

in·coherence

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Issue #4

The Arc of the Deal



The
Coherence
Project

www.thecoherenceproject.life

About *in•coherence*

In•Coherence is a periodical of reflection, inquiry, and presence. It explores the systemic and personal dynamics that shape coherence and incoherence in modern life – and the practices that help us orient in the midst of complexity, distortion, and collapse. Each issue weaves together conceptual frameworks, lived experience, and practical insight to support more grounded, life-honoring ways of being.

This is Issue #4.

THE ARC OF THE DEAL

Waking to the deal

This all started at my campsite, as I listened to an audiobook by Yuval Harari. I tend to drift in and out when I listen to audiobooks at night, often replaying portions again and again for the parts my subconscious probably didn't catch.

But one statement by the narrator cut straight through me, right as I was drifting out.

“Religion is a deal; spirituality is a journey.”

Something clicked. I snapped awake and made a note. This wasn't about religion, nor spirituality. The implication felt much wider than those words. It was about society, history, collapse, and meaning. Within them the word *deal* illuminated a pattern I've been sensing for years — one that, at least for me, helps explain a lot of the incoherence we're living through now.

In the end there may be different explanations for our situation. But we need to start thinking in different ways to understand what's happened, what's happening, and what's going to happen throughout modern society. We are facing unprecedented and existential challenges - some rightly referred to as 'predicaments.'

This article frames a new lens, or at least an uncommon one, to see and respond to these matters differently. A 'deal lens'. Thanks for reading.

The deals we make in modern life

Once I started to look through our civilization with a ‘deal lens’, I began to notice a pattern across the human experience. Not written contracts, but quieter, psychological, mostly sub-conscious, arrangements that shape how we live, without ever being named.

Work hard and you’ll be secure.
Follow the role and you’ll be respected.
Stay inside the lines and you’ll be accepted.
Adopt the right identity and you’ll belong.
Don’t ask too many questions and life will stay predictable.

These are the more conscious frames of the deal that ascribe behavior and thought, but the deals are generally much deeper and more complex than just those rather common understandings.

“What deal!?", someone might ask at this point with growing irritation. Indeed, that’s the point: Most of us never consciously see or agree to a deal. Yet we grow up inside or adopt them, mostly because they are part of belonging in society. By the time we’re old enough to see and question the arrangements in our lives, they have simply become the furniture that’s always been there. We don’t even notice them.

I think it’s possible for anyone to see deals in motion, from the small, ordinary motions of modern life, or in the bigger frames of society. From a family placing their child into school, to the conversion into a religion, to the electing of a new government, and to how we engage in the supply and demand macro of economics. No one says, “By the way, this is the deal,” but if we pause in presence and curiosity, we can begin to unfold what is happening.

The nature of the deal

Looking back over history, it’s easy to see that deals aren’t a new phenomenon. Since the first communities, we made arrangements among each other. We depended on a certain level of negotiating for survival: loyalty for protection, labor for benefit, obedience for safety. These arrangements kept people alive. The arrangement was fairly simple and transparent.

Over time, those simple exchanges hardened into more complex structures — religious roles, political hierarchies, economic obligations, moral expectations. Children inherited them. Adults performed them. Cultures came to experience them as “this is life.” Today, the world spins much faster, the deals are more complex, happen quicker, and often more insidious.

The Arc

Whether today or ten thousand years ago, a deal is a promise exchanged for another promise. It starts with a need or desire on both sides of the deal, and a willingness to engage with one another.

1. Perceived needs emerge.
2. A deal is made - promise for a promise ("If you do/give me this, I'll do/give you that").
3. The deal becomes internalized / Identity may organize around it.
4. The deal fails to deliver on its promise.
5. The deal erodes.
6. The deal collapses.

Is a deal a contract? Not really. Deals and contracts have slightly different connotations.

A contract is explicit. A deal is more likely to be invisible.

A contract is negotiated and acknowledged. A deal is absorbed and assumed, often sub-conscious, inherited, or even unintended.

