Between Bomb and Breath (The Practice of Sanctuary)

a report from Inner Safety Project

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What does it mean to feel safe in a world that is anything but?

This report marks an initial foray into the Inner Safety Project's ongoing exploration of inner safety, an emergent framing of psychosocial care rooted in the lived realities of trauma and the pursuit of healing.

In these pages, we center the voices of those most intimately acquainted with the rupture of safety: individuals who have endured the traumatic violence of war, and practitioners and scholars whose work is devoted to understanding what safety means in its absence.

Rather than offering neat solutions, clear positions, or definitive answers, this piece creates space for dialogue, for a conversation between those who have survived unspeakable harms and those who have spent their lives studying the pathways to recovery. Sometimes, of course, these roles converge in a single person.

Drawing on reflections that span refugee camps in Southwest Asia, healing circles in Berlin, and academic communities in the United States, we trace the contours of **subjectively felt inner safety** across geographies, professions, and identities. We examine not only what safety feels like, but how it emerges—bodily, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually—even in the absence of material stability. In doing so, we ask: What are the raw ingredients of safety? What internal, interpersonal, and cultural resources allow people to reclaim a sense of security in the face of overwhelming danger?

This report does not aim to define inner safety conclusively. Instead, it invites conversation. It offers a palette for how we might think, research, and practice differently when it comes to trauma, healing, and human dignity in the presence and aftermath of violence.

Divine Anchors

"**Al-Hamdullilah. Thanks goes to God**." Those were the first reflections from Amjad, a Syrian poet and father of four living in Al-Za'atri Refugee Camp in Jordan. Sitting in his modest space—constructed from an array of tin, plastic, tarp, and prefab containers, Amjad's instinct toward gratitude feels dissonant yet important. Safety, he says, is fleeting, sometimes entirely absent, and yet it is the thread that holds his hope intact. He says the last time he felt truly safe was back in Syria; when dawn broke and he could return to a home that was his, surrounded by familiar streets and the warmth of a community where he felt he truly belonged. Though war forced him to flee, Amjad was fortunate to seek refuge in Jordan with his family, carrying a piece of that safety with him on his journey towards the unknown.

Rowda, a psychologist and community healer, knows all too well the fleeting nature of felt safety. She describes her experiences navigating the streets of Mogadishu, where every step carries the weight of uncertainty and the lurking possibility of something really bad. She comforts herself by saying, "**When I trust in Qadr—that whatever happens is Allah's will—I find that my shoulders lighten**," she shares. Rowda notes that fear still lingers in her body, visiting her periodically as she walks those known streets, holding tight to her faith in Divine will.

For Madlene, a Syrian visual artist now living in Germany, safety is something she strives to cultivate internally. "**I tied my sense of security to external things—residency papers, jobs. But when I realized safety must come from within, my life changed,**" she reflects. Her journey involved confronting deep fears, challenging the systems she was raised in, and building a new foundation: "**true safety came when I embraced my imperfections and trusted life again**." Madlene knows how important family and community are, especially in the Arab world where parental expectations loom large. For Madlene, a search for safety within herself naturally required offering safety and comfort to others in similar circumstances.

Suparna, an interdisciplinary researcher and writer, agrees that social others are crucial in our deeply personal construction of safety. For her, true safety comes through connection. She remembers the feeling of relief that washed over her when she knew her children were safe and she could rely on safe others to support her as a parent: "**My back pain eased, my shoulders loosened, breathing slowed. It was like my body trusted again**," she recounts, highlighting how relational safety can restore the body's sense of calm, and how important it is to have support from those around us especially when we ourselves are not feeling safe.

Alina, a child trauma therapist, grew up in a place where she never had to glance over her shoulder or question the intentions of those around her. Today, her entire career is dedicated to helping children who face that kind of uncertainty she never felt, and experiences far worse. She believes that one of the ways safety can reveal itself is through the small yet significant moments of a child's laughter; uninhibited, full of abandon. "**When a child laughs with their belly exposed, they are showing you they feel safe**," she explains. The key for a child lies in the presence of a nurturing caregiver, an essential foundation for cultivating inner safety amidst external chaos. Without the grounding support of a caregiver, true internal safety, or a compass for knowing internal safety, is difficult to establish.

