

FOREWORD BY GANGAJI

SUDDEN AWAKENING

Stop Your Mind,
Open Your Heart, and
Discover Your True Nature



ELI JAXON-BEAR



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Foreword

Eli Jaxon-Bear is a master teacher, and this book is a clear reflection of his mastery. If you read it carefully, you will receive a transmission of the awakened mind. With care and exquisite timing Eli reveals the culmination of his spiritual search as irrefutable evidence of the possibility of freedom for all.

Like most of us I began my spiritual search as an extension of the primary search that started as a learning, growing infant. We all come into this world seeking identity. What better way to survive! We learn where our particular safety is and where the threats to that safety may be. We learn layer upon layer of the complexities of safety and threat in our world. As we develop we add to this complex of identity. Our world and our identities change as we grow and expand.

Circumstances are sorted to give believability to our most current sense of a particular self. Concepts of all kinds are accepted, fit into the structure of our identity, or thrown away within an hour, a phase, or a lifetime. We are mostly forever searching for enough identity to securely know who we are so that we can finally live freely.

There are moments however, if we are lucky, that reveal a free life regardless of identity and safety. Whether these moments appear in an instant of terror and true threat or in a moment of relaxed pleasure, they become the proof of a vastness that eludes our capacity to name, interpret, store or discard.

When I was teenager and busy throwing away my childish identities, I—like most teenagers—discovered these expanded, uninhibited moments with the aid of alcohol and risky behavior. And when I exchanged alcohol for the substances of the counter-culture of the 1970s, I was still seeking those free moments. When I exchanged mind-expanding substances for meditation and chanting, still my goal was to experience the pure pleasure and freedom of experience that transcended my known, constructed world.

Expansive moments did occur with meditation, as they had before with alcohol, sex, psychedelics, or even out of the blue with no known cause. But since I was continuing to form my identity, as we mostly do until death ends it all, these very moments of “freedom” became aspects of my bondage by forming who I thought I was.

I began to call myself a spiritual person. I thought of myself as someday reaching the final goal of becoming a fully realized spiritual person. This spiritual identity had different imagined personas. Mostly I imagined always resting in equanimity. Sometimes I imagined clairvoyant powers. Always an aspect of my idealizations was the hoped for future knowledge that I had reached the goal of completing my identity.

Certainly I recognized that the odds against my reaching this goal were huge. But I listened to many teachers. I vowed to use this lifetime to serve the fantasy of a future when I would finally know that the mountain had been climbed and the treasure secured.

I worked hard at becoming still and giving up my attachments. I tried to replace anger with peace. There were many beautiful experiences, but mostly I failed. My mind remained active, I was still attached to what I wanted, and now I wanted and was

attached to non-attachment. I could name myself a spiritual person, think and look like a spiritual person, but I was still *me*. I was still searching for more me, better me, and now, enlightened me.

And I didn't get it. Except for those moments of grace when I did and laughed with mysterious joy at how truly absurd this search for identity was. I was unable to capture the freshness of freedom, but spurred on by the illusion of hope I continually returned to the search. I continually determined that with more work or practice or time, freedom would be mine.

After years of getting it and always then losing it, I knew there was something essential that I did not truly know. I prayed for a teacher who could show me what I was missing. By that time I feared that the enlightenment subculture was a fake. I suspected that the search for ultimate resolution was only another distraction to keep us away from the abyss of meaninglessness.

I wanted to know the truth whatever it was, and I knew I needed help.

Eli and I were partners then and we prayed together.

The answer to that prayer was extremely good news. Better than I could have imagined and infinitely more elegantly simple than I could have imagined.

Our teacher revealed that freedom is not an object that can be acquired. He revealed that truth has nothing to do with past or future. He demonstrated through his glance and pointed with his words. Our attention was drawn to unmoving silent awareness; silent awareness that is conscious of its own beingness.

