

# **MIGRATION & TRAUMA**

**57 tips to heal yourself  
and to make your  
DREAMS COME TRUE**



Shazia Amer - Yousaf

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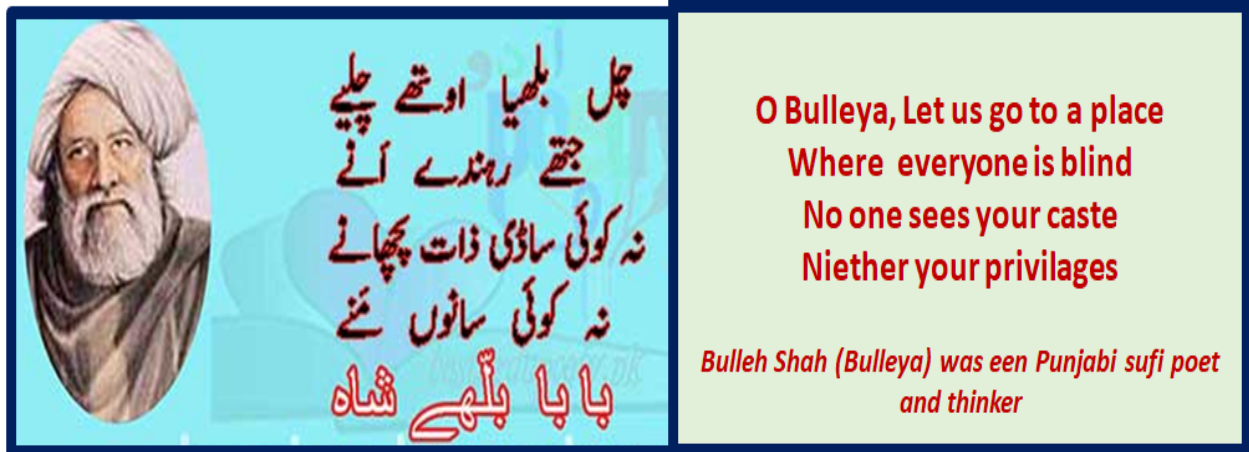
## Preface

I write this ebook to create awareness, understanding, and empathy about the process of migration and its impact on the lives of migrants and their coming generations.

I myself was not aware of the severity of this impact when I was living in Pakistan. I was a part of the majority. Occasionally I heard some negative talk about migrants who came from India to Pakistan after the partition in 1947. In the 1980s due to war, many Afghans were forced to migrate to Pakistan. Most Pakistanis were passionate to help Afghans and with time many Afghani migrants succeeded in making their place in Pakistani society but not everyone was positive about them.

After moving to the Netherlands I realized how it is to adjust yourself in new circumstances. I can feel how it is to be seen as a migrant whose knowledge and experiences are not considered equal to the native residents and who is often perceived as a burden or a threat.

Migration is an inevitable phenomenon. It has existed ever since the beginning of life on earth. Walls and restrictions can't stop it. We should have more compassion and acceptance for humans who migrate. Migration is not just the movement of a body from one place to another but also a shift in thinking and perspectives.



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## Why do people migrate?

Human beings have migrated ever since the beginning of mankind. People may migrate for many reasons including:

- **Danger:** In case basic survival needs are in danger, things like food, shelter, and safety, people have to choose between moving ahead or dying from danger and hunger. You can think about situations like wars, famines, and natural disasters.
- **Love:** After being away from their loved ones, people want to reunite and reconnect with their families or their loved ones. This is an increasing motivation nowadays, as people may fall in love with someone on the other side of the world via the internet.
- **Knowledge:** People want to study in different countries and expand their knowledge and skills.
- **Work:** People may come to work to expand their work experiences. Due to this, they contribute to creating more possibilities for themselves and for others.
- **Dreams:** To fulfill their ambitions and to make their dreams come true as they just want to settle in another country. This could be because they like the landscape, culture, and weather of another country.
- **Adventure:** People may have a desire to discover the unknown world and they want to discover and use their own hidden potential as they go for new adventures in life.
- **Inspiration:** People may get inspired by others who migrated and achieved successes that they could not achieve if they remained in the circumstances where they were.
- **Helping others:** People may move to other places in order to help other people who need their help and support on a humanitarian basis like Mother Teresa and Dr. Ruth Pfau did.

