







*This is a book written by all of us,  
and all who came before.*



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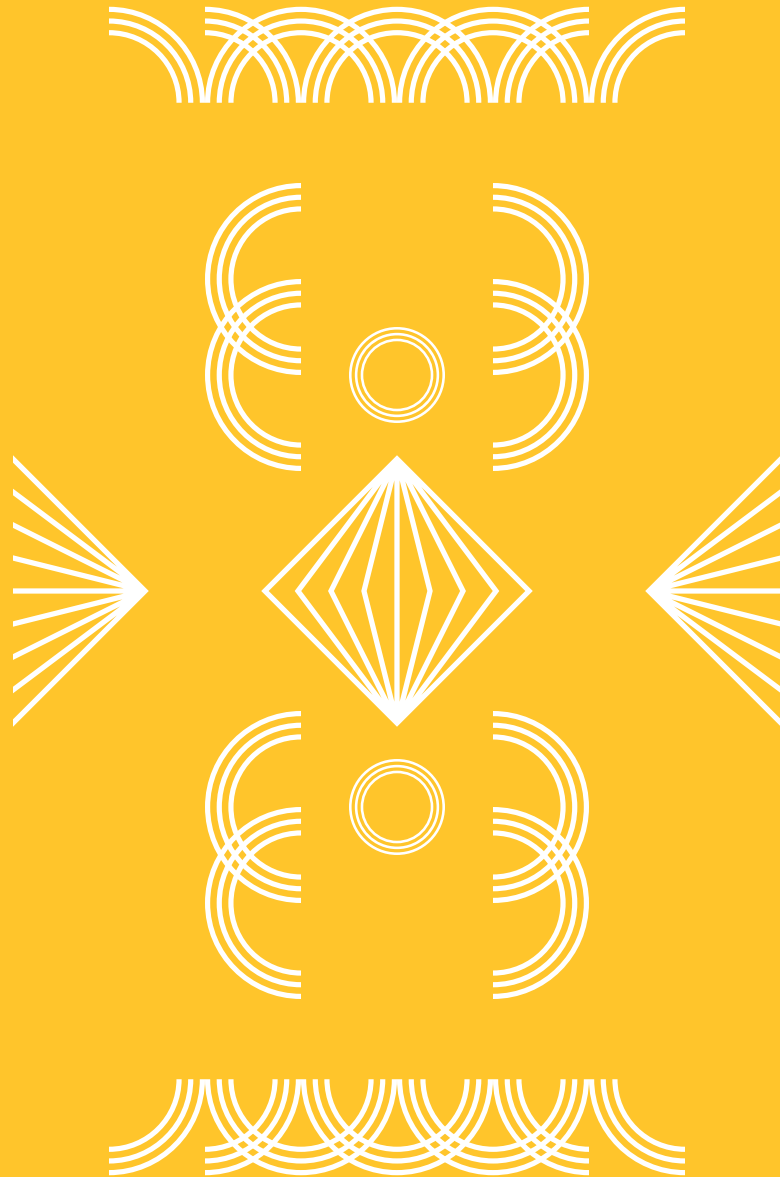
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# A RIVER, A STUDENT, & A PROMISE



## 1.

# *The Lessons of the River*

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Since the dawn of time, we have been drawn to rivers. We've built our towns next to them. We've launched trade routes along them. They've fed us and quenched our thirst. But, for some, it was the river's wisdom that was most powerful.

*"They listened silently to the water,  
which to them was not just water,  
but the voice of perpetual becoming."*

HERMANN HESSE

As a river jostles through a terrain, it leaps and bounds, swells and dwindles, twists and sways as the land demands and yet it carves channels where there were none before. It carries its own beauty and reflects the beauty of those it meets. It rejuvenates and dismantles, brings nourishment and removes debris. It gurgles with mirth and it rests with a murmur. It brings water to the parched and gains water from the sky. It is able to both give and receive simultaneously. And yet, despite its ever-changing nature, it is still true to itself. It is still the river.

