpose. But it helps to know two words, because they explain so much about why you feel the way you feel.

Your nervous system runs on two main settings. One is called the **sympathetic** nervous system — think of it as your gas pedal. It's what switches on when there's a threat, real or perceived, and it prepares your body to act. The other is your **parasympathetic** nervous system — your brake pedal, the state that lets you rest, digest, connect, and heal.

Most of us are living almost entirely on the gas pedal. Not because we're weak or broken, but because modern life — deadlines, notifications, traffic, unresolved relationships, old trauma that never got processed — keeps our sympathetic system switched on far more than it was ever designed for. We were built to use that gas pedal in short bursts, for real emergencies, and then come back down. Instead, many of us live in a low-grade version of emergency mode all day, every day, without ever fully realizing it.

When the sympathetic system takes over, it shows up as one of four patterns. You've probably heard of **fight** and **flight** — getting confrontational, or trying to escape the situation entirely. You may have also heard of **freeze** — shutting down, going numb, feeling stuck. But there's a fourth one I want to name, because it's the one most people miss in themselves: **facade**. This is the mask. The performance. Smiling through it, staying “fine,” keeping everyone comfortable while something underneath you is anything but regulated.

Here's the point I want to make as clearly as I can: you cannot heal, grow, or change a pattern while your nervous system is dysregulated. It doesn't matter how much insight you have, how many books you read, or how badly you want to change. If your body is in survival mode, it isn't interested in growth — it's interested in getting through the next five minutes. Healing requires safety first. Insight can wait for the nervous system to catch up.

So before we get into the four realms of healing later in this book, I want you to have some real, practical ways to help your nervous system come back down out of survival mode. These aren't complicated, and

you don't need to do all of them. You just need a few that work for you.

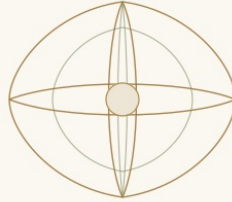
Ways to help regulate your nervous system:

- **Balanced blood sugar.** Big spikes and crashes in blood sugar mimic — and worsen — the same stress response we're trying to calm.
- **Proper hydration.** Your nervous system runs on electrical signals, and dehydration makes that system noisier and less stable.
- **Intentional breathing.** Slow, extended exhales are one of the fastest ways to signal safety to your body.
- **Fascial release.** The connective tissue throughout your body holds tension the same way your mind holds memory.
- **Walking in nature.** Simple movement, natural light, and being outside all help shift you out of survival mode.
- **Grounding your body.** Feeling your feet on the earth reminds your nervous system that you are here, now, safe.
- **Emotional Freedom Technique (tapping).** A simple, physical practice that helps discharge stuck emotional energy.
- **The four realms of healing.** Working through your story at every level is itself one of the most regulating things you can do.

None of these are about forcing calm. They're about giving your body enough safety that it can finally put the gas pedal down.

Questions to sit with:

- Which of the four patterns — fight, flight, freeze, or facade — do you default to most often?
- What does dysregulation feel like in your body, specifically?
- Which of the regulating practices above do you already do, even without realizing it was helping?
- What would it look like to build one small regulating habit into your daily life?
- Do you know what it feels like to have a regulated nervous system?



CHAPTER FOUR

Responding Rather Than Reacting

*“Consider when we react, it's usually a sign
we feel shame, fear, or guilt.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

Responding Rather Than Reacting

There's a difference between reacting and responding, and learning to feel that difference in real time might be one of the most useful skills in this entire book.

A reaction is fast, automatic, and usually out of proportion to what actually just happened. Someone makes an offhand comment and you're suddenly defensive for the rest of the day. Someone's late and you feel a flash of rage that surprises even you. A reaction isn't really about the moment in front of you — it's your ego, activated, protecting you from something old.

Here's what I want you to understand about that moment: when you react, your ego is almost always experiencing shame or fear underneath it. And that's not a bad thing. It's not a flaw to fix or a weakness to hide. It's information. Your reaction is pointing, like a compass needle, straight at something that still needs your attention.