## My migration story

Like every first-generation migrant, I also have a migration and integration story. When I was going through all the challenges I felt many times a strong need to write about my thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Now I have learned the language, am working and I have a social network but still I am facing challenges. The aim of sharing my story is to reassure you that you are not alone and that there is a way that can help you to overcome your challenges.



My name is Shazia Amer. My maiden name is Shazia Yousaf. Fifteen years ago, I moved to the Netherlands from Pakistan to join my husband who was already living and working in the Netherlands. When I came here, I was a mother of two kids and already had ten years of work experience in Pakistan as a medical doctor.

When I came to the Netherlands, I immediately started learning the Dutch language. This was a challenging journey along with my responsibilities at home. I was blessed with my third child while I was learning the Dutch language and doing my integration exams. I was happy with my lovely kids and activities at home, however, I wanted to begin my work as soon as possible and get financially independent again.

Once starting my work in the Netherlands I, as a highly qualified migrant woman, went through many work-related challenges. That taught me that people with migration backgrounds need a different approach to work. While focusing on their work they need to give attention to themselves in order to stand up to all the challenges they are facing.

Most of the time, the problems I faced at work were not coming from work itself but from other people who had doubts about my abilities. They were worried about things that could go wrong because of me and I was not able to satisfy the people who had distrusted me and my abilities. They were not willing to see any good in me and my

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services. Naturally, I asked for feedback and I got feedback like you are too polite, too friendly, too slow, too detailed, and too careful. One feedback that was consistent was that my Dutch is not good enough. Strange was the fact that when they gave me a job they admired my language skills but after one year they did not extend my contract due to bad language skills. Often I heard that I should be myself that I totally don't understand as I was always myself.

In other words, I did not fulfill their expectations time and time again even though I was continuously improving myself and fulfilling the job requirements. Somewhere in this journey, I lost myself emotionally. I got a feeling as if I am not intelligent enough,



something will always be missing from me. I could not maintain a balance between these accumulating setbacks and the emotional burden they brought on me. In these circumstances, if I wanted to make my dreams come true then first I had to heal myself. I learned that in order to make my dreams come true I need “me” the most.

In the meantime, I found my own path and I am doing my work in my own way. It was not easy but it was worth walking. I think that as migrants we must not try to fit in. It is my dream that every person who migrates not only survives but also expands their inner potential and possibilities and can give 100% back to the world.

I write the essence of my journey in this e-book. Here I am integrating my knowledge, experiences, and insights to give you a strong base in order to cope with your life-related and work-related challenges in the Netherlands. To fully understand how these guidelines work it is important to understand;

- Why do people migrate?
- How does migration affect their lives (consciously or unconsciously)?
- What are the challenges for people after they migrate?

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# How migration affect the lives of people who migrate?

After leaving their own countries people are totally out of their comfort zones. They may realize that finding their place in another country is a challenging and time-consuming process.

This demands in us abilities like patience, accountability, commitment, flexibility, resilience, and persistence. Besides this, they might for the first time in their lives realize how far they differ from the people around them. These differences may not only be in their appearances like the colors of their eyes, hair, and skin but also in their ways of thinking, mindsets, belief systems, and other observable behaviors.

Migration is challenging but it also brings more opportunities with it. One has to grow oneself to get access to these opportunities.



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## What are the challenges for migrants?

- **Changes in a short time:** If a change happens gradually people do not recognize it, because this change is an unconscious learning process. However, after migration, everything changes at once and one has to adjust quickly and consciously to the changing circumstances. This can be physically and emotionally distressing for people who migrate. The degree of distress depends on their personal situations and their power of adjustability at the moment.
- **High degrees of vulnerability:** Once on their journey, migrants face multiple risks and when they reach their destination they often face difficulties in getting access to health care, housing, education, or employment.
- **The threat of losing identity:** In totally different surroundings they may feel a threat to their own identity. This feeling operates mostly at an unconscious level, but people may reflect this in their behaviors. They may think that other people will refuse to accept them as they are. Due to such thoughts, they may show reluctant and fearful behavior.
- **Feeling of belonging nowhere:** People have a strong desire to regain their social status after migration as valuable citizens as soon as possible. They want to do meaningful work and contribute to the progress of the community. However, the process of gaining this status may be filled with setbacks and failures and it may take a long before achieving this goal.
- **Psychological problems:** Migrants may have deep feelings of sadness, sorrow, and distress due to their pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences. These experiences show them a reality that they could not fit in or settle anywhere, neither in their own countries of origin nor in the country where they are living now. This may lead to psychological problems and the existing psychological problems may get exaggerated.
- **Communication problems:** Newcomers may feel incompetent if they cannot communicate adequately. They may be ashamed of their own identity and feel less than others around them. They may have practical problems due to limitations in communication skills and language barriers. They may feel so bad

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and misunderstood that they do not discuss their feelings with other people or caregivers. Due to this, they may feel more demoralized and alone.