Deals, in the form we are exploring, usually involve the unconscious exchange of something internal — autonomy, imagination, integrity, relational independence, self-sufficiency, meaning — for something we want or perceive we need: certainty, belonging, safety, status, acceptance.

A student hears that growth and learning is the most important thing, but the high GPA is what is rewarded. The desire for personal growth doesn't disappear; it just goes quiet. A deal is made without anyone noticing, it's built within the existing rules.

As we more deeply inherit these 'deals', we don't even recognize them. It may feel that nothing was given up. Sometimes the sacrifice is acknowledged, but is painted as "being realistic." What is gained is valued, what is given up is often not even recognized.

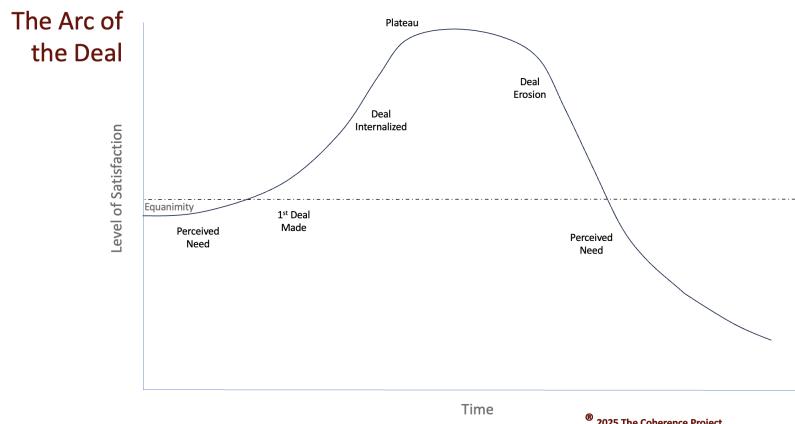


Fig-1. The Arc of the Deal. The basic structure of the 'deal', starting with a perceived need up to the plateau, where satisfaction ceases to grow, begins to decline, and as the deal erodes, dissatisfaction takes hold.

Why have just one Arc? In fact, most of the experiences we have consist of multiple 'deals'. As one deal unravels, humans will seek a new one to address the increasing dissatisfaction. Over time, this is represented by a flow that cycles downward on the satisfaction spectrum, as the pattern of highs and lows points them to an inevitable dissatisfaction.

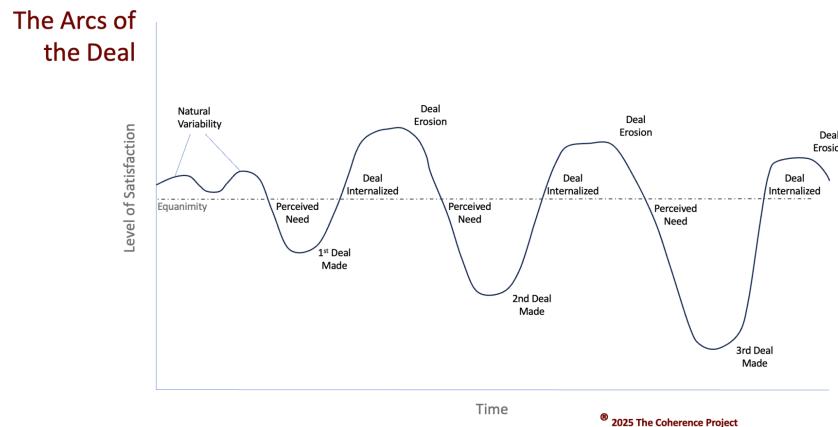


Fig-2. The Arcs of the Deals. When one deal fails, dissatisfaction grows, perceived need is generated, and another deal is often sought for satisfaction.

The erosion — and collapse — of the deal

Here's the Arc of it: Deals don't last forever (not a sales promotion!). They begin, rise, peak, erode, collapse, and end. Even in the flow of multiple deals (Fig- 2), at some point, the deals along that story dry up. The story itself wanes and ends.

For most people, the ride along the arc is simply felt. Relief, elation, contentment, concern, fear, exhaustion, resignation, hope, relief - are all potential emotions.