*“The whisper of the river is a roar at the sea.”*

MARITIME PROVERB

Stream by stream, the river gathers in speed and strength as it is joined by those heading in the same direction. It is fueled by each individual drop and yet carries those drops in turn. It is not bound by boulder nor rock. It never stops. No matter how full it is, the river still wants to grow.

*“Where a river flows, there is abundance.”*

NILOTIC PROVERB

Alight is itself, yet contains the energy and shape of those who join it. It understands the tension of scarcity and abundance, co-existing and both being true. It can hold the idea that we exist to both give and receive. It has the power to reflect a thousand different faces. And it can be both boldly gentle, and gently bold. As more join, so its potential grows. It unleashes abundance wherever it flows.

*We are the  
organization  
that learns  
from the river.*



## 2. *Eyes that See*

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Once, an older gentleman working for Alight visited a college campus in the United States to speak with ten young Somali students, all of whom were refugees. At the end of the visit, one of the students—a young man who had been quiet throughout the meeting—approached him.

He said, “I lived in the Dadaab camp in Kenya from when I was six years old to when I turned sixteen. I’ve never been able to talk to someone senior from a humanitarian organization, so I want to tell you two things.

First, I know that you don’t work in Dadaab, but I want to say thank you. If it weren’t for organizations like yours, I wouldn’t have gone to school, seen a doctor, or had food or a roof over my head. So you kept me alive, and I thank you. But there’s a second point.”



The student paused, and looked at him with some intensity.

“My name is Mohammed.”

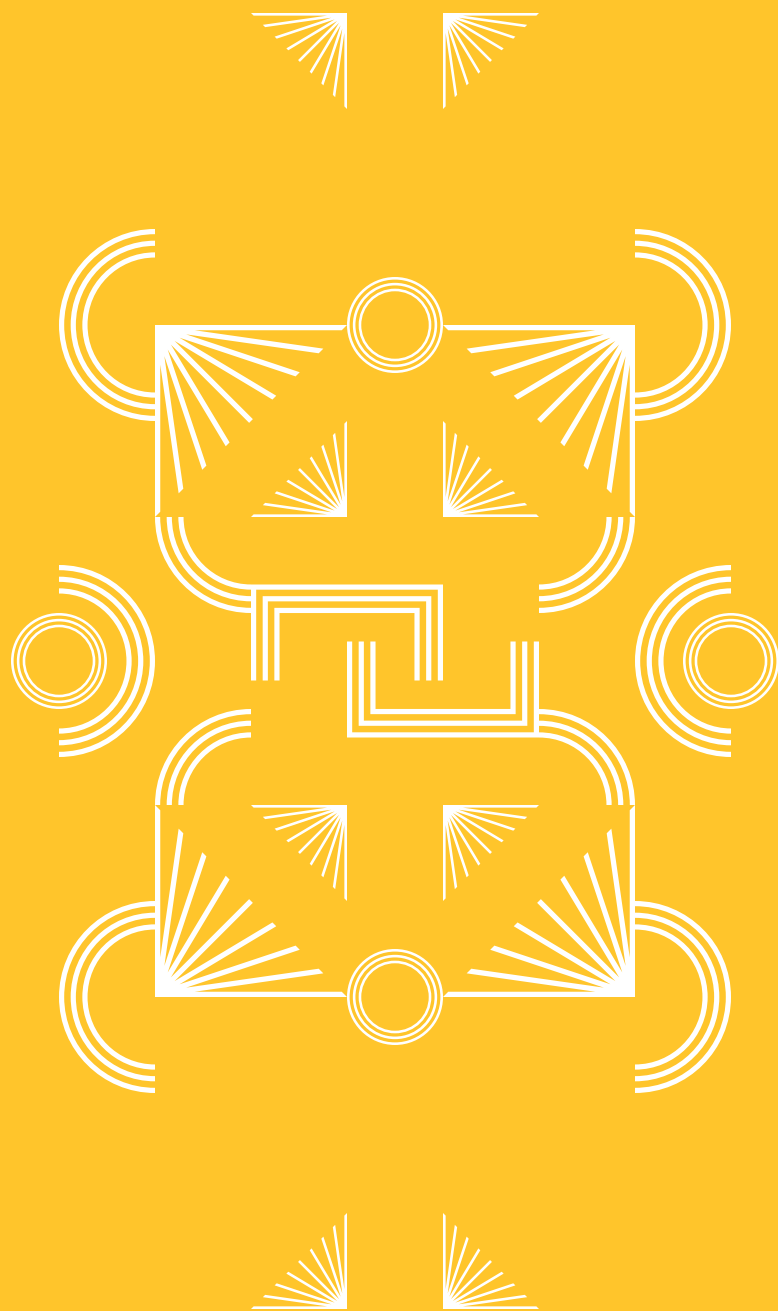
He gave his hand to shake, and when the older man took it, the student held it, gently, but without letting go.

