REALITY DECODER

A Light in the Dark

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Introduction

"The light shines in the darkness,
yet the darkness did not overcome it."
John 1:5

The Perennial Question of Good and Evil

Here's something curious about human history. While most people were busy trying to figure out what to eat for their next meal, where to build their houses, or how to conquer their neighbors, a handful of thinkers kept wrestling with a question of a completely different kind: *where does evil come from?*[1]

It's one of those questions that sounds simple until you actually sit with it, and then it turns maddening. If the universe was made by a Creator that is fundamentally good, and everything in creation is good, then where does evil come from? Did the Creator make a mistake? Is there some other cosmic force at work? And if so, who created that?

For centuries, the brightest minds of every age kept banging their heads against it. Then along came a monk named Augustine of Hippo, and all the pieces fell into place.

His answer was simpler than anyone expected: evil isn't a thing in itself. It's not something God made, nor a cosmic villain waiting in the wings. Evil is what happens when something good goes astray — the way a wound is not a separate thing added to your body, but healthy tissue that has been damaged and is working to heal.[2]

The same principle runs through everything we call evil. Hate is wounded love, hardened past the point where it knows itself. Violence

is strength that forgot how to be gentle, and greed is desire that got so good at fulfilling itself that it ignored everything else.

If evil is a distortion rather than a substance, then it has to be a distortion of something. And that something is energy.

Evil as Corruption of Good

In our previous book *Reality Decoder: A Soul's Guide to the Earthly Experience* we discussed the energetic nature of reality and proposed various ways of engaging with inner and outer experiences from that standpoint. The idea is that everything — a person, an object, a passing mood — has its own energetic signature. They are all manifestations of flow, interaction, exchange, and transformation of energy.[3]

What would be considered evil, or an act of evil, is also a manifestation of a certain energy. Following Augustine's thesis, what was originally neutral or even good, by a certain turn of fate or by choice, became corrupted along the way. The creative energy or power that was meant to be used beneficially ended up being misused.

Popular stories are full of this, because good storytellers feel it in their bones.

Gollum was once just an ordinary hobbit. Saruman started as one of the good guys, the wisest wizard of them all. Anakin Skywalker didn't emerge from his mother already plotting to choke stormtroopers — he was a child slave who wanted to save everyone. Even Agent Smith, the cold digital villain from *The Matrix*, was originally just a helpful computer program doing its job.

But the same pattern plays out in quieter lives, too. A parent who controls because they love. A friend who gossips because it's the closest thing to intimacy they have right now. Every dark turn follows the same arc, whether it makes the history books or just ruins a Tuesday evening: someone found a special energy in themselves or around them, tried to do something good with it, and lost their way in the process.

The Four Corruptions

If every distortion began as something good, then the essential question becomes: **what exactly went wrong?**

Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher and founder of Anthroposophy, offered a crucial starting point. "Evil is nothing else than a misplaced good," he wrote, illustrating it this way: a master piano technician is perfect in the workshop, building and tuning the instrument with exquisite skill. But if that same technician, moved by enthusiasm, walks into the concert hall during the performance and starts hammering away — perfection becomes chaos. Something good, in the wrong place, becomes something terrible. Steiner extended this to cosmic evolution: what was perfectly appropriate and necessary at an earlier stage of development becomes a source of obstruction if it overstays its welcome and is dragged into a later stage.[4]

Steiner's insight illuminates a great deal, but not everything. A parent's love can be perfectly timed and well-placed, and still corrupt, if the intent is possession rather than freedom. That is a different kind of corruption, and it needs a different name. In our work with people, we identified three additional modes through which something originally good can become harmful.

Together, these form **The Four Corruptions**:

1. Wrong Context (Time, Place, Object)

You know that friend who gives brilliant advice at the absolutely worst moment? Or the parent who chooses to have "a talk" exactly when you're falling apart? That's this corruption. The intention is good, maybe even wonderful. But it's showing up where nobody asked for it.

Anger can be a natural and righteous response in certain situations. It can protect what needs protecting and stand up for what's been knocked down. But when rage is directed at your terrified child who needs comfort, it can destroy the very thing it should be guarding.

The good hasn't disappeared. It's just misplaced — showing up when it's not welcome, or absent when it's desperately needed. Sometimes the energy is also focused on the wrong person or expressed in the wrong place (like having an affair at work).

The remedy is to develop the wisdom to discern when, where or in what context something is needed, and when it is not.

2. Wrong Means

Wanting safety is natural. But if you achieve it by wrapping yourself in secrecy until nobody can get close enough to hurt you, you've isolated yourself and lost all the good things that come from having relationships with people.

If you sought peace, but enforced it by crushing every voice that disagreed, you've become tyrannical.

