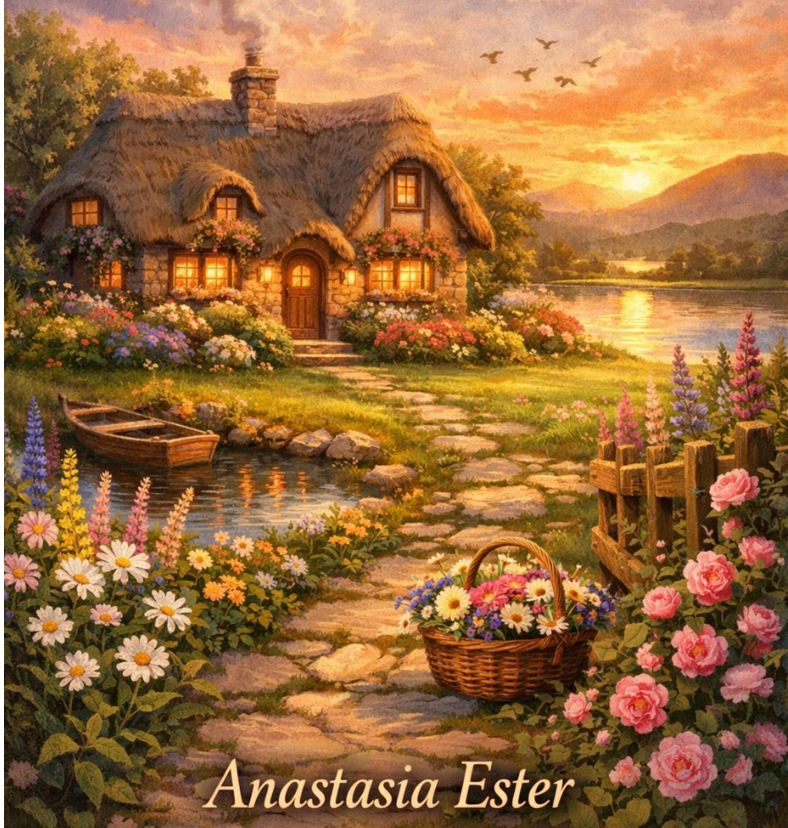


# *The Home Where Happiness Dwells*



*Anastasia Ester*

# **Анастасия Эстэр**

# **The Home Where**

# **Happiness Dwells**

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## **Аннотация**

This book is a tender, about the invisible threads that hold a family together. It is not about perfection or ideal routines, but about the quiet moments that shape our lives a shared dinner, a warm glance, a pause in the kitchen, a conversation that softens the heart. With warmth and psychological insight, Anastasia Ester invites readers to rediscover home not as a place, but as a feeling we create every day within ourselves and with those we love. Through gentle reflections and simple practices, this book helps nurture closeness, preserve warmth, and build meaningful family traditions. This is a book to return to when you long for peace, connection, and a quiet kind of happiness that does not need to be chased only recognized. Anastasia Ester is a psychologist and author exploring family closeness and emotional well-being. Her work combines depth and tenderness, offering practical wisdom and gentle support for creating a home you truly want to return to.

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**PROLOGUE**

**The Quiet Moments That Shape Happiness**

One day, on the most ordinary of days, without any special signs or reasons, I suddenly noticed something simple and almost imperceptible — something that later became an inner anchor for me, a place I could return to. The warmest, truest moments of life are almost never loud. They do not announce themselves in advance. They do not require preparation, the right mood, beautiful light, or carefully chosen words. They do not ask to be remembered. They simply happen — between tasks, between one breath and the next, between “I must” and “later,” quietly weaving themselves into the fabric of everyday life.

Sometimes it is a morning when the house is still asleep and the day is only beginning to gather itself, as if cautiously trying itself on. When tea cools a little faster than usual, and there is no irritation in that. When silence does not feel empty, but full — of breathing, anticipation, presence. And sometimes it is an evening when everyone is already together, yet each person remains in their own world: someone is reading, someone is drawing, someone is silently looking out the window. In that silence there is no loneliness, no tension, no need to explain anything. There is only calm and a quiet sense that this — just as it is — is enough.

It is in moments like these that a clear, almost physical feeling suddenly arises, one that cannot be confused with anything else: everything is in its place. There is no desire to add, fix, improve, or hurry anything. There is only the wish to be — in this moment, in this home, in this life.

I remember one such evening very clearly — an entirely ordinary one, unmarked by dates or events. The day had been full and demanding, at times tiring, and fatigue settled on my shoulders like a warm blanket: at first it feels heavy, and then suddenly becomes comforting, almost supportive. In the living room, a soft flame burned in the hearth — not bright or showy, but just enough to see one another and feel warmth. I walked into the kitchen, put the kettle on, and unexpectedly stopped — not because I didn't know what to do next, but because the need to hurry had suddenly disappeared. At that moment, my daughter passed by and lightly brushed my shoulder — almost by accident, without words, as if saying, *"I'm here. I'm with you."*

A quiet laugh stirred inside me — short and warm, like a spark. In that instant, something settled into place, an inner stillness gathered, and I felt it with absolute clarity: this is it. Not "happiness as a goal." Not an "ideal life." But something real — small, warm, alive — something that does not shout about itself, yet stays for a long time. And it was then that I truly understood: happiness almost never lives in big decisions or loud events. It rarely arrives as celebrations or dramatic turns. More often, it hides in small, repeating things — the ones we easily stop noticing because they seem too simple, too familiar, too "ordinary."

In the habit of gathering together, not necessarily for something important. In the words we say to one another day after day — sometimes the same words, yet no less meaningful

because of it. In traditions that arise almost by accident, as if casually, and one day become what holds a family together from within, even when things are difficult on the outside. Sometimes it is a shared dinner where nothing significant needs to be discussed. Sometimes it is a bedtime story read even when one longs to go to sleep earlier. Sometimes it is a cup of tea in the kitchen, where one can simply be oneself without explaining why today feels quiet. Sometimes it is a short message in the middle of the day: *"How are you?"* Or a hug by the door that lasts one second longer than usual — and that single second suddenly becomes enough to feel supported.

For many years, I have worked with people, families, relationships. I listen to stories, observe, ask questions, search for answers — and the longer I watch life unfold, the clearer one simple truth becomes: a home does not begin with a place. A home begins with a state of being. My name is **Anastasia Ester**. I am a psychologist and an author, and for a long time I have been exploring how people feel when they are close to one another. But more than anything else, I have always been drawn to one very human, very quiet question: why is it easy to breathe in some homes, and not in others? Why do some places make us want to stay, while others make us want to escape — even when everything looks “right” on the outside?

Over time, the answer turned out to be surprisingly simple. It is not about perfect relationships or “the right words.” Not about flawless order or a beautiful picture. It is about atmosphere —

about how we look at one another, whether we know how to pause, whether we allow ourselves to be together not in passing, not between tasks, but truly present. This book is for you if even one of these feelings resonates with you: if you love your family but sometimes feel tired and unsure how to preserve warmth; if you long for simple traditions that support rather than become another obligation; if you are not searching for perfection but for something alive, real, and warm; if it matters to you that home be a place one wants to return to — for both adults and children.

Here you will not find strict rules or universal formulas. Instead, you will find stories, gentle reflections, and small practices that easily weave themselves into everyday life and require neither discipline nor effort. They require only one thing — attention.

I wrote this book not as a specialist who knows “the right way,” but as a person who has seen how warmth is created gradually — through care, simple gestures, and small, repeated moments that, over time, become an inner support. At some point, every family develops its own “set of happiness”: its own words, habits, and small rituals that hold it together from within, even on difficult days. And I truly hope that after this book, you will have more of these supports — that ten or fifteen small traditions will appear, ones that work specifically for your family, and that you will have a page to return to whenever you especially need warmth.

And right now — a very small invitation, without obligations or expectations. As you read these lines, try to notice one simple

thing: what warm moment already exists in your life? Not the biggest or the “most correct,” but the most real. Perhaps it is your morning tea. Perhaps the sound of a child’s voice in the next room. Perhaps a familiar phrase from your partner. Perhaps a silence in which you can finally exhale.

Happiness does not always need to be searched for.

Sometimes, it is enough simply to recognize it.

This book can be read from beginning to end, or opened at any page — like a book you return to when you long for warmth. And if, after these words, you feel a little calmer, a little gentler toward yourself, and a little warmer toward those around you, then it has already found its place in your home. Because a home is not what we have. A home is what we create every day.

With love, **Anastasia Ester**

# **PART I. WHERE EVERYTHING BEGINS**

# Chapter 1. The Home Within Us

*“A home does not begin where you close the door behind you. It begins where you no longer need to hold yourself together — where you can let your shoulders drop, stop explaining yourself to the world, and, for the first time in a long while, simply be.”*

Perhaps this chapter truly wants to be read slowly — with pauses, with moments of returning to lines already read. Not because there is anything difficult here, or anything that requires special understanding, but because this chapter is not about analysis or conclusions. It is about recognition — that quiet inner recognition that happens without words, without logic, and without the need to fully explain anything to yourself.

