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A Metaphorical Self

A Study of Conceptual Metaphors
in Robin Sharma's The monk who sold his Ferrari

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Abstract

Self-help literature has become an increasingly popular genre, offering readers guidance on personal growth and self-improvement. Central to this genre is the use of metaphorical language to communicate ideas about abstract concepts such as the self and personal transformation. While previous research has examined metaphors in self-help discourse, little attention has been paid to how Robin Sharma, one of the best-selling self-help authors, uses conceptual metaphors to shape understandings of the self and personal transformation. This study examines these concepts in Sharma's *The monk who sold his Ferrari* (1997), a fictional story about a successful lawyer who, after a heart attack, leaves his career and learns principles for a more balanced life from Himalayan sages. The data consist of 52 metaphorical expressions from the book that describe the self or personal transformation. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study adopts a qualitative top-down approach to identify and analyse metaphorical expressions and the conceptual metaphors they realise. The analysis identifies eight recurring conceptual metaphors through which the self is represented as something that can be cultivated, strengthened, healed, awakened, or liberated through individual effort. These metaphors consistently frame personal transformation as an internal process centred on self-discipline, personal responsibility, and the development of one's inner potential. Overall, the study demonstrates how Sharma's metaphorical language constructs a particular understanding of the self in which personal transformation is presented as coming primarily from within the individual, rather than being shaped by wider social or structural influences.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, self-help literature, the self, personal transformation, Robin Sharma, metaphor analysis, self-improvement

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1. Introduction

"Don't live the same year 75 times and call it a life" (Sharma, 2015). This striking quote from Canadian self-help guru Robin Sharma does more than criticise a stagnant existence. It can be seen as a way of understanding the self, where the ordinary person is conceptualised as acting out of habits and in repetitive patterns, and therefore needing to change or develop. Sharma is well-known internationally for books such as *The monk who sold his Ferrari, Who will cry when you die?* and *The 5am club*. According to his official website, his books have sold over 25 million copies in more than ninety-two languages and dialects, making him one of the most widely read authors in the world (Sharma, n.d.). Robin Sharma's widespread success highlights the growing popularity and cultural influence of self-help books today.

Self-help books address a range of abstract topics, including identity, purpose, success, personal growth, and psychological well-being. Dolby (2005) explains that readers turn to self-help books because they address personal concerns and reflect their desire to develop a clearer understanding of who they are and how they navigate their lives (p. 24). Since these concepts are abstract and cannot easily be observed or described directly, language plays an important role in making them accessible and understandable to readers. Authors such as Robin Sharma therefore rely heavily on metaphorical language to communicate their ideas and encourage readers to think differently about themselves and their lives. Metaphors provide readers with familiar experiences through which complex and abstract ideas can be understood more easily. Kövecses (2002) notes that there is substantial evidence that metaphors serve a conceptual function, particularly by helping people understand unfamiliar and abstract concepts (p. 1). This view is central to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) , which argues that metaphors are not merely stylistic features of language but also reflect patterns of thought through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete and familiar experiences (p. 4). Previous studies have also investigated the use of CMT in self-help discourse. Examples of such research include Łącka-Badura's (2016) study of journey metaphors used to represent success and Binkley's (2024) study of metaphors of interiority, which presents the self as an inner space that can be explored and improved.

While such studies demonstrate the central role of metaphor in shaping understandings of the self, they tend either to take a broad perspective on self-help discourse as a whole (Binkley,

2024) or to focus on a single concept, such as success, across many texts (Łącka-Badura, 2016), rather than offering a detailed metaphor analysis of one specific author's work. Notably, there has been little scholarly analysis of how best-selling self-help authors such as Robin Sharma employ metaphorical language to construct ideas of personal transformation, success, and the self. His work draws heavily on CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), yet this has rarely been examined through the lens of CMT. This is a notable gap, since *The monk who sold his Ferrari* repeatedly describes the mind and the process of change through concrete images such as a garden, a fire and a journey. CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) provides a framework for analysing these metaphorical expressions by allowing individual expressions to be grouped into underlying conceptual metaphors. The theory makes it possible to examine how a concrete source domain is used to structure and understand a more abstract target domain, through mappings in which elements of the source domain correspond to elements of the target domain.

My interest in this topic stems from my experience as a reader of self-help literature and my observation of how persuasive its language can be. This led me to consider how conceptual metaphors contribute to this persuasive effect. Given the limited research on how such metaphors construct ideas about the self and personal transformation, this study examines their use in Robin Sharma's The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are conceptual metaphors employed in the selected work by Robin Sharma to construct a specific image of the self?
2. In what ways are such metaphors used to conceptualise and promote the process of personal transformation?
3. What underlying assumptions about the self and personal transformation are conveyed through these conceptual metaphors?

2. Theoretical background

This section presents the theoretical background of the study in four subsections. Section 2.1 introduces self-help literature as a genre. Section 2.2 examines the role of metaphors in self-help literature and how they help communicate abstract ideas about the self. Section 2.3 introduces CMT, which provides the theoretical framework for the study, while Section 2.4 reviews previous research applying this theory to self-help discourse.

2.1 Self-help literature

Self-help literature has developed into a prominent genre within contemporary culture, offering guidance on personal development, success and well-being. Its rise is closely connected to a general shift towards emphasising individual responsibility, self-optimisation, and continuous improvement. As Dolby (2005) argues, the popularity of self-help books can be understood in relation to their cultural function, namely, to provide readers with frameworks for interpreting their lives and navigating personal challenges. In this sense, self-help literature operates not only as a source of advice but also as a cultural discourse that shapes how individuals understand themselves and their potential for change (pp. 24-26).

Since self-help literature is so closely concerned with how individuals understand themselves, it is useful to consider what is meant by the self. The self can be understood as a multifaceted structure made up of a person's perceptions of who they are, including their beliefs, values, characteristics, and sense of identity. In simple terms, the self is concerned with the question Who am I? (Hards et al. 2024, p. 4). The self is also something that develops over time and is shaped by experiences and interactions with other people (p. 2). It includes not only how people see themselves in the present but also how they understand their past selves and imagine who they might become in the future (pp. 3,9).

Birney (2023, p. 3) notes that, unlike the body, which changes over time, the self is generally understood as something that gives people a sense of continuity and of being the same person over time. Yet the self is also closely connected to a person's values and ideals. Drawing on the work of the philosopher Charles Taylor, Birney (2023, p. 5) explains that who we are cannot be separated from what we consider to be good, meaningful, or worth striving for. In other words, people's sense of self is shaped not only by what they do but also by what they believe in and who they want to become.

In self-help literature, the self is often presented as both the source of problems and the solution to them. This means that personal difficulties, such as stress, unhappiness or lack of success are treated as originating from within the individual rather than from external or social circumstances, and the way to overcome them is also presented as individual, summed up in the common self-help message that the only person stopping you from succeeding is you (Rimke, 2020, p. 44). As reflected in Douglas’s (1979) early analysis of self-help

literature, one of the first systematic studies of the genre, the unhealthy individual is described as anxious, insecure and unable to cope, with such difficulties framed as personal shortcomings that can be addressed through changes in attitude, behaviour and self-control (p. 51). Similarly, the healthy individual is described as self-disciplined, independent and in control of their emotions (p. 50). In this way, self-help literature consistently presents personal development as a process of working on oneself, where change is achieved by adjusting one's mindset, emotions and actions rather than by addressing the broader social factors.

At the same time, self-help literature often guides readers through this process of self-transformation by framing it as a kind of personal journey. Collingsworth (2011) argues that the reader is constructed as a subject who can move from a problematic state toward a more fulfilled and successful version of themselves. Self-help authors create this effect through recurring patterns such as motivational language, narrative examples, and structured advice, which together create a sense of direction and progress for the reader (pp. 153-156). Alongside motivational language and structured advice, self-help authors also rely heavily on metaphor to communicate their ideas. The role of metaphor in self-help literature is examined in the following section.