Bilal, a young Palestinian man from Lebanon who was studying abroad and returned home shortly before the escalation of violence and aerial bombardments in 2024, recalls experiencing safety in unlikely moments. He remembers a recent hike in the cedar forests of Tannourine, where the stillness of nature enveloped him despite the distant hum of fighter jets and drones above. "**It was paradoxical,**" he says, "**but the quiet felt louder than the chaos.**" He also talks about a pasta-making session with friends during the early days of the war in Lebanon: "t**he kitchen was small, the war was raging, but my stomach felt light, and for a moment, I forgot everything**." He found himself among others who shared the same fears and anxieties, all gathered in a single room. In that moment, they took comfort in a simple act that offered a brief escape from their harsh reality. It was a shared sense of safety, born from warmth and quiet solidarity, providing temporary relief from the storm surrounding them.

Nancy, a clinical psychologist, professor, and psychophysiology researcher, echoes Bilal's paradox: "**In reality, the world is not particularly safe, but there's something about the vastness of places, like standing by the ocean, that puts my place in the world into perspective. That feels strangely reassuring and comforting.**"

For Idris, a psychotherapist specializing in faith-integrated therapies, a profound sense of safety emerged during The Troubles in Northern Ireland, when he found himself at an IRA barricade with no clear way forward. In that moment, he recalls, his heart felt as light as a feather. He was overcome by sakina (a divine tranquility) that seemed to move his feet of their own accord, guiding him to safety without his knowing where that safety lay. He felt protected, held, and enveloped by a peace unlike anything he had ever known. "**I had the ability to enter that space I call the Qalb—the heart**," he explains. "**It's an inner space, almost like returning to the womb.**" For Idris, inner safety lived deep within the chest: a space beyond intellect and logic, filled instead with the profound and unshakable sense of a divine presence.

Relational Refuge, Relational Practice

Alina teaches parents and children to use their imagination to create an inner safe world even when the bombs fall. While such an exercise cannot ensure their physical safety, it offers a fleeting moment of safer in the midst of the most terrifying experiences of their lives.

"**Let's say that there's a bombing happening, and both the child and parents are very scared. We have trained parents to basically hold their children close and say, let's imagine the sea. How was the sound of the sea? Imagine lightness and darkness. What's the sound of the sea? Where is the sun? Here, here, here (pointing to her chest). The sun is hot, right? How happy were we at the sea?**"

Idris agrees that sometimes no matter what we do we might never be safe, and that's the sour reality that we have to swallow even if we are often taught to believe that we will be fine no matter what, but in reality this is a promise we cannot keep, so alternatively "**all you can do is dissociate, in a way, from the body and the emotions, and you go into a place which is beyond all of that, and which is the essence of yourself**." In moments of profound uncertainty, when we have no control over whether we stay in this world or depart, wisdom lies in turning our attention inward to a world that we have tried to build within ourselves; a world that would feel safe, familiar and gentle, and ready to meet us where we are at, even if wildly dissonant from external circumstances.

Suparna finds this ability in the realm of relationships, where the presence of others can conjure a sense of calm, co-regulating. That's what Bilal experienced when he was with a group of friends who all were living the same fear, the same danger: "**I think what instilled safety was all of the shared experience of the lack of safety. So we know what it's like not to be safe. It's also scary when you're unsafe alone. But for some reason, the comfort level increases when you're unsafe with other people**."

Nancy takes these insights further into the physiological dimension of connection, recalling controlled experiments that show how simply holding another person's hand when facing a potential shock reduces the intensity of the body's stress response. In this way, the presence of another, be it a loved one or even a stranger, becomes a subtle yet powerful cue that eases our anticipation of harm, reminding us that we are, in some measure, safer together.