He stopped our minds. In that stopping we discovered what is free of both stopping and going. Free of all concepts of getting or losing. We discovered a silent awareness that is and was always

here. We discovered that the recognition of the truth of oneself is available for all who have the willingness to honestly inquire.

Eli's words show the steps of his own inquiry and transmit the truth revealed.

They are radical in their power and promise. But without your own participation they are just beautiful words. If you immerse yourself and allow yourself to be pointed home, you will discover yourself—free of assembled identity, free of idealization, free of postponement.

May all beings live in peace,
gangaji

Preface to the Second Edition

Each decade we have watched as consciousness awakens to itself in expanding waves around the globe. From the Dalai Lama at the White House to Eckhart Tolle on Oprah, millions of people in our culture are being exposed to a new worldview and a deeper understanding of their true self. This is a miracle I never expected to see in my lifetime. I grew up in a world that had never heard of meditation or yoga and that considered all things foreign both strange and not very interesting. India in the 1950s in New York was as far as the moon and a lot less visible. Yoga, meditation, and self-reflection were simply not yet a part of the American landscape in my neighborhood.

Just today in the *New York Times*, I read a sentence in a column that facetiously started with, “But unless you are the only person in New York City who is not currently practicing yoga . . .”—a sign of how far we have come in such a short time. That yoga classes can be found on every street corner and that a host of spiritual teachers and teachings are available on the Internet are signs of the ripening of human consciousness. The meme of awakening is spreading throughout our culture.

When I started my spiritual search in 1972, I had never heard of *satsang* or witnessed anyone awake. I had never read or heard of the possibility of liberation in this lifetime. In the eighteen years that followed, I met wonderful teachers and learned teachings

from many traditions, but no one mentioned the possibility of a silent mind. Direct realization, if mentioned at all, was a far-off improbability, not likely in this lifetime.

Now, satsang is spreading across the planet. I meet people from all over the world who have had profound awakenings. This change signals a revolutionary shift in the collective consciousness. We as a species are waking up.

In this ten-year update to *Sudden Awakening*, I have added two new chapters. The first one deals with my experience of cancer. Seven years after writing this book, I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, an incurable blood cancer. In the second new chapter, "Songs of Freedom," I share the couplets I wrote that came out of my experience of meeting death during chemotherapy.

I have received letters from readers of the first edition letting me know of the profound effect this book had on their lives. Many also ask what to do when their circumstances turn against them. They want to know how to stay true during hard times. I hope that these two new chapters help to address meeting the calamities that confront all of us as we go through life.



I searched for eighteen years before meeting my teacher. In these pages, I would like to introduce you to him and his direct transmission of freedom. When I knocked on his door in Lucknow, India, a beautiful, happy man greeted me and said, "Yes, he is waiting for you. Please come in." Since I had had no previous contact with him and had not let anyone know that I was coming, this was a breath-taking moment for me. I was led through a tiny

house to a stairway at the back of a small open courtyard. I went up the stairs and knocked on the door. I was invited to enter. The room was big enough for a single bed and a chair. My teacher was sitting cross-legged on his bed and asked me to join him. I could not believe my good luck.

Sitting on the bed with him, I immediately realized that I was in the presence of an enormous conscious silent love looking back at me. I saw my own Self looking back at me from another form. In that instant I knew that everything I had directly realized on my own was true. Without speaking a word he was the direct confirmation, simply by being himself. I had come to the end of my spiritual search there on the bed of my *sat-guru*. He radiated love and silence, and my mind fell into emptiness while my heart exploded with love. It was done in an instant. Each moment after that was added grace.

He invited me back the next day. We had our meals together. His granddaughters cooked for their father, Surendra (the sweet fifty-five-year-old man who had met me at the door the first day), their grandfather, whom they affectionately called Papaji, and me. When Papaji could not finish his food, he poured his bowl of fresh peas and potatoes into mine. I was fulfilled and needed nothing more. I was in constant bliss with a silent mind.