2.2 Metaphors in self-help literature

Self-help books deal with topics that are very abstract by nature; the self, personal growth, motivation, transformation. These are things that cannot really be pointed at or described directly, so writers need another way to make them understandable to readers. This is where metaphor comes in. According to Moser (2007), complex and abstract topics such as the self must be expressed metaphorically to make sense and to be communicated to others. Without metaphor, it would be very hard to talk about something as intangible as finding yourself or personal growth in a way that readers can relate to (p. 156).

In addition to this, Moser (2007) makes a second point that is important. Metaphors do more than just simplify things or help communication. They are the linguistic expression of culturally and socially accepted concepts in society, and they indirectly convey what is thought to be appropriate and how to go about things–for example, what it means to be successful (p.156). In other words, when a self-help book uses a metaphor like finding your path or building yourself up, it is not just making an abstract idea easier to picture, it is also

drawing on ideas that are already shared and accepted in a culture about what success, growth, or what a good life looks like.

Following her argument that metaphors play an important role in helping people understand and express abstract aspects of the self, it is not surprising that the book relies on recurring metaphors throughout the text. These metaphors make complex and intangible ideas, such as personal growth, self-discovery, and transformation, easier to understand by relating them to more concrete and familiar experiences that readers already know from everyday life, such as going on a journey, constructing or rebuilding something, and the growth of plants. These connections between concrete experiences and abstract ideas will be further discussed in the next section through CMT, which provides the theoretical framework for analysing the metaphors used in the book.

2.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

CMT was developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and according to them, conceptual metaphors are not simply stylistic features of language but ways of thinking that shape how people understand and experience the world. They argue that people understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences, meaning that metaphor plays an important role in human cognition and everyday thought (pp. 4-7).

A conceptual metaphor consists of two domains, a source domain and a target domain. The target domain is the abstract concept we are trying to understand, while the source domain is more concrete and provides the structure for understanding it (Kövecses, 2002, p. 6).
For example, in the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, the target domain is argument, and the source domain is war. This can also be seen in expressions such as he attacked every weak point in my argument, or I demolished his argument where elements of war such as attack are used to structure how arguments are understood (Kövecses, 2002, p. 5).

Furthermore, as Kövecses (2002, p.6) explains, conceptual metaphors work through what is called mappings. This means that specific parts of a more concrete experience are connected to parts of a more abstract concept. For example, when someone says we aren't going anywhere, it does not refer to a physical journey, but to the development of a romantic relationship. The travellers are the lovers, the journey refers to the events in the love

relationship, and the destination represents the goal, such as commitment, stability or a shared future. In the same way the expression it's been a bumpy road refers to difficulties in the relationship (p.7). These elements did not exist in our understanding of love independently; it was the journey domain that gave the love domain its structure in the first place.

What these mappings reveal, therefore, is that the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor structures the very way we conceptualise love relationships, determining how we understand their goals, progress and difficulties. In other words, the structure of a journey, including movement, obstacles and direction is used to organise how people think about relationships. This all means that understanding a conceptual metaphor involves recognising the systematic mappings between a source and target domain.

The importance of conceptual metaphors can be seen in how they help individuals make sense of complex experiences and organise understanding of the world. As Kövecses (2002, p.9) illustrates through the myth of Oedipus, metaphors play a crucial role in how meaning is constructed. To the riddle by the Sphinx, "Which is the animal that has four feet in the morning, two at midday and three in the evening?", Oedipus answers "Man, who in infancy crawls on all fours, who walks upright in maturity, and in his old age supports himself with a stick". By knowing the metaphor THE LIFE OF HUMAN BEINGS IS A DAY and understanding it, Oedipus can interpret the riddle correctly and save his life in the process.

This example illustrates that metaphors are important because they provide a framework that allows individuals to interpret complex phenomena. Without this framework, the meaning would remain unclear or even impossible to understand. In this sense, conceptual metaphors are essential for making sense of indirect references and expressions, as well as for interpreting more abstract ideas.

However, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, when a metaphor highlights certain aspects of a concept, other aspects may be overlooked (p. 10). When something is understood through a particular source domain, certain features are highlighted and brought to the foreground, while others remain in the background. For example, when argument is understood through the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, the focus falls on attacking and defending positions, while the cooperative dimensions of arguing, such as the exchange of ideas and mutual understanding are obscured. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note that some

metaphors become so conventional that they no longer feel like metaphors at all, they feel like the natural and obvious way of understanding something, which can make it difficult to notice what they leave out (p. 12).

2.4 Conceptual Metaphor in Self-Help Literature

Previous research has applied CMT to examine how key ideas are conveyed in self-help discourse. For instance, Łącka-Badura (2016) analysed the metaphorical conceptualisation of success in American self-help literature, demonstrating that success is frequently framed through metaphors of movement, progress and goal-oriented journeys. The dominant conceptual metaphor identified is SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, in which success is portrayed as a path that the individual must actively follow, often involving obstacles, forward movement and a destination. Typical expressions include The road to success is always under construction and every failure is a step to success (p. 45).

Another study relevant to the present research is Binkley (2024), who examined how metaphors shape understandings of the self in self-help and therapeutic discourse. He argues that metaphors of interiority present the self as an inner space that should be explored and improved, illustrated through expressions such as “I had to face myself and go inside.” According to Binkley, these metaphors are not neutral but reflect a broader therapeutic culture in which looking inward encourages individuals to continually manage and improve themselves rather than simply gain self-understanding (pp. 136-137).

Similarly, a study done by Bhat (2024) who conducted a detailed linguistic analysis of Napoleon Hill’s classic Think and grow rich (1937), which is one of the most influential self-help books of all time, explores how Hill’s lexical choices, syntactic structures, repetition, metaphors and rhetorical strategies work together to create a powerful motivational language that inspires readers to believe in their own potential success. He shows, for example, that Hill repeatedly uses the lexical item desire, especially as part of the metaphor burning desire, which is often used to show how strong motivation needs to be for achieving success. Bhat (2024) further explains how metaphors like this help make abstract concepts more concrete and relatable, thereby strengthening their motivational impact and inspiring readers to believe in their own potential. Hill’s use of affirmations, such as Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve (cited in Bhat, 2024, p. 37), reinforces the idea that belief and

imagination are crucial to success. Bhat (2024) also analyses the language used in Hill's Think and Grow Rich (1937), focusing on how metaphors and rhetorical strategies contribute to the book's motivational message. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) CMT, Bhat shows that Hill uses journey and battle metaphors to describe the pursuit of success. He also describes the subconscious mind as a fertile garden mapping the concrete domain of gardening onto the more abstract domain of the mind (p. 27)

These studies show that self-help literature does not only describe concepts such as success but also constructs them as personal and achievable. However, none examines Robin Sharma's use of conceptual metaphors to construct the self and personal transformation. This study addresses this gap by analysing these concepts in *The monk who sold his Ferrari* through the lens of CMT.

3. Material and Method

3.1 Material

The primary material for this study is Robin Sharma's self-help book The monk who sold his Ferrari, published in 1996. The book is written as a fictional story with a clear moral message about personal growth and self-improvement. It follows Julian Mantle, a successful but exhausted lawyer who suffers a heart attack and decides to leave his old life behind. He travels to the Himalayan village of Sivana, where he learns principles for living a more meaningful and balanced life from a group of sages. The book explores themes such as personal transformation, self-discipline, and finding purpose in life. This book was chosen for this study for two main reasons. First, it is one of the most widely read and internationally recognised works of self-help literature, having sold more than four million copies in fifty-one languages (HarperCollins Canada, n.d.), and is regarded as an influential example of the genre. Second, and more importantly for the purposes of this study, The monk who sold his Ferrari makes extensive use of metaphorical language to communicate its ideas about the self and personal transformation making it a particularly suitable source for a conceptual metaphor analysis.