Sensing his uncertainty, the student said:

“You’re not getting it. My name is Mohammed. For all that time that I was in Dadaab, I felt as though you were doing those things — giving me food, shelter, and healthcare — *to* me. But no one saw me. No one looked at me, and saw me for me.

So I want to introduce myself: My name is Mohammed.”

*We are the  
organization  
that sees  
Mohammed.*



### 3.

## *The Unanswered Promise*

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It was over a simple cup of tea that the challenge was made. It was in Sudan — after having visited the far corners of Darfur where few outsiders ever go. And, at the end of a long week, we sat down for a cup of tea with the government official we had spent the last few days with.

This official was responsible for coordinating humanitarian activity in the country, so he had plenty of experience with Americans and international humanitarian groups.

Conversation was flowing freely, so after a few sips, I asked him if there was anything he needed me to know.

He looked at me over the rim and paused, weighing his words carefully.

I imagined what he was thinking.

He was surely aware of how the world perceived him.

He was grateful — and had said so many times — for the goodness of everyday people.

And he knew that we came here freely — often crossing vast distances — to serve people that were not family or friends.

What would he say?

He looked up. I leaned in.

He met my gaze. And, very quietly, he said something that I will never forget.

He said this:

“I only want to say this one thing. We just want you — want you all — to be as good as your promise.”

*We are the  
organization  
that is going  
to live up to  
that promise.*





# WHAT IS OUR PROMISE TO THE WORLD?

*Everything we do is built on three core beliefs that we hold dear. These underpin all our values, our purpose, and every single action that we take and decision that we make.*

#### OUR BELIEFS

We believe that there is simple human justice in the chance to build a life.

We believe in an abundant world full of amazing people who want to help.

We believe in doing a better thing.

We inspire  
AND  
UNLEASH  
The  
ABUNDANCE  
IN EVERY  
human BEING





WE BUILD A  
MEANINGFUL  
LIFE FOR  
AND WITH THE  
DISPLACED



## OUR PURPOSE

*To inspire and unleash the abundance in every human being.*

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Where others see only pain, we see joy and potential.

Where others see scarcity, we unleash abundance: within ourselves, our partners, and within those we meet.

We are simply servants of other people's goodness.

*We channel the idealism of everyday people.*

The world is filled with amazing people who want to help. We unlock this abundance when we give them the opportunity to come in, to use their gifts, and to work with us in ways that are meaningful to them. It's personal.

## WHAT WE DO

*We build a meaningful life for and with the displaced.*

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We believe there is simple human justice in the chance to build a life. When we find people displaced from their homes, countries or lives, our instinct may be to focus on their basic needs.

And that is essential.

But that is living — it is not a life. A life is filled with joy, dignity, connection, and purpose. And that's what we aim to build.

We are an open family of organizations that works closely with refugees, trafficked persons, and economic migrants, to co-design solutions that help them build full and fulfilling lives—

lives which are *alight*.