- **Missing their families and grief for all the losses:** Most asylum seekers have had intense experiences before, during, and after migration. That may include the loss of their loved ones, their work, and their ownership. They may have families left behind for whom they might be worried and have to take care of. Being alone may increase the feelings of missing their families.
- **Parenting problems by raising their children:** If they have children then they may face challenges in the upbringing of their kids as there is a difference in the way they themselves were grown up and the way their kids are growing up in another culture. This can exaggerate their fear of losing their kids (in the end) and losing their identity. They may become overprotective and suspicious about their kids. This can increase the gap between them and their children, which can be threatening and troublesome for their children also.
- **Women and work:** Women who come from South Asian countries mostly remain housewives. This can be a well-thought choice that they make but this can also be the only option to maintain peace at home. However, after a while, women start feeling alone and frustrated. This happens mostly if their kids also begin to talk in a language that they are not fluent in. They may not know about the possibilities for them. As time passes by it becomes more difficult for them to trust others and come out of their homes and learn the language or do any paid work. This decreases their self-esteem and self-confidence.



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- **Mutual concerns and prejudices:** People coming from another culture may have deep criticism about the lifestyles of the other people living around them but they can't express this. For example, they may think that they are better as they don't drink alcohol. They may feel proud of their norms and values but can't express their good feelings confidently due to a fear of rejection, disapproval, or belittling from others who do like alcohol and don't think the same way about alcohol as they do.



On the other side, inhabitants may think that migrants may steal their job opportunities and their resources. They may see migrants as a threat to their norms and values. This makes it difficult for migrants to survive and thrive as they are in the minority and they must adjust and try to fit in.

- **Feeling of being inferior or superior but not equal:** They may feel good about themselves in some aspects (for example they don't drink alcohol) but at the same time they may feel inferior due to the things like having less general knowledge about the people around them, about the world and having less traveling experiences. For instance, either feeling of being inferior or feelings of being superior won't help them, as these feelings keep the prejudices in place. In fact, these feelings can be reciprocal and if people don't feel equal as human beings, they may get blocked in their communication with each other due to all the apparent differences. Coming from South Asian countries, this can be a serious issue for women.
- **Media and news:** All the negative news and opinions about other migrants, asylum procedures, integration procedures, and rejections make them feel angry, sad, anxious, inferior, desperate, and hopeless. As a result, migrants begin to doubt themselves and they lose their confidence. They get marginalized by others and also they keep themselves back. They don't hear the news which portrays them only as a burden and as bad persons with bad intentions. They can be so afraid that they may not dare to stand up for themselves. They may have no idea how to support themselves in such circumstances. This can be destructive for their self worth and with less self-esteem, it takes longer for them to settle in an unknown place.
- **Feeling of being stuck:** In order to survive and thrive, migrants must learn almost everything anew, the faster the better. They feel a need from inside themselves to learn, adapt, and fit in. From the outside, they may also have a

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compulsion to learn the language for getting legal status and thus access to more possibilities. This pressure from inside and outside can give them a feeling of being trapped and stuck.

- **Feeling of being judged and misunderstood:** People with migration backgrounds (especially from South Asian countries) may have a tendency to avoid conflicts as they want to respect others and maintain peace. They may try to solve problems by doing their best but they will not discuss it while local people want to discuss everything in detail. This mismatch in their ways of doing things may lead to more problems at work. As a result, they may get frustrated in the long run. These long-lasting frustrations and lack of future perspectives may affect their physical and mental health.
- **Fewer opportunities to grow at study/workplaces:** As compared to local residents migrants have fewer opportunities to get a study place and a workplace. They may experience more problems in completing their studies or making their careers due to all the reasons mentioned above.
- **Bullying at schools/workplaces:** Sometimes their children or they themselves have to face bullying at schools and workplaces. It can happen that they don't recognize this at first and they try to solve everything by doing their best because they are newcomers who must fit in. They may have no idea how to come up for themselves and for their children.