More specifically, when you react strongly to something in the present, it's very possible your ego is associating that moment with an earlier experience — often a childhood experience — where you felt shamed. The person in front of you today might have nothing to do with what happened back then. But your nervous system doesn't always know the difference between then and now. It just recognizes the feeling, and it reacts the way it learned to react the first time.

This is where curiosity becomes so important again. Can you become aware of your reactive ego parts — not to shame them for reacting, but to actually get curious about what they're protecting and what they're remembering? That awareness is the first step toward something different: responding to life, instead of constantly reacting to it.

To respond rather than react, we first have to understand what the triggering thing actually represents to us. Almost nothing that sets us off is really about the surface-level event. It represents

something — rejection, abandonment, not being enough, not being safe — and until we can name what it represents, we'll keep reacting to it and projecting it onto everything and everyone outside of us.

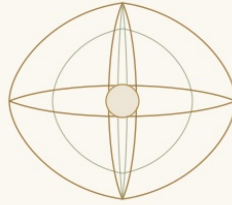
And to truly respond, we have to be regulated — which is exactly what we talked about in the last chapter. A dysregulated nervous system cannot respond; it can only react. So responding isn't just a mindset shift. It's a nervous system state, built on the practices we already talked about.

There's one more layer underneath all of this, and it's worth being honest about: to really get regulated and responsive, we often have to process a hidden belief that's been running quietly in the background — the belief that we're not enough. That belief is usually what's underneath the shame we feel when we react. It's uncomfortable to look at directly, but it's also the thing that, once acknowledged, loosens its grip.

When I can respond to life instead of constantly reacting to it, everything shifts. Life becomes more peaceful. I stop taking things so personally. And maybe most importantly, I get to move from sympathy to compassion — from feeling sorry for people (or for myself) to actually understanding what's underneath the behavior, in myself and in others.

Questions to sit with:

- Think of a recent moment you reacted strongly. What might that reaction have been protecting you from?
- What does that trigger actually represent to you — rejection, not being enough, not being safe, something else?
- Can you trace that reaction back to an earlier experience where you felt something similar?
- What would it take for you to pause between the trigger and your response, even by a few seconds?
- Do you know the difference between sympathy and compassion?



CHAPTER FIVE

Individuation Becoming Who You Actually Are

*"Beneath every role you played to stay safe,
is a part of you that's dying to be seen and accepted."*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

Individuation Becoming Who You Actually Are

Have you ever heard the word “individuation” before?

If not, don't worry — it's a simple idea wearing an unnecessarily complicated word. Individuation just means becoming who you actually are, underneath everyone else's expectations, roles, and definitions of you. It's the process of separating your true self from the version of you that was shaped to keep everyone else comfortable and happy.

Think about everything we've talked about so far. Your ego formed to protect you. Your emotional needs got buried or redirected into taking care of other people. Your nervous system learned to live on high alert. And your reactions have been pointing to old wounds this whole time. All of that happened for a reason — but somewhere in the middle of surviving all of it, many of us lost track of who we actually are, separate from all the roles we've been playing.

Individuation is the work of finding that person again.

Here's what it can look like when someone hasn't individuated: they're still living out someone else's script. Maybe they chased a career that made a parent proud, but never asked if it made them happy. Maybe they're still the family peacekeeper, the one who smooths everything over, even at the cost of their own needs. Maybe they've built an entire identity around being needed, being agreeable, being whoever the room needs them to be — and somewhere along the way, they stopped knowing what they actually wanted, or even what they actually felt.

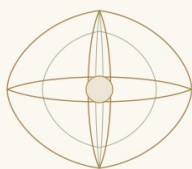
This doesn't mean something is wrong with you if you recognize yourself here. It's incredibly common. Most of us were never taught that separating from other people's expectations was even allowed, let alone necessary.

The signs of not being individuated tend to show up quietly: a persistent sense of “Who am I when no one's watching?” A tendency to say yes when you mean no. Feeling responsible for other people's emotions. Feeling lost after a breakup, a job change, or a big life transition — not because you lost the relationship or the role, but because you built your identity around it and didn't know who was left underneath.

