

Noorie's Lightbulb!

Finding the lightbulb moments in life



by Noor Rubani

“We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, you can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you would threaten the man. Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are.”

— *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, We Should All Be Feminists*

Contents

Hey my name is Noor	6
Being 18	9
Career: Landing my dream job at 22?.....	10
First time Abroad: Cascais, Portugal.....	14
Career: When I worked with teenagers.....	20
Final Reflections.....	25

Hey, my name is Noor.

I see myself as a woman who wants to believe the best in people and improve some people's lives along the way. This approach to life has led me to amazing experiences. As a young South Asian woman, we have been conditioned to put the needs of our family first. To perform and make sacrifices. This is the norm of most South Asian girls. Choosing yourself can seem like a selfish task when in fact, it is necessary for self-preservation.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare,”

-Audre Lorde wrote in *A Burst of Light*.

When I was introduced to Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou's poems a few years ago, I felt strong and as a 'phenomenal woman'. Speaking up for my rights became easier as I recall the line

“I come as one but I stand as ten thousand”

— Maya Angelou.

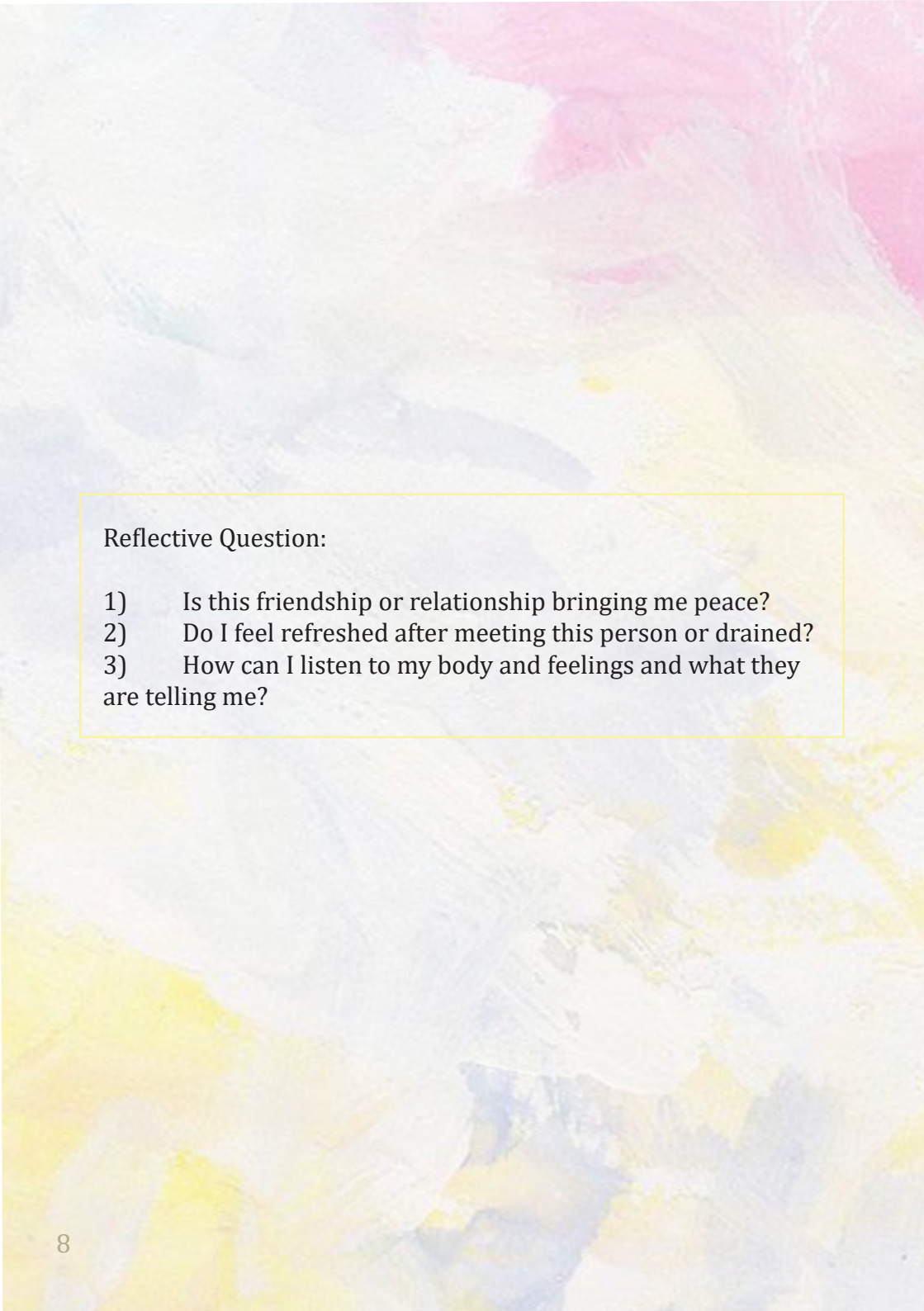
Not one of us is alone. We may feel alone, but we can seek solace from the great women who came before us. At a time of turmoil in my own life, I picked upon the book of the first Pakistani female prime minister, Benazir Bhutto. She faced a great deal of personal and public challenges, but what kept her going was her belief in justice. Reading books and finding strong women is what led me to choose to fulfil a Masters in Social Work which I will be completing in Summer 2021.