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# Guidelines to survive and thrive in another culture

1. **Be kind to yourself:** Be aware that you are now out of your comfort zone. Have an understanding of yourself and your aims, that you want to secure your life and the life of your loved ones. Have respect for yourself and your aims despite the negative reactions of others. If the world is not kind to you, at least be kind to yourself.
2. **Give priority to yourself:** It doesn't mean that you don't take care of others. It only means that you have to be healthy to take care of others. If a mother neglects herself then she will not be able to take care of her children. No matter how much she wants this.
3. **Adore your journey:** You don't need to be ashamed of your background and your story. You are a unique person in this whole universe.
4. **Embrace your shortcomings:** You may have imperfections but you can better support yourself by understanding and cherishing your weaknesses and at the same time make your qualities stronger.
5. **Respect others even if they don't trust you:** This keeps you positive and you will enjoy your own positive energy. Others don't know your journey. Maybe if they know about you, they will respect you. Understand that they are also human beings. Despite all the differences you can understand them and they can understand you if you get a chance to communicate with them.
6. **Improve your communication skills:** Communication is more than just speaking. It is not only the language that we speak but also our body language and attitude that other people can feel. You can also communicate with gestures and in artistic ways like music, dancing, or making drawings. Learn about more ways to express yourself.



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7. **Live in here and now:** Most of our problems come from things that have happened in the past or worries about our future. There is no problem here and now. Learn from your past, live in the present, and have faith in the future! Be aware that every moment and every day that passes is gone forever. Remain in peace in this moment wherever you are.
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8. **Write down positive things daily:** Every night before going to sleep write down at least 5 good things that happened that day. Maybe in the beginning it is difficult to see any good thing happening to you. It is a practice. Try to notice small things; maybe you saw a flower today and admired its beauty, write this down in your notebook. These positive vibes will reprogram your unconscious mind for more positivity during sleep.
9. **Take small steps:** As Lao Tzu said, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Be aware that your integration process may take a long time. Keep taking small steps towards your goals every day. For example, learn at least two words of a new language every day. In this way, you can learn 60 new words in one month.
10. **Encourage yourself:** Keep encouraging yourself! Whenever you do something good or you hear any good news, whether it's big or small, pat yourself on the back. Sometimes you may be the only one in an unknown place who recognizes your own achievements. Don't miss any chance to appreciate yourself.
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11. **Be patient with yourself:** If you cannot perform up to your own expectations, be patient with yourself. If you are too strict with yourself then your performance may get worse. Keep trying with more understanding for yourself.
12. **Have realistic expectations from yourself:** Realise that your body and your mind may need more time than you expect to process all the new information that you are gathering every day.
13. **Remain consistent:** Consistent, small, effective, efforts lead to success. Remember that success is not one destination, it's rather every step you take, every time you fall and get up again, and every time you cried and smiled with

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tears in your eyes. Keep doing small things every day in order to make your place in another country.

14. **Understand your emotions:** Sometimes you may get emotional. You will feel sad, angry, or frustrated. Know that emotions are 'energy in motion. Mostly they come as a reaction to our unconscious thoughts. Don't fight with them. Let them come, watch them, try to understand them, don't react, and let them go.

15. **Be social, talk with someone who can help you:** Be social and take initiative to connect with other people around you. If it is possible, have a conversation with someone who helps you to recognize, understand and heal yourself.

16. **Understand your emotions:** Sometimes people just keep going on with the heaviness of all the losses they may have been through. In these situations, you may suddenly cry or feel anxious or angry without any reason. Understand that you may need help in order to be in your strength again.



17. **Know your limits and communicate about your limits:** This means you know how much physical and emotional burden you can have. If you can lift 10 kg from the ground and not 11 kg then 10 kg is your physical limit. Similarly, if you get emotional in a situation and feel uneasy then it is your emotional limit. At that time you may take a break or talk with someone.

18. **Take time to grieve your losses:** You may have multiple and complex losses and you may be going through a phase of grief and mourning. For example, you hear about the losses of your loved ones in your country of origin and you could never make it to meet them again. Grief can also be the loss of your status and your functions or your health. You have to grieve for yourself but you don't need to do this alone. Get help to process your losses in a constructive way.