I knew I was in the presence of what I called at the time a living Zen master. Over the coming weeks, I would watch people come into his presence, sit in his living room, and have their minds stop and their hearts open as they realized their true nature. I had never before witnessed anything like this. It was the turning point. Nothing after was ever the same. That same transmission is

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still alive and free and radiating out to humans everywhere. This book is a small expression of that.

I am writing to pass on the possibility of directly meeting everything that arises—love, fear, life, and death. In this, you will discover the bliss of meeting your true self and of endlessly falling into yourself. Awakening is possible for you here and now, in this moment.

The dawn is closer, the sparks of freedom have spread, and pinpoints of light are shining all over the world. May you be a light of love that incarnates in your body and shines out through your eyes and heart. May your fire of consciousness be a spark that lights up the dawn.

Eli Jaxon-Bear

Preface to the First Edition

In 1971, when I was twenty-four-years-old, I was hiding out in a cabin in the mountains of Colorado. I was a federal fugitive because I had freed a prisoner and fought with police during May Days, an attempt to stop the Vietnam War by shutting down the American government. I had been a doctoral student in international studies before I took to the hills.

At that time, I read the great Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu. I knew that what I was reading was true, but I had no idea how I could get to that perfect tranquility of non-effort. In fact, I couldn't see the point of personal tranquility in a world dominated by genocidal war. I wasn't looking for enlightenment. I was looking for a way to stop the global violence.

Luckily, when pushed against the wall, I found I was not willing to kill to stop the violence. But I was willing to die if that was what it took. Miraculously, one night after fasting for three days, terrified and alone in that cabin in the Rocky Mountains, I was brought face to face with death. Through grace, I passed to the other side: I awoke to the truth of my own nature as empty, immortal consciousness. I knew that if everyone could have this realization, the world would come to peace. I saw this as the great benefit of awakening. I dedicated my life to finding a way to pass on the realization.

Even after the experience of awakening to my true nature, I didn't know how to stop the flow of my egoic mind—the habitual pattern of misidentification that keeps us mired in suffering. I spent the next eighteen years on a quest that led me around the world. In my continuing search for the answer and a true teacher who could transmit the answer to me, I had the great good luck to meet and become close to many wonderful teachers of different spiritual traditions.

I took *bodhisattva* vows with Kalu Rinpoche, and in 1978, after having a dream about me, he appointed me the president of his first dharma center in Marin County. By then, I had sat in profound bliss with Swami Muktananda at his ashram in Oakland and spent four years with my Chinese Taoist teacher, practicing Taoist yoga, tai chi, and Chinese calligraphy. In the 1980s, I spent some time in a Zen temple, and after *dharma* combat in Saiko-ji Monastery in the western hills of Kyoto, I was presented with a Zen Teaching Fan by my beloved Ojisan of Chosho-ji Zen Temple in Kyushu.

When my mind stopped at the Zen monastery after receiving the transmission of the head *roshi*, profound realizations resulted. In the late 1980s, an initiation ceremony on the coast of Morocco with a Sufi band also stopped my mind and revealed deep mysteries. Psychedelics and life-threatening experiences had the same effect.

But always, no matter how high the experience or deep the silence of the moment, the egoic mind would return with its story and commentary.

These teachers and others gave me many beautiful practices, and I still enjoy some of these. I found that some of these practices lead to a disciplined life, which I deeply appreciate. But practice

did not lead to deeper realization. All the experiences that arose from practice, although they were beautiful and deep, did not last. Neither the practices nor the deep experiences permanently ended my false identity as the practitioner.

The question that I asked myself at the beginning of my search is the question I hear over and over again now, more than thirty years later, as a teacher. Most people I meet have already had many spiritual experiences. They want to know what to do after the spiritual experience or the practice session ends. They want to know how to stay true in the midst of the confusion of daily life, how not to leave the exalted state of peace and love that is untouched by life circumstances.