This chapter does not ask for the mind’s attention. Rather, it gently invites attention toward yourself — toward those subtle sensations that usually remain in the background of everyday busyness, yet speak to us in the most honest language. And perhaps, at some point, you may not even want to “read” it in the usual way. You may simply want to sit with it, allowing the words to pass through you the way warm water moves across the skin when you slowly lower your hands into it — and suddenly notice how the body begins to relax on its own, without effort or instruction.

There is a particular kind of silence in which you no longer

need to hold yourself together — no need to be composed, strong, attentive, or “appropriate.” It is this silence I want to create here, on these first pages, so that you can enter the book not with tension, but with a soft exhale — as if returning to a place where you have been quietly awaited for a long time.

Once, I noticed something very simple, yet surprisingly important, and since then it has been confirmed again and again — both in my own life and in the stories of the people I have worked with. The feeling of home does not always arrive when we cross the threshold of a familiar space, open the door to our own apartment, or return to a place traditionally called “home.” Sometimes this feeling appears unexpectedly, without warning, without external logic, without attachment to walls, furniture, or familiar routes.

It can come while traveling — when you look out the window of a train or a car and suddenly realize that you are not running away from anything, not trying to catch up with anything, but simply moving forward, and that is enough. It can appear in a kitchen that has not yet been tidied, with cups left on the table and someone nearby quietly breathing as they go about their own business — and in that breathing, a sense of calm unexpectedly settles. It can arise early in the morning, before the day has demanded decisions, explanations, or responsibility, when you find yourself in a narrow space between yesterday and today, where it is still possible to simply be.

Sometimes this feeling arrives in a very brief pause between

tasks, when you stop — not because everything is finished, but because you allowed yourself to stop — and in that moment something inside gently aligns itself.

Describing this feeling in words is always a little difficult, because it is hardly connected to thought. It lives much closer to the body. It is like shoulders suddenly softening, releasing tension that has been held for so long it has become almost invisible. It is like breathing that suddenly finds its natural rhythm, without control or effort. It is like a quiet inner agreement with yourself — a barely perceptible “yes,” without excitement or loud emotion, yet filled with deep authenticity.

In such moments, the urge to prove, fix, explain, or hurry disappears. The need to rush or to meet expectations fades away. What remains is a simple, almost unnoticeable sense that right now you are in the right place — and that this is enough.

Over time, I began to notice these moments more often — not by trying to catch them, but by allowing them to appear somewhere at the edge of attention, between tasks, words, and meetings. Along with this, a familiar question began to surface inside me — calm, without anxiety or self-criticism: why is it that sometimes even the most beautiful, carefully designed home, filled with cozy details, does not bring this feeling — while at other times it arises in places without familiar walls, without the “right” interior, without any sense of completion?

Why can you return to a space that seems perfect and yet feel like a guest there, as if everything is beautiful but not truly yours

— and at the same time sit on an old chair in someone else's kitchen and suddenly experience a deep, quiet sense of home that requires no proof?

The answer did not come at once, nor did it feel like a sudden revelation. It formed gradually — from observations, conversations, pauses, personal stories, and very honest inner responses that cannot be imitated. And at some point, it became clear: home is not a place.

### **Home is a state.**

It is a state in which you do not need to gather yourself into pieces, in which there is no requirement to be convenient, correct, or aligned with someone else's expectations. It is a state where you are allowed to be different — tired, silent, joyful, uncertain, doubtful — and still remain accepted, first and foremost by yourself.

In my psychological practice, I have seen this again and again. People spoke about beautiful homes, caring partners, stable lives, and outward well-being — yet tension sounded in their voices, as if they constantly had to stay on guard inside. And there were other stories — about temporary spaces, difficult circumstances, uncertainty — yet in these stories there was calm, as if an inner place already existed, somewhere one could return to, even when the outer world remained unstable.

The home within us begins with very simple things that often

seem insignificant. With permission to slow down, even when the world around you is rushing. With the ability to hear the signals of your own body before the demands of the day. With a soft, careful relationship with yourself — one free from judgment, expectations, and constant comparison with others.

We often search for home outside ourselves — in interiors, atmosphere, people, relationships — and all of this truly matters, because we are alive and we need closeness. But if this inner state is absent, even the most beautiful walls remain just walls, and comfort turns into decoration. And at the same time, sometimes a single look, a single touch, or one phrase spoken at the right moment is enough for calm to arise inside — a feeling that is recognized immediately, without doubt or proof.

Home is the place where you no longer need to be strong and collected inside. Where you do not have to keep your back straight or control every breath. Where thoughts stop colliding and breathing does not falter. It is a state in which you are not preparing to live, but allowing yourself to live right now. If you listen closely, almost everyone knows this feeling — we simply do not always allow ourselves to stop and notice it, because we are so used to movement and tension.

This chapter is not about creating a home from scratch. It is about remembering that it already exists within you — and about learning how to return to this state again and again, gently, without effort or inner force.

Because everything we will speak about next — family,

closeness, warmth, traditions, and happiness — begins right here, in the moment when you first allow yourself to feel that you are home, and that this home lives within you.

## **Why the Feeling of Home Begins Not with a Place, but with a State**

*“Sometimes all that is truly needed is to stop searching for that one place, time, or state in which everything will finally feel right — and to allow yourself to pause exactly where you are. To listen to the body, to the breath, to the silence between thoughts, and suddenly notice: in this moment, there is already peace. Not bright, not ecstatic, not promising that everything ahead will be easy — but quiet and reliable, like solid ground beneath your feet, something you can lean on without proving that you have earned this pause. And it is from this barely noticeable sense of calm — not found somewhere outside, but recognized within — that life gradually stops being a search and begins to feel like happiness.”*

We are often used to thinking that comfort and safety are created primarily by external things — by what can be seen, touched, arranged, and brought to a sense of completion. It seems to us that space, surroundings, order, thoughtful details, and beautiful solutions will one day come together into the right picture, and that in this moment we will finally feel calm and at ease inside. We believe that once we find the “right” place, renovate, create perfect order, or allow ourselves long-postponed

purchases, the feeling of home will arrive along with keys, square footage, and new furniture.

But over time, through lived experience and observation, something very simple — and not always pleasant to acknowledge — becomes clear: we carry this feeling with us. Or we don't. Space only amplifies the state that already lives within us; it rarely creates it from nothing.

Home begins inside — with how we relate to ourselves in moments when no one is watching or evaluating us. With the tone of voice we use when speaking to ourselves throughout the day — whether it is supportive and warm, or demanding and constantly corrective. With whether we are able, at least sometimes, to slow down and return to the present moment, allowing ourselves to be here, instead of living endlessly in the mode of “later,” “when it’s finished,” or “when it gets easier.”

It begins with whether we allow ourselves to be alive — with feelings, fatigue, joy, doubt, and imperfection — or whether we try to exist only as a “proper” version of ourselves: always composed, calm, and convenient for others.

For many years, I have observed this in families and relationships, listening to stories and being present in many different homes and spaces. Again and again, I see the same picture — honest and almost always recognizable. In one home, there may be everything: space, light, beauty, order, an ideal layout, and a sense that every detail has been carefully thought through — and yet there is a coldness that cannot be explained

by temperature. It is the cold of haste, tension, and expectations that must be met, as if in this space one cannot simply exhale and be oneself.

And in another home, it may be cramped, noisy, far from perfect. Things may be out of place, life visible everywhere — in scattered objects, traces of the day, sounds and movement — yet breathing there feels easy. It is a place where one wants to linger, not because it is “right,” but because there is no need to stay composed all the time, no need to keep form or justify expectations.

And the difference is almost never in the external. It is in the state of the people who live there. In whether they have inner support and permission to be themselves — not the best version, not the most convenient, not perfectly coping, but alive and real. In whether there is attention to the simple moments of life, rather than only to results, to-do lists, and endless tasks.

When this state appears inside — when it becomes possible to stop, to exhale, to look at one another without rushing further — home arises on its own. Sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes without any special conditions, as if it quietly grows around this inner feeling, naturally and without pressure or force.

Home is not about perfection or flawless order. It is about presence. About the ability to be here — in your body, in your day, alongside those who are with you right now. About the feeling that you are not being rushed or evaluated — and, most importantly, that you yourself stop doing this as well.

And if you listen a little more closely, almost everyone knows where this state arises for them — in what rhythm and pace, near which people — and what, on the contrary, makes breathing shallow and shoulders tense. Perhaps you have already noticed where and when it is easiest for you to breathe, in which moments the body releases tension on its own, and what helps you feel this quiet, recognizable inner sense of home, even when everything around you is still far from ideal.

Sometimes an honest answer to these questions becomes the first step toward a home that begins not with a place, but with a state — one you can return to again and again.