3.2 Method

For its theoretical framework, this study draws on CMT as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT holds that metaphors are not merely decorative features of language but fundamental cognitive structures through which people understand abstract concepts in terms of more concrete and familiar ones.

The identification of metaphorical expressions followed a top-down approach, guided by the study's focus on the self and personal transformation as target domains. This means that rather than flagging every metaphorical expression in the text regardless of topic, the reading was directed by the study's research questions. Expressions that described the self or personal transformation through concrete source domain language were identified and highlighted during the reading of the book. The metaphoricity of each flagged expression was then verified by comparing its contextual meaning with its more basic, concrete meaning. The basic, physical meanings of individual words were verified using the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). An expression was considered metaphorical when a word or phrase that has a more basic, physical or concrete meaning elsewhere was being used in a way that contrasted with that meaning in its present context but could still be understood through comparison with it. Once the metaphorical expressions had been collected, they were grouped into conceptual metaphors by identifying shared source domains across multiple expressions. Expressions drawing on the same concrete source domain were grouped together under a single conceptual metaphor. For example, expressions related to gardening, fire, or imprisonment were each analysed as belonging to separate conceptual metaphors, following the CMT principle that a conceptual metaphor exists when a set of linguistic expressions systematically maps a concrete source domain onto an abstract target domain.

The analysis addresses three main aspects. First, it examines metaphors that primarily construct different aspects and conditions of the self. In total, six such conceptual metaphors were identified, which are analysed in Sections 4.2.1- 4.2.6. Second, it examines metaphors that conceptualise personal transformation as a process of change**.** Two such metaphors were identified, which are analysed in Sections 4.2.7- 4.2.8. For each metaphor, the cross-domain mappings are first presented in a table, followed by an analysis of representative expressions from the book**.** Finally, the discussion considers what the identified metaphors reveal about the underlying assumptions they carry, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, p. 10) argument that every conceptual metaphor highlights certain aspects of a concept while hiding

others. Therefore, it examines not only what the metaphors make visible about the self and personal transformation but also what they conceal**.** In this context, critical approaches to metaphor discussed by Rimke (2020) and Douglas (1979) are also considered, particularly their work on how self-help discourse constructs individualistic understandings of personal problems and their solutions.

Representative expressions are presented in two ways. Passages that are compared with each other or referred back to later in the analysis are presented as numbered examples, whereas expressions that are discussed only in the paragraph in which they appear are quoted directly in the running text, where only the most relevant part of the sentence is sometimes included. A complete list of the 52 identified metaphorical expressions, with their full sentences, is provided in the Appendix. The conceptual metaphors in the Appendix are presented in the same order as they are discussed in the analysis.

4. Analysis and results

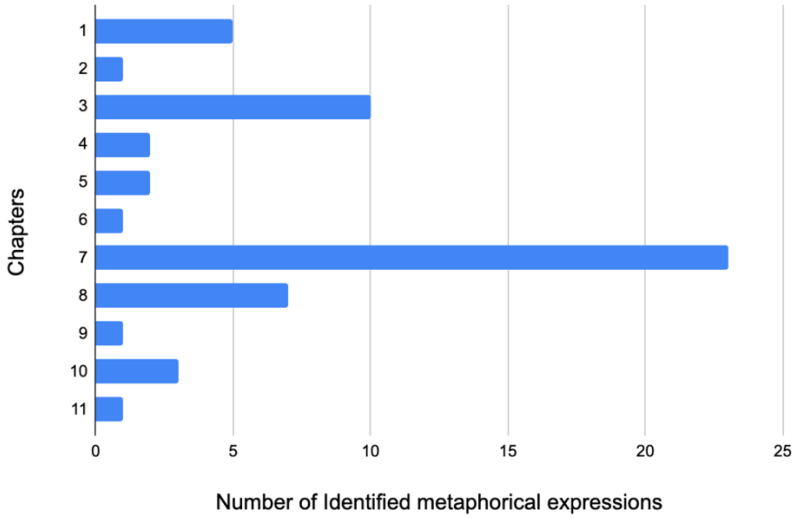
This section will present the results of the analysis in two subsections. Section 4.1 will provide an overview of how the identified metaphorical expressions are distributed across the chapters of *The monk who sold his Ferrari*. Section 4.2 will then present the analysis of the eight conceptual metaphors identified in the book, beginning with the six metaphors that primarily construct the self, followed by the two metaphors that conceptualise personal transformation.

4.1 Distribution of metaphorical expressions

The analysis identified metaphorical expressions across different chapters of The monk who sold his Ferrari. To provide an overview of how these expressions are distributed throughout the book, Figure 1 shows the number of metaphorical expressions identified in each chapter:

Figure 1

Distribution of the identified metaphorical expressions across the chapters of *The monk who sold his Ferrari*



Note. The figure represents only the metaphorical expressions selected for analysis in the present study, not all metaphorical language in the book

The highest number of identified expressions occurs in Chapter 7, followed by Chapter 3. A possible explanation for this pattern lies in the narrative structure of the book. Chapters 1 and 3 both deal with Julian's physical and emotional collapse and the events that led to his transformation, which may explain why both chapters feature a relatively high number of metaphorical expressions compared to the chapters that follow. Chapter 3 introduces several of the conceptual metaphors identified in the present study.

Similarly, the high number of identified metaphorical expressions in Chapter 7 may reflect the thematic focus of the chapter. As suggested by its title, A Most Extraordinary Garden, much of the chapter revolves around the garden metaphor, which may explain the larger number of metaphorical expressions found in this study. Chapter 8 also features a relatively high number of expressions, which may be explained by the fact that it continues directly from Chapter 7. While Chapter 7 introduces the main conceptual metaphors, Chapter 8 develops the lighthouse and journey metaphors further, focusing on the theme of inner purpose and applying the metaphors through instructional language directed at the reader.

The chapters with few identified expressions, such as Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6, are mainly narrative and focus on Julian’s return and his experiences in Sivana rather than on directly presenting teachings. This may suggest that metaphorical expressions are more common in chapters where Julian actively shares his teachings, while chapters that mainly move the story forward contain fewer metaphorical expressions. Also, the noticeable decrease in the number

of identified metaphorical expressions from Chapter 9 onwards may suggest that, once the main conceptual metaphors have been introduced, Sharma places less emphasis on developing them further. Instead, the later chapters appear to build on ideas that have already been established, which may explain why fewer identified metaphorical expressions occur in these chapters.

4.2. Analysis of conceptual metaphors

This section examines eight conceptual metaphors identified in the text. The first six primarily construct different aspects and conditions of the self: THE MIND IS A GARDEN, THE SELF IS A FIRE/INNER LIGHT, THE PAST/MIND IS A PRISON, THE MIND IS A MUSCLE, THE SPIRIT IS A WOUNDED ENTITY, and THE MIND IS A CONTAINER. The final two conceptualise personal transformation as a process of change: PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS AN AWAKENING/REBIRTH and PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY. For each metaphor, the most representative expressions are discussed. A complete list of all identified expressions is provided in the Appendix.

4.2.1 THE MIND IS A GARDEN

One of the most extensively developed conceptual metaphors in The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari is THE MIND IS A GARDEN. Within the framework of CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the metaphor maps the source domain of a garden, a physical space associated with cultivation, weeding, nurturing, and protection, onto the target domain of the mind, an abstract cognitive space that cannot be physically perceived. The metaphor is developed through several related expressions that establish systematic correspondences between the two domains, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1

Conceptual mapping for THE MIND IS A GARDEN

Source domain - GARDEN	**Target domain - MIND**
The garden	The mind
Cultivating	Developing positive thinking
Weeds	Negative thoughts

Toxic waste	Harmful external input
The gateway	Mental boundaries
Blossoming	Reaching full potential

The metaphoricity of each expression was confirmed by comparing its contextual meaning with its basic meaning. For example, the basic meaning of cultivate relates to preparing land for growing. In Example 1, however, the verb is applied non-literally to the mind:

Example 1
If you care for your mind, if you nurture it and if you cultivate it just like a fertile, rich garden, it will blossom far beyond your expectations. But if you let the weeds take root, lasting peace of mind and deep inner harmony will always elude you (p. 51).