The deal begins and rises without recognition and peaks and then erodes long before it visibly breaks. Today, this is happening across multiple deals in society - the cracks are visible only to those who wish to see them. For those who do not, collapse can come as a shock.

A person in a once-stable industry senses that the promises they built their life on — security, progress, predictability — no longer hold. They feel anxious or irritable, but can't quite say why. They aren't just losing a job. They're losing a framework of meaning - and often their sense of identity.

For now, we can explore some macro-level examples of deals within modern society to see their impact.

Deals within Religion

I want to be careful here, because this is often where people feel talked *about* instead of talked *with*. That isn't my intention.

I'm not suggesting that people who ascribe to a theology consciously "made a deal." In most cases, there is no moment of negotiation, no internal barter where someone knowingly trades autonomy for certainty. What's far more common is inheritance. A rhythm. A moral grammar. A way of understanding life that arrives early, wrapped in warmth, guidance, and belonging.

For many, faith is lived sincerely as relationship – with their God(s), with community, with tradition. With a lineage of meaning that says: your life matters, here is what it means, suffering has context, and you are not alone in it. That matters deeply. It always has.

At the same time — and this is where structure quietly enters — religion has historically functioned as a complete meaning framework. It answers the questions we eventually all run into: What is life? How do we belong? What matters? How should we live? Who will care for me when I'm afraid or in need? What happens at the end?

Structurally, religion offers a story. A story about the way the world fits together. And within that story sits an unspoken arrangement: live within this story and life will make sense. You will belong. You will be held. Again, not a conscious bargain, but a shaping context that becomes reality itself.

The externalized consequences rarely show up in the story being told. They tend to surface elsewhere — in doubt that cannot be spoken, in grief that must be spiritually bypassed, in critical questioning framed as moral failure rather than discernment, in authority replacing lived sensing, and in the hurt and pain that others outside a given tradition endure through exclusion or religion-based violence.

None of this negates the sincerity of belief. It simply names that every meaning framework carries trade-offs, and those trade-offs often remain invisible from the inside, unrecognized, even when the consequences have real world impacts.

That many of these frameworks have existed for so long hints at just how powerful these arrangements have been. And yet religious meaning has loosened for much of our growing population as other systems, social, technological and economic, have risen to offer an alternative structure, and alternative deals, for order, belonging, safety, and meaning.

Deals within Economy

If religion offered meaning and belonging through cosmology and moral order, the modern economy offered something different: material security, convenience, comfort, and the promise of an improving quality of life.

Over the past four hundred years, fossil fuels unlocked extraordinary amounts of energy, accelerating production, transport, and technological change at a scale humanity had never experienced. That acceleration reshaped not just industry, but expectation. Growth became normal. Expansion became assumed.

Within a capitalist system organized around exchange value rather than use value, success increasingly depended on producing more, selling more, and consuming more. Profit became the primary signal of health, and everything else was expected to align around it.

Here, the deals are easier to spot once we start looking.

For workers, the deal often sounds like this: specialize, comply, be productive, and you will be rewarded with stability, mobility, and dignity. For a time, that appeared to work well enough to be believable. But what was rarely disclosed were the longer-term consequences: burnout, precarity, loss of autonomy, erosion of purpose, eventual loss of loyalty, and a growing gap between effort and reward.

For consumers, the deal is different but related: convenience, ease and comfort, satiety, novelty, and status in exchange for attention, time, and often health. The system promises satisfaction, but requires continual consumption to sustain it. Desire is kept alive by design.

At the macro level, the economic deal prioritizes short-term financial performance over long-term resilience and wellness. Accounting systems faithfully record the price paid to extract resources, but not the consequences borne by ecosystems. They capture labor costs, but not the downstream effects on bodies, families, or communities. Those consequences are externalized — displaced into somewhere else's system — where they remain invisible until they no longer can be ignored.

The economy presents itself as a closed loop, but it has never been one. Its short-term effectiveness depends on consequences returning slowly, diffusely, and often to those least responsible for creating them.