A photograph of a woman and two children in a rural setting, overlaid with a blue tint and white text. The woman is standing in the center, wearing a striped sleeveless top and a patterned skirt, with her right arm raised. Two young children are visible: one on the left and one on the right. The text is written in a white, stylized font with a hand-drawn, radiating background.

And  
HOW  
Do we  
Fulfill  
OUR  
PROMISE  
???

*We are an organization  
filled with a multitude  
of amazing people.*

*This diversity is one of  
our greatest strengths.*

*And one of our  
greatest prides.*

And while we are a kaleidoscope of unique experiences, gifts, and strengths, there are a set of values that unites us all. They drive how we do our work, how we interact with the people we serve (and each other), and help us make decisions. They are what we expect of each other, and perhaps even what we should hold each other accountable for being. Maybe.

#### OUR VALUES

Be Human Centered

Bravely Be Better

Spark Joy

Choose Optimism

Start with Giving

Find Others

Do the Doable



*“ALIGHT would be empty. Alight wouldn’t have a soul without the people. And so we are alight! Because we are the people and we serve the people.”*

– ABRAHAM

**H**uman beings are truly wondrous; each one a universe unto themselves and they deserve efforts worthy of their gifts. And every person, no matter their past nor current circumstance, should be treated as sacred.

We open our arms in welcome. We make eye contact and see ourselves in the face across from us. We ask and listen, rather than assume and tell. We acknowledge the past, but create the present. We love. We honor. We see.

We believe that just meeting a refugee’s physiological needs is not enough. Meaning and purpose, pride and hope, a sense of connection and belonging; these are the needs we must meet. It’s deeply personal. And it’s deeply human.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *Am I treating this person with dignity and respect—the way I would like to be treated?*
- *Am I designing with empathy and humility?*
- *Do I understand what is truly meaningful to them and what will help them live a life alight with joy, connection, and purpose?*



*“We all have that burning desire, that light... sometimes you need somebody to identify it or see that in you and help you. And in turn, if you can help others, that is the ripple effect.” – DULA*

**W**e believe in doing a better thing. The status quo is not an option. We are deeply rooted in the belief that people are sacred and that we must live up to our promise by doing work that is worthy of our shared humanity. But we’re confident that if we do a better thing, the world will join us.

We *have* to be the ones who value goodness. The ones people hoped for and whom they can believe in. The boldly gentle and gently bold. The fearlessly kind and kindly fearless. Dare we even say it — we should be the noble ones. To be a beacon, signaling a new path.

This requires bravery, dogged determination, and a willingness to take risks, to try new approaches, and perhaps even to fail sometimes. We aren’t afraid to break dishes — it’s better to break one than to wash none at all. This is how we ourselves will be better, and do better. The people we serve deserve that and so much more.

#### **ASK YOURSELF:**

- *Have I considered alternative, and potentially better, ways of doing this or am I sticking with the status quo?*
- *Have I delivered on what I promised? Have I gone above and beyond?*
- *Is my thinking being limited by the grant?*



*“Certainly, there must be a level of dignity and respect for the people and their situation, but I think we are all better off if we also bring joy.” – IGOR*

**E**motion does not make us unprofessional, it is the heart of our profession. To laugh. To smile. To dance. To connect deeply with people. This is what makes us human. And this is what sets us apart.

To us, joy is both a catalyst for, and an expression of, abundance. It is the how we know that we are living a life of well being, of purpose, and of connection. It has the power to transcend all and the power to move us in a way that touches us forever.

When we travel to places that others often see as scarce, we are delighted, again and again, to find laughter and smiles. Our job is to elevate that: To bring joy, creativity, beauty, and play to both our work and the people that we serve.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *How can I add a sense of play and joy to my work?*
- *Can I see moments of joy around me?*
- *How can I celebrate or amplify those?*



*“We don’t diminish the harshness of reality, but create moments and opportunities for endless possibility with the abundance that we find.” – STEPHANIE*

Over the years, we have learned a simple but often overlooked truth: Optimism is a choice. If we choose to believe that things are possible, they become so. If we choose to focus on the positive, the path becomes clear. If we choose to believe the best in people, they will exceed our expectations.