The goal itself wasn't wrong, but the path you took betrayed the destination. You just won't recognize it when you get there, because you'll have become someone you never wanted to be.

The remedy in this case is to develop integrity in how you pursue what you want. You may also want to reexamine your goal and adjust it so that it no longer requires the wrong means. Perhaps you *thought* you wanted peace, but what you wanted deep down was to exercise your leadership. You can find a more appropriate path when your goal is clearer.

3. Wrong Intent

This is when something "good" is being done with duplicitous intent. This one is trickier, because everything looks right from the outside.

Consider generosity. If you're giving primarily to feel like a generous person, to get admiration or to avoid the discomfort of being seen as stingy, you're not generous. You're just purchasing compliments.

Honesty can corrupt too, when you tell the truth to intimidate, to wound, or to make yourself look smarter at someone else's expense.

The action looks identical whether it comes from a good place or a corrupted one. Transforming this kind of corruption back to the original good is especially challenging, as it requires honest self-examination and the courage to look at what you'd rather not see.

The remedy is to develop integrity of motive: be willing to examine why you're really doing what you're doing.

4. Wrong Degree

Some things are good in moderation and terrible in excess.

The capacity to sense and attune to other people's emotions is a valuable gift. But it becomes a burden if you are so "over-sensitive" that you are always exhausted after interactions, or you take on other people's emotions as your own.

Striving for high standards leads to excellence. But if you dial them past "rigorous" into "impossible to satisfy" then you've created a prison.

Too much of something good becomes its own kind of bad. The same goes for too little, as in the case of eating and resting.

The remedy in this case is to develop the capacity to understand where the right balance lies.

Many of the things we call evil involve more than one corruption. Workaholism, for instance, can be a blend of wrong degree (all work and no play), wrong time (working after hours, weekends, and vacations), and wrong intent (striving for validation rather than an honest overflow of energy). Gossip can arise from both wrong means (connection built at someone else's expense) and wrong intent (communication used for self-aggrandizement or damage).

Understanding which corruption, or combination of corruptions, is at work is important, because each mode points to a different healing path.

Facing the Darkness — A Transformative Approach

Once we see evil as corrupted good and understand how the corruption happens, the way we face darkness changes — in ourselves and in the world.

If evil was an independent force — some kind of cosmic enemy — we'd have only one option: to fight it and destroy it wherever we found it.

Humanity has taken this approach countless times. And while dismantling evil things — oppressive systems, violent regimes — is sometimes necessary, treating evil as a cosmic enemy to be vanquished almost always leaves the underlying corruption intact, and often creates new suffering in its wake. The crusades against evil have a nasty habit of spawning new evils.

If, on the other hand, we see evil as a corrupted expression of an energy that once served something, we are no longer fighting an enemy. We can begin to think about how to reclaim this energy, and restore it to its original purpose.

Understanding the different modes of corruption helps us see exactly where the good went wrong. Each mode points to a different kind of medicine. The person whose passion has become hatred through wrong intent needs a different healing than the one whose anger has become rage through wrong degree. The same darkness can have a different anatomy, and so needs a different remedy.

What's more, evil thrives in the shadows. It depends on staying hidden and unnamed. This is why our **consent** to evil is almost always unconscious. Shining a light on the corruption — seeing it clearly and naming it honestly — shifts our relationship with it, and makes it possible to transmute its energy into something that benefits both ourselves and the world.

A light doesn't defeat darkness by fighting it. It doesn't argue the shadows into submission. It simply shines. As for the darkness — having no substance of its own — it gives way.

Alchemists spent centuries chasing the secret of turning lead into gold. It turns out the real alchemy is simpler: recognizing that darkness was always just light twisted out of balance.

The light still shines. The darkness never did overcome it — it only thought it did.

About This Book

This book is meant primarily for your inner work — for discovering the light within what feels dark. If you are in a helping profession, it can also give you insights and different perspectives on how to support the individuals or groups you work with.

In the pages that follow, you will find ninety-four inner alchemy cards, each one examining a specific way that good becomes distorted in everyday life. These are based on the lived experiences of real people we have worked with: the person trapped in chronic worry, the one who can't stop controlling everything, the couple drowning in resentment after years of small wounds, and so on.

When dealing with darkness, many of us do one of two things: we judge ourselves harshly for our struggles, or we excuse them with false acceptance. The inner alchemy cards offer a third way: to see our distortions clearly and name them honestly, while also recognizing the good still struggling to express itself. We can tell the truth about our hate without concluding we are hateful. We can acknowledge our control patterns without believing we are merely control freaks.

With this kind of **self-compassion without self-deception**, we can finally find a way forward. We can stop fighting ourselves, understand the nature of the distorted energy, and redirect it in healthier ways. Hate

becomes passion for justice. Control becomes wise influence, grounded in respect for other people's autonomy.

