

## Meditative Story Transcript – Austin Mao

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**AUSTIN MAO:** When I commit to non-judgment with absolute certainty, it is full of peace and love. We can only experience this when two people feel so safe with each other that they can expose the breadth of their necks and expect a kiss instead of a cut. This is what unconditional love is.

**ROHAN GUNATILLAKE:** Love letters. While love letters fell out of literary fashion in the first half of the 20th century, they can be so precious for what they teach us about the human condition and the heart.

Today's Meditative Story departs from our standard format. It's not a story. But it's as striking and resonant as any wisdom we've ever shared on this podcast. In this episode, Austin Mao – a listener in our community and a friend – shares a love letter to his wife, Chuchu, and another to his mother. The sentiments and understandings you're about to hear in these letters stem from a family celebration that takes a hard turn between Chuchu and Austin's mom. These are letters of love – grounded in vulnerability and integrity.

Austin Mao is an entrepreneur and investor who is increasingly acting as a spiritual guide. He has mentored dozens of startup founders towards greater purpose, understanding, and peace.

In this series, we blend immersive, first-person stories with mindfulness prompts to help you restore yourself at any time of the day. I'm Rohan, and I'll be your guide on this episode of Meditative Story. From time to time, I'll pause Austin ever so briefly for me to come in with guidance to enhance your experience as you listen.

The body relaxed. The body breathing. Your senses open. Your mind open. Meeting the world.

**MAO:** Dear Chuchu,

This past week has been extra challenging for us. I'm writing this letter with greater clarity and calm than I've had all week. I don't know if you'll ever read it, so this is inherently for me.

First, please know that I love you so much and am so grateful for everything about you, including the incredible despair, anger, and pain that you've recently experienced. All of life is a journey, and it's not lost on me that how I approach the lows in the journey are far more important than how I approach the highs.

This letter is my understanding of both of our journeys after much meditation. I'm so grateful for Paul opening the window into spiritual context. Before speaking with Paul last

night, I was confused as to what to do next. Now, I feel very certain that my fixation on the future “next” is why I could not find the right answer.

On New Year’s Eve, I wrote a Facebook post where I shared that I’ve found my inner truth. I’m letting go of my need to save other people, and to be the “know it all” coach. And I am moving toward becoming a spiritual teacher. This is a transition of my identity into acceptance of what intuitively fulfills me. I have felt immense gratitude for you as my greatest teacher, challenging me to be more accepting, patient, loving, humble, caring, and softer.

Paul helps me realize that this transition for me is bound to contain extraordinary difficulties as I come into harmony with myself. My subconscious Ego creates obstacles for me to overcome, to teach me to be better, and to ultimately dissolve my past identity for the sake of the future one. Let me offer some more concrete examples in the spirit of vulnerability and clarity.

The following may be difficult for you to hear. I ask that you receive my vulnerable share as just a stepping stone in my journey. Please be patient with me here and accept me for my faults. A month ago in Miami, I came to the painful intuition that I should exit our partnership because I didn’t feel supported by you on my journey. I will not add color to this statement because it’s really not important now. Suffice it to say, I had this idea embedded deep in my subconscious ... the feeling that our partnership is in itself not aligned with my being because of how much and how often I feel called to compromise my integrity.

Now back home in Colorado and committed to being grounded, finding our purpose, engaging in flow every day, I’m turning and looking into the light of our partnership, and I find the glow of hope. Still, the subconscious inception of “this is not right” haunts me from behind, and the nagging voice of shadow creeps up into reality when I deliver micro-aggressions. I constantly let you know things I’m doing for our household while pointing out my perceived imbalance of things you’re not doing. When I compared our personality test results, and you caught me finding pleasure that my scores were higher than yours, I was really confused by why I would be such a bully. I understand with so much clarity now: that deep, dark voice calls me to push you away. And that’s exactly what I do through the sum of all the little microaggressions.