By no means is safety a guarantee or promise. Is it a practice, then? Perhaps it is an ongoing process of conjuring calm amid chaos, residing in the spaces we create within ourselves and the bonds we form with others.

Whether through imagination, connection with the divine, shared acknowledgement of danger, or the simple presence of a loved one, it seems safety is both deeply personal and inherently relational. Though external circumstances may remain uncontrollable, inner safety sits within, in connection, in finding refuge within ourselves and with others, all while knowing that the outside world can still be terrifying.

Between surrender and action

The majority of the world's population identifies as part of a religious community. Most people believe in a divine or higher power, and it is imperative to bring into conversation the role of that sensed power or force in abetting a feeling of inner safety. Faith is often described as the anchor that steadies people through their darkest moments, offering a sense of certainty when the world around them is engulfed in uncertainty. For so many, the only unwavering Truth is the divine, the Creator, God.

Amjad speaks softly yet firmly as he explains how faith anchors him amidst the uncertainty of refugee life: "**I don't stress myself out thinking about everything. I know that one should strive and put in the effort, but also have complete conviction—and achieving that level of certainty is not easy—that everything happens for a reason, that there is a divine plan, and God's choices for us are better than our choices for ourselves**." In his small home at Al-Za'atri camp, he has built whatever sense of safety he has on this conviction. It is not the fragile walls of his tent or his residency papers that offer him safety, but the belief that he is in the hands of something greater, and no matter what he does, if God wills it to be, then it shall be. In Amjad's estimation, there is no point in constantly and tirelessly fighting your reality, even if it is the opposite of what you would have wanted for yourself. To him, the choice has been made by the Creator, and that gives him the solace he needs to keep going.

Idris, whose career focuses largely on integrating Islamic conceptions of the self into modern psychotherapy practice, echoes this by saying, "**I always think of the prayer of Yunus, 'La ilaha illa anta subhanaka inni kuntu min alzalimin', 'There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers**.' **It's something that also relates to and induces this feeling of knowing that even if you are in the deepest recess of hell, the Qudos, the power of Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta-A'la is always there, and you are never alone.**" This surrender to the Divine will mirrors Amjad's reliance on a higher plan, underscoring how faith transforms fear into contentment, رضا in Arabic.

The sense of a higher purpose and will was recalled by most folks with whom we entered into conversation. Rowda too finds echoes of this in her work as a peacebuilder , where every day feels fraught with small uncertainties held by an absolute certainty in God. She notes that "**the minute you internalise and you put your trust in God, it helps you to feel safe. Even if there is danger coming your way, you believe something greater than that might happen.**"

Like Rowda, Bilal saw firsthand how faith became the glue that held his parents and community together during the war in Lebanon. He himself tasted that divine presence when he was with his cousin walking in the forest and they paused to pray. **“When we were praying, that moment of just standing there, we both finished our final prostration and we had a weird, scary silence moment at the beginning where it was way too quiet, which I guess we both felt it.**”

This sense of contentment, of divine will, of certainty of the beyond is not universal. It is not shared by every believer in every moment, and it is fraught with pressures and norms that can shape how comfortable folks are expressing moments of unsafety, when that presence is not felt or fails to bring calm. For Madlene, the spiritual elements of certainty have been less straightforward. She explained how times of hardship often present a fork in the road: “**some people, when safety is stripped away, turn towards God. Others, feeling life is unfair, lose faith in justice altogether. Personally, I lost my faith for a while, but my healing journey brought me back. I regained my belief in God and in the justice of life. Today, my relationship with God is stronger than ever**.”

Alina’s work underscores Madlene’s experience, showing how a chronic lack of safety can drive people in one of two directions: closer to an understanding of the divine or further away. For Madlene, finding her way back to faith was transformative: “**there is a vast difference between my life before and after this awakening,**” she says, describing how belief has given her the strength to make sense of her narrative. Folks’ relationship with God or the Divine or spirituality may be fraught in times of pain, and in instances the struggle –for many–can feel almost to be with the divine directly.