This does not mean we are naive but the contrary. We are honest about the conditions we work within and all the hardships that people have gone through. We respect this, but we don’t dwell on it. We find the hope and we build on it.

We believe that people aren’t defined by their circumstances. A remarkable life is not canceled out by displacement. Where others see only pain and suffering, we see joy and potential. Where others see scarcity, we see abundance.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *Where is the untapped abundance in front of me?*
- *Have I asked people what is working already and what gives them hope?*
- *What can I build on and make better?*



*“The most powerful realization a person can have is the knowledge of their own worth. The irony is that this can only be truly realized when we freely give to another.” – DANIEL*

**T**o freely give is to be fully human. We all have a gift within us, and when we give it to another, we become whole. We become ourselves. We become alight.

This is how you unleash abundance, and it has nothing to do with money. Give wholeheartedly of yourself. Be willing to go the extra mile. Give people your belief in them. Give people the benefit of the doubt and a chance. Because when you expect the best of someone, they not only live up to that expectation, but surpass it.

The forgotten truth of organizations like ours is that we exist to give, not to receive. It's leading with generosity. It begins with belief.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *Am I being generous with my time, my work, and my gifts?*
- *Am I being generous with other people and giving them the space and autonomy to share their own gifts?*
- *Am I helping first without wondering what I will receive in return?*





FIND  
OTHERS

*“We may not be rich in money, but we are rich in people and ideas.” – BERNAD*

**W**e are a “we” organization, a shared organization, because we believe that our strength is in our togetherness. In our borderlessness. In our openness and belief in one another.

This begins with humility—to know that we don’t, *we can’t*, have all the answers and we can’t do it alone. We need each other. So we find others. We seek diversity and include those who know better than we do. We make the room bigger. We seek out people’s input, no matter who they are. We open the door.

We lie at the intersection of belief in people and places, and places and people that need belief. We take great joy in serving the idealism of others. And we do it together.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *Who will benefit the most from this work?*
- *Are we complementing our own strengths with different ones?*
- *Are we elevating others?*



*“We want the world to know that these problems are very doable and very fixable, and we want people to join in.” – JON*

**I**n the face of the impossible, we do the doable. Where there is no door, we find a window. We are not naive, we are visionary. When we dream big, we get close. We roll up our sleeves and do the work worth talking about. We don’t wait, we do.

While others see problems as too big to tackle, we dive right in with what can be done. Right now. Small actions can lead to big impact. Momentum can lead to change. Touching one person through one act can inspire all.

We want the world to know that these big, gnarly problems are not impossible. In fact, they’re fixable. They’re within our grasp. In fact, they’re within *everyone’s* grasp.

**ASK YOURSELF:**

- *What is the thing that is needed right now?*
- *Am I focusing on the larger task or the small step I can take now?*
- *What can we do with \$500?*