### **Small Personal Traditions That Support Us Every Day**

*“Sometimes life is held together not by grand decisions or forceful willpower, not by dramatic turns of fate or those rare moments we later recount aloud, but by almost invisible, quiet gestures of attention toward ourselves — those tiny moments in which, day after day, without witnesses or applause, we gently choose ourselves.”*

Over time, I came to understand one more very important — and at first glance almost unnoticed — truth, one that changed both my own life and the way I began to look at families and the people I work with. The sense of home within us is not sustained by great effort, does not require constant tension, and certainly is not created through endless self-control or the urge

to do everything “the right way.” It does not need to be rebuilt, defended, or maintained each day like a fragile structure about to collapse, because the inner home does not tolerate pressure or an overly harsh attitude toward oneself.

This state is held by entirely different things — small, almost unnoticeable ones, so simple that we often pass them by without paying attention, considering them insufficiently important or not “useful” enough. They are so natural that it seems there could be no depth or power in them — and yet it is precisely these small things that, day after day, create a sense of steadiness and quiet inner warmth.

This is not about complex rituals or beautifully designed morning practices that must be performed so that “everything will be okay.” These are not obligations, not lists of good habits, and not another rigid “should” added to an already overloaded day. They are simple, recurring actions — ones you can return to without effort or strain, like quiet anchors, even in the busiest schedules and the most difficult periods of life.

For some, such an anchor is a cup of something warm in silence — not on the run, not between tasks, not with a phone in hand, but with the feeling that these few minutes belong only to them. People sometimes tell me that this is the first moment of the day when they begin to feel their body, their breathing, their presence — as if returning to themselves after a long absence.

For others, it is a few minutes by the window, simply watching the light change, the clouds move, the world living its

own life without demanding decisions, answers, or involvement. Sometimes a single glance like this is enough for the inner space to widen slightly, for things to grow quieter, and for the tension accumulated throughout the day to begin gently releasing.

For some, an important support becomes a brief note in a notebook — not necessarily meaningful or structured. Sometimes it is just one sentence, sometimes a single word, and sometimes simply a dot, as if to say: *this day existed, and I lived it*. In my practice, I often see how such simple notes help restore a sense of wholeness, especially during periods when everything around feels fragmented and too fast.

For others, it is a quiet thought of gratitude at the end of the day — not for something big or significant, but for something deeply human and simple: a conversation, warmth, a moment of closeness, or the fact that today it was possible, at least a little, to exhale. These moments do not make life perfect, but they make it alive and steady.

All of these personal traditions require neither much time nor strength nor resources. What they require is attention — first and foremost attention to yourself, to your sensations, and to what truly helps *you* feel supported, rather than adding yet another item to an endless to-do list. Over time, they become inner supports so reliable that they no longer depend on circumstances — even when the day is difficult, plans fall apart, or the world feels noisy and uncertain.

It is precisely these small, almost invisible actions that

gradually form a deeply important inner feeling — one I hear so often in people's words: *I am at home*, regardless of where I happen to be — on the road, in a line, in a new place, or in an unfamiliar situation. This feeling does not disappear with fatigue and is not destroyed by external changes, because it lives within.

When such inner supports exist, relationships become easier to build, because there is no longer a need to seek stability in another person — hoping they will fill an inner emptiness or hold balance for two. We enter relationships not in search of support, but carrying it within ourselves, and this profoundly changes the fabric of closeness.

It also becomes easier to create family traditions, because they grow naturally, without pressure or coercion — as a continuation of an inner state, rather than an attempt to replace something missing inside. It becomes easier to be with other people — without constant tension, without expectations, and without the need to always be strong or composed.

Because everything real — everything warm and alive — always begins from within, with small, quiet moments that, almost imperceptibly, day by day, make life a little softer, a little steadier, and far warmer.

## **Practice: A Warm Beginning and a Gentle Ending to the Day**

I would like to offer you a very simple practice — so simple that at first it may seem almost unnoticeable, even too easy to

be taken seriously. There is no effort in it, no discipline, and no “right way” to do it well, because it is not about results or control. It is about attention and kindness toward yourself.

This practice has no strict rules, no obligations, and no demand for consistency. You do not need to do it perfectly, and you do not need to do it every day. You may forget about it, set it aside, return to it again when you feel the need — and that will be enough. What matters here is not “following” it, but trying it and honestly sensing whether it resonates with you.

Morning in this practice begins very gently — before the phone, before conversations, before news, before the list of tasks that usually rushes in to claim all attention and set the rhythm of the day. At the very beginning of the day, I invite you to make a short pause. Sometimes it may last only a few seconds, sometimes it may be just one conscious breath that you allow yourself to take without hurry or expectation.

In this moment, there is no need to get up, change position, or do anything special. It is enough simply to notice that you have awakened and that this day is beginning right now. And in this pause, quietly and without inner pressure, you can ask yourself one question — one that does not require a “correct” answer: **“With what inner state do I want to live this day?”**

Here it is important not to drift into familiar thoughts about tasks, duties, and expectations — not to ask yourself what you must accomplish or what you should be like — but to try to feel the *state* with which you would like to enter this day.

There is no need to search for an answer or analyze it. Sometimes it comes on its own; sometimes it does not come at all — and both are perfectly normal. For some, it may be a single word — calm, gentle, attentive, careful, warm. For others, it may not be a word at all, but a sensation — something like a color, a quality of breathing, or an inner direction.

And if during the day you remember this state even once, even in passing, that alone is enough for the day to unfold a little differently.

Evening in this practice also does not require summaries, analysis, or self-evaluation — especially on days that were difficult or did not go as hoped. Before sleep, when the day is almost complete, I invite you to recall just one moment in which you felt even slightly good — just a little, so small it would be easy to miss if you did not pause.

It may be a smile, a warm glance, a short conversation, an unexpected silence, or a thought that briefly made things feel lighter inside. There is no need to search for anything important or significant — something alive and real that truly existed in this day is enough. And in that moment, you can simply thank it inwardly, without words or explanations, as if quietly nodding and saying, *“I noticed you.”*

Over time, these two small gestures — a warm beginning and a gentle ending to the day — become a personal tradition. Not because you are trying to hold on to it or follow it, but because it begins to support you on its own. Gradually, something

new appears between morning and evening — not a perfect or “proper” day, but a more alive and stable one, in which there is room for the real you.

And where a personal tradition appears, steadiness slowly grows — and with it comes the feeling of home, that inner home which does not depend on circumstances and always stays with you, wherever the day may lead.

## **Gentle Conclusions**

*“When these small supports appear in a day — a cup in silence, a pause by the window, gratitude without a reason — life stops demanding constant composure from you and begins to quietly support you on its own.”*

This chapter is not about arranging everything correctly or organizing life into neat compartments. It is not about instructions to memorize, hold in mind, and then diligently follow while checking yourself for compliance. It is not about steps, schemes, or becoming “better” or more “effective.” It is about something else — about where the warmth we so often seek outside truly begins.

This warmth is born not from actions or decisions, but from an inner state — from that place inside where you meet yourself without haste or tension. It begins with you, with how you feel within your own day, within your thoughts, sensations, and rhythm of life. With that quiet moment when you suddenly stop

rushing even inwardly and allow yourself simply to be, without correcting or pushing yourself.

Sometimes it begins with a very small inner *"I am here,"* one that requires no explanation and needs no confirmation. This *"I am here"* may be barely noticeable, almost weightless — like a breath you suddenly become aware of, or a short pause between tasks in which quiet unexpectedly appears. Sometimes it feels like a moment in which nothing seems to be happening — and yet it is precisely in this absence of events that the peace you have been missing begins to emerge.

Further in this book, we will speak about many things, and some topics may feel especially close to you. We will speak about a home shared by two, about a home where children grow, about a family through time — changing, alive, sometimes tired, sometimes uncertain, yet continuing to remain together and to seek one another. We will speak about traditions that support and warm rather than become another obligation, about closeness, about warmth, and about how to preserve the feeling of home during periods when life becomes intense, demanding, and not easy.

But all of this begins right here — not with relationships and not with the roles we are used to performing, but with that place inside where you feel calm. With that inner space where you can lean on yourself without demanding perfection or forcing yourself to fit. With that state in which you are allowed to be alive, feeling, vulnerable — and whole.

And if, while reading this chapter, you felt this place even for a brief moment — if your shoulders softened just a little, your breathing became steadier, and a quiet sense of recognition appeared inside, as if someone very gently said, “*Yes, exactly,*” then we are already moving in the right direction. Because home always begins with the one who enters it — and if that person is you, real, alive, and present, warmth will always find its way and stay close.

## Chapter 2. Being with Yourself Is Also a Tradition

*“We live within ourselves longer than anywhere else — longer than in any cities, relationships, roles, or circumstances that come and go, change, end, and flow into one another. And that is why the inner tone — how we speak to ourselves, how we hold pauses, how we move through joy and fatigue — becomes more important than any external conditions. We may find ourselves in very different places, with different people and different experiences, but if tension, haste, or cold demand sounds inside, the world will respond in kind. And conversely, when the inner tone grows softer, more honest, more caring, even difficult circumstances are lived differently — not as a threat, but as part of a path that can be walked while staying in contact with oneself.”*

This chapter is not really about new skills, nor about becoming a “better version” of yourself. It is about the very first and most important home that appears in our lives long before all the others. About the home that comes before family, before roles, before habits, expectations, and even conscious choices — and which we often fail to notice precisely because it is always with us.