What we are experiencing now seems not a sudden failure, but the delayed arrival of those consequences. Ecological strain. Health crises. Inequality. Exhaustion. The deal worked as long as the feedback was distant. It unravels as that feedback becomes proximal and more immediate.

Deals within Governance

Governance sits at the intersection of story and structure. It translates shared beliefs into rules, institutions, and enforcement. And here too, subconscious deals are made — often quietly, often with good intentions.

Democratic systems promise representation, fairness, and protection in exchange for trust, compliance, and participation. Ideally, they rest on reason, evidence, and accountability. But governance systems, like all systems, operate under constraints. Short election cycles reward immediacy over foresight. Power concentrates. Complexity is simplified.

The deal for citizens often becomes: accept imperfect systems and limited agency in exchange for order and predictability. Question too forcefully, and you risk being framed as disruptive. Opt out entirely, and you lose voice altogether.

Here again, consequences are externalized. Long-term risks are postponed. Structural inequities are managed rather than resolved. Social strain accumulates beneath a surface of procedural normalcy.

As corporate power grew through the economic deal, courts began granting them personhood and protected speech through the financing of campaigns. The result is a shift in the deal within democratic governance, where the promise of representation, fairness, and protection no longer feels as reliable as it once did.

When trust erodes, people don't usually name it as a systems issue. They experience it as frustration, polarization, or fatigue. The deal feels thinner, less believable, but the alternatives also feel unclear. So people cling harder, disengage, or look for simpler narratives that promise restored order.

Governance doesn't collapse all at once. It frays. And like the other systems, it frays long before it visibly breaks.

A shared pattern

Across religion, economy, governance, the pattern seems strikingly similar to me:

Each system offers orientation, stability, and meaning.

Each system asks for trade-offs that are rarely fully visible and even less understood.

Each system externalizes its consequences into other systems, other populations, or the future. And each system relies on consequence distance — psychological, temporal, or ecological — to remain intact.

When they fail it is because the consequences, both direct and externalized, can no longer be avoided. We are living through a time of delayed consequence asserting itself. The deals are unraveling.

But even as an old deal erodes and unravels, people may look for new ones. A way to recover what was lost or gain what had been promised - status, power, authority, perceived superiority.

This may help to explain political and cultural shifts that can look baffling from the outside. When coherence disappears, anything that seems to restore it becomes magnetically attractive.

As an example, some people believe they have a deal with society — cultural authority, moral clarity, demographic certainty. As that deal erodes due to demographic changes, they may turn toward figures or movements that promise to restore that deal, even if doing so would contradict their stated values.

The pull in this case isn't toward a specific person; it's an attachment to the story (often represented by a slogan), and they will seek to restore the deal however they can.

Why these deals arise — the stories behind them

At some point, the deal was created. What made the first deal attractive? My sense is that it's the story.

One major example is politics: a politician speaks to a need, offering satisfaction in exchange for belief, loyalty, and votes. The deal is made. Then comes the unraveling — when promises fail to deliver and dissatisfaction grows, people turn to new stories and/or new figures, repeating the cycle.

Over time, stories can become more complex and scalable. They shift worldviews. And worldviews, when embedded into systems, became deals.

A child may grow up believing self-worth is tied to wealth. The story is adopted early and enacted unconsciously. Years later, life is organized around that belief. But when the story fails to deliver meaning, it unravels.

Stories are the soil from which mental models and deals grow. Yet we don't recognize them as stories — we simply live them, we see with them. And through those lenses, we interpret everything. Often without realizing it, we relinquish self-authorship and accept inherited narratives — many of which are destructive to life.

To interrupt this cycle, we need to be present. To see the stories for what they are. And to reclaim our capacity to orient ourselves — with clarity and care.

The Living Compass includes four natural orientations that support and are supported by presence: Truth, Connection, Freedom, and Adventure. These orientations don't tell us what to do — they help us find our way from within, rather than defaulting to inherited scripts.

Where deals and stories live

One thing I realized as I kept sitting with this framing of our existence is that the deal isn't just an idea we hold and it isn't just a structure we live inside. It's the point where mental models and structures meet.