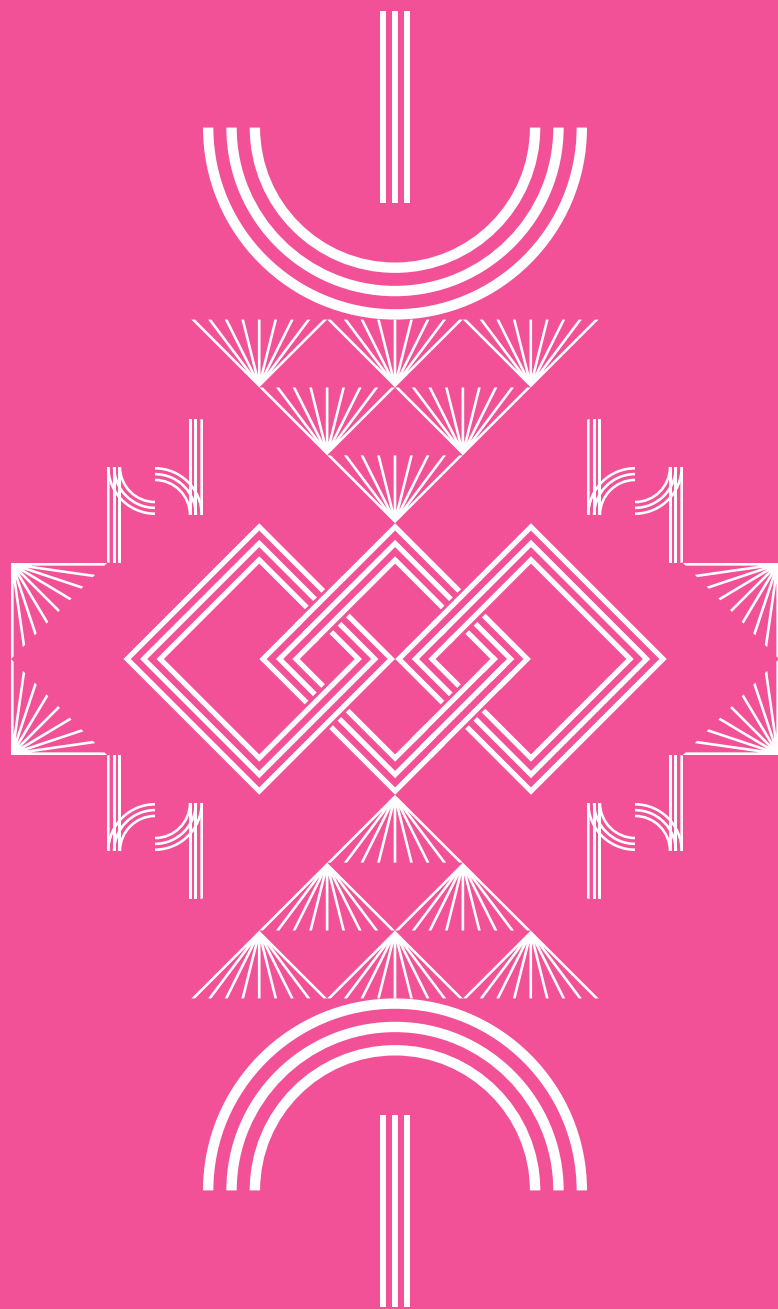


# WHAT ARE THE SMALL THINGS WE CAN DO?



*This is just the beginning of our journey as Alight and as we think about how we bring our promise to life, we'll find that there are a few things that work, and perhaps a few things that don't. And that's okay.*

On the next few pages, you'll find a few of the things that we definitely want to keep doing. You'll also find space to write—we invite you to keep track of the small actions that you feel are important to your team and the people you serve.



## THE THINGS THAT WE'D LIKE TO DO ALWAYS

*Relish simple human gestures:* We greet people and know their names. We still write handwritten notes. We offer to take the middle seat. We listen and ask why and why again. We take time to have tea together. We bring each other candy from all over the world. We hug. (We also have a photo album of all our big moments).

*Be a borderless team:* There may be vast distances between us all but we still like to stay connected. And WhatsApp is a powerful tool to help us do just that. It's how we share our stories with each other and get everyone's input as well as thank, support, and help each other out. It helps us be a borderless team. It helps us stay afloat.

*Get close to those we serve:* We don't do our work behind a desk. We get up, tuck away our laptops, put on our boots, jump on a truck or plane, and get close to those we serve. We go to where they are, we roll up our sleeves, and we get close.