This chapter is about ourselves — about that quiet and

sometimes vulnerable place within where we are alone with ourselves, without witnesses or applause, without the need to fit in or justify who we are. About the understanding that the very first home is us — our inner space, where we live every day, speak to ourselves, make decisions, doubt, rejoice, and grow tired.

And if there is no gentleness in this home, if we do not know how to be with ourselves in a soft and attentive way, if a demanding or devaluing voice constantly sounds inside, then no external comfort can last for long. It may delight for a while, inspire, create a sense of novelty and change — but without inner support it gradually empties, like a beautiful space where warmth was never allowed to stay.

Because warmth is not only what surrounds us — not only walls, light, scents, and objects — but first and foremost what sounds within us every day. It lives in how we address ourselves, how we support ourselves in difficult moments, how we allow ourselves to be alive, not only composed and strong.

This chapter is an invitation to listen inwardly and notice what your very first home feels like right now — and perhaps, for the first time, to ask yourself without hurry or judgment: *what is it like for me to live with myself, and what could make this inner space a little warmer and safer?*

## **Conversations with Yourself That Create Support**

*“Sometimes the most radical expression of love is not a grand*

*gesture or an outward sacrifice, but a quiet, almost imperceptible turn inward: beginning to speak to yourself in the same voice you already know how to use with those you care for. A voice with patience instead of pressure, understanding instead of reproach, gentle clarity instead of a harsh ‘pull yourself together.’ In that moment, love stops being something directed outward. It comes home — to the place where it has long been awaited, but rarely allowed in, because we believed we were required to be stricter with ourselves.”*

Over time, observing people in my practice and listening closely to how I myself live within my own days, I began to notice a very quiet yet remarkably consistent pattern — one that is rarely spoken about openly. We can be incredibly attentive to those we love. We know how to support them, how to choose words carefully, how to pause when another is struggling, how to avoid hurting, rushing, devaluing, or pressuring — especially in vulnerable moments.

And yet we often speak to ourselves in ways we would never allow ourselves to use with a loved one, a friend, or a child. Sometimes it is just a fleeting thought, barely noticeable, like background noise that accompanies the day and asks for no attention: *“Pull yourself together.” “Again, not good enough.” “You could have done better.”* These phrases are rarely spoken aloud and almost never sound dramatic. More often, they appear between tasks, automatically, without anger and without

conscious intent to wound.

Sometimes it is a tired inner commentary at the end of the day, when energy is already low, yet familiar self-review still arises — not loud, not accusatory, simply habitual. There is no sharp emotion in it, no conflict, but there is something deeply familiar, almost intimate, and precisely for that reason it so easily goes unnoticed.

These phrases rarely shout; much more often they whisper. And that is where their power lies — because quiet voices gradually become indistinguishable from who we believe we are. Over time, these short, nearly invisible conversations form the background of our lives, the inner climate in which we live day after day, without questioning whether it is warm or cold.

I have seen this many times in my work with people — and, honestly, recognized it in my own life as well. A person may be composed, responsible, reliable, capable of coping and holding things together, may accomplish a great deal and be a source of support for others — and yet inside remain without support, as if living in a space where something is always expected of them, but where no one asks how they truly are.

In such conditions, even good days are lived with tension. Even joy requires effort, as if it must be earned rather than simply allowed. Even rest does not bring full relief, because inside that familiar, quiet voice continues to sound — urging, evaluating, reminding that things could have been done better.

And here I would like to ask you very gently, without

expecting a correct answer and without asking you to change anything immediately: how do you speak to yourself when no one hears? What tone does your inner dialogue take on an ordinary day? And is there room in it for the support you so readily offer to others?

Sometimes the first step toward inner support begins not with major decisions or dramatic change, but with simple attention to these conversations — with the willingness to hear them and, perhaps one day, to respond to yourself a little more gently than before, as if saying: *“I am here. I am with you. And you do not have to manage everything alone.”*

## **10 Questions That Help You Identify Your Values and Understand What Truly Matters to You**

**What truly matters to me in life?**

(For example: family, career, health, freedom, creativity.)

**Which moments from my past do I remember with the greatest sense of pride?**

(What did I do or what decisions did I make that brought me genuine satisfaction?)

**What inspires and motivates me the most?**

(Who or what moves me to act and strive for something more?)

**How do I define success?**

(What does it mean to me to live a successful life?)

**Which qualities or values do I admire most in other people?**

(For example: honesty, courage, kindness, integrity.)

**In which situations do I feel the greatest sense of fulfillment and happiness?**

(What am I doing when I feel most alive and content?)

**Is there something I am willing to stand up for, even if it is difficult?**

(What is so important to me that I would not allow it to be threatened?)

**If I knew I had only a few months left to live, what would I change in my life?**

(What would I start doing — and what would I stop?)

**What irritates or upsets me in other people?**

(This may point to values that are especially important to me.)

**How do I want to be remembered?**

(What do I want to leave behind? What kind of legacy do I

want to pass on to others?)

## **Being with Yourself Is Not Loneliness**

*“Closeness does not begin where someone comes to comfort you.*

*It begins where you remain with yourself — without haste,  
without correction,*

*and without the demand to be different.”*

Being with yourself is not about isolation or withdrawing from the world. It is not about a closed door or an inner decision of “*I don’t need anyone*,” which so often sounds more like protection than a true choice. It is not about turning away from people or rejecting closeness. On the contrary, it is about its very first and most reliable form — closeness with yourself.

That quiet, calm, steady closeness from which a sense of safety gradually grows — one that does not depend on circumstances, on other people’s words, or on external support. It is the ability to stay with yourself in moments of fatigue, disappointment, or overwhelm, when the day feels larger than your strength and it becomes especially easy to rush yourself, push harder, or assign blame.

Being with yourself is an inner presence that does not flee from difficult feelings and does not demand immediate solutions.

It does not hurry you or force you to gather yourself faster than is possible right now. It is a state in which you can say to yourself, “*Yes, this is how it is right now,*” without immediately trying to fix it.

When such inner contact exists, external relationships gradually stop being places where support must be urgently obtained at any cost, as if without it you would not be able to stand. They cease to be a way to escape loneliness or fill an inner emptiness and instead become a space of meeting — alive, equal, and warm — where two people come to one another not from lack, but from presence.

And it is precisely here, in these inner dialogues — in the tone with which we speak to ourselves on an ordinary day — that the most important personal traditions are born, the ones rarely listed in checklists.

The tradition of not rushing yourself when life’s pace becomes too fast.

The tradition of noticing fatigue before it turns into irritation or sharpness.

The tradition of allowing yourself to be alive, feeling, sometimes vulnerable — not only the composed version of “*how it should be.*”

I would like to ask you very gently, without pressure or

expectation: how do you usually stay with yourself in difficult moments? Are you able to be there for yourself when you most wish someone else would take your hand and say that everything will be okay? And if you imagine that this *someone* is you, how might your voice sound so that it carries a little more warmth and a little less demand?

Sometimes it is precisely this inner permission to be with yourself that becomes the beginning of closeness — the kind that later moves easily and naturally into relationships with others, making them not tense, but alive and real.

### **A Small Pause for Yourself**

*“We do not always need more strength — sometimes a small pause is enough for the inner voice to appear, the one that knows how to stay.”*

Sometimes, in the middle of the day or at the end of a long evening, it is enough to pause for just a moment — without changing anything around you and without trying to urgently understand or fix something. Simply allow yourself a brief inner pause, in which you can ask yourself a few quiet, very honest questions. Not for analysis and not in search of correct answers, but for a sincere meeting with yourself as you are right now.

How do I usually speak to myself when I am tired and my energy is lower than I would like it to be? What tone does my inner voice take in these moments — supportive and accepting,

or urging and demanding? Is there a voice within me that allows me to be alive, feeling, and imperfect, rather than constantly striving toward an ideal?

These questions do not require immediate conclusions. Sometimes it is enough to let them be heard and to notice what responds inside.

And if it turns out that this warm, supportive voice is still faint — if the inner dialogue more often resembles a strict report than care — this is not a reason to start correcting yourself or rushing toward change. Rather, it is a gentle invitation to begin speaking to yourself with a little more attention, a little more kindness, a little more warmth — in the same way you already know how to speak to those you truly love.

Because being with yourself is not a one-time effort or a skill for “someday.” It is a living, daily tradition that gradually becomes an inner support — and perhaps one of the most important traditions in life, the one from which closeness, steadiness, and the feeling of home within later grow.

### **Small Rituals of Self-Care**

*“Sometimes what matters most happens so quietly and ordinarily that we pass by without noticing — not because it is insignificant, but because it is not accompanied by strong emotions, signs, or the feeling of ‘this is it.’ That is why self-care must be learned through noticing. Self-care is not an event; it is attention. And when we begin to recognize it in the most ordinary*

*gestures, it becomes clear: it is not life that passes us by, but our habit of never stopping.”*

Personal traditions of self-care almost never look important or ceremonial. They carry no special conditions, no beautiful formulations, no sense that something truly significant is happening. More often, they are so simple and ordinary that we pass them by without noticing, as if their simplicity means they cannot influence our state or inner stability.