I hope you will find something in my journey.

The most important thing in life is having peace. At the end of the day, that's what matters. That's what I base my life around.

In order to bloom,
you must grow





Reflective Question:

- 1) Is this friendship or relationship bringing me peace?
- 2) Do I feel refreshed after meeting this person or drained?
- 3) How can I listen to my body and feelings and what they are telling me?

Being 18

'If we don't tell our own stories, no one else will' – Mira Nair, acclaimed filmmaker

Being 18 and knowing what your next step is a daunting task for anyone. Now looking back at that time, I don't know how anyone would know what they want to do without a strong self-confidence and both emotional and financial support from mummy and daddy.

Finishing my A-Levels with no clue what I want to do, I was advised to choose my highest grade which was Psychology. I started and finished my degree half-hearted. I have now learnt and seen myself the importance of taking your time. There is no rush and there shall be no timeline that I will adhere myself to. I wanted to rush into a masters and get my credentials. However, I learnt how damaging this route can be as I didn't want it to be half-hearted again. No one tells you how precious time is – no matter what your age is. 18, 25, 30. These are the benchmarks we set ourselves to. Career, boyfriend, house. That's the order the senior Aunties have written out for us.

Following a path just for the sake of following a path is not the answer.

One good thing my degree did do was that it led to my first graduate job working for the university. I met good people, enjoyed my work, and enjoyed university without the constraint and pressure of academic work.

Career: Landing my dream job at 22?

*'The price of silence is far greater than taking a stand' –
Deeyah Khan, powerful filmmaker*

I had landed my dream job in a sector I was passionate about: helping young people find their voice as I had done a few years ago. I was to be employed by someone who had helped me on my own leadership journey. My own leadership journey started off as scary, exciting, and nerve-wracking. I undertook this journey on (literally) a 9-month leadership course developing a plan to improve the local environment. I thought I could change the world after learning about local politics, improved confidence, and planning how I could change the world. All with the support of like-minded people on the course.

After finishing the course, all I could think of how could I get a job working for that organisation. The advice given from senior member of staff was to come back with more experience. I took a job as a Research Assistant at the university and volunteered for the organisation by supporting other young people in their leadership journey.

When a job opening for Project Coordinator opened, I was still hesitant to apply as I wasn't sure if I could fulfil the criteria. A nudge from the manager, at the time, encouraged me which led me to applying, attending the interview, and then finally accepting the role. Starting the role for a youth organisation which put youth at the front meant that I was in my element. I was living, chatting, and breathing youth and leadership.

I had booked my tickets to my motherland earlier that year and which meant that only after a mere few weeks of starting my new role I was away. During this time, my manager's health became suddenly worse and he could no longer return. I came back to a miserable and lonely January. In February, a new manager was appointed.

I saw in my new manager something I didn't see growing up: a successful, beautiful, and confident brown (South Asian) woman. And I put her on that pedestal. I was 22 at the time, quite sheltered having lived in one place my entire life, and my self-esteem was tied to my professional roles. I let myself become too vulnerable when there was a job to be done. I let professional blur the lines of personal.

After a few weeks, I began to dread coming to work. I became drained, my skin suffered, and I felt burnt-out. What I wanted was someone to validate me and rescue me. I see now how problematic that was. However, I realised the importance of finding your tribe and how warming a WhatsApp group chat can be with people who understand you. I realised the importance of reaching out instead of struggling alone. I also realised that how easy one can fall into a depth of self-pity.