**THE THINGS I'D LIKE TO DO ALWAYS**

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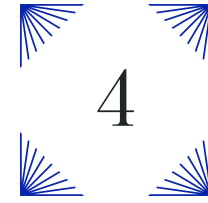
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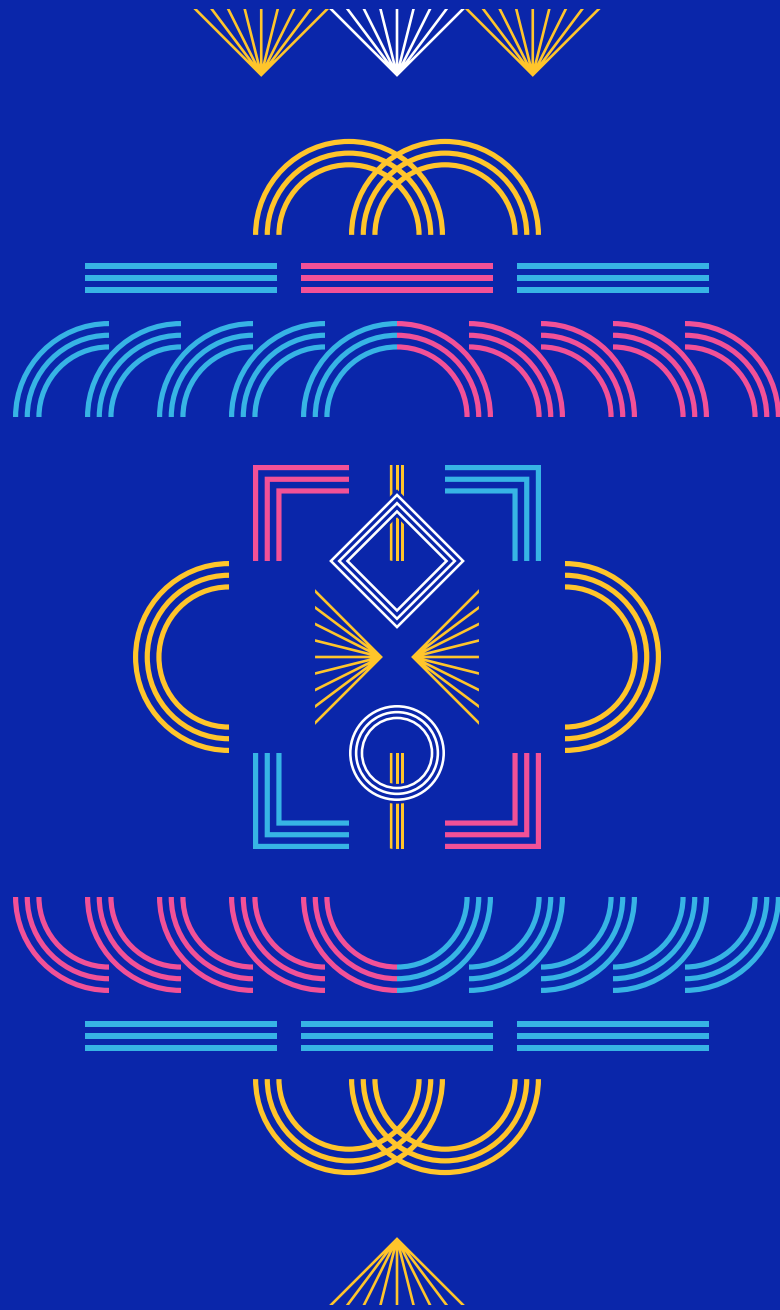