This chapter is a bridge. Everything we've covered so far — the ego, your needs, your nervous system, your reactions — has been circling one central question: who are you, underneath all of it? That question is exactly what the four realms of healing, which we're about to move into, are designed to help you answer. Individuation isn't a destination you arrive at once. It's an ongoing return to yourself, and the four realms give you an actual process for making that return. So here's the question underneath all the others: how much longer are you willing to live as someone else's version of you before you choose to become your own?

Questions to sit with:

- Had you heard the word “individuation” before reading this chapter?
- Where in your life are you still living out someone else's expectations rather than your own?
- Who are you when no one else's needs, opinions, or presence are in the room?
- What roles have you built your identity around, and what would be left of you without them?
- Can you remember a moment as a child when you knew exactly who you were, before you learned to adjust for other people?
- What would it mean to individuate — to actually become who you are, rather than who you were shaped to be?



PART TWO

The Four Realms of Healing

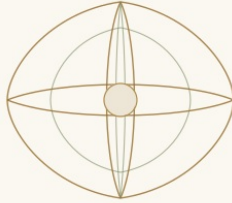
You now have the language — the ego, your emotional needs, your nervous system, your reactions, and the deeper work of becoming who you actually are.

From here, we move from understanding into practice. What follows is the same framework I use with every client, session after session — the actual steps of holistic coaching.

Each realm builds on the one before it. Take them in order, and let each question sit with you before moving to the next.

Let's begin.

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING



CHAPTER SIX

The Literal Realm Where the Ego Resists Change

*“Before we can heal the story,
we have to be honest about what it is.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

The Literal Realm Where the Ego Resists Change

The literal realm is where almost every client starts, and it's also where the ego wants to stay.

This is the realm of symptoms. Pain in the body. Fatigue. Anxiety. Relationship challenges. Compulsive behaviors. Negative thoughts. Procrastination. Self-sabotage. Disordered eating. Avoidance. People-pleasing. Anger. Sleep problems. The list goes on, and you've probably recognized yourself in more than one of them already.

The ego loves the literal realm because it gives us something concrete to talk about, defend, and attach our identity to. “I have anxiety.” “I'm a procrastinator.” “I always attract the wrong relationships.” These become stories we can tell in detail, explain to other people, even build a kind of identity around — because a story we can name feels safer than a root cause we haven't looked at yet.

Here's the shift this chapter is asking you to make: a symptom is not a root cause. It's a signal. Pain in the body, anxiety, the pattern of sabotaging things right when they start going well — these are the ego's way of pointing at something without having to look directly at it. The ego will talk about the symptom endlessly, because staying focused on the symptom means it doesn't have to face what's actually underneath it: shame, fear, or a subconscious belief that's been running the show for years, often since childhood.

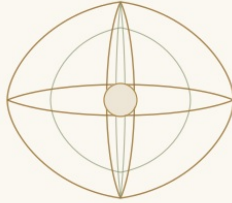
This is why so many people can spend years managing a symptom — medicating it, distracting from it, even “working on” it — without ever actually changing. They're negotiating with the ego on the ego's terms, staying in the literal realm because that's where the ego feels safest. Real change requires

being willing to ask what's underneath the symptom, not just how to make the symptom go away.

That doesn't mean the literal realm is a waste of time. It's actually necessary — you can't skip it. You have to be able to name your symptom clearly, honestly, without minimizing it or over-explaining it, before you can move any further. But naming the symptom is the beginning of the work, not the end of it. If we want real results — not just symptom relief, but actual change — we have to be willing to consider possibilities beyond our ego attachments, and ask what the symptom has been protecting us from having to face.

Questions to sit with:

- What symptom or pattern do you find yourself talking about, explaining, or identifying with most often?
- Have you ever noticed yourself getting attached to a symptom, almost like it's part of who you are?
- What might your ego be avoiding by keeping the conversation focused on the symptom itself?
- If your symptom is a signal rather than the root cause, what do you think it might be pointing to?
- What would it take for you to get curious about what's underneath the symptom, rather than just trying to manage or explain it?



CHAPTER SEVEN

The Metaphoric Realm What Things Represent to You

*“Every symptom is a language.
Curiosity is how we learn to read it.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

The Metaphoric Realm What Things Represent to You

This is where the work starts to get harder — and also where it starts to get real.