A way to combat this is to practise gratitude everyday by noting down what three things you are grateful for. This simple task helped me out of the rut and I was able to see clearly how blurry the lines became. By that point, I had left the role to focus on my health.

This began my journey to be assertive when it's hard. To put yourself first because no-one else is.

Reflective prompt:

- 1) Try writing down three things you are grateful for every day for one week and see how your mood has changed.
- 2) Take a moment to think about to go through the five senses. What can you hear? What can you taste? What can you see? What can you smell? We are experiencing so much all the time and it can be nice to see that we are in the here and in the now.



First time abroad: Cacais, Portugal

'For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.'

– Virginia Woolf, writer

This was the first time where I learnt that there is so much which connects us. I was chosen to represent Manchester as delegate for a Youth Exchange in Cascais, Portugal to nurture and exchange ideas of youth practice. It was a European meet-up where Manchester was one of five countries all with a common-aim.

After speaking to many of my colleagues on the programme, it was the first time many of us had travelled without families, and for some travelling via plane. This programme an opportunity to travel and break boundaries set by others. This was clearly achieved by the family-like feeling which was established by the end of the 5-day course.

My understanding of 'European Citizenship - values, identity and cultural diversity' was weak before this programme, except on what you read on the news. Meeting other young people showed that we all connect on the same wavelengths, we are all trying to make the world a better place. Most of the time, we can only achieve this if 'the adults' listen to us. One of the Hungarian delegates I was speaking to, told me that she wants to become a detective and through her school, she was introduced to a mentor who worked as a Forensic detective, and that mentor had suggested the Cascais programme.

This Hungarian delegate was a very strong woman and someone whom I looked upto, she had encountered many struggles in her life from a young age, such as realising she is a lesbian, her sick mother

not accepting this and a difficult time in school. However, from her exterior, she was the happiest person. She is someone who I never would have otherwise met, but she left a mark on me.

The lovely Portuguese young people took us from the tourist-infested beaches to a quiet area in the suburbs. When we got off the coach, we saw a reddish bungalow in the centre of a few buildings which resembled the council flats in Hulme, Manchester. The bungalow was, in fact, a converted youth centre, where the directors work with young people to inspire a love of arts and music. The group of 40 huddled in a large office, learning that the Director of the Youth Centre had organised an 8 day international festival, where 8 artists came and painted 8 walls of the flats.

These were beautiful, bold and brightly coloured murals. Though the artists were not from the small town of Cascias, many of the paintings were relevant to the local people, such as a painting of an elderly woman as a skeleton selling fish from a woven basket. This painting was especially poignant because the Creative Director had expressed a woman who lived nearby used to sell fish in this same manner and wore similar clothing to the woman in the painting. Now she doesn't come anymore to sell fish because this way of life has diminished. The painting demonstrated a loss of livelihood, community and gentrification.



Another painting we had the pleasure of witnessing was of a number 404 bus. This number was significant because it was represented a real bus which used to transport the local people of the area to the rest of Cascais, however, due to the ill image of the area, the council stopped the bus from coming to this area, which put the locals at a disadvantage. The people would encounter difficulties in reaching their jobs, education, sightseeing and thus isolating them.

However, all is not lost, this bus had returned to the area to accommodate for the nicer, richer and affluent, tourists who fit in with the image of a modern European city.

One of my values is social inclusion. I saw that through the volunteering we witnessed on the beach. Social inclusion, for me, means empowering and creating pathways for people, for this reason, the beaches provided floating beach wheelchair, which were developed for those who experience mobility problems. The volunteers on the beach would support that person to sit in the chair, then would push the chair onto the water, which will result in the person to enjoy the water and live a “normal” life.

Overall, I had a fantastic and unforgettable time. I am so thankful and grateful to everyone who made this trip a reality for me. My horizons have widened and I believe in the power of youth work more strongly. I aspire to become a leader working to improve services for others and empowering young people to have a voice. I have learnt more about who I am and what my values are.



Photographs I took of some of the amazing art work I saw whilst in Portugal



Career: When I worked with teenagers.