One way of framing this is through the 'Iceberg model' of systems. This model is broadly used by systems thinkers, looks at the layers of the systems we live in – what is visible (above the water line), which are the events we see, and what is not visible (under the water level).

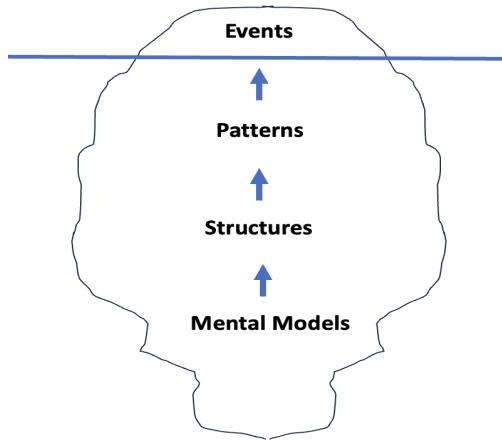


Fig-3. The Iceberg Model. A representation of the systems across human life. Events are the visible results of systemic behavior, over time represented by patterns of this behavior, the structure of relationships that helps to generate them and the mental models that support those structures.

At the deepest level are our mental models — the assumptions we carry about how life works, how we see the world, what's normal, what's possible, what is acceptable and desirable. They influence the development and reinforcement of systemic relationship structures - that is the cause and effect relationships of different variables in our lives that are shaped by the rules, norms, and practices that people (and the rest of the system) engage in.

Those structures generate patterns of system behaviors, and those patterns show up as the events we see and experience day to day.

The deals that we've been focused on sit right at the coupling point of mental models and structures.

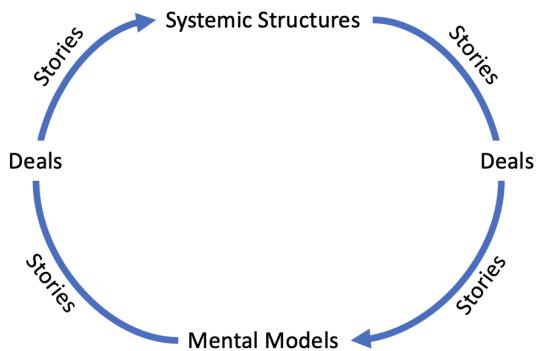


Fig-4. Deals as Hinge. From the Iceberg Model, we can frame Deals as playing a role between mental models and systemic structures, supported by and reinforcing the stories that generate the deals.

The deal isn't just an idea we hold or a structure we live inside. It's the point where the two meet.

It's where a mental model says, *"This idea makes sense,"* and a structure says, *"This is how you participate in that idea."* We enter the deal when we buy into a story — often unconsciously — that orients us to adopt them into our own behavior and the structures around us. And that structure then reinforces the story and the deal itself.

If this feels like circular logic, that is because it is. A reinforcing feedback loop.

That is how these deals are able to counter lived reality - through stories that appeal to perceived needs and wants in the short-term, reinforced by the systemic structures they enable, while delivering negative consequences that are not yet recognized or visible.

In short, what we believe shapes what we build, and what we build confirms what we believe. The mental model tells us what we believe, the story tells us who we are, and the deal is what we agree to in order to live in that story.

They inspire both participation and a cognitive blindness to the consequences. From inside that loop, nothing feels strange. This is just how life is. This is truth.

Until it isn't.

For example, someone raised to believe that economic growth is a requirement for human society to continue, and has made economic growth their professional focus, may feel destabilized when ecological feedback consistently and firmly limits industrial activity — it might be as if meaning itself has betrayed them. The distress isn't just intellectual; it's existential.

That someone might be an individual, but in reality it is often the collective of large numbers of people. All engaged in the same story, perpetuating the same systemic structures. One example is the common story and mental model that underwrites the economic structure of western industrial capitalism that dominates our entire global society. One that provides certainty and simplicity: "Growth will continue indefinitely."

Even when we consciously understand the impossibility of such an assertion, the power of the story still holds. We act on that story and the deals made, while the consequence continues to build as we engage in stories and actions counter to the reality of life. Incoherence.