In this book, I offer you the gift of awakening that was given to me by my teacher Sri H. W. L. Poonja, a fully awakened satguru called Papaji. Awakening is real: it is actually the only reality. Awakening is permanent: it doesn't come and go. This gift was passed on to me by my teacher, and this book is an offering of that gift to you.

As you read *Sudden Awakening*, you have the opportunity to receive radically new insights into the nature and structure of ego and its role in the creation of suffering.

It is possible that in a flash of insight—a sudden awakening—you will come to understand the prison of mind we are all born into and that you will receive the keys to your escape. You will discover that the possibility of true freedom is available to every human being, regardless of life circumstances. My goal for this book is to clearly lay out the choices we face in the search for truth, the traps along the way, the difference between reality and

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illusion, and the fruits of dying before the body dies as consciousness returns to its source.

Sudden Awakening is for those who are ready for the end of the spiritual quest. I share with you the message of my teacher: It is time to stop the search and to realize your nature as immortal, empty, intelligent love. You will receive a transmission while reading this book if you are ready to lay down your suffering and to find true, lasting peace.

Welcome!

Eli Jaxon-Bear

April 2001

A Note on Language

As cultural experience evolves, we often adopt words from other languages that best express new concepts and experiences. One current example is the word “computer,” which now rolls off of many tongues besides English.

When it comes to words for the instruments of modern technology, English may have the edge, but it is sadly lacking in spiritual vocabulary. In contrast, the Sanskrit language has long included a vast array of words describing the spiritual experiences of awakening. For thousands of years, the people of India have devoted attention to the spiritual path. To describe in English what in Sanskrit is simply called *samadhi*, we would say, “the blissful experience of plunging within, into the deep experience of one’s true self.”

Sanskrit has many names for the different stages and degrees of *samadhi*. The culture of India has extensively explored the inner experiences of the spiritual world just as Western culture has deeply explored the outer world of matter.

Over the past century, the awakening that India’s culture has actively cultivated for thousands of years has surfaced in the West. In addition to Indian food, dress, and other various customs, we are discovering a rich vocabulary that describes what most of us in the West don’t yet have words for. That spiritual vocabulary, in terms such as *samadhi* and *satsang*, will come to life in the following pages.

PART 1

The Way to Freedom

CHAPTER 1

Welcome

“A life of freedom is possible for you. You can awaken this instant and live as love itself.”
My teacher Papaji radiated this message to all who met with him in satsang. Satsang is beyond the realm of the mind, beyond the reach of any language. Please listen deeply as you read this teaching story of satsang.

Satsang: Out of slavery

Imagine for a moment that you're living in the time of slavery in the United States. Imagine what it would be like to be born a slave. Imagine that your parents were born slaves and their parents as well.

Now, imagine for a moment not only that you are a slave but also that your personal bondage, as well as slavery in general, is going to go on forever. This is just the way the world is. This is what you were born into. You are told what to do. You can be sold or traded at any time. You can be beaten. You can be used in any way.

If you're lucky, you get to work inside a house or for kind people. If you aren't so lucky, you have to work out in the fields or for unkind people. This is your life. This is just the way it always has been and always will be.

As a slave, you have probably never been more than fifty miles away from your birthplace. Maybe you've been to another town, but maybe not. There are no televisions, no radios, no newspapers. It is illegal for you to learn to read or to write. You don't know any other life except a slave's life.

Since your parents and grandparents weren't allowed to speak their native tongue, you don't have a cultural past. You may still hear the inner call of the drumbeat and the secret rhythms of old tribal songs that refuse to die, but you don't have a memory of being free—and there is nothing around you that points to that possibility. It seems preordained that you and your descendants will live and die as slaves. These are the parameters of your universe.

Within these parameters, you may be allowed to marry or not, have children or not, work in the house or the field, live here or

there, but all of these circumstances appear against the background of slavery.

Then one day, you hear a whisper, "There's a freedom train."