19. **Don't compare yourself with others:** You are not comparable with any other migrant or any other person on earth. You are unique and your problems and solutions to your problems are also unique.

20. **Be curious:** Don't suppose that you know everything about yourself and about others. Don't draw any conclusions based on your own experiences. Be curious! Keep asking! Ask yourself, "what else could this mean"? And search for a meaning that helps you.

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21. **Learn, learn, learn:** Learn the language(s) and different cultures. Learn about other migrants and their cultures. Learn about local inhabitants and their history.

22. **Practice and repeat:** Learning is a process. Your brain needs repetition to learn. Can you remember how long it took you as a child to learn the table of 2? But now it feels as if you have never learned it. Yet you have learned it with repetitions. The more you would speak the language the better you could speak it unconsciously without any conscious effort.

23. **Accept, accept, accept:** Sometimes you have to face things that you don't like but you have to go through them. Think of things that are not in your control like wars, losses, and rejections, but 'it is what it is. You still have a choice to give up or to come up and make something out of these situations. Even if you have to fight with your circumstances, accept it as your choice to fight. Be aware that coming up for yourself may look like a fight in the outer world but you can do this better with a calm spirit.



24. **Learn about yourself:** Real knowledge is self-knowledge. Maybe in your own country, you were always doing good without putting much effort. Because you were acting from your automatic way of doing things on the basis of long-term and unconscious learning. Migration gives you the possibility to learn again and to experience the process of conscious learning.

25. **Continuous self-reflection:** It is very important to sit with yourself regularly and ask these questions: What am I doing, why am I doing this and what am I learning from this? How did I react to the situation? How can I be better in the future? Self-reflection can be done with a mirror. It is a moment to come into your power and it is not intended for just regrets. You must think of at least two positive things you have done well against one thing that you could improve.

26. **Discover your hidden talents:** Migration gives you the possibility to discover more possibilities in yourself. How much you will discover depends on your willingness to put your interest and energy into the process of learning.

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27. **Enjoy the process:** If you expect less from yourself and others and do whatever you can do, you will enjoy the process. Don't live in worries. Try to enjoy your life while working on your dreams.

28. **Work on your self-confidence:** Look at what internal resources you have that you can use to achieve your aims. During times of continuous struggles where you are going to face many failures and judgments, it is important to remain working on your self-confidence. Self-confidence can be trained like muscle.



29. **Be brave:** Being brave means being confident despite your fears. For example, going to a job interview and doing your best despite your fear of rejection.

30. **Practice self-love:** In times when you are going through difficulties and there is no one to show love to you, give love and acceptance to yourself. Look in the mirror and admire yourself.

31. **Make a plan on paper / keep an agenda:** Once in another country, the first thing you may realize is that there is no one who holds you accountable for what you must do in a day and whatnot. You have to begin from scratch. You must know to plan on paper even if it is a voluntary activity like a walk with a friend or cooking for other companions.

32. **Take responsibility for the healing of your traumas:** Take your integration process as your own responsibility. Only you are responsible for yourself. Ask yourself "How can I make my life happy and satisfied?" and work for it. Even if you have faced problems due to the bad behaviors of other people, take responsibility for your own healing and growth. The better you are in taking your own responsibility, the better the quality of your intimate and work relationships will be.

33. **(Re)discover yourself:** Realise that you are not what has happened to you or what you could do but have done or not have done. Build yourself once again. Every day is a new beginning.

34. **Confusion is okay:** After migration, it's possible that things are not clear and you feel as if you are confused due to new information, new places, new people with new names and new ways of living. Accept confusion as part of the growth

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process. Because you are going to solve your problems as puzzle pieces and then it will become clear to you.

35. **Ask for clarity:** If you don't understand, ask questions. People have no idea what precisely you don't know. If you ask questions they can give you the help that you need.

36. **Focus on what you want:** Look at people at the top of any given field. They are not only working hard but they are also thinking of new ways of doing the same work more efficiently. Focus on doing the things that will help you to improve yourself and to achieve your goals.



37. **Improve your language and communication skills:** It is not only interesting but also crucial for you to learn the language of the majority of people around you. This helps you to come close to native people, understand them and work easily with them. Learning another language stimulates your brain's powers in a unique way. At any age, your brain can learn and increase its capacity.