Sometimes it seems that such gestures are too small to be called care, too insignificant to change anything. And so we postpone them “for later,” choosing again and again to be useful, composed, and busy. Yet care very often begins not with major decisions, but with the most ordinary moments — once they become conscious.

It may be a cup of tea, drunk slowly — not between tasks and not alongside thoughts about the next obligation, but with genuine presence in the taste, the warmth, and the pause. It may be a few minutes of morning quiet, before the day has demanded decisions, answers, or engagement — a brief space where you can simply be with yourself, without explaining or planning. It may be a walk without purpose — not for benefit, steps, or results, but simply to walk, to feel the movement of the body, to notice the breath, allowing thoughts to move freely.

For some, care becomes a short note in a notebook — without analysis or structure, not to understand something, but

to leave a trace of the lived day and confirm to oneself that this day existed. And sometimes care is the moment when you consciously stop rushing yourself to be “put together,” when you do not internally straighten your shoulders or accelerate your thoughts, but allow yourself to be exactly as you are right now — without immediately trying to improve anything.

These small rituals almost never require much time, strength, or resources. What they require is permission. Permission to stop at the very moment habit insists that there is no time for this. Permission to hear yourself, not only external tasks and expectations. Permission to be attentive to your inner state, not only to the to-do list that will always find something to fill the space.

I clearly remember a moment when this became especially evident to me — and it was remarkably ordinary. The day was full and structured, without drama or crisis. I was doing everything “as I should,” checking boxes, handling tasks, feeling outwardly quite successful. And yet inside there was a sense of fragmentation, as if I was both present and absent at the same time — as if life was happening nearby, but not through me.

At some point, a very simple thought appeared — without anxiety or blame, almost in a whisper: “*Where am I in all of this?*” I did not change anything dramatically, did not cancel plans or search for solutions. I simply sat down, poured a cup of tea, and allowed myself a few minutes of not being useful, not being needed, not being effective. It was a tiny gesture, almost invisible

from the outside — yet it carried something precise and deeply restoring.

It is from such small gestures that the path back to oneself begins — not through effort or control, but through gentle presence, where nothing needs to be proven. When these acts of care become familiar, they gradually form an inner structure — not rigid or demanding, but quiet and reliable — one in which you can lean on yourself without holding on by sheer force.

And within this inner support, over time, a very important feeling is born — one that cannot be created through effort, but can be grown through attention: the feeling that you are not lost or forgotten in your own life, because you are with yourself. And this presence becomes the most stable home of all.

## **Gratitude That Does Not Require Words**

*“Gratitude does not begin with a list of things one should say ‘thank you’ for, nor with an attempt to see the good at any cost. It begins with how you continue to live with yourself — in ordinary days, in fatigue, in doubt, and in the pauses between events. With the tone you use when speaking to yourself, with the attention you allow yourself not to earn, but simply to have. When gentleness appears within, gratitude stops being an exercise and becomes a state. It grows out of the ability not to break yourself, not to devalue what has been lived, and not to rush through feelings that need time. And then ‘thank you’ sounds not like an obligation, but like a*

*quiet recognition of the value of life itself — just as it is right now.”*

Sometimes gratitude does not need formulations, beautiful words, or carefully constructed sentences, because its essence lives much deeper than language and explanation. It does not have to be spoken aloud, it does not need a clear reason, and it does not have to be addressed *for* something specific or measurable. This kind of gratitude reveals itself not in words, but in attitude — in how we live with ourselves day after day.

It shows itself in small things that rarely fall into the focus of attention, yet speak most clearly about our inner state. In how we treat our body when it is tired — whether we hear its signals or continue moving as if nothing is happening. In whether we notice the tension accumulating in our shoulders, breath, and thoughts, or treat it as background noise that simply has to be endured.

It appears in whether we allow ourselves to rest without guilt, without inner explanations or justifications, without the need to first do something, prove something, or “earn” a pause. In whether we rush ourselves to be better, faster, more efficient, more put together — or whether we allow ourselves to be *alive enough*: present, real, imperfect, yet here in our own life.

In my practice, I often see how much easier it is for people to feel gratitude for external events than for themselves, as if acknowledging one’s own effort means becoming too soft or stopping growth. And yet it is precisely in those moments when a person first allows themselves to quietly recognize that the day

has been lived — that they managed as best they could, that they made it through, even if it was not easy — that a steadiness appears inside, one that had been missing before.

You can thank yourself for a lived day, even if it was the most ordinary one and there was nothing in it you want to highlight or celebrate. You can thank yourself for patience, for not breaking down when there was a lot of tension inside, for attention — toward others or toward yourself, for simply being present in this day despite fatigue, doubt, and overload. This kind of gratitude does not require a list of achievements, comparisons, or evaluations, because it is born out of respect for the path you have walked and for the effort that existed, even if no one else noticed it.

Such gratitude does not make us complacent or stop forward movement. It does not lull growth or take away the desire to develop. On the contrary, it creates inner steadiness, as if quietly saying within: *“I see you. I know how it was for you. You did what you could in this moment — and that is enough.”* There is no indulgence in these words, but there is recognition — and it is this recognition that makes continuing possible.

It is this unobtrusive, calm gratitude that gradually forms self-respect — not loud or demonstrative, but soft, quiet, and real — the kind upon which confidence, the capacity for closeness, and the ability to be with others without losing oneself are later built.

If you feel inclined, you might try it right now — not as an exercise and not as a technique, but as a very personal gesture.

Quietly, inwardly, without explanations or justifications, say to yourself:

*“Thank you for being here today.”*

And perhaps, in that moment, you will notice how something inside grows a little warmer — as if someone has finally seen and acknowledged your presence in your own life.

## **THANK YOURSELF**

Thank you for my resilience in difficult times.

I thank myself for the courage to try new things.

Thank you for taking care of my health and well-being.

I thank myself for my ability to learn and grow.

Thank you for my creativity and my unique way of seeing the world.

I thank myself for my kindness and compassion toward others.

Thank you for my ability to solve problems and find a way through challenges.

I thank myself for my diligence and perseverance.

Thank you for my capacity to love and to be loved.

I thank myself for accepting my imperfections and mistakes.

Thank you for staying calm in stressful situations.

I thank myself for being open to new ideas and new people.

Thank you for my sense of humor and my ability to enjoy life.

I thank myself for the dreams and ambitions that inspire me.

Thank you for my ability to listen and truly hear others.

I thank myself for honesty and sincerity in relationships.

Thank you for my commitment to personal growth.

I thank myself for responsibility and reliability.

Thank you for my ability to forgive myself and others.

I thank myself for caring for those close to me.

Thank you for finding time to rest and restore my strength.

I thank myself for my ability to manage my emotions.

Thank you for my commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

I thank myself for staying true to my values and principles.

Thank you for my resilience in times of change.

I thank myself for enthusiasm and a positive outlook.

Thank you for having personal and professional goals.

I thank myself for attention to detail and the ability to complete what I begin.

Thank you for the support I give myself in difficult moments.

I thank myself for being who I am — with all my qualities and uniqueness.

### **Small Moments Alone With Yourself**

*“To be with yourself does not mean disappearing from life or escaping responsibility. It means returning to life from the place*

*where you have been too long only for others. It is not a rejection of connection and not a retreat into loneliness, but a gentle return to your own presence — the one that quietly dissolved over time into expectations, roles, and other people's needs. There is no drama or sharp gestures in this return. There is a pause in which you hear yourself again: your boundaries, your fatigue, your desires, your breath. And it is from this state that life begins to feel different — not as an endless response to external demands, but as a space where you are allowed to be alive, feeling, and real.”*

Spending time alone with yourself is not about isolating from the world, nor about wanting to disappear, close the door, or hide from life. It is not withdrawal and not a refusal of people or closeness. It is about returning.

A very quiet, unobtrusive, almost imperceptible return to yourself — to that inner space where you no longer have to constantly react, stay engaged, hold attention on others, or live up to expectations, even the kindest ones. It is a return to a state where you can, for a moment, release the need to be composed, useful, responsible, and simply allow yourself to exist — without explaining or justifying that existence.

For some, these moments come through a book — not one meant to be read “for benefit” or self-improvement, but one whose lines suddenly feel closer and more understandable than the noise of the day, as if they are speaking your language.

Sometimes it is music — music you do not want to analyze or

interpret, music that settles directly into the body, evens out the breath, and gently gathers you back together, restoring a sense of wholeness.

Sometimes it is an evening cup of tea, sipped slowly, or a glance out the window where someone is walking, lights are turning on and off, and the world continues living its own life — without asking for your participation, decisions, or involvement.

Sometimes these moments are a few minutes of silence in the bath, when no one calls, waits, or asks questions, and you can simply be in warm water, feel your body, and let your thoughts flow freely, without responding to anything or anyone.

These pauses are rarely long and rarely look significant from the outside, yet they hold a depth that gradually brings us back to ourselves.