The same applies to weeds, which literally refers to unwanted plants but is used here to represent negative thoughts, and blossom, which refers to the opening of a flower and is used to describe the mind reaching its potential. This pattern appears in several expressions as illustrated in Examples 2 and 3:

Example 2
Yet look at the toxic waste that most people put into the fertile garden of their minds every single day: the worries and anxieties, the fretting about the past, the brooding over the future and those self-created fears that wreak havoc within your inner world (p. 52).

Example 3
Never let the weeds of impure thought and action take the garden of your mind. Stand guard at the gateway of your mind. Keep it healthy and strong (p. 84).

The individual expressions vary in how directly they evoke the source domain. Words such as cultivate, weeds, fertile garden and blossom have basic meanings connected to gardening and plant life, which makes their metaphorical use readily identifiable. Other expressions are less direct but still activate the same domain. In Example 3, stand guard at the gateway draws on the image of a garden gate. Although this expression would not necessarily suggest a

garden in another context, it directly follows Never let the weeds of impure thought and action take the garden of your mind, and since the gardening frame is already active, the gateway is easily interpreted as part of the same domain.

Example 1 also contains a contrast between cultivation and neglect, which structures mental life as either improving or deteriorating. The two contrasting conditional clauses, “if you care for your mind … it will blossom and if you let the weeds take root, lasting peace of mind … will always elude you” frame the outcome as entirely dependent on the individual's conscious choices and daily effort. As a result, a neglected mind appears to be a personal failure that could have been avoided through the right kind of daily attention. This responsibility is made even more explicit in Example 3, where the imperatives never let and stand guard place responsibility directly on the individual, constructing them as solely responsible for managing their own mind and for what enters their mental space.

Through this sustained mapping, Sharma constructs the mind as a living and developing entity that can either flourish or deteriorate depending on what the individual allows into it. By positioning the reader as the gardener, the metaphor assigns the individual an active role in shaping and maintaining the mind. Just as a gardener decides what to plant, nurture, and remove, the reader is encouraged to consciously select the thoughts and influences that are allowed to enter the mind. In this way, the metaphor frames peace of mind as something that is actively developed through conscious effort and daily practice. It therefore not only presents an understanding of the nature of the mind but also implies how the individual should engage with it. At the same time, the metaphor presents the self as something that requires ongoing attention. Just as a garden gradually becomes damaged when weeds are allowed to grow, the mind is portrayed as deteriorating when it is neglected. This indicates that peace of mind is not a permanent state but something that must be continuously maintained through effort, discipline, and attention.

4.2.2 THE SELF IS A FIRE/INNER LIGHT

Whereas the garden metaphor conceptualises the mind as something that can be cultivated and developed, the second metaphor identified in the book, THE SELF IS A FIRE/INNER LIGHT, draws on the characteristics of fire and light to conceptualise the self, particularly its inner vitality, passion, and sense of purpose. Fire produces heat and light, can burn intensely or weakly, and can eventually be extinguished or rekindled. These characteristics are

systematically mapped onto different states and qualities of the self. The main cross-domain mappings identified in the metaphor are summarised in Table 2:

Table 2

Conceptual mapping for THE SELF IS A FIRE/INNER LIGHT

Source domain – FIRE/LIGHT	**Target domain - THE SELF**
Sparks of possibility	Small signs of inner potential
Flickering	A self-losing its energy and purpose
An extinguished fire	Loss of inner passion or motivation
Bright light	A vital, purposeful self
Burning desire/passion	Intense inner motivation and drive
Rekindling	Recovering one's sense of purpose
Fanning the flames	Strengthening one's potential

Like the garden metaphor, this conceptualisation is grounded in everyday experience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, metaphors are not unmotivated but are grounded in physical and cultural experience (p. 19). Fire and light are familiar to everyone as sources of warmth and energy that drive away darkness and make life possible. By projecting these properties onto the self, the metaphor makes the abstract idea of inner vitality appear concrete and recognisable rather than philosophical.

In the early chapters, the metaphor is primarily realised through expressions that portray the self as being in a state of decline. In the expression *Julian's spark of life had begun to flicker* (p. 16), the verb flicker, whose basic meaning refers to the unsteady or intermittent movement of a flame, is used metaphorically to describe Julian's declining vitality and sense of purpose. Similarly, spark, which literally denotes a small particle of fire, is mapped onto the remaining trace of his inner energy.

A similar pattern can be seen in the expression: "He saw a golden opportunity to rekindle the inner fire he had known when he was younger, a fire that had been extinguished as the Law

became less a pleasure and more a business." (p. 22). Here the co-text specifies exactly what the extinguished fire maps onto the loss of pleasure and passion in Julian's work, which had once been the source of his inner energy.

The same imagery of light and flickering recurs shortly afterwards, when Julian describes the crisis he experienced as the moment the once bright light of his life began to flicker in the winds of an out-of-balance lifestyle (p. 26). The phrase once bright light creates a contrast between Julian's past and present self, presenting his former vitality as something that has gradually faded. The passage also adds the image of winds that cause the flame to flicker, and the expression itself identifies their source as an out-of-balance lifestyle. This suggests that the weakening of the self is caused by the way a person chooses to live rather than by chance. Taken together, these passages indicate that the self is portrayed as a flame that may become weak or unstable, or even go out, but that can be rekindled under the right conditions.

As the narrative progresses, the conceptualisation of the self as a fire takes on a more instructive function. Rather than primarily representing the decline of the self, the metaphor is used to guide the reader towards restoring and strengthening their inner vitality. This shift is illustrated in Examples 4 and 5:

Example 4
Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into the flames of achievement (p. 82).

Example 5
This is the secret to kindling the inner fire that lurks within you (p. 85).

This functional shift is also reflected in the choice of verbs. Whereas flicker and extinguish present the self as passive, with the fire weakening or going out, fan, kindle, and rekindle construe the self as an active agent capable of restoring its inner fire. Example 4 illustrates this shift, as the reader is encouraged to transform "tiny, inner sparks of possibility into the flames of achievement." The expression suggests that even limited potential can be developed through individual effort. The metaphor therefore encompasses both the decline of the self and the possibility of renewal.

The metaphor highlights the idea that the self possesses an inner energy associated with vitality and purpose. This becomes particularly evident when the expressions are considered together. Although flicker and extinguish describe a loss of this energy, the surrounding expressions frame this loss as reversible through rekindle, fan, and kindle. The metaphor thus presents the self not only as containing an inner fire but also as retaining the possibility of restoring it, even when it has weakened. Vitality and purpose are consequently conceptualised not as fixed qualities that an individual either possesses or lacks, but as qualities that may remain present even when they are less visible. From this perspective, the metaphor conveys an optimistic yet demanding view of personal development, as the possibility of renewal is presented as available to the individual, while the responsibility for realising this potential is placed largely on the individual.