You may not even know what these words mean. Some of your friends may hear the news of freedom but dismiss it out of hand as the mad ravings of crazy people. Others may hear the news and say, "Well, I've got a pretty good life here. I live in the master's house. I eat good food. I don't need a freedom train." They are content with the way things are.

Other people, even those who aren't content with a slave's life, may be far too frightened to want to even know about a freedom train because if they attempt escape, they know dogs will be sent after them. If they are captured, they fear they will be whipped, tortured, and perhaps even killed, to set an example so that no one else will run away. Those who are too frightened to risk these dangers may say, "Don't tell me about a freedom train. I don't want that; this is good enough."

Others may worry, "How would I eat if I were free? Where would I live? What would I do if a freedom train took me to a strange new land? Here, I know where I belong. I know where my food comes from. How would I know what to do there? How would I know what to say? How would I know how to act?" They are terrified of leaving the known and even more terrified of the imagined unknown.

Some may cry, "I'd like to go, but my children are here. They can't go. I have to stay here with my children." Others may mourn, "I'd like to go, but I can't leave because I'm so in love, and my lover can't possibly go." They are terrified of losing the relationships that keep them attached.

But a few hear the whisper “freedom train,” and it’s the most important news they have ever heard. They are willing to take the risk to be free, no matter what it takes.

Accepting the call of the freedom train isn’t easy. Once you hear the whisper, you’re called to put yourself in grave danger just to discover more. You go to secret meetings because you need directions to find this freedom train and instructions on what to do when you get there. You have to be very careful because you’re always being watched. But still, you long to know more. It’s a life-or-death situation. You are no longer willing to live in slavery.

Since you’ve never been fifty miles from home, you don’t know the way to freedom. You don’t know anything about it. You have to be willing to go alone through the swamp and the woods, leaving everything behind, if that’s what it takes. If you carry too much baggage with you, you won’t make it; you will sink under the load. So alone and with few possessions, you put yourself on the line and face the unknown. This is the test of fire.

If you can’t bear another moment of slavery, regardless of the cost, regardless of the risk, you heed the instructions, follow the trail, and find your way to the freedom train.

This is the end of your identification as a slave and the beginning of a life of freedom.

♦ ♦ ♦

The map and the destination

First, satsang is the whisper. This whisper lets you know that it is possible to escape from slavery. Some people can’t bear anything

more than simply to hear about this possibility. Just to hear this good news—that freedom is possible—is enough. It may take years or lifetimes before they are ready for the next step, but at least now they know it is possible.

This is the first function of satsang: the announcement of the truth of freedom. Sometimes you have to hear it over and over again. When you've heard that freedom is possible enough times and this possibility sinks in fully, eventually you fall deeply in love, and attaining freedom becomes the very purpose of your being.

Second, satsang is the map, the path, and the way to find the freedom train. Satsang provides the direction to follow and warns of the traps and pitfalls along the way. Satsang points out the confirming signs, as well as the dangers of getting lost. Satsang shows you your current location, describes the ultimate destination, and points out the quickest route for getting there.

Third, satsang is the freedom train itself. It is the end of your burden. Once you're on the train, you don't have to carry your luggage on your head; you can put it on the rack and sit down. You can stop everything and let the train carry you. You can put down the burden of slavery and surrender to the grace that carries you home.

Finally, satsang is the destination: it is home. It is freedom. It is where you arrive. How long does it take to arrive? It depends on how far you have wandered away from yourself.

Eventually, when you arrive, you laugh at the deep realization that there never was a leaving: it was all in your mind. You sold yourself into slavery in your mind. Since you never really went anywhere, how long can it possibly take to return?



The sweetness of coming home

Satsang is your own heart speaking to you in silence. It is nourishing, sweet, and true. This sweet silence comes and carries you home.

Satsang is the mirror in which you see yourself, in which you see at last who you are and who you are not. When you know who you are, you realize the great benefit of stopping your false identification as a slave. True freedom is being your Self. Satsang reveals the truth of your Self and the way back to a natural life, free from the slave identity.