It is in these brief stops that we begin to hear our inner melody — the one that does not shout or demand attention, but has always been playing quietly in the background. It is easily lost in everyday busyness, responsibilities, and others' expectations, yet it knows our true rhythm — the pace at which we genuinely feel well — and the inner place where we stop rushing, even mentally.

The more often we allow ourselves these small returns, the easier it becomes to maintain inner balance, even when there are many people, tasks, and noise around us. We stop dissolving completely into the external world, because something inside appears — a place we can return to, even when there is no opportunity to pause for long.

Sometimes it is enough simply to know that this place exists, that it has not disappeared, and that it is waiting.

And if you feel like it, you might gently ask yourself — without demands and without trying to change everything at once:

*Where in my day is there at least a small place for me? And if there is almost none right now, where could I begin to create it?*

Very often the answer turns out to be much closer than it seems. And it does not begin with extra time, perfect conditions, or radical decisions, but with the simplest and most important thing — an inner permission to be with yourself, even for just a few minutes.

I have prepared a list of questions for self-reflection. It can become a gentle foundation for a daily gratitude practice — one that helps you focus on your strengths and what you have lived through, creating a calm, confident inner tone.

## **10 Questions That Help You Understand Yourself More Deeply — Your Feelings, Desires, and Values**

Which moments in my life do I consider the most meaningful, and why?

What does happiness mean to me, and which actions bring me closer to it?

What are my strengths, and how can I apply them in my life?

Which values are truly important to me, and how do they

influence my decisions?

In which situations do I feel the most confident, and what creates that feeling?

What fears live inside me, and what am I willing to do to gently move through them?

What matters most to me in relationships with other people?

What goals do I want to achieve in life, and what currently stands in the way?

How do I usually cope with stress and difficulties, and what could I change to support myself better?

How do I see myself in five or ten years, and what steps could bring me closer to that vision?

Your answers to these questions may become a source of inspiration for personal growth and a deeper understanding of what truly matters to you.

## **A Gentle Ritual**

*“To return to yourself, you do not need long conversations, special conditions, silence, or a future moment ‘when there is time.’ All it takes is one honest question — asked without hurry and without the need to immediately find the right answer. A question free of pressure and expectations, filled only with sincere curiosity about what is happening inside you right now.”*

I want to offer you a ritual so simple and unobtrusive that it

is almost impossible *not* to do — even on a busy, noisy day that feels completely unsuited for pauses. It requires no preparation, no special time, and no “perfect moment” we so often wait for, postponing care for ourselves until later.

This ritual does not need silence, privacy, or a free evening. It fits easily into any life, no matter how full, unpredictable, or demanding it may be.

I call it the **“One Question” ritual**, because it truly consists of only one small action — brief, almost invisible, yet deeply alive.

Once a day, at any time and in any place — between tasks, while standing in line, walking down the street, or pausing for just a second — I invite you to ask yourself one simple question: **“How am I right now?”**

It is important not to add anything to it. Not to expand it, clarify it, or turn it into a chain of reflections. The value of this question lies in its simplicity and directness. It is not a mindfulness test or a deep self-analysis exercise. It is not a way to urgently understand, fix, or improve something.

It is simply an invitation to contact.

The answer may be very brief and unremarkable. Sometimes it is just one word that comes first: *tired, calm, tense, warm, empty, steady*. Sometimes it is not a word at all, but a bodily sensation — heaviness or lightness, tightness or ease — something you notice without needing to explain.

And that is more than enough.

There is one important and rather unfamiliar element here — something that often meets resistance at first, because we are used to immediately *doing something* with what we notice. This ritual asks you to answer honestly **without fixing, rushing, or dismissing** what you find. Without immediately saying, “I’ll pull myself together,” “Not now,” “I can’t feel this,” or “Later.”

Just allowing the state to be what it is in this moment.

This question is not about control. It does not ask *why* things feel this way. It does not require action or solutions. It exists for a brief moment in which you stop being the background of your own life and become present within it — alive, aware, included — even if only for a few seconds.

In my practice, I have seen many times how this simple question gradually changes people’s lives — not abruptly and not dramatically, but quietly and steadily. It becomes an anchor you can return to at any moment, even when time and energy feel scarce.

This anchor does not stop the day or turn it upside down, but it changes how you inhabit what is happening.

Because where there is contact with yourself, stability slowly appears.

And where there is stability, a sense of home is born — not an external one, not dependent on circumstances, but that inner home that is always with you.

A home you can return to by asking just one question.

## A Letter to Yourself

*“A letter to yourself is not a way to record something or to organize your thoughts. It is a rare opportunity to be heard without explanations, justifications, or translating feelings into a language others can understand. It is a space where you do not need to be logical, strong, or composed — where you can let the words come as they come, without caring about form or impression. In such a letter, there is no addressee who evaluates, argues, or demands clarity. There is only you — with everything that has accumulated, become tangled, or never fully took shape. And that is why a deep honesty appears: when no one interrupts or asks you to ‘say it differently,’ the inner voice begins to sound quieter, but truer.”*

If at some point you feel the desire, you can write a few lines to yourself — just a little — without a goal and without expecting a result. Not to save it, and not as an exercise, but as a quiet conversation with someone close, someone you do not need to prove anything to, explain yourself to, or persuade.

It can be a conversation with the part of you that is tired, uncertain, still moving forward, or simply wants to be noticed — without trying to urgently fix anything or pull everything together.

If it feels difficult to begin and the words do not come, that is completely normal. Not every conversation starts easily. Sometimes it is enough to allow yourself a very simple opening,

such as *“I want to tell you...”* or *“It matters to me that you know...”* — and then simply follow what rises inside, without a plan and without trying to write beautifully or correctly.

Form does not matter here. Sincerity does — even if it feels awkward, fragmented, or quiet.

In this letter, you can write about support, about what you are feeling right now, about what feels difficult, if it does, and about what still worked out, if you want to notice that. You can write about gratitude — not for big victories or achievements others usually celebrate, but for presence, for the path, for the fact that you continue to stay in your own life even when you are tired and unsure where exactly you are going.

Sometimes these letters hold words about what matters to you *now* — not in general, not for others, but in this specific period of life, on this particular day, in this state. It may be something very simple and grounded, and that is precisely what makes the letter alive.

You do not need to reread this letter or turn it into a reminder, a plan, or a guideline. You do not have to keep it, store it, or give it special importance. Its value is not in what remains afterward, but in the moment of contact itself — in allowing yourself to be heard, even if only by yourself.

Sometimes a few lines are enough for things inside to become a little quieter, a little warmer, a little more stable — as if someone finally sat beside you and was not in a hurry.

And if after this letter it becomes easier to breathe and a

little calmer to move through your day, then it has already done everything it needed to do.

## **My Letter to Myself**

I want to say a few words to you — not because you need to change something or urgently understand anything, but simply because you exist, and that alone is enough to pause and be close.

I know that you are more tired than you usually allow yourself to admit, and that behind your outer composure there is often tension you have learned not to show, even to yourself. I see how hard you try, how you keep going even when it is not always clear inside where exactly you are going or why. And it matters to me that you know this: your effort matters, even if no one noticed it.

I want to remind you that you do not need to be strong all the time, and you do not need to meet anyone's expectations in order to deserve warmth, pauses, and care. You are allowed to be tired, uncertain, unsure — and still remain valuable and alive, exactly as you are right now, without improvements or adjustments.

If today was difficult, it does not make you weak. It makes you honest with yourself — and there is far more strength in that than it may seem. If something worked out today, even something very small, you have the right to notice it and not diminish it, because the path is made of exactly these steps.

I want you to remember: you do not need to rush all the time, be useful all the time, or hold yourself together all the time. You

are allowed to simply be sometimes — to breathe, to feel, and to allow yourself not to know the answers.

I am with you, even when it is noisy around you and the demands do not end.

Thank you for this day. Thank you for being in it. Thank you for not disappearing from your own life, even when it was hard. And thank you for continuing to move forward while keeping a living heart inside.

That is enough. You are enough.

## **Gentle Reflections**

*“The relationship with yourself is the tradition that holds all others together. It is not an event, not a goal, and not a one-time decision, but a repeated inner gesture: how you return to yourself when you are tired, how you speak to yourself after a mistake, how you choose care over pressure in an ordinary day. This tradition quietly sets the tone for everything else — for how we build closeness, hold differences, ask for help, and remain present. When there is inner support, relationships with the world stop being a struggle for validation and become a continuation of the respect that already exists within.”*

The traditions and rituals we create in our relationship with ourselves rarely look important or worthy of special attention. They are certainly not a luxury, a privilege, or a whim reserved for those who supposedly “have more time.” In truth, they are one

of the simplest and, at the same time, one of the deepest forms of respect that can exist in a person's life — quiet, unobtrusive, and requiring no external confirmation.

This is respect for yourself as a living human being — not perfect, not always composed — respect for your own rhythm, for a state that changes, and for the part of you that sometimes grows tired, doubts itself, does not cope as well as it hoped, yet still continues to exist and to move forward. There is no grandiosity in this respect, but there is honesty, and over time it becomes a steady inner support.