Most people never get past the literal realm. They can describe their symptom in detail, tell the story a hundred times, even understand it intellectually. But very few people are willing to go one layer deeper and ask: what does this actually represent to me? That question is the doorway into the metaphoric realm, and it's often the first place people resist, because it asks you to stop explaining and start feeling.

Here's the shift. In the literal realm, we stay with the facts: "My partner doesn't listen to me." That's a true, describable, defensible statement. But the metaphoric realm asks a different kind of question: What would you guess *not being heard* means to you?

Notice how different that question feels. It's not asking you to prove anything or explain what happened. It's asking you to get curious about the emotional charge underneath the fact — the feeling your ego has been quietly protecting you from having to sit with.

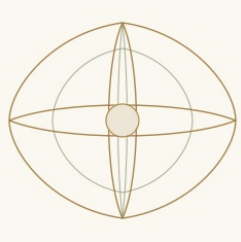
This is where we begin identifying what certain experiences are actually associated with. Not being heard by your partner today might connect to something much older — a childhood where your feelings were dismissed, or you learned that speaking up wasn't safe, or worth. The literal event is real, but the emotional weight it carries almost always comes from somewhere further back. The metaphoric realm is where we start connecting to that emotion directly — the one your ego has been hiding from, because staying in the literal story was safer than feeling it.

I want to be honest with you: this realm is uncomfortable for most people, and that's exactly why so few people ever go here. It's much easier to talk about what your partner did than to ask what it means to you that you weren't heard. The metaphoric realm requires a kind of self-discovery that can't be rushed or explained your way through — you actually have to sit with the question and let an honest answer surface, even if it surprises you.

This is also where you start writing your own story, instead of just reciting it. When you ask yourself what an experience represents, you're doing something your ego was never built to do on its own: you're finding meaning underneath the facts, on your own terms, instead of the meaning your ego assigned to protect you a long time ago.

Questions to sit with:

- Take a symptom or situation you named in the last chapter. What would you guess it represents to you?
- What are these symptoms inviting you to consider?
- Would you guess the emotion hiding from you is shame, guilt, or fear?
- What does this experience or symptom remind you of?
- When you were younger and you felt sad or angry, how did your parents handle those emotions?



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Paradoxical Realm Giving Your Pain Purpose

*“Two truths can live in the same heart
without either one being a lie.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

The Paradoxical Realm Giving Your Pain Purpose

A paradox is simply two things that seem contradictory, both being true at the same time. Not one canceling the other out — both, fully true, existing together. That idea alone tends to make the ego very uncomfortable, and that's exactly why this realm matters so much.

Up to this point, we've been working with things the ego can grab onto. The literal realm gave it facts to defend. The metaphoric realm gave it meaning to attach to. But the paradoxical realm asks something the ego was never built to handle: to hold two seemingly opposite truths at once, without needing to resolve them into a single right answer.

This is where new meaning and balance start to become possible — because emotion, for a moment, gets set aside. Not ignored, not suppressed, just set down long enough to look at things a little more clearly. Without the emotional charge running the show, you can start considering possibilities you'd never have let yourself consider otherwise.

Here's an example. Wanting closeness, and fearing intimacy at the exact same time. Most of us would call that confusing, or a contradiction to fix, or evidence that something is wrong with us. But what if both are simply true? You can want to be close to someone and be terrified of what closeness might cost you — both, at once, without one having to be the “real” feeling and the other a mistake.

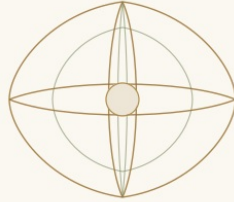
This realm also invites you to step outside of right and wrong, good and bad. The literal and metaphoric realms often keep us stuck in judgment — was this fair, was I justified, was I wrong to feel this way. The paradoxical realm doesn't ask any of those questions. It asks something much more useful: how does a part

of you benefit from this symptom or challenge?