When you look back from the shore of freedom, you see that you were not who you thought you were. Who you thought you were didn't transform into something else. It never was. It was all just a nightmare of slavery passed on for generations, a nightmare of the ego's separation, alienation, and loss of love, which has ended as suddenly as awakening from a dream. In this awakening, you can accept and love life as it is.

Looking back at a dream from awakened consciousness, you see the perfection of even the dream. You see the nonseparation in the appearance. You realize yourself as the living truth of immortal love. Then life begins.

CHAPTER 2

What Do You Really Want?

In any life, essential questions emerge that demand answers. The answers determine the course of your life for good or for ill. I remember being faced with such a question when I was an eighteen-year-old freshman at the University of Pittsburgh, in March 1965. I had the good fortune to be present when a phone call came in from a neighboring college letting us know that a bus was heading down to Montgomery, Alabama, to take students to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee marching for civil rights in the face of great violence. The question everyone asked was, "Are you on the bus?"

My answer was instant and deeper than any thought. Andrew Goodman, a boy from my neighborhood in New York, had been found murdered and buried in a swamp with two other SNCC workers the summer before. A white, Northern minister, Reverend James Reeb, on just such a bus had been beaten to death a few days before on the streets of Selma, Alabama. Police were turning marchers back with dogs and water hoses. People were being violently attacked and thrown into jail. This was a terrifying situation full of unknowns, and I was an upper-middle-class, Jewish boy who had led a relatively sheltered life. All of my family and friends would call me mad if I got on that bus. I would be putting my life in danger; I would miss school and possibly flunk out; and I would end up on an FBI list, ruining my future career options. Yet I knew without a doubt that I was “on the bus.” The gift and clarity of that choice gave me the confidence not to look back.

Gradually, my choice in favor of freedom, even in the external political way that I defined it at the time, pushed me to my limits. “Really?” freedom would ask. “What about this situation? Are you willing to compromise here? Will you hold steady there?” Inch by inch, year by year, I came to see what my life was about and where I was heading. I was forced over the cliff of the known world.

Getting on the bus represented a much deeper commitment than enduring a few weeks of dangerous adventure. Finally, I had to give my life fully to getting on the bus for freedom without a thought of ever getting off. The bus at that point embodied a commitment to walking the talk. Freedom asked, “Are you willing to risk death to stop the suffering in this world?” When the miraculous answer “Yes” appeared, the necessity of facing death opened the way for me to cross the ocean of illusion and to receive the truth of my own Self.

Getting on the bus was a choice that led me forward on the path toward freedom. Other choices I have made led in a different direction. When I followed my desires and called it freedom, I found this led to deeply painful consequences. Like me, you have faced life-altering choices: whether to stay or to go, whether to have children or not, whether to follow what is in your heart or to cling to the safety of the known. You can look back now and see the results of the choices you have made. You can see the precious moments when you stayed true to yourself in the deepest way, as well as the times when you betrayed yourself and followed the norm. Each of those choices leaves a mark—sometimes in the form of a wound or a reinforcement of fear and doubt, and other times as a revelation of the deepest essence of soul. All of your choices, whether fortunate or unfortunate, are useful. Each shows you something important about yourself, and all are allies in helping you face the truth.



The essential question

Now I pose this essential question to you: What do you really want?

Surprisingly, most people have never asked themselves this question with any depth. Indeed, most people live their entire lives without really questioning what it is that they truly want. Most just make do with whatever shows up. Most are content to settle for some version, hopefully a little bit better, of what their parents had or wanted. Others may rebel and strive for something totally different from what their parents had but end

up with the same results. Many people who choose to become parents say that what they most want is not to treat their children the way their parents treated them. But all these choices exist in the realm of relative slavery. These are not true choices but conditioned responses.