**GUNATILLAKE:** As the listener to this first letter, in a way we play the part of Austin's wife Chuchu reading, hearing his private words. How is she feeling? How are you feeling? What is here? If our minds are a polished mirror, what do you see in yours?

**MAO:** Last night, I shared with Paul that I felt frustrated by how you have been on your phone so much rather than present. He responded, “Have you ever thought that you pushed her to do that?” This question really opened my eyes. I had never thought that my non-acceptance and judgments of you, even when I keep verbally quiet, leads you

away from me because I am willing it to happen. Indeed, I believe I'm the creator of my reality ... and it's up to me to open my eyes and expand my heart to see how I'm doing it. I see now that I have manifested this extraordinary turmoil by way of not being honest with myself and honest with you. I see that I have failed in being the spiritual teacher that I aim to be by not leading with love, by not trusting and surrendering with love in my heart, but instead allowing my inner critic voice to subconsciously guide my hand to these hurdles.

Yesterday, you asked me how I felt, and I shared that I have clarity now on the path forward. Indeed, I do. It is to open my heart at all times – especially when it is most challenging – to love you and everyone and everything with deep presence. I asked Paul for an example of maintaining my integrity while doing this, using timeliness as an example. He shared that opening your heart and then surrendering to whatever time delivers you will allow me to be within my deep integrity, that attempting to collapse time, to force the future by nagging you to hurry up, ultimately quickens all that I try to avoid in the name of “integrity.” He says that when he rushes his partner, she tends to go slower; and that when he pours energy out from his heart, everything – and I mean everything – manifests as it should.

I realize that this is the case with everything in my life: you, my mother, money, my path, relationships, all of it. I try to force saving or making money, and then our finances become more challenging to manage. I try to force you to change, and then you push back in resistance and stay more firm in who you are now. I try to push my mother into healing, and then she finds some new ailment to suffer from. I try to force my journey, and then I end up right back here: facing the lesson of humility, patience, acceptance, and unconditional love once again.

I've tormented myself with the questions of “What if?” so much these past few days. What if we have a child? Am I dooming myself to always be a caretaker? And then I would show up with fear and resentment of a future yet to be, which would push you further away from me. What if our business fails? And then, I would receive more penalties from the County and internal challenges. Time and time again, I am manifesting my own fears by forecasting into the future rather than being love in the present.

So this is where I am. I commit to deeply listening to you, giving you all of my empathy and love. When I see you're in pain, that's all that matters. All the things you say come from that well of pain. I can see that you are moving through your own journey, which is so appropriately a reflection of mine. The most and best I can do is to polish my mirror as much as possible for you to see the reflection of love and acceptance from me. I hear everything you've said to me and honor it all; and I want you to know that I love you more than ever before because I commit to loving you unconditionally in the present, not attempting to control our future.

So just as I started, I tell you again: I love you so deeply with all my heart. We are moving through our separateness into oneness, and I'm so grateful for you being my counterpart. I'm so grateful for your teachings so I can be a better husband, a better man, and the embodiment of love that I am meant to be.

Sincerely,  
Your husband, Austin.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Ok. We now turn to a letter Austin writes to his mother at the same time. Do what you need to do to reset, and let's take a listen.

**MAO:** Dear Mama,

I've been in the habit of writing letters to really explore my deeper, more complex truths and communicate them in an intentional way. I pray you receive this message with the love and acceptance that I intend to pour into it. This is primarily for me, and for me to share with you my journey to also share with you the love and care inherent within.

The past week beginning on the night before you left has been extraordinarily challenging for me. I am also learning an equally extraordinary lesson, so I would not trade a moment for another. I am very, very grateful.

No doubt, you have received a few messages from Chuchu – the first filled with rage; the next, tempered with regret. These are projections of the journey that both of us have been on that was first activated in the dinner we had at Temaki Den where you shared your judgments about Chuchu. Knowing what I know now, I know that this journey began many years ago – even before Chuchu existed – and I see this as a culmination of spiritual repair for my soul.