When we learn to treat ourselves with care, something very important begins to change in our relationships with others — even if that was never our intention. It becomes easier to be present not from tension or obligation, but from an inner resource that does not constantly need to be replenished from the outside. Relationships become simpler because the need to continually prove your worth or your right to attention gradually falls away. Listening becomes easier because an inner space appears — no longer occupied by constant self-criticism or inner arguments.

In my work, I have often seen how this inner attitude toward oneself changes the atmosphere in a family far more powerfully than any agreements or rules. Warmth in a home rarely appears “out of nowhere.” It cannot be created by willpower or held together by control. It flows quietly from within — from a state in which a person feels at ease with themselves — and from there it naturally begins to spread outward.

The path to love, so often spoken about and so often sought, does not begin with effort, with the right steps, or with attempts to become better, more convenient, or more correct. It begins with attention — with the ability to pause, even for a moment, and notice yourself in your own life. With simple presence, in which nothing needs to be proven and nowhere needs to be rushed.

Being with yourself is not an abstract idea and not a temporary practice. It is one of the most important traditions we can create and sustain, even without calling it that. This tradition requires no special conditions, does not depend on circumstances, and is not canceled by difficult days — because it lives inside you and remains accessible even when everything around feels unstable.

And it is from this inner home — from this ability to be with yourself in a living, gentle way — that all other traditions are eventually born: home as a space, closeness as a meeting, warmth as a state, and the capacity to be with others without losing yourself. Everything begins here — in this quiet choice to return to yourself again and again, with trust and with love.

## **PART II. WHEN THERE ARE TWO IN THE HOME**

## Chapter 3. On Love That Lives in Simple Things

*“What does not require proof often turns out to be the most reliable — because it lives not in evidence, but in sensation. It is a kind of knowing that does not argue or persuade, does not seek agreement or applause. It simply exists — like breath, like the feeling of ground beneath your feet, like a quiet certainty that never raises its voice.”*

### The Story of One Evening

There are evenings that, at first glance, seem completely unremarkable — evenings that leave no sense that anything special or significant has happened. They are not marked on calendars, and people rarely tell others about them. There are no planned conversations, no beautiful words meant to be remembered, repeated, or preserved. There is no feeling of celebration or of an “important moment” everything was leading toward.

It is simply an evening — one of many — quietly woven into the ordinary rhythm of life.

No one is rushing anywhere, because the rush for today is already over. Dinner is ready, or almost ready. The light in the room is soft — not bright, not demanding attention, but

supportive, like a background in which it is possible to relax. Someone is washing cups without thinking of it as an action. Someone sits nearby in silence — not because there is nothing to say, but because words are not needed right now. Someone flips through a book without really reading. Someone looks out the window, where life continues beyond the glass, not requiring participation.

And it is precisely in this ordinary, almost invisible moment that a sense of closeness suddenly appears — something difficult to explain and impossible to create through effort. It does not arrive as a flash and does not overwhelm. It is not an emotion one wants to hold onto or intensify. It is a quiet, deep feeling — very real — as if something inside gently settles into its place.

This is closeness that does not require proof and does not need words.

On evenings like these, there is no desire to prove anything. There is no need to say out loud, “*we love each other*,” or to test the relationship for strength. There is no need to confirm your importance or look for signs that everything is fine. It simply becomes clear: *we are here*, and that is enough — without conditions, explanations, or expectations.

This feeling does not come because everything is perfect, and not because the day was light or joyful. Sometimes it is quite the opposite. The day may have been exhausting, dense, difficult, filled with tasks and tension — and that is precisely why this quiet togetherness becomes especially valuable, like a space where you

can finally exhale and stop holding yourself together.

Perhaps you have had evenings like this too — very simple, almost unnoticeable ones that are easy to miss if you are waiting for something bigger, searching for bright emotions or special signs of love. Maybe you did not immediately recognize their importance, and only later caught yourself thinking that *this* is where you feel calm, *this* is where you can breathe, *this* is where nothing needs fixing — neither in yourself nor in the other.

Over time, observing couples in my practice and living through my own relationships from the inside, I began to understand one very important thing more and more clearly: love rarely lives in loud words and almost never demands explanations. Most often, it hides in simple, almost invisible things — the very things that are easy to dismiss if we do not pause and listen.

It lives in shared silence, where there is no need to fill pauses or prove closeness with words. In familiar gestures — when a hand finds a shoulder on its own, when a cup is placed a little closer, when someone asks, “*Are you tired?*” without extra explanations or advice. In the feeling of “*we are here*” — not as “*we must*” or “*we are trying*,” but simply as something that exists, calmly and reliably.

This kind of love is not always noticeable from the outside and does not always look romantic in the usual sense. It may seem too quiet, too ordinary, too “uninteresting.” And yet it is precisely this love that creates that feeling of home — where,

beside another person, you can be yourself without gathering yourself up or playing a role.

And if you stop for even a moment and listen to evenings like these, it becomes clear that real closeness is made from them — from these simple, unmarked moments. A closeness that does not require effort, yet gives the feeling that you are not alone, and that nearby there is a place where you are allowed to be alive.

### **Shared Habits That Bring You Closer**

*“Relationships are not held together by events — not by holidays, anniversaries, turning points, or rare flashes of closeness — but by how two people choose each other day after day in the most ordinary moments. In the way they greet each other in the morning, listen in passing, respond to fatigue, irritation, or silence. It is in these almost invisible choices that stability is born: in the ability not to turn away when a conversation feels uncomfortable, not to dismiss feelings when they are complex, and not to disappear when it would be easier to retreat into silence.”*

Working with couples, observing their stories, their words, and the pauses between words, I began to notice one very quiet yet steady pattern — one that over time became almost obvious to me. The strongest and most alive relationships are not held together by big events or rare emotional peaks, not by dates, celebrations, or carefully planned moments of intimacy that are

usually considered “important.”

They are held together by small, repeated things — so simple and familiar that they are almost invisible, and precisely for that reason, deeply reliable. This is not about effort or special striving, but about a rhythm of life in which two people gradually learn how to be together.

A shared breakfast, even if it lasts only ten minutes. Even if there is little conversation and each person is still partly inside their own morning, their own thoughts and sensations — it still becomes a point of connection, where the day does not begin alone.

A walk without a goal — not as an obligation to “spend time together” and not as a specially scheduled activity, but as a natural continuation of the day. Walking side by side, unhurried, without discussing anything important or solving problems, simply feeling each other’s pace.

A short conversation before sleep that does not need to be deep or meaningful. Sometimes it is just a few sentences. Sometimes one question and one answer. Sometimes only a shared glance in the dark, when words are no longer needed, but presence is felt especially clearly.

The habit of asking “*How are you?*” — and truly waiting for the answer. Without interrupting, without immediately offering solutions, without rushing or correcting — allowing the other to be heard exactly as they are in that moment.

From the outside, these moments rarely look significant. And

that is why they are so easy to miss, postpone, or devalue — believing that closeness must be something bigger, more visible, more expressive, and necessarily filled with strong emotions. We often think that if there is no intensity, there is no depth. Experience, again and again, shows the opposite.

It is precisely these simple actions that gradually create a sense of “we” — not as a role, not as a social status, and not as an obligation, but as a living, warm feeling of shared presence. When such habits repeat day after day, they become invisible threads — thin and almost imperceptible — yet it is they that gently and reliably connect two people. Not by binding or holding tightly, but by allowing each person to remain themselves while being together.

We often believe that closeness must be created — that effort is required, something special must be invented, new forms and ways found to “bring back” or “strengthen” feelings. In reality, far more often closeness simply needs to not be destroyed by haste, not pushed aside for later, and not replaced with constant busyness and exhaustion.

Closeness is born where there is time to be together without a task or a goal. Where there is attention without pressure or expectations. Where there is a habit of noticing each other in the most ordinary, unremarkable moments of life.

And from this calm, everyday presence, love gradually grows — a love that does not require proof, because it simply lives. Quietly. Reliably. Truly.

## **10 Questions to Help You and Your Partner Identify Shared Values and Build a Strong Foundation for Your Family**

Which qualities and values do we both consider the most important foundation for a healthy relationship?

*(for example: trust, honesty, respect)*

What matters most to us in life, and what do we dream about for the future?

*(how do we imagine our shared future?)*

How do we define happiness in a relationship?

*(what makes us happy together, and how can we support this state?)*

How do we want to spend our free time together?

*(which shared hobbies or activities would we like to develop?)*

What are our views on finances and budgeting?

*(how do we plan expenses and approach saving?)*

Which traditions and values from our families would we like to pass on to our children?

*(what feels especially important to us in parenting?)*

What are our expectations around mutual help and support?

*(how can we be there for each other in difficult times?)*

How do we define boundaries and personal space in our relationship?

*(how do we respect each other's time and interests?)*

What are our views on health and physical well-being?

*(how can we support each other in maintaining a healthy lifestyle?)*

What are we willing to do regularly to strengthen and maintain our connection?