"**In the Bible, there's a whole chapter that focuses on Jacob, who wrestled with God in the desert. And the fact that it's important to wrestle with God in these moments,**" says Alina. This relationship with the divine is unlike any other. It shapes not only worldview but also the choices we make as we navigate present and future. It begs profound questions about the role, timing, and likelihood of justice, and informs, in various ways, the choices people make about how to interact with risk, danger, and possibility. Alina often wonders: "**Am I going to try to create my own justice? Am I going to try to create my own meaning? Or do I just realize that all of this is in God's plan? Do I focus on prayer and closeness to God or do I focus on daily survival? Do I just stay in my house and pray or do I flee away?**"

These questions reveal the delicate balance between surrender and action, between trusting in a cosmic or divine providence and taking responsibility for one's journey, it is in the tension between these choices that faith truly takes form, guiding how we live, survive, and find meaning in trials.

The body knows, even if you do not

The body often speaks in ways words cannot capture, or maybe even before words can start to form. It communicates through its own channels, conveying messages of tension, discomfort, comfort, and safety. Bilal and Suparna both described the experience of tense shoulders that begged for relief when they were not feeling safe, and which loosened when that relief finally arrived. Meanwhile, Alina, Madlene, Rowda, and Nancy felt safety in the slow, synchronized rhythm of their breaths. Alina noted: "**I could really breathe in deep to feel the bottom of my lungs. You feel your pupils aren't dilated, you feel that you can really take in everything around you out of curiosity and not out of fear, and just the whole feeling that every cell in your body is open to the world, and not already to the brim of overwhelm from fight or flight**."

Amjad, on the other hand, felt completely disconnected from his body after fleeing the war. Then, the body provided little resource for safety-making. Even long after he was safe from the danger of the falling bombs, a sense of disconnection persisted. Still, his body, ever intuitive, sent him subtle yet insistent signals, urging him to tend to himself and regain a sense of safety: "**There were severe warnings from our minds, irrational responses, and our bodies constantly wore out without us doing anything. Blood pressure and heartbeats increased without any reason—that was fear, that was anxiety**." Truly, for those who've endured chronic stress and trauma, even the smallest shift in their surroundings can trigger alarm in mind and body. A subtle change in a parent's mood, an odd noise on the street, or a new face appearing at the door may all register as potential threats, urging the body to remain on high alert. "**Your body is very much a better-safe-than-sorry kind of mechanism**," explains Nancy, as survivors learn that there's no room for letting one's guard down, no matter how small or seemingly harmless the stimulus might be. Amjad is a living example of how the body can be conditioned to remain constantly on alert for potential threats. He feels he cannot afford any slip, knowing that his family depends on his survival for their own safety.

This vigilance, however, isn't limited to scanning the horizon for obvious danger. As Alina notes, "**even the ways in which children pick at their nails**" are telling. It's not just a nervous habit; it's a physical shrinking of oneself, a way of taking up less space because feeling "big" in the world doesn't feel safe. This response isn't about cultural norms—Alina points out that in the Arab contexts she works in, it's not considered natural or expected to remain so small. Yet chronic trauma teaches survivors, including children, to be perpetually wary. They lose the baseline assumption that adults are safe and trustworthy, while children raised without toxic stress often never think twice about the grown-ups around them, assuming support rather than harm. This relentless watchfulness, while adaptive in the short term, takes its toll in the longer term.

Bilal illustrates this heightened need for safety through subtle behaviors, such as choosing a seat with his back to the wall in restaurants so he can survey his surroundings, or taking the steering wheel from friends when trust feels uncertain. "**It's very hard to trust people when you're constantly anxious, or constantly on your toes, or constantly feeling unsafe**." Without the resource of predictability, the body cannot ease into the quieter work of resilience-building; instead, every ounce of energy goes into bracing for the next emergency.