When you shared that you felt Chuchu to be selfish and irresponsible, I expressed to you that this is her journey and that mine is to accept her as she is. Now I know that there are so many deeper layers at play here. Tracing these back, I first admit that I agreed with your judgments. It's taken me a great deal of energy to merely release this admission, which is a window into just how often I hide from truth. You spoke with what I felt so many times before, and it felt good to receive affirmation from my mother.

The layer below is that I manifest this judgment for you. I have only been able to discover this through deep meditation and Chuchu's guidance, which helps me realize and admit a deep inner truth: I create my reality. I do the vast majority of the house work and services for which our partnership thrives. While I like to preach that I have become more accepting, I subconsciously accumulate the ticks of times that I do something and she hasn't. Every single day, I add an extra measure of resentment to my heart until the weight cannot be ignored.

Before you arrived during the holidays, I created the intention to cook for you every meal. I cleaned the home vigorously, wiping every surface more than I have before. I wanted to make everything perfect. And meanwhile, I was also calculating just how much more sweat I was sweating than Chuchu. I would even say to her, “No, you don’t have to help me, I’ve got this,” and then become just a tad bit more resentful. I create my own suffering.

I’m learning that stored energy needs release. We all have different forms of release. You see, my form of release is crafty: mine is in micro-aggressions, making little quips here and there to remind Chuchu of just how much more I’m doing. I ask, “Have you let Tofu out to pee?” already knowing that she hasn’t. I subconsciously want to remind her that she hasn’t, just so I can feel validated that I do more. And the best part of it is that I can only lie in my victimhood, expressing and truly believing that Chuchu creates this imbalance. You see, I create this imbalance. The crazy trick of this consciousness game is to realize that I create it, and so does Chuchu, and so do you – each of us for different reasons rooted deeply in our souls. We all create this reality to bring our shadow into the light. Our souls crave the opportunity to heal.

There is one more layer, and this one cuts very deep. Doing more than others is an act of love for me. It is also an act of receiving validation. You have always shared with me just how special I am. I’m supremely grateful for the confidence that this constant affirmation has afforded me. I have also just come to realize that your affirmations are frequently relative – you would share that I’m so gifted compared to the other kids, or that I am so special, and Chuchu is so lucky. I see now with a clearer lens that the relative comparison, albeit a positive one, has embedded in me my own subconscious tendency to compete for love.

I’ve manifested the entire conflict between Chuchu, you, and me by subconscious design. I set myself up to be a caretaker, constantly taking charge rather than even giving Chuchu the opportunity to lead. I created the expectation to impress you with how conscious I’ve become in the week you arrived. I cooked, cleaned, and did more that week while nurturing the idea that I do more than Chuchu. Meanwhile, the built-up resentment leaks out of me in micro-aggressions, adding that much more tinder to the flame that ultimately leads to explosion.

So you see, I spin the web that traps me in my own suffering. I almost wrote “traps us all” but that’s incomplete: each of us individually spins our own threads of suffering, stemming from our own subconscious will, into this giant web of our family. I create this reality of mine just as you create yours. If it wasn’t with Chuchu, it would be with someone else because I have yet to be aware and do the work to release this shadow of mine, this need to be better than others rather than just better.

**GUNATILLAKE:** The comparing mind is an insidious thing. We all know the pain of this in our own way. Comparing ourselves to others. Comparing ourselves to other versions of ourselves

which don't actually exist. What version of you does exist right now? Turn to it. And ground your attention in your body, wherever feels most solid.

**MAO:** I'm shaking right now. Peeling back these layers of inner truth is a physical experience because I am finally releasing long-trapped energy in my journey into integrity. I have sat in silence so many times, opting to preserve the peace. But this is a fake peace. It is not a maximal existence because we do not get to honor each other's inner truth. We only get to love at the surface of what is truly available, which is a true connection of our souls that lies at the intersection of joy and safety.