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It's not difficult to imagine how the same level of collective incoherence is affecting an increasing food and water shortage around the world. The people with the power to affect this crisis are too caught up in their stories to recognize its presence or simply to care. What happens when the collective consequence builds to the point of it impacting their own lived state? They may be too engaged in their story to see it until it is directly upon them.

Dissatisfaction isn't quite the word. Both of these examples show what we consider to be "incoherence" in terms of the living reality of life. We will discuss our model for orienting for coherence later in this paper.

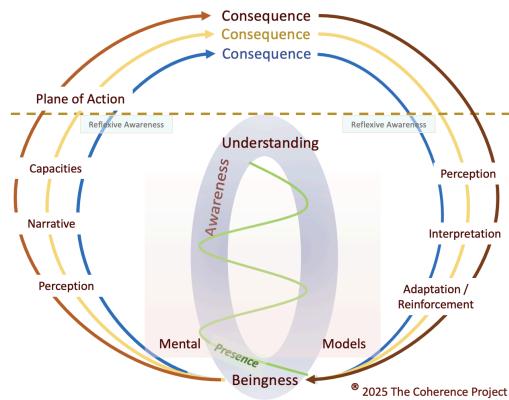


Fig-5. The Ecology of Coherence (EOC-3). This exhibits how mental models (and thus stories and deals) affect perception-narrative-action, leading to consequence, feeding back through perception, interpretation, and adaptation/reinforcement into mental models. This circular framing is how stories and mental models get reinforced through the deal mechanisms and the importance of presence to help modulate their incoherence with life.

This is hard for us to see

If any (or all) of this feels abstract or slightly uncomfortable, that makes sense. Just as mental models, and their related assumptions, are invisible to the being holding them, so are the derivative deals one adopts or assumes.

A fish in a bay doesn't know the ocean surrounds it. In the same way, someone raised inside a particular social deal often can't see it as a deal at all. It just feels like "the way things are."

Someone living in a high-performance culture may genuinely believe constant productivity is normal life, the better way of life, not noticing how much of themselves has been shaped — or lost — along the way.

One more subtle point matters here:

The stories we hear might be coherent or incoherent with life. In modern society, the majority are generally the latter. Yet, even incoherent stories that reflect the incoherent systems they are a part of can feel coherent from the inside. When mental models and structures share the same distortion, everything lines up internally.

For example, if I am working in corporate finance consulting in New York (which I did), and I am surrounded by a story that the ‘free market’ system and the world at large benefits from each person and entity striving to achieve its profits by whatever means (which I was), that the dominant culture, and the only culture I knew (which it was) fully embraced the idea that what happened in the market was supposed to happen (which it did - ie “market efficiency”) - then my own behavior - to support a private equity client to acquire and then split apart and sell off assets that were worth more individually than the business was as a whole (which I did not) - was the ‘right’ thing to do.

That if I am doing things in congruence with a mental model (“the market is efficient; greed is good”) and a story (“I am an advisor and a conduit for market efficiency and profit growth”), then my work — even though it creates waste, extracts meaningless profit, and carries real societal and environmental consequences — feels fully aligned with my view of reality and what is ‘good’.

The world feels ordered. Identity feels stable. Behavior feels justified. And when others are engaged in the same worldview and behavior, there is no reason to question what I am doing, let alone stop doing what I am doing, especially when my own quality of life and sense of belonging is tied to it.

That internal congruence is often mistaken for coherence.
But it is alignment only within the system — not alignment with life itself.

And this reveals the deeper challenge we now face:

How do we change systems that *feel* right to us from the inside?
Systems that reward us, protect us, give us identity and belonging — even as they quietly erode the conditions for life, relationship, and meaning?

From within these systems, everything appears ordered.
Our actions feel justified.
Our identities feel stable.
Our stories explain why things are the way they are.

From outside — from the perspective of lived sensing, ecological reality, and relational consequence — the misalignment is often obvious.

The difficulty is that most of us are trained only to see from the inside.

When the only ways of seeing we’ve learned are the ones embedded in the system itself, imagining something different can feel impossible.