4.2.3 THE PAST/MIND IS A PRISON

Julian's break with his former life is described in terms of confinement and liberation, which reflects the conceptual metaphor THE PAST/MIND IS A PRISON. In this metaphor, the past does not refer to time as such, but to the past as it lives on in the mind, in the form of memories, habits and established ways of thinking. The past and the mind are therefore combined in the target domain, since it is through a person's thinking that the past continues to confine the self. The source domain is the physical experience of imprisonment, involving being trapped, chained and eventually freed, while the self takes the role of the prisoner and personal transformation is conceptualised as a process of liberation. The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 3:

Table 3

Conceptual mapping for THE PAST/MIND IS A PRISON

Source domain – PRISON	**Target domain - THE PAST AND THE MIND**
Liberation	Freedom from past-oriented thinking
A captive/prisoner	A person dominated by memories of the past
Chains	Habitual, restrictive ways of thinking

Being chained to something	Being controlled by one's former lifestyle or mindset

The word captive or prisoner, for instance, has a basic meaning related to a person who is physically imprisoned or held against their will. In the expression: “Rather than focusing on all the good in their lives and thinking of ways to make things even better, they are captives of their pasts.” (p. 53), it is applied non-literally to people who are mentally dominated by past events rather than physically confined. The prison metaphor recurs several places in the novel, portraying the self as being confined, restrained, or liberated in relation to its past and former ways of thinking:

Example 6
Though he felt entirely liberated from the stress and strain that personified his former world (p. 29).

Example 7
Rather than focusing on all the good in their lives and thinking of ways to make things even better, they are captives of their pasts (p. 53).

Example 8
When I was chained to my former lifestyle (p. 97).

Taken together, these expressions create a metaphorical scenario in which the self is portrayed as a prisoner and the past as something that keeps a person trapped. For example, example 7 presents individuals as psychologically imprisoned by memories and previous experiences. Similarly, example 8 portrays former habits and ways of thinking as physical restraints that limit freedom and independence. In contrast, example 6 introduces the possibility of freedom from this state of being trapped and presents personal transformation as a process of psychological liberation.

The repeated references to being a prisoner of one's past further reinforce the idea that attachment to former experiences prevents personal growth. Notably, the expression prisoner of your past recurs in several later chapters, and in each case it is addressed directly to the reader: You will stop being a prisoner of your past (p. 57), you have the capacity to be more

than a prisoner of your past (p. 165), and Never be a prisoner of your past (p. 180). The use of the second person and, in the last example, the imperative shifts the metaphor from describing Julian's experience to instructing the reader, in a similar way to the fire metaphor. The metaphor thus portrays the past as a force that can control and limit the self, much as a prison restricts a person's freedom. At the same time, the expressions imply that this confinement is not permanent, since the reader is presented as having the capacity to escape it. In this way, Sharma portrays personal development as a process of breaking free from old identities and restrictive patterns of thinking, a process that, as in the previous metaphors, depends primarily on the individual's own will and effort.

4.2.4 THE MIND IS A MUSCLE

Physical training provides the source domain for THE MIND IS A MUSCLE, a metaphor that conceptualises the mind as something that can be strengthened through regular exercise and weakened through neglect. As with the previous metaphors, the source domain is grounded in a familiar bodily experience, since most people know that muscles develop through repeated effort and lose their strength when they are not used. By mapping this experience onto the mind, the metaphor presents mental discipline not as an innate quality but as a skill that can be trained, in much the same way as physical fitness. The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 4:

Table 4

Conceptual mapping for THE MIND IS A MUSCLE

Source domain – MUSCLE	**Target domain - THE MIND**
Mental fitness	A well-developed, disciplined mind
A flabby muscle	An undisciplined, unfocused mind
A weak muscle	A negative, undeveloped mind
A strong muscle	A disciplined, focused mind
Training/exercising	Deliberate mental effort and practice

The metaphor becomes explicit in the following statement: “I think my mental muscles have grown a little flabby.” (p. 61). The expression mental muscles directly compares the mind to a physical muscle. The adjective flabby, which normally describes muscles that have become weak through lack of exercise, is transferred to the mind. It frames an undisciplined or unfocused mind as the result of neglect just as muscles become weaker without training, the mind also becomes weaker if it is not regularly exercised.

Another example follows on the same page: “If you want to strengthen the muscles of your arm to achieve more, you must train them. If you want to toughen up your leg muscles, you must first exert them. Similarly, your mind will do wonderful things for you if only you will let it.” (p. 61). The argument moves from the familiar and concrete example of the arm and leg muscles to the more abstract concept of the mind. The transition word similarly indicates that the same principle of physical training is applied to mental development.

The same metaphor appears again later in the book: “Weak minds lead to weak actions. A strong, disciplined mind, which anyone can cultivate through daily practice, can achieve miracles.” (p. 73). What this example adds is the use of anyone, which presents the ability to develop mental strength as universally available, regardless of a person’s starting point.

Overall, the metaphor highlights the idea that the mind can be gradually developed through consistent individual effort, just as the body becomes stronger through regular exercise. This idea is constructed step by step in the passages analysed above. The adjective flabby frames an undisciplined mind as the result of neglect, the connective similarly explicitly transfers the logic of physical training to mental development, and the pronoun anyone presents this development as available to all, regardless of their starting point. Taken together, these choices construct mental strength as something earned rather than given, and a weak mind as the outcome of insufficient training.

4.2.5 THE SPIRIT IS A WOUNDED ENTITY

“A sanctuary where his broken spirit would slowly start to heal” (p. 36). In this passage, Julian's spirit is presented as an injured body in need of recovery, which reflects the conceptual metaphor THE SPIRIT IS A WOUNDED ENTITY. The metaphor draws on the source domain of physical injury and healing to conceptualise the spirit, the abstract and non-physical part of a person, as something that can be damaged by the pressures of modern life and restored under the right conditions. The term spirit is used here because it is the word

Sharma himself uses to describe this dimension of Julian, which he also refers to as his inner core (p. 44). The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 5:

Table 5

Conceptual mapping for THE SPIRIT IS A WOUNDED ENTITY

Source domain – WOUNDED ENTITY	**Target domain - SPIRIT**
A broken body	A damaged inner spirit
A sanctuary	A place where the spirit can heal
Healing	Recovering a sense of balance and purpose
A rupture	Damage to the spirit

The metaphor is introduced in Chapter 3, where the consequences of Julian's lifestyle are described in terms of physical damage to his spirit: “The constant pressure and exhausting schedule of a world-class trial lawyer had also broken his most important-and perhaps most human- endowment: his spirit.” (p. 22). The domain of physical injury is formed by lexical elements such as broken, rupture, heal and sanctuary, as these words all belong to the concrete world of bodily experience and physical recovery. Julian, the book's protagonist, becomes the wounded patient whose spirit has been broken by the pressures of professional life, presenting his spirit as something that can be wounded and like a physical injury requires healing.

For instance, Julian is positioned as someone who has suffered a profound inner injury in the following passage: “I needed to be healed from within. My unbalanced, chaotic lifestyle left me in great distress. It was much more than a heart attack that I suffered. It was a rupture of my inner core.” (p. 44). In this metaphor, Julian’s rupture of his inner core functions as the wound, his unbalanced lifestyle as the cause of the injury, and the journey to Himalayan village of Sivana as the path towards recovery. The goal or the destination of this healing process is described as being healed from within. Just as a physical wound requires the right conditions and time to heal, the metaphor suggests that the damaged self requires the right environment, discipline and inner work to be restored.

4.2.6 THE MIND IS A CONTAINER

Another conceptual metaphor employed in the book is THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, where the source domain is a container, a physical space that can hold and protect its contents and can be filled, emptied, opened, or closed. These characteristics are mapped onto the target domain of the mind**,** allowing it to be understood as something that contains thoughts, emotions, knowledge, and potential. The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 6:

Table 6

Conceptual mapping for THE MIND IS A CONTAINER

Source domain – CONTAINER	**Target domain - THE MIND**
A treasure-trove	Hidden inner potential waiting to be discovered
A full cup	A mind closed to new ideas
An empty cup	A mind open and receptive to learning
Unlocking	Accessing hidden inner potential

The metaphor is introduced through a direct analogy Julian makes to John:" just like this cup, you seem to be full of your own ideas. And how can any more go in... until you first empty your cup?" (p. 45). Here the cup functions as John's mind, while its fullness represents an attachment to existing ways of thinking that prevents anything new from entering. Emptying the cup symbolises becoming open to new ideas and knowledge.