38. **Believe in yourself:** Have a strong belief that you are a good person and that the world is full of good people. Believe that only good will come out of your present situation. Believe that where there is a challenge there is also an opportunity and that you are going to have many opportunities in life which you don't know yet.

39. **Take care of your body:** Eat a healthy, balanced diet with lots of vegetables and fruit, exercise as often as you can, stay away from drugs and addictions and get enough sleep.

40. **Be in your body:** How? Most of the time if we are too busy in our heads with all the thoughts of worries, we forget that we have a wonderful body that is working and keeping us alive.

41. **Focus on your breathing:** Try to focus on your breathing especially if you find yourself getting lost in sadness or worries, reconnect with yourself by giving attention to your breathing.

42. **Be thankful:** Be thankful for every breath and for everything that is going well in your life. Be thankful for the journey that you already are going through.

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Thankfulness decreases stress hormones in our bodies and it increases the body's healing powers.

43. **Affirmations:** Sometimes only good things that happen to you are the things that you are doing to yourself. Make positive affirmations that your journey is taking you to your beautiful future.

44. **Visualize a future you want:** Many times we want a good outcome while we are unconsciously afraid of negative results. Try to visualize yourself as someone enjoying your dream life. A life that you would love to have.

45. **Try to learn new skills and come out of your comfort zone:** remain open to learning and growing your skills and expertise.

46. **Build your network:** Human beings are social animals. Build new connections, you are not alone. Make friendships with people of all nationalities, colors, and languages. This will give you more energy and make your journey easier and more interesting.



47. **Learn about parenting your children in another culture:** Being in another culture does not mean that your children can't learn about your original culture. Learn how you make your children stronger and more understanding. Believe in the abilities of your kids.

48. **No regrets:** Sometimes you may have guilt that you could have achieved more success if you remained in your own country or if you went to another country. These thoughts make it difficult for you to give your 100% in the here and now.

49. **Make it your choice:** If you were forced to migrate because you were in a threatening situation, then remaining in the feeling of being forced will not help you grow further. Try to change this decision to your own choice. Because even in threat full situations you can choose to remain there and die or to go to a safe place. Make it a choice and go ahead to live your life as fully as you can!

50. **Have plan B:** After migration, everything you want to do may not be successful. In these situations, it is better to search and learn more about other possibilities for you. Maybe towards an unknown yet more beautiful path.

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51. **Be flexible:** Know that flexibility is power. Don't compromise on your core values, remain flexible in learning new things and adding new opportunities.

52. **Know your passion:** Think about what you want to achieve in your life. Know your priorities and your big why.



53. **Get help:** Don't hesitate to ask for help. You have nothing to lose in any way. Maybe you will get help. Maybe you can help them in return by providing a service. For example, you do some household work for others and you get language lessons from them.

54. **Give help to others:** Give help to others. Even in situations where it seems you don't know anything you have the ability to help others. You may help other migrants, other women, children, and people of other nationalities. Maybe you can cook food for others. Take care of their children. Or help in taking care of handicapped or elderly people.

55. **Look for blessings in disguise:** After migration, you are in an uncertain situation and this is both the ugliness and the beauty of this situation. Don't take the world for granted. It is going to be kind and cruel for everyone and it is what it is. Be creative and look for blessings in disguise.

56. **Know your strengths and weaknesses:** This is part of self-knowledge. Know your identities with your strengths and weaknesses. Your identities are not static but they can grow and become richer.

57. **Be patient, persistent, and positive:** While you are working on increasing your knowledge, sharpening your talents, and learning new skills remain committed and faithful. Have self-esteem and look for your inner talk because it can be negative. Have positive inner talk because sometimes the only good things you hear are the things that you tell yourself.



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58. **Invest in yourself:** See your struggling period as a training period and the money that you invest in your education, healing, and personal growth is like the tuition you have to pay for what you don't know. So that you are able to use your inner abundant potentials. Also invest your time in improving yourself, and understanding your emotions and your inner drives. You can always grow to the next level of your consciousness.
59. **Experience the shift:** Experience your migration process as a shift. It is not just your physical body that moves from one part of the world to another, but also a shift in your thoughts, world picture, emotions, meanings, perceptions and perspectives. You are experiencing the same life as all other human beings, animals, and plants around you are experiencing. Take a grip on yourself, learn, grow, heal yourself and help others ♥