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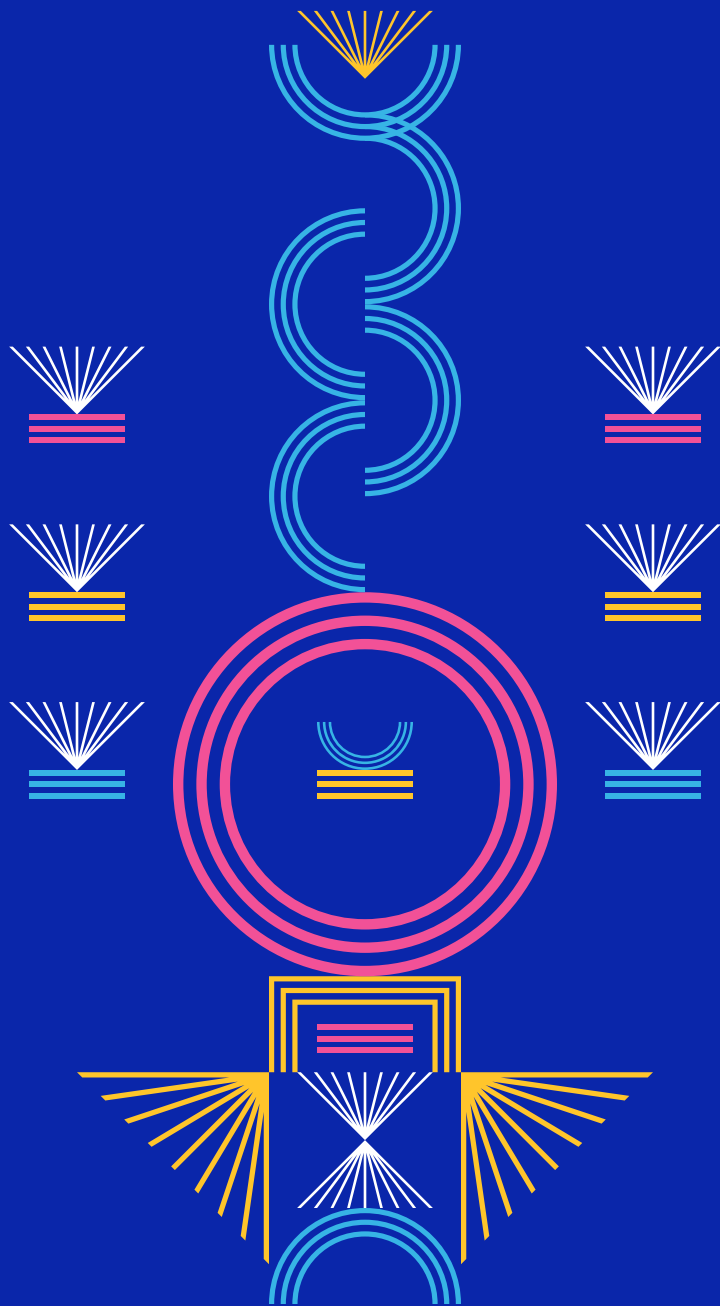
# FROM STREAMS TO A MIGHTY RIVER



*Alight is a family  
of organizations.*

*To every one of the  
members of the Alight  
family, we celebrate  
you, welcome you,  
and honor you.*

*Alight is better  
because of you and we  
hope you are better  
because of Alight.*



**W**e promise to do our best to deliver on our promise. When you meet us, we will listen. We will help you bravely do better. And we will see and celebrate the hope and joy you unleash in the world.

You chose us and we chose you. We have shared purpose and shared truth. We exist to honor the people we serve. And, we will do it the very best we can.

We invite you to keep this little book close by. Know the promise we are making to the world. And gently remind us of our promise when we need reminding.

A woman with dark hair is smiling warmly, her face partially obscured by a large, circular graphic on the left. The graphic consists of concentric, hand-drawn blue lines forming a wreath-like border. Inside this border, the text is written in a white, casual, handwritten font. The background of the entire image is a solid, deep blue color.

"WE  
JUST WANT  
OUR WORK  
TO BE FELT"  
— PURITY

## *The End*

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*Or is it just the beginning?*

When we wrote this book, we didn't want to create a book of strict rules or some tome that sits on a dusty shelf, we simply wanted to capture the beauty that exists within all of you already and bring that to the surface.

So, read this book, remember the words, look within and feel them to be true, and remember that this is a guide, but not a bible.

Now go, you wondrous human, and unleash abundance.