This is not about seeing everything through rose-colored glasses. Certain acts do cause genuine harm, damaging relationships and communities, and ruining your own health and peace of mind.

When the corruption you encounter is in another person or group, and especially if you are subject to its misuse of power, it may not be appropriate to look for the light in it, at least not at first. In such situations, this book can help in two ways.

First, it can help heal the frozen energy in your own reactions — the shock, the fear, the resentment — so that you can choose the response the situation calls for, whether that means drawing boundaries, asking for support, or expressing your grievance clearly and firmly.

The second way, called *retrieving the projection*, is a more advanced practice, so it is best not attempted until you have worked through the first and feel genuinely ready to deepen the work. The approach is this: when you witness darkness in others that particularly disturbs you, seek out the hidden positive current within that same energy, even as you acknowledge that their version of it is corrupted. Then ask yourself what your relationship with that energy is, and how you could express it, in a positive way, in your everyday life.

Consider the person who seems coldly indifferent to others. Before this energy soured into indifference, its original form may have been the ability to prioritize one's own authentic goals and aspirations. Ironically, many caring people, who are disturbed by such people, exhaust themselves accommodating the needs of coworkers or relatives, yet never think to turn that same care toward themselves.

To use this second method, set aside the corrupted way the energy was used, and turn to The Underlying Good and The Healthy Expression entries in the cards. Try to welcome that energy's wholesome form into your own life; it may be the very quality you most need at that moment.

As you work with the inner alchemy cards, you will notice that there are a few different perspectives or angles to what happened. This recognition itself begins the transformation, because you can see not only that something has gone wrong, but how, and therefore what kind of restoration is needed.

The wisdom traditions have always known this. The word "repent," in its original Greek (*metanoia*), does not mean to feel guilty — it means to change one's mind and heart, to see differently.[5] Transformation begins with a new way of seeing. When you see that your anxiety is foresight without trust, or that your perfectionism is excellence without self-acceptance — something shifts. The distortion loosens its grip because it has been understood rather than resisted.

This book is a collection of lights — one for each darkness you may encounter on your journey. We wrote it in the hope that when the clouds grow thick and the stars disappear from view, these lights will help you find your bearings again.

And remember: the darkness is not your enemy. It's just light that got lost and no longer recognizes itself.

Your job is to help it find its way back home.

Adi Andrei, Hitomi Sakamoto

London, UK, June 2026

How to Use This Book

Each inner alchemy card that follows identifies how a particular energy has become distorted or frozen, its underlying good, and most importantly, the path of transformation — of return to the original good. Each card also provides inquiries toward the end. These are not meant for you to give "the right answers", but rather to help move the energy that has become frozen and stuck. Take time with these questions. Rather than answering intellectually, try feeling into what they inspire in you.

As you work with each card, notice which of the Four Corruptions is at work. Sometimes a single corruption is operating; sometimes several are intertwined. The cards will help you discern which, and the remedy will follow from that recognition.

The cards are divided into seven sections, grouped by where the struggle tends to show up in a life:

Emotional States — when feelings are running the show: worry, fear, anger, loneliness, and so on.

Relationship Challenges — when another person is part of the picture: conflict with someone, envy, jealousy, an affair, and so on.

Groups, Work & Belonging — when the struggle is with the group: leading a team, silence in a meeting, feeling like an outsider, and so on.

Self & Identity Struggles — when the wrestling is mostly with yourself, such as low self-esteem, perfectionism, procrastination, self-criticism.

Body & Energy — when the struggle shows up in the body or your energy: feeling scattered, easily drained by others, chronic physical symptoms.

Deep-Rooted Distortions — the heavier patterns, where a real strength or power has turned against itself: hate, greed, pride, manipulation, violence, and so on.

Thresholds & Transitions — when life is shifting from one chapter to the next, such as the empty nest syndrome, the fear of aging, a crisis of faith, feeling lost.

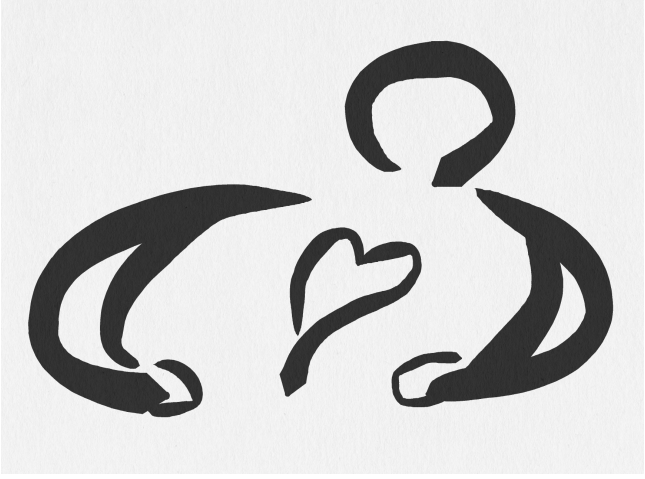
You can read the cards from beginning to end, or go straight to the one you need today. Some will feel like they were written directly for you, while some will make you think of someone else. Some might describe patterns you've never had words for before.