*(which actions can help us consistently live our shared values together?)*

## **Couple Traditions Without Obligation or Expectation**

*"In closeness, what matters is not what is repeated by agreement, but what you genuinely want to return to."*

There are things that need to be spoken aloud slowly and calmly, almost as if checking how they resonate inside — because they determine whether closeness becomes a space of warmth or gradually turns into another source of tension. One of

these truths sounds like this: traditions in a relationship should not become rules that must be followed, nor do they need to match anyone's idea of what love is "supposed" to look like.

They do not have to be perfect, regular, or agreed upon in advance. They do not need to be performed because "that's how it's done" or because "we once decided this forever." The moment a tradition begins to feel like an obligation, warmth quietly disappears from it, replaced by expectation, demand, and subtle pressure. And where pressure appears, what is alive slowly retreats — even if, on the surface, everything still looks fine.

The warmest and most genuine traditions in relationships almost always arise on their own, without discussion, planning, or formal definition. They are born not from the need to maintain something, preserve something, or prove something, but from a simple and deeply human desire to be together. These are the moments no one officially calls a "tradition," yet over time they become associated with a feeling of home and closeness.

Sometimes it is an evening without phones — not because it is "right" or "recommended," but because at some point it simply becomes more important to see each other's eyes, hear each other's voice without distractions, and feel presence. Sometimes it is a cup of tea in the kitchen without a particular conversation, where words are optional because being together is enough. Sometimes it is the shared walk home, even if part of the way is spent in silence — a silence that is not empty, but filled with the feeling of *"we are together."*

Sometimes it is the habit of hugging before sleep — not as a required ritual and not as a test of closeness, but as a natural gesture that says far more than words and needs no explanation. These traditions do not need to be remembered or monitored. They do not require effort and do not create tension. On the contrary, they gently dissolve it, restoring a sense of calm and presence.

There are no expectations in them — no insistence that today must be “just like always,” no demand that the other must want the same thing, no fixed idea of how closeness should look. There is only presence — warm, calm, and real — a space where you can be yourself without fear of losing connection if something does not go according to plan.

In my practice, I often see couples begin to feel freer and closer precisely when they stop “maintaining the relationship” and start simply living side by side, noticing each other in the most ordinary moments. Because love rarely lives in rare events and almost never exists on a schedule. It does not need constant proof or confirmation.

Love is not an event and not a set of rules.

It is a habit of being there — choosing presence again and again, even in silence and simplicity.

And it is this quiet, unobtrusive habit that, over time, becomes the most reliable home for two — a place where you can exhale and be alive together.

## On Gratitude That Lives Between the Lines

*“Gratitude begins not with words, but with an inner willingness to see the other person’s contribution — even in the smallest, most invisible things.”*

Gratitude in relationships rarely sounds like a clearly spoken word delivered at the “right” moment. It is seldom formed into a complete, polished sentence. More often, it lives between the lines — where there are no direct statements, but there is tone, a look, a pause in which a person feels seen.

It shows itself in how we respond, in how we listen without interrupting or dismissing, in how we react to small things that are so easy to overlook when our attention is fixed only on what feels big and significant.

This gratitude begins with the ability to notice the other person’s contribution not only in actions usually labeled as important, but also in the ordinary, everyday gestures from which life is actually made. In the fact that they got up earlier so you could sleep a few extra minutes. In bringing you tea without being asked. In silently taking on something extra without turning it into an event. In simply being there when the day was difficult and words were hard to find.

When we start noticing these small contributions, relationships gradually become softer — as if more space appears inside for warmth and less for tension. Complaints

decrease not because everything suddenly becomes perfect, but because acceptance grows — an understanding that the other person is trying, even if not in the way we would prefer, and not always in the way we expect.

Sometimes it is enough, in the quiet of an ordinary evening when the day is already over and no longer demands decisions, to remember just one small thing your partner did today. Not for analysis or discussion, not to fix or improve anything, but simply to let warmth return inside — to feel connection and closeness, a reminder that you are not on opposite sides, even if you are tired or temporarily out of sync.

I have noticed many times, both in my work and in my own life, that couples who know how to express gratitude quietly — not necessarily with words, but with attention and presence — are less likely to fall apart during difficult periods. Not because they have no challenges and not because they do not get tired, but because gratitude creates an inner memory of the relationship.

A memory of what has already been good between you.

A memory that the other person is investing in their own way — not always perfectly, but sincerely.

Gratitude is not an obligation to be constantly satisfied, nor a ban on difficult feelings, irritation, or exhaustion. It is a way of saying — sometimes out loud, sometimes only inside — *“I see you.”*

And when this way of seeing remains, even in times of tension

and misunderstanding, the relationship gains the chance to move through many things while staying alive and real.

## **THANK YOUR LOVED ONE**

Thank you for always supporting me, even in the most difficult moments.

I am grateful for your patience and understanding.

Thank you for knowing how to truly listen to me.

I appreciate your willingness to help me in any situation.

Thank you for caring so deeply about our family and our home.

I am grateful that you share your dreams and plans for the future with me.

Thank you for your ability to lift my mood when I need it most.

I appreciate all the small surprises you create for me.

Thank you for your attention to details — they make life feel special.

I am grateful that you respect my feelings and always accept them.

I value your honesty and openness in our relationship.

Thank you for always finding time for the two of us.

I appreciate your support in my ideas and passions.

I am grateful for your kindness and generosity.

Thank you for sharing responsibility and everyday duties with me.

I appreciate the moments you create to make our life brighter.

Thank you for accepting me exactly as I am.

I am grateful that you strive to nurture and improve our relationship.

Thank you for being there for me when things are hard.

I appreciate that you teach me new things and share your experience.

Thank you for all the adventures we have lived through together.

I am grateful for your care for our future and our shared goals.

I appreciate your ability to see the positive even in difficult situations.

Thank you for your attention to my health and well-being.

I am grateful that you stay true to our values and principles.

Thank you for your responsibility and reliability.

I appreciate your responsiveness and your ability to help even without being asked.

Thank you for the moments when you were simply there — just to be there.

I value your passion and enthusiasm, which inspire me.

Thank you for being in my life and for the love you give me.

**Shared Values as a Quiet Foundation**

*“Values are not a coincidence of opinions and not the absence of disagreement. They are a quiet agreement to move in the same direction — even when the path requires different steps, different rhythms, and the ability to stay close without needing to prove who is right.”*

Values within a couple are rarely spoken aloud and are seldom shaped into words that could be written down or discussed at the table as a separate topic. Most often, they are not discussed at all — because they seem either “obvious” or too abstract to touch.

And yet values are felt before they are understood. They become the background of a relationship — the invisible field in which two people live side by side.

They reveal themselves not in declarations or beautiful formulations, but in how people speak to each other — gently or sharply, with attention or from a place of defense, with a desire to understand or a need to protect themselves. In how difficult questions are approached: by trying to hear each other and find common ground, even when it is hard, or by trying to prove one’s point at any cost. In how partners choose to stay close — remaining in contact even when it is difficult, or gradually drifting apart not because love is gone, but because they have stopped looking in the same direction.

Values always show up in small things — sometimes so subtle that we do not immediately understand why we feel calm with one person and constantly tense with another. In what

is considered important and what is easily dismissed. In what receives time, energy, and attention. In what is not postponed “for later,” even when life feels full and demanding.

When values align, there is less inner resistance in a relationship and more trust — not because disagreements disappear or because partners suddenly want the same things. Disagreements remain, and sometimes even become sharper, because living relationships always include different perspectives and desires. But something deeper than individual opinions appears — a shared direction that does not need to be proven.

It is like walking along different paths toward the same horizon. You may choose different routes, stop along the way, argue about how best to go, grow tired, or doubt. And yet inside there remains a quiet knowing that you are not moving in opposite directions. Even if paths temporarily diverge because of fatigue, circumstances, or different rhythms, there is still a sense that you are looking toward the same place.

In my practice, I have often seen how this very feeling helps couples move through difficult periods without breaking their bond. Sometimes it does not feel like joy or inspiration. Sometimes it is simply calm — inner steadiness, a quiet support that needs no words or confirmation. Yet it is precisely this support that allows relationships to endure time, to change and transform, without losing what matters most.

Because values are not something agreed upon as rules or conditions, and not something that can be imposed or written

down in advance. They are what you stand on even when there is no strength left to explain, even when words run out. And that is why this support turns out to be the most reliable of all.

## **Love, Care, and Respect — in Everyday Life**

*“Over time, it becomes clear that love is not a burst of feelings and not proof of importance, but a quiet form of presence — in which two people choose each other again and again, in fatigue and silence, in different rhythms and states, without the need to meet expectations, fix one another, or confirm closeness with words.”*

With time, it becomes increasingly clear that love is not only a feeling — and not always an emotion that can be clearly named or described. More often, love is a way of being close, a way of showing up in another person’s life not out of obligation, habit, or because “it’s the right thing to do,” but through an inner choice made again and again, sometimes almost imperceptibly.

Love rarely lives in words, and even more rarely needs beautiful phrasing. It shows itself in how we are together — in how we look at each other on an ordinary evening, in how we listen without interrupting or rushing to conclusions, in how we stay when the day has been difficult and there is little energy left for conversation. In these moments, love stops being an emotion and becomes presence — quiet, reliable, real.

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