The unlocking image recurs throughout the book, forming a consistent pattern: "unlock the mental and physical reserves that you never thought you had." (p. 110), and "it is simply a matter of unlocking these treasures and applying them for some common good." (p. 185). In each case the individual serves as the one holding the key, and the mind as the locked space containing everything they need. The obstacle preventing the individual from reaching their potential is presented as internal rather than external; what is needed is already inside them, waiting to be unlocked.

The analysis above shows that the container domain structures the mind as a bounded space that holds hidden contents of great value. Within this space, two complementary processes are emphasised. On the one hand, the mind must be emptied of existing ideas in order to

make room for new knowledge, as illustrated by the image of the full cup (p. 45). On the other hand, the valuable contents that are already present must be accessed, which is expressed through the repeated image of unlocking (pp. 110, 185). In both cases, the individual, whether Julian, John or the reader, is positioned as the owner of the container, responsible for managing what goes in, emptying what no longer serves them, and unlocking what lies within. The metaphor thus suggests that the resources needed for change are already contained within the mind and only need to be released.

4.2.7 PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS AN AWAKENING/REBIRTH

This conceptual metaphor presents personal transformation not as a gradual process of change, but as a sudden shift from a state of unconsciousness or inactivity to one of awareness and vitality. The source domain is waking from sleep, a universal bodily experience, while the target domain is personal transformation. By mapping the experience of waking up onto personal growth, Sharma presents transformation as a moment of becoming fully aware of one's potential. The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 7:

Table 7

Conceptual Mapping for PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS AN AWAKENING/REBIRTH

Source domain – AWAKENING/REBIRTH	**Target domain – PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**
Sleep/unconsciousness	Living without awareness or purpose
The ordinary	Life lived below one’s potential
A cocoon	A limited, ordinary existence
Emerging from a cocoon	Breaking free into a new way of living
Waking up	The moment of personal transformation
Being born/reborn	Becoming an entirely new person
The extraordinary	A fully awakened, purposeful existence

The metaphor is introduced visually before it is stated explicitly. When John sees Julian for the first time after his transformation, he observes: “Gone was the elderly appearance and the

morbid expression that had become his personal trademark." (p. 21). The words ghost-like and lifeless construct the pre-transformation self as something barely alive, not yet fully awake to its own existence. Julian before his transformation is not simply unhappy, he is described as if only partially living, which sets up the awakening frame that follows.

This is made explicit when John reflects on his own experience of listening to Julian: "I knew my life would never be the same and that something marvellous, maybe even miraculous was about to happen to me. It was an amazing awakening." (p. 28). The word awakening has a basic meaning related to the act of waking from sleep. Applied here to personal transformation, it maps the sudden shift from unconsciousness to consciousness directly onto the experience of changing one's life, suggesting that before transformation the self was in a kind of sleep, unaware of its own potential.

The rebirth dimension is most vividly captured through the expression: "Julian slowly ventured out of the cocoon of the ordinary and began to explore the realm of the extraordinary." (p. 28). A cocoon is a protective covering in which an insect undergoes a process of transformation before emerging in a new form. This process is mapped onto the idea of personal rebirth, where the self that emerges is no longer the same as before. In the book, the cocoon of the ordinary represents a limited way of living before transformation, while venturing out of the cocoon symbolises the moment of rebirth into a new and more meaningful way of life.

What this metaphor highlights is the idea that transformation is available to everyone, because the potential for it already exists within the individual and is simply waiting to be awakened. This is expressed most clearly when Julian comes to understand the treasure-trove of potential sleeping within his own mind, waiting to be awakened and used for higher purposes (p. 38). Here, potential is not something that has to be acquired from outside, but something that is already present in a dormant state. The metaphor also assigns distinct roles to the characters. Julian, the book's protagonist, becomes the sleeper who has awakened, while John, and by extension the reader, are positioned as people on the verge of their own awakening. This is reflected in John's description of listening to Julian as an amazing awakening (p. 28), which suggests that encountering Julian's story is enough to set the process of transformation in motion. As with the container metaphor, the source of change is thereby located inside the individual, and although awakening is presented as available to everyone, it is the individual who must allow it to take place.

4.2.8 PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY

Among the conceptual metaphors identified in the book, PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY plays a particularly central role. In this metaphor, the source domain of physical travel, moving along a path towards a destination, is used to structure the abstract process of personal change and self-development. Through this mapping, the individual undergoing change is understood as a traveller, while the goals of transformation are understood as a destination that is reached gradually. As a result, personal change is presented not as a single event, but as a process that requires direction and continued effort over time. The cross-domain mappings are summarised in Table 8:

Table 8

Conceptual mapping for PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY

Source domain – JOURNEY	**Target domain – PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**
The traveller	The individual undergoing transformation
The path	The process of personal development
An inner compass	Intuition guiding one's choices
The destination	The goal of transformation
The road less travelled	Choosing personal growth over comfort
Distance to travel	Progress yet to be made
Ships without rudders	People without purpose or direction
A lighthouse	A clear sense of purpose guiding the journey
Rough seas	The challenges of life
Crashing against rocks	The consequences of a purposeless life

What is particularly notable about this metaphor is that it operates on two levels simultaneously in the book. On the narrative level, Julian literally travels to India and the Himalayas. On the metaphorical level, this physical journey mirrors and enables his inner transformation. As the narrator observes: "Julian told me that his journey to India was more than a simple vacation to ease an overworked mind. He described his time in this far-away

land as a personal odyssey of the self." (p. 23). The literal and metaphorical journey are deliberately woven together, making PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY not merely a narrative device but something that shapes the whole narrative.

This impulse for change is consistently framed as coming from within rather than from external pressure: "It was like I had received a command from within, an inner instruction telling me that I was to begin a spiritual voyage." (p. 23). A similar internal guidance appears in the expression: "it was like I had some sort of inner compass, nudging me gently towards my destination." (p. 28). This is a particularly interesting mapping because it suggests the guide for this journey is not external but located within the self. Julian later tells John: "I too have walked this path, my friend." (p. 26) positioning transformation as a shared human route rather than a unique experience, which implicitly invites the reader to see themselves as a fellow traveller. A moral dimension is added when Julian urges John to "take the road less travelled" (p. 68) and reflects that he still has "a distance to travel on the road to mental mastery." (p. 73). Those examples together suggest that personal growth requires both courage and ongoing effort rather than a single decisive act.

This last point leads naturally to the extension of the journey metaphor through the image of the lighthouse. While the journey metaphor establishes that transformation involves movement along a path, the lighthouse adds a crucial dimension, namely for a clear sense of purpose to guide that movement. Julian introduces this explicitly by stating that: "Clearly defined priorities and goals for every aspect of your life will serve a role similar to that played by a lighthouse, offering you guidance and refuge when the seas become rough." (p. 83). Here the individual's life purpose is like a lighthouse, a light in a tower that guides ships safely through dangerous water. Without a purpose, people are floating like ships without rudders and weary souls searching for a lighthouse that will keep them from crashing against the rocky shores (p. 83).