Not because alternatives don’t exist — but because we lack the orientation to perceive them.

The Compass

Starting in 2013, I faced what felt like a slow collapse in my own personal space — one that gathered pace over time, until by 2022 it seemed to accelerate all at once.

The immediate world I thought I knew no longer fit. The story no longer held. The deals of life I had entered began to unravel. Meaning dissipated and I was left disoriented.

I needed to re-orient myself back into a meaningful relationship with life through presence and what evolved to become four simple but demanding orientations:

Truth – presence with what is beyond the stories and deals.

Connection – presence with the lived relational experience of life.

Freedom – presence with self-authorship and wholeness of response.

Adventure – presence with the vitality of the unknown and uncertain.

It is through presence within these orientations — historically human orientations modern society has steadily pulled us away from — that I found my way back into relationship with the world around me, and back into relationship with myself.

When identity shaped by inherited systems begins to dissolve, grounding does not come from grasping for new roles or replacing collapsing structures with new ones built from the same mental models and deals.

It comes from returning to these orientations as lived experience.

Not to restore certainty. But to stay in relationship with life — where meaning can begin to emerge again. Where coherence can begin to take shape, even in the midst of incoherent systems.

Conclusion

It isn't just me. Most people recognize that life feels different these years. What many point to with blame are more symptoms than causes. As we've noted here, it's better to look into the systemic issues we face to understand what is happening. And it's not the collapse of a single system that is defining our moment — it's the unraveling of the hidden deals beneath them all.

Across religion, economy, governance, and identity, the promises that once held modern life together are breaking down. But it's not just structural failure. It's a failure of meaning and of orientation. The inherited stories no longer make sense, and the frameworks built on those stories no longer deliver. We are living in an age of incoherence.

In this collapse, we face not only disorientation — but an invitation.

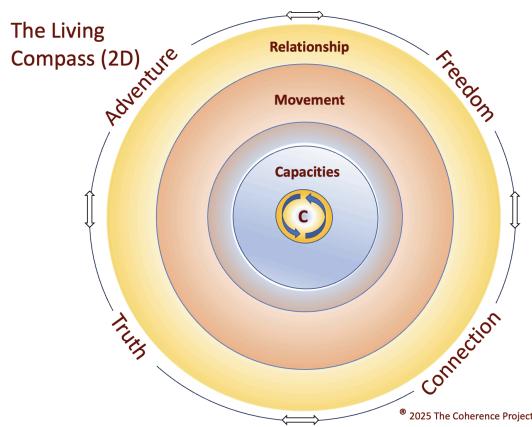


Fig-6. The Living Compass. A model for orienting through truth, connection, freedom, and adventure, with presence in the dimensions of movement and the domains of relation of life.

The Living Compass offers something old and new. Not another deal, but a return to presence. A method to orient not through promise, but through lived contact with life in its broadest and most detailed sense. Through truth. Through connection. Through freedom. Through adventure.

Through meaning.

The next piece — *When Meaning Is No Longer Given* — begins with Viktor Frankl's journey into the void left when societal meaning was violently stripped away in his own life. It explores how meaning can re-emerge through direct relationship with life, and what coherence means in times of collapse.

WHEN MEANING IS NO LONGER GIVEN

(Frankl, Collapse, and the Human Return to Coherence)

The story we inherit

Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist, a son, brother, and a husband. He practiced medicine in Austria in the 1930s and 40s, where he wrote about meaning-centered therapy – *logotherapy* – and later developed his work in existential analysis.

Like all of us, his sense of meaning developed inside a social world with norms, expectations, and quiet assumptions about what life was for. His identity was woven into those structures through family, profession, culture, and belonging.

His meaning was, structurally speaking, given. Inherited.
Held in place by the larger *deal* of the society he belonged to.

Then the deal collapsed.

In 1942, Frankl, his wife, and his mother were taken into custody by the Nazi regime. He was separated from his wife and mother and sent to labor camps in Auschwitz and Dachau. He never saw them again.

The meaning that had been given was now taken.

The collapse of meaning given

Frankl's meaning-world did not erode gradually.
It was violently stripped away.