Nancy elaborates that safety shows up in our bodies in ways that are both subtle and profound. It serves two essential roles: providing us the space to rest and recover, and encouraging curiosity and active engagement with our surroundings. Physically, these forms of safety share similarities but also differ in important ways. Restful safety often involves the calming of our sympathetic nervous system, creating conditions for healing and rejuvenation. Meanwhile, curiosity-driven safety requires just enough sympathetic energy to spark our interest and motivate us to explore. Our autonomic nervous system skillfully manages this balance, gentle activation of the parasympathetic system helps us feel safe, producing a state of calm alertness. Too much sympathetic activation can leave us restless and unable to rest, while too little may leave us feeling dull and disengaged.

When confronted with danger, our bodies rapidly assess the situation, long before our conscious minds catch up. Rather than a simple alarm, the body draws on past experiences to decide on the best immediate response. Sometimes this means sprinting away from a threat, such as the sudden sound of bombs triggering a powerful urge to run. Yet in other circumstances, fleeing can actually be dangerous; imagine leaving a secure shelter during an airstrike. In such cases, our body's task shifts from fleeing to remaining steady, thinking clearly, and staying present. This rapid decision-making, known as predictive coding, is informed by countless past experiences that help the brain swiftly choose between fight, flight, or freezing.

In situations of chronic danger, like prolonged exposure to violence or instability, our bodies may become exceptionally sensitive, constantly on alert for even minor signals of threat. Something as subtle as a shift in a parent's mood or an unfamiliar noise can instantly heighten vigilance, priming us for immediate action. Over time, these repeated experiences create deep physiological and psychological patterns.

Nancy highlights that if escape consistently proves effective, our bodies may instinctively favor fleeing. But if we learn through experience, perhaps guided by the supportive presence of someone we trust, that difficult situations can be navigated successfully, our bodies may adopt a different lesson: shoulders can relax, breathing can slow, and steadiness can prevail. Importantly, the presence of supportive relationships can indeed enhance our capacity to feel safe and resilient. Having even one reliable person who consistently represents safety offers a potentially vital emotional and physical anchor. This relationship helps mitigate the effects of ongoing stress and trauma, building stronger internal frameworks of safety, even in the face of adversity.

Much of the internal decision-making described happens rapidly, often beneath our level of conscious awareness, and over time, it builds a blueprint of response patterns shaped by culture, upbringing, and real-world outcomes. Just as we've seen in Amjad's relationship with his own body, the path to feeling safe isn't always straightforward or unified. The body's messages, rooted in history, habit, and human connection, keep guiding us toward what we need most and, often, what is familiar to us, whether it's the swift action of outrunning a threat or the measured calm of facing it head-on. This may sit at odds with spiritual and emotional ease, with the safety felt in the perceived presence of divine care and support.

The body's defensive maneuvers are by no means mistakes, and safety-seeking orients physiology just as it orients collective behavior and narratives, in many cases. Safety-seeking responses are a repertoire of learned strategies, cultivated in lived conditions and influenced by cultural values, moral convictions, and deeply held identities. A child who shrinks to avoid conflict, an adult who clings to illusions of dominance, or a community rallying behind perceived strength—these are all attempts to secure some measure of safety.

Studies and frontline accounts also show that having "one safe person" can disrupt this cycle. This single figure, be it a trusted family member, a stable neighbor, a consistent mentor, can serve as an anchor, teaching the body and mind that not every flicker of change signals danger, gradually restoring the capacity to experience calm and plan for a future beyond just mere survival. As Nancy puts it, "**If we understood safety better, I think we would have a much better opportunity for understanding the symptoms of PTSD in the context that they are trying very hard to establish it.**" Recognizing that many adaptations that present in the midst and aftermath of traumatic unsafety are attempts toward safety, rather than mere dysfunction, may allow us to meet them with compassion rather than judgment.

The day after

Navigating uncertainty and creating moments of safety amidst ongoing instability is a quiet, often invisible labor. For many, the sources of fear and insecurity, like war, poverty, separation, or loss, persist far longer than they should. In such conditions, cultivating inner safety often begins with the recognition that external threats may not disappear anytime soon.