The lighthouse extends the journey metaphor by shifting the setting from land to sea. Through this further development of the journey imagery, personal transformation is no longer presented only as travelling along a path but also as navigating uncertain surroundings in which guidance becomes important. Unlike a road, where it is possible to stop or change direction, the sea is as a place where the traveller risks becoming lost or crashing without a lighthouse to guide the way. As a result, a life without a clear purpose is portrayed as more than simply unfulfilling, it is presented as something that can lead a person astray. John later

confirms this when he says: “Through the symbol of the lighthouse, I had learned of the over-riding importance of a definite purpose in life and the effectiveness of goal setting.” (p. 154). Additional examples of this metaphor can be found in the Appendix.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has shown that in The monk who sold his Ferrari, Robin Sharma constructs the self and personal transformation through a coherent set of conceptual metaphors covered above. Sharma's language is not simply motivational or inspiring in a neutral sense; it actively constructs a particular view about who or what the self is, what may be wrong with it, and who is responsible for fixing it. As Dolby (2005) argues, the authors of self-help books select certain elements of the prevailing worldview to highlight and reinforce, presenting them as the natural solution to the reader’s problems (p. 11), and this is precisely what Sharma’s metaphorical language does throughout the book.

Regarding the first research question, the analysis showed that Sharma constructs the self through six conceptual metaphors, which present the mind as a garden, a muscle and a container, the self as a fire, the past as a prison and the spirit as a wounded entity. Together, these metaphors construct an image of the self as holding great inner potential that must be actively developed, protected or released by the individual. Regarding the second research question, the analysis demonstrates that personal transformation is conceptualised in two complementary ways. On the one hand, transformation is presented as the emergence of previously dormant potential into conscious awareness, on the other, it is represented as a gradual process of movement towards a desired state. These conceptualisations highlight different dimensions of the same transformative process, with the former emphasising awareness and realisation, and the latter emphasising gradual development and progression. Taken together, they present personal transformation as an active and ongoing process centred on self-discipline, personal responsible and the cultivation of inner potential.

These findings can also be related to the understanding of the self outlined in Section 2.1. As Hards et al. (2024) note, the self encompasses not only how individuals perceive themselves in the present but also who they imagine they may become in the future (pp. 3, 9). This future-oriented aspect of the self is particularly relevant to self-help literature. In The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari, Sharma repeatedly addresses both the reader’s current sense of self

and the person they have the potential to become. The findings of the present study reflect this future-oriented understanding of the self, as the metaphors analysed present personal development in terms of a movement from the reader's present state towards a more developed version of the self. The book encourages readers to reflect on who they are, question their current ways of living, and work towards becoming a better version of themselves.

The findings of this study support Moser's (2007) argument that abstract aspects of the self must be expressed metaphorically to be understood and communicated (p. 156). The monk who sold his Ferrari by Robin Sharma provides a good example of this phenomenon. The book centres on abstract concepts such as purpose, willpower, identity, and human potential, which are the same kinds of self-related concepts discussed by Moser (2007**).** As the analysis has shown, each of these concepts is made concrete through a familiar source domain, such as a garden, a fire or a journey, which confirms the important role metaphors play in helping people understand and express abstract aspects of the self.

However, the metaphors in the book do not only make abstract concepts easier to understand; they also shape how these concepts are understood. What emerges from previous studies of self-help literature is that self-help literature does not only describe concepts such as success or personal growth, but also actively constructs them as something personal and achievable. Through both conceptual framing and motivational language, self-help texts persuade readers that change begins and ends with the individual**.** The findings of the present study are in line with this body of research**,** (e.g., Bhat, 2024; Binkley, 2024; Łącka-Badura, 2016) as Robin Sharma similarly relies on conceptual metaphors as a rhetorical strategy to convey his message and persuade readers to take active responsibility for transforming their own lives. This is particularly evident in the instructions addressed directly to the reader, such as to *stand guard at the gateway of your mind* (p. 84), to *fan* the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into the flames of achievement (p. 82) and to *never be a prisoner of your past* (p. 180). In these expressions, each metaphor is turned into a task that the individual is expected to carry out.

Turning to the third research question**,** what is striking about these metaphors is the consistency of their underlying logic. In every case, the self is constructed as something that holds enormous potential, like a fertile garden waiting to blossom, an inner fire waiting to be rekindled, a treasure-trove of ability waiting to be unlocked, a spirit capable of healing, a

sleeper waiting to awaken. At no point do the metaphors present social structures, external circumstances, or other outside influences as part of the solution. As Rimke (2020) argues, self-help discourse characteristically promotes an individual deficit model in which personal problems are located within the self rather than within society, encouraging readers to locate flaws within themselves rather than deficits in their social or material conditions (p. 40). The metaphors analysed in this study reinforce this perspective by consistently presenting personal transformation as something that must come from within the individual.

Equally important, however, is what these metaphors leave out. According to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) notion of highlighting and hiding, conceptual metaphors emphasise certain aspects of a concept while drawing attention away from others (p. 10). This pattern can be seen in the metaphors identified in the present study. By presenting the mind as a garden to be cultivated or a muscle to be strengthened, the metaphors emphasise personal agency, discipline, and self-improvement, while giving less attention to the influence of biological, social, or environmental factors. Likewise, portraying the past as a prison highlights the importance of breaking free from previous experiences, while leaving less room for the possibility that the past can also contribute to identity, resilience, or learning. This does not mean that the metaphors themselves are inherently misleading. Rather, Sharma presents these metaphors as if they were simply true, rather than acknowledging that they represent only one possible way of understanding the self. Sharma does not recognise that some readers may face social or structural barriers that cannot simply be overcome through individual effort. Instead, the metaphors are presented as general truths about how the mind and the self work. This aligns with Douglas's (1979) early observation that self-help literature frames personal difficulties such as anxiety, insecurity, and an inability to cope as shortcomings to be corrected through changes in the individual's own attitude and behaviour, with little reference to the conditions that produced those difficulties in the first place (pp. 51-52).

This is not to suggest that Sharma's use of these metaphors is without value, nor that the self-discipline and inner reflection his language encourages are without merit for many readers. Rather, the argument of this study is that the metaphors do a great deal of ideological work precisely because they can be effective and engaging. By making personal transformation feel as natural, achievable and universally available as tending a garden or walking a path, Sharma's language quietly closes off other ways of understanding why people struggle and

what kind of help they might need, ultimately framing the individual as both the source of the problem and the primary solution.

The study contributes to the field of language and communication by showing how conceptual metaphors in Robin Sharma's The monk who sold his Ferrari shape the way the self and personal transformation are presented to readers. Through a close analysis of recurring metaphors, it shows how familiar experiences are used to present the self as holding inner potential and transformation as an internal process. In relation to research on self-help literature, the study offers a detailed analysis of the metaphorical language of one of the best-selling self-help books, whose metaphors have received little scholarly attention. It also shows how the focus on the individual described in earlier research on self-help literature is expressed through the metaphors of the book.

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis is limited to a textual reading of conceptual metaphors and does not include any empirical investigation of how real readers interpret or respond to Sharma's language. Claims about what the metaphors imply for the reader are therefore based on the internal logic of the text rather than on evidence from actual readers. Furthermore, the metaphors selected for analysis were chosen because they were the most frequent and most relevant to the study's research questions, meaning that other metaphorical patterns present in the book have not been captured. Building on these limitations, future research could investigate how readers interpret and respond to the conceptual metaphors identified in this study through reader interviews or surveys. Such research could explore whether and how readers internalise the messages communicated through Sharma's metaphorical language.

In conclusion, this study has shown that Sharma uses conceptual metaphors to present the self as something that can be cultivated, strengthened, healed, awakened, or liberated through individual effort. While these metaphors make abstract ideas about the self more accessible and engaging, they also present a view of personal change in which individual effort and self-discipline are the primary means through which change is achieved, leaving limited room for social, environmental, or structural explanations of why people struggle and what kinds of support they might need.