He was taken from his home.
Separated from those he loved.
Placed inside a system designed to erase personhood.

Everything that once anchored his identity – his work, his relationships, his social role, his expectations of the future – was shattered.

He entered a reality where meaning was no longer provided by the world around him. There was no story to lean on. No promised outcome. No social contract. No recognizable path forward.

And in that void, something essential was revealed:

When inherited meaning collapses, we are forced to confront a deeper question:
Where does meaning come from when the world stops giving it?

Frankl's work was not theoretical

Frankl's later work on meaning was not based on philosophy. It was based on his own survival.

Meaning was a lifeline — a way of orienting in a world stripped of its coordinates. And the meaning he found was not abstract. It was relational and immediate.

He found it in:

- recalling and visualizing the love he felt for his wife
- recognizing beauty in small moments
- choosing inner freedom within outer captivity
- refusing to surrender the dignity of his personhood

Presence became the only place life remained accessible — not as a spiritual idea, but as a lived necessity.

The deals that once gave meaning

Frankl's experience reveals something crucial about modern humanity:

most of us do not generate meaning directly.

We inherit it through the stories our societies tell.

The economic **story** tells us what success means.

The national **story** tells us who “we” are.

The political **story** tells us what to value.

The religious **story** tells us what life is for.

The social **story** tells us how relationships should look.

The **deals** determine what we are willing to give up in order to live inside those stories.

These inherited structures form the backbone of our meaning-world.

So when those deals erode - as many are today - meaning begins to dissolve with them.

This dissolution rarely announces itself clearly. It shows up as anxiety, confusion, outrage, exhaustion, or a persistent sense that *something is wrong*, even when we can't name it.

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The quiet version of collapse

We are not living Frankl's extremity.

But we are living a quieter, slower version of the same existential challenge. A broader more fundamental predicament that reveals the challenge as us, through the systems we have built and perpetuated, and the stories that go along with them.

The inherited stories and deals that once told us who we are and how to live in them - economically, politically, socially - are now unraveling. The meaning they provided no longer holds.

And because we were never taught to generate meaning through direct contact with life, we find ourselves unprepared.

This is the modern meaning crisis: the world is no longer giving us meaning at the rate we expect.

Meaning through presence

Frankl discovered that meaning emerges in moments of direct contact:

- seeing what is true
- connecting with others
- choosing one's response
- sensing life's immediacy
- orienting toward possibility

In our language, these are the **Orientations for Coherence: Truth, Connection, Freedom, and Adventure.**

Presence does not *create* meaning.

It opens the field where meaning can be revealed again through relationship with life itself.

Meaning is not manufactured.

It appears when the noise of inherited stories falls away.

Why coherence matters now

As the deals that once organized our lives continue to erode, we face a choice — far less extreme than Frankl's, but structurally similar:

Will we collapse inward as inherited structures dissolve?

Or will we learn to meet life directly, without outsourcing meaning to systems that can no longer carry it?

Coherence becomes the capacity to remain present, relational, and responsive when our mental models no longer explain the world.

Meaning and coherence arise together.

When we are coherent - not controlled or certain, but present - meaning becomes perceptible again.

The Compass as a guide for meaning-making

This is where **The Living Compass** enters.

Not as a belief system.

Not as a solution.

But as an orientation tool for a world where meaning can no longer be outsourced.

It does not tell us what life means.

It helps us remain in the only place where meaning can be found:

- truth as contact
- connection as relationship
- freedom as authorship
- adventure as aliveness

These orientations return us to the ground where Frankl rediscovered meaning — not as comfort, but as a living act.

When meaning is no longer given

Frankl showed that even when everything familiar is stripped away, meaning can still return — not through explanation, but through presence.

We are not in Auschwitz.

But we are living through multiple, overlapping forms of collapse: of stories, of systems, of deals that once held the idea of our modern way of life together.

And if this issue points toward anything at all, it is this:

meaning may not be waiting for us in the next structure, the next belief, or the next solution — but in our capacity to stay in relationship with life as it is, breath by breath, moment by moment, even as the old ground gives way.

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