That question tends to land strangely at first, maybe even feels a little offensive. Benefit? From my anxiety? From the pattern that's been hurting me for years? But almost every symptom, every stuck pattern, is serving some function — keeping you safe, keeping you from a risk, keeping you attached to an old identity that once protected you. Finding that function isn't the same as excusing the symptom. It's understanding it well enough to finally let it go.

Questions to sit with:

- What if there's a part of you that desperately wants to change, and another part of you desperately wanting to stay the same?
- How does a part of you benefit from this symptom or challenge?
- What feels good about staying the same?
- Are you open to the possibility there is no right or wrong, good or bad decision?
- If this symptom has been protecting you from something, what might that something be?



CHAPTER NINE

The Creative Realm Living Not Surviving

*“You do not have to understand your whole story
to start authoring the next chapter.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

The Creative Realm Living Not Surviving

This is the realm where you take one hundred percent responsibility for your life.

Not blame — responsibility. Blame looks backward and asks who's at fault. Responsibility looks forward and asks: given everything that's happened, what am I going to do with it now? That shift is the entire point of the creative realm.

By the time you arrive here, you've done real work. You named the literal symptom. You got curious about what it represented. You sat with the paradox of it, and found a perspective you hadn't considered before. Now, in the creative realm, you get to do something few people ever get the chance to do: liberate and re-parent the parts of your ego that have been running the show, often since childhood, often out of fear.

Re-parenting means becoming, for yourself, what you may not have had — the steady, understanding presence that meets a hard feeling without shaming it. It means going back to the parts of you that learned to defend, perform, or stay small, and giving them something different this time: permission, safety, a new way of being met.

This is also where you become the author of your life, instead of a character being written by old patterns. Up until now, most of your reactions, choices, and beliefs were coming from a subconscious or unconscious place — old programming, running quietly in the background, making decisions before you were even aware a decision was being made. The creative realm asks you to step into a conscious state instead, where you're actually choosing, on purpose, rather than repeating.

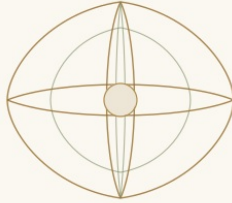
I want to name something important here: the difference

between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is information — understanding your patterns, knowing your triggers, being able to explain why you are the way you are. Most people stop there, and knowledge alone doesn't change much. Wisdom is different. Wisdom is what happens when you take the lesson from a challenge and actually let it change how you live. Knowledge tells you what happened and why. Wisdom decides what you're going to do differently because of it.

That's the real work of this realm: not just understanding your story, but deciding — consciously, deliberately — how you're going to live differently and more functionally because of everything you've been through. The challenge doesn't disappear. Your experience of the challenge is what changes — it allows us to respond to life rather than react to it.

Questions to sit with:

- How would it feel to take one hundred percent responsibility for your life?
- Will you consider what you're experiencing right now is a symptom, not the root cause?
- Are you aware of the patterns in your life that have repeated?
- If you could say anything to your 12-year-old self, what would you say?
- What are your five takeaways from this book?



CHAPTER TEN

Bringing It All Together Living the Four Realms Day to Day

*“Healing was never meant
to be a straight line.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

Bringing It All Together

Here's the one thing I want you to carry forward above everything else: healing cannot happen without a regulated nervous system. You can understand every concept in this book perfectly, and none of it will change your life if your body is still living in survival mode.

That regulation depends on so many small, unglamorous things — how you're sleeping, what your blood sugar is doing, whether you're breathing shallow and fast without noticing, whether you ever actually put your feet on the ground and let your body remember it's safe. This work becomes so much more effective when it's paired with the foundational principles that support a regulated nervous system in the first place: a good, balanced diet, real stress management skills, proper hydration, and good sleep hygiene. None of that is separate from the deeper work. It's the ground the deeper work stands on. And when your nervous system is regulated, something shifts — you become open to new possibilities you couldn't even consider before, because none of it overwhelms you the way it used to. A regulated body has room for curiosity. A dysregulated one only has room for survival.

Once your nervous system has some room to breathe, everything else in this book becomes possible. You start to notice your ego — not as an enemy, but as the part of you that learned, a long time ago, how to prove and defend and survive. You start to see your own emotional needs clearly, maybe for the first time, instead of meeting them by taking care of everyone else's. You start to catch the moment between a trigger and your reaction, and in that moment, you get a choice you didn't used to have.