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Appendix

Metaphorical Expressions corresponding to each Conceptual Metaphor

THE MIND IS A GARDEN	
If you care for your mind, if you nurture it and if you cultivate it just like a fertile, rich garden, it will blossom far beyond your expectations. But if you let the weeds take root, lasting peace of mind and deep inner harmony will always elude you.	Chapter 7, p. 51
As a matter of fact, most good gardeners guard their gardens like proud soldiers and make certain that no contamination ever enters.	Chapter 7, p. 51
Yet look at the toxic waste that most people put into the fertile garden of their minds every single day: the worries and anxieties, the fretting about the past, the brooding over the future and those self-created fears that wreak havoc within your inner world.	Chapter 7, p. 52
I have very little control over the thoughts that are floating around the garden of my mind," I said with sincerity.	Chapter 7, p. 61
Weak minds lead to weak actions. A strong, disciplined mind, which anyone can cultivate through daily practice, can achieve miracles.	Chapter 7, p. 73
If it was the virtue of discipline they wished to cultivate within their lives they would picture themselves getting up at dawn, performing their rigorous physical regimen without fail and spending days in silence to enhance their willpower.	Chapter 7, p. 76
Cultivate your mind - it will blossom beyond your expectation.	Chapter 7, p. 81
Never let the weeds of impure thought and action take the garden of your mind. Stand guard at the gateway of your mind. Keep it healthy and strong— it will work miracles in your life if you will only let it.	Chapter 7, p. 84
It is willpower that allows you to get up at five in the morning to cultivate your mind through meditation, or to feed your spirit by a walk in the woods when a cozy bed beckons you on a cold winter's day.	Chapter 10, p. 156

THE SELF IS A FIRE/INNER LIGHT	
Simply put, Julian's spark of life had begun to flicker.	Chapter 1, p. 16
When given the ultimatum by his doctor either to give up the Law or give up his life, he said he sawa golden opportunity to rekindle the inner fire he had knownwhen he was younger, a fire that had been extinguished as the Law became less a pleasure and more a business.	Chapter 3, p. 22
He revealed, with great emotion, his inner turmoil and the crisis of spirit he had experienced when the once bright light of his life.	Chapter 3, p. 26

began to flicker in the winds of an out-of-balance lifestyle.	
We all come from the same universal source. However, the ones who do more than just exist, the ones who fan the flames of their human potential and truly savor the magical dance of life do different things than those whose lives are ordinary.	Chapter 7, p. 52
Those who rise with the sun all have one thing in common." "Insanity?" "Very funny. No, they all have a purpose that fans the flames of their inner potential.	Chapter 7, p. 66
Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into the flames of achievement.	Chapter 8, p. 82
Lasting happiness comes from steadily working to accomplish your goals and advancing confidently in the direction of your life's purpose. This is the secret to kindling the inner fire that lurks within you.	Chapter 8, p. 85
A burning sense of passion is the most potent fuel for your dreams. Here, in our society we have lost our passion.	Chapter 8, p. 101
Reclaim the joy of waking up every morning, full of energy and exhilaration. Breathe the fire of passion into all that you do. You will quickly reap great material, as well as spiritual, rewards.	Chapter 8, p. 101

THE PAST/MIND IS A PRISON	
Though he felt entirely liberated from the stress and strain that personified his former world, he did wonder whether he could really spend the rest of his days without the intellectual challenge that the legal profession had offered him since he left Harvard Law School.	Chapter 3, p. 29
Rather than focusing on all the good in their lives and thinking of ways to make things even better, they are captives of their pasts.	Chapter 7, p. 53
You will stop being a prisoner of your past.	Chapter 7, p. 57
When I was chained to my former lifestyle, one of my main problems was that I took life too seriously.	Chapter 8, p. 97
Similarly, you have the capacity to be more than a prisoner of your past.	Chapter 10, p. 165
Never be a prisoner of your past.	Chapter 11, p. 180

THE MIND IS A MUSCLE	
I could see that he had made many changes to his former lifestyle, but it was obvious that the starting point of his magnificent transformation was mental fitness.	Chapter 7, p. 61
I think my mental muscles have grown a little flabby.	Chapter 7, p. 61

this is because you have not cared for your mind and taken the time to train it to focus on the good.	Chapter 7, p. 61
"Are you saying that if I don't exercise my mind it will grow weak?"	Chapter 7, p. 61
"Yes. Look at it this way. If you want to strengthen the muscles of your arm to achieve more, you must train them. If you want to toughen up your leg muscles, you must first exert them. Similarly, your mind will do wonderful things for you if only you will let it.	Chapter 7, p. 61
Weak minds lead to weak actions. A strong, disciplined mind, which anyone can cultivate through daily practice, can achieve miracles.	Chapter 7, p. 73

THE SPIRIT IS A WOUNDED ENTITY	
The constant pressure and exhausting schedule of a world-class trial lawyer had also broken his most important—and perhaps most human—endowment: his spirit.	Chapter 3, p. 22
A sanctuary where his broken spirit would slowly start to heal.	Chapter 4, p. 36
I needed to be healed from within. My unbalanced, chaotic lifestyle left me in great distress. It was much more than a heart attack that I suffered. It was a rupture of my inner core.	Chapter 6, p. 44

THE MIND IS A CONTAINER	
However, just like this cup, you seem to be full of your own ideas. And how can any more go in... until you first empty your cup.	Chapter 6, p. 45
When you push beyond your limits, just as you did in this little demonstration, you unlock mental and physical reserves that you never thought you had."	Chapter 9, p. 110
It is simply a matter of unlocking these treasures and applying them for some common good," noted Julian.	Chapter 12, p. 185

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS AN AWAKENING/REBIRTH	
I was dazzled by his incredible transformation. Gone was the ghost-like complexion, the sickly cough and the lifeless eyes of my former colleague. Gone was the elderly appearance and the morbid expression that had become his personal trademark.	Chapter 2, p. 21
It was here, high above the humanity below, that Julian slowly ventured out of the cocoon of the ordinary and began to explore the realm of the extraordinary.	Chapter 3, p. 28

I knew my life would never be the same and that something marvellous, maybe even miraculous, was about to happen to me. It was an amazing awakening.	Chapter 3, p. 28
As the weeks slipped into months, he came to understand the treasure-trove of potential sleeping within his own mind, waiting to be awakened and used for higher purposes.	Chapter 4, p. 38
Julian said that the first indications of his personal expansion came after only three weeks in Sivana. He started noticing the beauty in the most ordinary of thing.	Chapter 5, p. 39

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IS A JOURNEY	
He described his time in this far-away land as a "personal odyssey of the self".	Chapter 3, p. 23
Who better than another former hotshot lawyer who, through his own spiritual odyssey, had found a better way of living to teach him the secrets of creating a life of more balance, enchantment and delight?	Chapter 3, p. 26
"I don't mean to sound too off-the-wall, John, but it was like I had received a command from within, an inner instruction telling me that I was to begin a spiritual voyage to rekindle the spark that I had lost," said Julian.	Chapter 3, p. 23
"I too have walked this path, my friend. I too have felt the pain you have felt.	Chapter 3, p. 26
But to reach this destination, you must not get hung up on the outcome. Instead, enjoy the process of personal expansion and growth.	Chapter 7, p. 62
Take the road less travelled. Most people live within the confines of their comfort zone.	Chapter 7, p. 68
I still have a distance to travel on the road to mental mastery and responsibility over the thoughts that fill my mind.	Chapter 7, p. 73
Negativity pervades it and many in our society are floating like ships without rudders, weary souls searching for a lighthouse that will keep them from crashing against the rocky shores.	Chapter 8, p. 83
I learned from Julian that all highly developed, fully actualized people understand the importance of exploring their talents, uncovering their personal purpose and then applying their human gifts in the direction of his calling.	Chapter 8, p. 88
You see, John, anyone can revolutionize their lives once they revolutionize the direction in which they are moving. But if you don't even know where you are going, how will you ever know when you get there?	Chapter 8, p. 149
Through the symbol of the lighthouse, I had learned of the over-riding importance of a definite purpose in life and the effectiveness of goal-setting.	Chapter 10, p. 154