*‘The more I am me, the happier I can be’
– Reeta Loi, Gay Rights protector.*

When I started working for a mentoring charity in the centre of Manchester, I did feel a bit out of my depth. Me, a shy girl who hides behind people about to teach to a loud and rowdy group of 15 boys aged between 11 and 13. Nonetheless, I wasn’t alone with the school children. The boys were matched up to their mentor who was likely a university student looking to score extra credit for their degree.

It was a cold and tough year, but we got through it. The boys opened up to me and their mentors towards the end of the school year. When it came to the third term, the curriculum focused on social action. The government likes to throw this buzzword about in youth work, but I have my qualms about it.

Social action can be defined as ‘wanting to make an active change in your local environment and working towards a goal (by yourself or with a group of friends) to make the world a better place to live in.’

The rest of the group got going with their mentor and explored deep topics about what they would like to change about their environment: knife crime, obesity, and racism.

There was a boy who came late to the session. As there were no more mentors, I sat with him to explain the group task.

He opened up about his challenges. One of his teachers had openly discussed with the class that she identifies as a lesbian, and he was shocked and upset to learn about her sexuality.

Johnny was shocked and confused as he comes from a strict Christian household where sexuality isn't spoken about and LGBTQ+ identity is not accepted.

I challenged him by educating him about strong LGBTQ+ leaders such as Audre Lorde and Marsha Johnson who was a gay liberation and AIDS activist. Both of these amazing people have led movements that have impacted the world. I wanted to educate him about the importance of liberation of people and the struggle for equality for all. We can empower others by seeing the commonality in our struggles and the intersections of our identity.

Though that whole experience (of working in an after-school project club) was made up of many interesting and powerful conversations, upon reflection I felt this was the most important one. When I look back, I hope that it began his own exploration for his identity, curiosity, and challenging the status quo.

‘I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.’ –

Audre Lorde

Something within myself was found also. The intersection of working out of my comfort zone, my freedom to drive and own a car, and the horrendous Manchester weather one evening led to me giving a lift to one of my colleagues, Karishma.

That evening led to the most beautiful friendship. After every session of juggling behaviour management, organisation of the mentors, and playing sports with the pupils, Karishma and I would spend an hour talking and reflecting and I would return to my home feeling rejuvenated.

I would say to my younger self to invest time in myself, finding my voice through looking at the confidence of others, and simply to take time.

We would simply chat in my car, nothing fancy and posh. There was nothing extravagant about our evening catch-ups but we would speak about books we were reading, our next career steps, struggles of work, and of course finding a boyfriend. Now, a few years later, I can reflect how important that time was. I saw the value of female friendships and I will never discount my friends' time, input, and advice. My female friend became a system that I was supporting and who supported me.

Sisterhood is special to me and many other women in the world. I have seen firsthand the value and hardwork of 'women's work'. Working on a helpline to support women who have gone through abuse, my role involves mainly giving emotional support or signposting them to other professionals. When a woman needs help, and is down in the gutter, it has always been another woman to raise her from that low place. I am aware I am making huge generalisations. But looking back on my journey, when a man has left a woman in pieces (sometimes literally) and left her with nothing, it will most likely be another woman to support her. I don't know why this is except for the common unity that is women's experience and our empathy. In a woman's pain, we can see our own, we can see our mothers' pain, and we can see our future daughters' pain.



orendawomentribe



Final Reflections:

Thank you for reading this Zine. I would like to say to you, kind reader, that you shall never second guess your feelings.

Feelings and thoughts are valid and they are there for a reason.

Your feelings and thoughts will lead to actions.

**You know yourself better than anyone else.
What you can achieve has no bounds.**

Before you go into the world, think about who and what you are representing.

You do hold the power to change things you are not happy about.

“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen
can change the world.
When the whole world is silent, even one
voice becomes powerful.”

*Malala Yousafzai,
Pakistani activist for female education
and the youngest Nobel Prize laureate*

Here are some of the inspiring books which helped me to create this Zine:

Stories for South Asian Super Girls (Raj Kaur Khaira)

Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls (Elena Favilli, Francesca Cavallo)

The Body is Not an Apology (Sonya Renee Taylor)

Pakistan for Women (Maliha Abidi)

I was able to create this Zine from the warm words and encouragement of my lovely mentor, Jane Claire Bradley.

The organisation which made all this happen for me is the amazing 42nd Street. A mental health charity in Manchester. I am grateful to them for giving me this opportunity.