While we were gathering the reflections for this piece, something extraordinary happened. On December 8, 2024, Syria's Al-Assad regime collapsed following a major opposition-led operation, bringing an end to over five decades of authoritarian rule by one single family. The political histories and complexities surrounding this event are not our focus here. Yet, given that many of our collaborators and participants are Syrian, this moment offered a rare and powerful lens through which to explore a deeper question:

What happens to our sense of safety when what we felt to be the root of our fear is suddenly gone?

Does the disappearance of an external threat bring immediate relief?

Or does it stir new questions—about belonging, memory, identity, and what it means to feel safe after so long without it? Or if we were wrong about the source of the fear itself?

Soon after December 8, we phoned Amjad and Madlene to explore how their inner safety may have shifted after this major change, knowing that perspectives and thoughts would evolve over time. Each offered different takes on the same event.

Amjad was ecstatic. "**I haven't felt this happy in 14 years**," describing himself like a child who is jittery and excited to go out and play. At the time of our last formal conversation, Amjad was planning and hoping for his return to Syria, feeling hopeful and optimistic about his and his family's future: "**When I heard the news, it was like I became a child again—I wanted to go out, cry, laugh, celebrate, run into the streets. The joy was overwhelming, like nothing else in this world**." Before the collapse of the former regime, Amjad described living in constant fear: "**before, I was wanted by the authorities and sentenced to execution. It was terrifying. But now, I feel safe. I feel like I can return to my country any day, walk through the streets of my childhood, relive my memories, and nothing can harm me**." This shift to feeling more safe showed up in his body almost immediately: "**I had been suffering from a condition in my leg**," he said, "a**nd it would cause me pain from time to time. The moment I heard the news, I forgot my pain—I forgot the discomfort. I started breathing regularly, and so many things changed. Even my sleep improved. My eating habits have become more regular, and I can sleep well now. My body is finally getting the rest it needs**." Just a week earlier, he was plagued by insomnia and thoughts of leaving the refugee camp by any means—even crossing the sea without knowing how to swim. Like so many others, he was willing to risk his life for the prospect of a better life, and now a new door for safety has opened for him, and fortunately it is a familiar one.

Amjad's shifted reality, at the time of our conversation, is one of hope and possibility. "**I'm living my life normally, filled with joy," he said. "Nothing can disturb me now. I'm determined to go back to my country—it's decided. I'm going back to move forward, to live.**" He described a future in his home for the first time in a long time: "**can you imagine the weight that's been lifted off my shoulders, my mind, my thoughts? It's all gone now. InshaAllah, we'll host you in Syria soon**."

For Madlene, the fall of the Assad regime was less about immediate celebration and more about shock and a moment of deep introspection. "**All we wanted was a Syria without Assad—nothing more, nothing less,**" she said. Yet after so many years of lost hope, the sudden speed of the collapse left her feeling overwhelmed—crying, confused, and unsure how to handle emotions rooted in a lifetime under authoritarian control, memories of her childhood and Party propaganda resurfaced, reminding her how deeply she had adapted to living under oppression and how all of this, the entity at least, could be gone within minutes.

The experience felt surreal, almost otherworldly. For Madlene, who had spent years learning to distinguish between inner safety and the sense of security granted by documentation and residency papers, this event reawakened a fear she believed she had left behind. Just when she thought she was free from its grip, the collapse of the regime brought it surging back to the forefront of her mind. Unlike Amjad, who experienced a near-instant wave of relief, Madlene had spent years rebuilding her life in Germany; she arrived with little more than determination—learning the language, finding work, and establishing a new support system, "**since moving to Germany, I've started over from scratch and built a life here. I worked hard for it, and now I'm happy and settled. So when this happened, my immediate reaction was fear—fear that my life here could be disrupted.**" Her years of effort had contributed directly to a sense of security and belonging she had once thought was impossible. And when the regime fell, she worried that this hard-won stability might be threatened. Physically her reaction was subdued. She lost her voice due to illness and felt more reflective than jubilant.