I see now that when I create a judgment, I create my own suffering. I ask myself: What would life be like without judgment? What would life be without suffering? This is a very powerful question. When I commit to non-judgment with absolute certainty, it's full of peace and love. We can only experience this when two people feel so safe with each other that they can expose the breadth of their necks and expect a kiss instead of a cut. This is what unconditional love is.

Now, I'm here, eyes open and ready to heal. How timely that this is in the beginning of the New Year when making commitments is in fashion. I commit to trace all my feelings of resentment, anger, shame, hurt, and pain down through the layers of expectations into my early childhood programming. I commit to intentions filled with love and not tainted by a touch of expectation. I commit to loving both Chuchu and you to my fullest, and to demonstrate by example what love could create if given freely and truly.

We're all on our own journeys. I'm so grateful that mine gets to weave in and out of both of yours. Chuchu is my greatest teacher; you're the foundation that I've built my being on.

I'd normally say that I pray that each of you finds your own healing, and that you two reconcile, but I do not wish to say this because it does not resonate with me anymore. I know you'll find your healing; I know Chuchu will find hers; and I know that you two will reconcile, in this life or the next, when each of you discovers that the separateness that divides you is really a mirage. Chuchu is in my life for a reason. I picked her and stay with her for a reason. Life is not a mere chance, and I do not play it as chance. I choose to do the work with her by my side for a reason.

You're also in my life for a reason, and I'm in yours for a reason very much your own. You gave me life, and I help you heal. Even the challenges that we face – like this one so fresh – is our opportunity to move closer to God through love, compassion, and acceptance. It's up to me to open my heart to allow the river of oneness to flow in and through me, and to be the man that can truly serve you, her, and everyone else in the highest integrity.

Thank you for listening. I love you so much. Happy New Year, Momma.

Sincerely,  
Your son, Austin.

**GUNATILLAKE:** Thank you Austin. Your story has me reflecting on the healing power of letter writing. In her Meditative Story, Hannah Brencher also finds that new facets of love can be forged with her mother via the written word. If intentional letter writing has you curious, you might like to check out Hannah's episode, "One envelope at a time," which originally aired in October of 2019.

Now, there are a lot of threads to Austin's letters: radical self-awareness, vulnerability, how we share our journeys, the challenges of being in a relationship with another. The thread I want to pull on though for our short closing meditation together is a line from Austin's letter to his mother:

"I see now that when I create a judgment, I create my own suffering. What would life be like without judgment? What would life be without suffering? When I commit to non-judgment with absolute certainty, it is full of peace and love."

There is a lot of wisdom in these words. If you go digging, there's enough for a lifetime to be honest. So let me say the same thing in a different way.

When we let go of judgement, there is freedom.

Judgment of ourselves. Judgement of others. Judgement of how things turn out in reality compared to what we once thought might be.

Judgements that we are aware of, that we ruminate on. Those that exist beyond our awareness. These can be tricky to work with on demand, so what we do in mindfulness is, like in martial arts, we train in forms so that when the fight does come, we are ready.

So let's do one of my favorite of those forms.

How is your mind?

Tune into the quality of your mind in this moment. Your mindstate, thought patterns, your emotion. What is it like?

Did you notice? Did you notice any judgement that arose?

With awareness we know what the mind is like. Then, judgement arises because it is a persistent pattern. Then with awareness we know what the judgment is like.

Let's watch again. Know what the mind is like, and notice if any judgement appears alongside.

The training here is to refine our sensitivity so that we see the mind, see the judgement of the mind, see the suffering that comes with that judgement however subtle.

Then in time we learn to relax that judgement and notice the freedom that comes with that. Then as we appreciate the freedom, the mind lets go of its need to judge. As I said, this can be a lifetime's work, but it's worth it.

Thank you Austin for sharing your experiences.

And thank you. Go well.