Use them however it serves you. Read one and sit with it. Share it with someone navigating similar terrain. Come back when old patterns resurface, and now you'll have a language for them.

PART 1

Emotional States

When feelings are running the show



Worry

The Underlying Good

Foresight, Planning, Care for Outcomes — the capacity to anticipate and prepare for the future.

The Corruption

Healthy concern turns into circular thinking that never reaches a conclusion. The mind loops over the same scenario without landing anywhere. You're no longer looking ahead to prepare — you're looking ahead to control, and the part of it you can't control keeps the anxiety running.

Mode: Degree

Signals This Is Active

- Replaying the same scenarios repeatedly without resolution
- "What if" spirals that grow rather than contract
- Physical tension, held breath, tight shoulders
- Difficulty being present in the moment
- Preparing for problems that may never come
- Feeling responsible for outcomes beyond your control

The Healthy Expression

Wise preparation — concern that leads to appropriate action, followed by release. Trusting that what has been done is enough. Planning as a tool for stewardship rather than for control.

The Healing Path

1. Name the concern clearly: "What am I actually worried about?"
2. Distinguish: Is there action I can take?
    - If yes → take it, then release
    - If no → this is not planning, it's attempting control
3. Return to the present moment through breathing or sensation
4. Practice trust in your future self's ability to handle what comes
5. Notice when you've crossed from preparation into obsession

Inquiry

- What would wise preparation look like here?
- Can I trust my future self to handle this when it arrives?
- What am I trying to control that is actually beyond my control?
- Have I done all I can? If so, can I let go?

Remember

"Worry is planning that has lost its trust in the future — and in yourself."

Fear

The Underlying Good

Protective Instinct, Caution — the natural capacity to recognize danger and keep yourself safe.

The Corruption

Caution turns into avoidance, or freezes you in place. The alarm that should sound briefly and then quiet down instead runs all the time. You feel danger where there isn't any, or a small risk looms far larger than it really is.

Mode: Degree, Context (Time)

Signals This Is Active

- Avoiding situations that are actually safe or manageable
- Physical activation (racing heart, shallow breath) without real threat
- Catastrophic predictions that don't match evidence
- Difficulty distinguishing between discomfort and danger
- Staying small to stay "safe"

- Fear of fear itself — anticipating the feeling and avoiding accordingly

The Healthy Expression

Appropriate caution — alertness that matches actual threat level. The fear is recognized but not obeyed blindly as you move forward.

The Healing Path

1. Acknowledge the fear without judgment — the nature of this reality is to face "death" and transcend it
2. Assess if this is a real threat or an imagined one
3. Distinguish discomfort from danger — growth often feels uncomfortable
4. Take small steps toward confronting what you fear (when actually safe)
5. Let the body complete its threat response (movement, shaking, breath)
6. Build evidence that you can handle what you fear

Inquiry

- What is this fear trying to protect me from?
- Is there real danger here, or just discomfort?
- What would I do if I trusted myself to handle this?
- When have I faced something scary and survived?

Remember

"Fear is wisdom that has forgotten how to trust your capacity to respond."

Over-Sensitive

The Underlying Good

Perceptiveness, Empathy — the capacity to sense subtle cues and feel deeply.

The Corruption

Sensitivity tips over into overload. The filter that would sort experiences feels absent. The awareness that should be a gift starts to flood you instead.

Mode: Degree

Signals This Is Active

- Feeling easily overwhelmed by stimuli (noise, crowds, emotions)
- Difficulty distinguishing your feelings from others'
- Needing extensive alone time to recover
- Physical symptoms from emotional or sensory overload
- Avoidance of situations that might overstimulate
- Feeling raw or exposed in the world

The Healthy Expression

Attuned sensitivity — awareness that enriches life without overwhelming it. The capacity to feel deeply while remaining centered.

The Healing Path

1. Accept your sensitivity as a gift, not a flaw
2. Build boundaries that protect without isolating
3. Do grounding exercise regularly
4. Learn to distinguish your energy from others'
5. Manage input intentionally
6. Find environments and relationships that honor your nature

Inquiry

- What is my sensitivity trying to show me?
- Where do I need stronger boundaries?
- How can I protect myself without closing off?
- What kind of environments help me thrive?

Remember

"Sensitivity picks up what others miss. What it needs is a way to ground, and then to digest what it finds."