"**I'm not a refugee anymore; I have a residency here**," she explained, "**I've worked too hard to just give it all up suddenly, even if I do want to return one day**." She found herself grappling with the fragility of the life she had worked so hard to build; in a matter of moments, everything she had established felt exposed to change. Even if she chooses to stay for now, the possibility of returning to Syria looms, returning not to familiarity, but to starting over from scratch again in a place once called home. And yet, where does that leave the life she has painstakingly created in Berlin? These were reflections and decisions Madlene never imagined she'd have to face, or at least not face this soon, today. Yet here she is, examining her life, holding tightly to the safety and stability she fought so hard to build. Her journey wasn't just about creating a secure environment but about nurturing a deep sense of safety within herself—a foundation she is determined to protect.

Safety within the self is nuanced. It is personal, perhaps only knowable and cultivable in the presence of social, economic, political, or material factors. As external factors offer greater safety, the relationship to the hard work of inner safety shifts—Was it all for naught? Why did I have to go through that? Will I remember God as often? Was I fooling myself thinking I could feel safe in the face of such terror?

Inner safety is braided with personal history, belief, lived experiences, relational networks, political circumstances, and the environments we inhabit. It is a chameleonic process, emerging from reactions between external and inner circumstances, illustrating the deeply individual ways we navigate moments of profound change and uncertainty.

Someone Will Meet Me There

Amjad speaks of inner safety as a sense of balance—a state where harmony within oneself remains unshaken despite external pressures: “**It’s about being able to deal with challenges and maintain emotional equilibrium, even in the face of obstacles**,” he explains.

Suparna emphasizes that inner safety demands an understanding of the relational context in which we live: “**safety needs us to think in relational terms, in terms of power structures, power dynamics in particular societies**.” For Suparna, safety is situated in landscapes of society and relationships.

Madlene adds that “**true inner safety is the ability to live authentically—free from the weight of imposed beliefs. It’s finding peace in who you are, even when life is imperfect.**” Rowda brings in the importance of trust in oneself and in relationships. “**Inner safety is about trusting deeply, being genuine, and feeling at ease in your own skin,**" she says. For Alina, this trust takes the form of an anchor. She describes inner safety as **"a deep confidence in your right to exist, to be loved, and to endure no matter what surrounds you.**" It is this confidence that allows someone to stay grounded amidst chaos and recognize what's within their control. Nancy also spoke about the inner place within us that we can go back to and that we trust: "**a place where you're sort of able to be a good friend to yourself… having a fundamental belief in your own value, goodness and worth**."

Bilal shifts the perspective towards embracing discomfort. "**It's the ability to sit with a horrible feeling of being far away from everyone you love, and be at peace with it**," he reflects. This sentiment resonates with Idris: "**there is a point of surrender,**" he says, "**When I accepted that my fate was in God's hands, the fear lifted, and I felt a profound calm. You can feel this feeling of fear and still feel this comfort of where you are.**" For him, then, safety may emerge as part of surrender, not to hopelessness or injustice, but to a hope in the divine.

Taken together, those interviewed present complicated and nuanced dynamics about the origin of safety, the utility of safety, and the possibility of safety. **They speak together of quiet conviction that, regardless of what happens outside, there is a fundamental essence that can and will endure it**, if they manage to stay alive, while grasping firmly to sense that someone out there—seen or unseen—will meet me there.

Finally, Syria's seismic and unprecedented shift reminds us, safety is always provisional. In its most crude and material sense, safety is never guaranteed, but a sense of safety within may emerge in the most unlikely moments.

We glimpse its radical potential to exist not as a guarantee, but as **a practice of tending to life, one breath, one prayer, one shared meal at a time.**

This is not a conclusion but an opening and a reminder that safety, like the people who seek it, is always becoming. This is not a conclusion, but an invitation. To listen. To witness. To believe that even in the most terrifying circumstances, safety—in some small, trembling form—can still be found.