And underneath all of it is the question this whole book has been circling: who are you, once you stop performing for everyone else's comfort?

That's where the four realms come in. Not as four separate exercises, but as one continuous unfolding. You start literal — naming the symptom plainly, without explaining it away. Then you get curious about what it represents, and you find the feeling your

ego's been protecting you from. Then you discover a possible paradox that you never considered before, where two opposite things can both be true, and you ask how a part of you might actually be benefiting from the very thing that's been hurting you. And finally, you arrive at the creative realm, where you stop being someone this happened to, and become someone who decides what it means and what comes next.

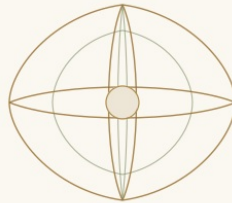
If you take one thing from everything we've covered, let it be this: you are not stuck. Whatever brought you here — the anxiety, the pattern, the relationship that keeps repeating old wounds — none of it has to be the way your story ends. You don't have to suffer through it indefinitely, and you don't need to have it all figured out today. You just need to stay curious, one honest question at a time.

I also want to be clear about something. This book is not therapy, and it's not counseling. I'm not a therapist, and nothing here replaces mental health treatment if that's what you need. What I do is holistic coaching — working with the whole person, body and mind together, using curiosity and these four realms to help someone move from surviving their story to actually living beyond it.

If any of this resonated with you, and you found yourself becoming curious about your own life's challenges rather than just tolerating them, that's an invitation to keep going.

Questions to sit with:

- What's one thing you could do this week to help your nervous system feel a little safer?
- Could we consider what's beyond the literal story and what I'm associating it with?
- Are you open to letting go of the old, so we can invite the new you?
- Would you consider allowing the part of you that's hiding to come out and be seen?



CHAPTER ELEVEN

A Final Word **How to Work With Me**

*“The hardest part of my healing wasn't the pain,
it was letting go of my old identity.”*

Mike Palmer
HOLISTIC COACHING

A Final Word How to Work With Me

I want to close this book the way I opened it — with my own story, because I think it matters that you know this isn't theory to me.

For most of my life, I dealt with anxiety and depression. Sleepless nights. Racing thoughts I couldn't shut off. Panic that would show up without warning, in moments that looked completely fine from the outside. And here's what I didn't understand at the time: my symptom was entirely different from my root cause. The racing thoughts, the panic, the exhaustion — none of it had anything to do with the actual attachments and stories running underneath, the ones I wasn't even aware of yet.

What I eventually uncovered was the sheer amount of pressure I had put on myself — to be the perfect athlete, the perfect dad, the perfect partner. Not pressure anyone was actively putting on me in that moment, but pressure I had absorbed somewhere along the way and turned into a standard I could never actually meet. My ego had built an identity around being enough only if I performed perfectly in every role I held. And when I inevitably fell short — because no one can be perfect at anything, let alone everything — my nervous system read that as a threat, and it responded the only way it knew how.

It took working through exactly what you just read in this book — the literal symptom, what it represented, the paradox underneath it, and finally the responsibility to create something different — for me to understand that my anxiety wasn't the problem to solve. It was a messenger, pointing at something much older and much quieter than panic ever let me see clearly on my own.

That's why I do this work now. Not because I studied it from the outside, but because I lived every layer of it, and I know how

disorienting it is to be handed a symptom without ever being shown what's underneath it.

If anything in this book resonated with you — if you recognized your own story in mine, or found yourself sitting with one of the questions longer than you expected to — I'd be honored to work with you directly. Coaching sessions give us the space to go through your own literal story, your own metaphors, your own paradoxes, and your own creative realm, together, at whatever pace is right for you.

You don't have to keep carrying this alone, and you don't have to have it figured out before you reach out. That's what the work is for.

You can book a session with me directly at **calendly.com/mikepalmercoaching/30min**, or visit **coachmikepalmer.com** to learn more about how I work.

Thank you for reading this book, and more importantly, thank you for being willing to get curious.