When we act out of conditioning, all of our choices are rooted in a ground of ignorance. Unless you know who you are, all of your choices remain the choices of a slave. Of course, slaves sometimes protest that they are in fact free and can do whatever they please. Except to be still. Slaves do not have the power of silence. Silence is the key that unlocks all of the chains of slavery. All slaves are bound to the noise of arising phenomena. In using the term slaves, I am including the roles of both master and slave, since all roles in this world are roles of relative slavery. The apparent master is as enslaved as the apparent slave. Both are addicted to sensory experience and to the voices of their egoic minds talking in their heads.

My teacher Papaji said that there is a river of thought waves, and this river is washing all beings downstream. Some rationalize that they are going with the flow, others zigzag and imagine that they are in control, while still others gather objects and people around them so that they can float down the river together. The rarest of the rare are those who give rise to the desire for freedom. Freedom is the willingness to take a stand exactly where you are, in the middle of the mind stream.

This desire for freedom cannot be contained. It cannot be moderated. It cannot be tailored to the expectations of others. When those who are washing by in the stream cry out that you are lost, that you are falling behind as they rush ahead, great

temptations surface that urge you to turn away from your true self and to swim back into the mainstream. But the desire for freedom is not a casual affair. It is the culmination of the spiritual path. It is the end of the search. It is the end of life as you knew it. So you do not waver.

My teacher would look into the eyes of seekers who said that they thought that they wanted freedom and demand, "If your hair were on fire and you were rushing to the river and passed some friends who called out to you to sit and join them for a cup of coffee, would you stop? Would you even take time to answer? No, you would keep heading straight for the river! That is the desire for freedom. There is no time to sit and think."

Examine yourself and see what is on your own list of what you want. For most people on the path, the list goes something like this: "Sure, I want to be free, but I also want to be successful. I want to have money. I want my parents to love me. I want to have great sex." None of these desires are bad or wrong. It is simply not the way to find true freedom and happiness. Ask yourself honestly: has changing your circumstances, changing your partner, or having more ever led you to lasting peace and true fulfillment? This is not about morality or any sort of judgment. What I am proposing is simply skillful means.

If you still believe that changing something in your life will make you happy, perhaps you aren't yet ready to find true happiness and freedom. But perhaps someday when you have exhausted all of your attempts to fulfill fantasies, you will finally be disillusioned enough with the world to look somewhere else. A faster, more direct way to freedom and happiness is to go through your list of preferences and desires right now and to see that none of them are ultimately fulfilling, because

they are all the desires of a slave. Then you're ripe. Then you're left with one single desire, the desire for freedom.

This desire turns into a blazing fire, because it is the only desire. It takes hold of you. This burning desire for freedom is like a funeral pyre; it burns all of the elements that made up your false identity as a slave.

Then everything is revealed. You fall into a realization of yourself that is beyond your wildest dreams. The depth and the duration of your experience in this vast realm of realization depend on the intensity of your desire. The more you surrender, the deeper it takes you, and the longer it lasts. This is the samadhi mentioned at the beginning of this book.

This, too, disappears, as all experiences come and go, but you are left with a certainty that is revealed through experience yet beyond experience.

At some point, everything that you turned away from comes back to test you. If you don't touch the temptations, they too burn in freedom's fire, and your realization goes even deeper.



The desire for freedom

Again, I ask the question, What do you really want? I repeat this question because you can accomplish nothing of real consequence until you answer this question on the deepest level. Once you answer this question, a radical reappraisal of your life may point you in a completely new direction.

Most people's lives are dedicated to getting what they think they want. The problem is that most people don't know what

they really want. Most people live in the conditioned wants of family and in the manufactured wants of society, with their subconscious fantasies projected onto the world. In this way, they spend their lives invested in false wants and desires.

Most people only know how to define what they want by what they already have and what they don't have, by what they want to fix or get rid of, by what they want to keep or increase. All of this, including all relationships, belongs to the realm of objects, but ownership of these objects is only the projection of the egoic mind. This egoic mind, which tells a story to itself about who it is, feels separate, alone, and cut off. Caught in the habit of misidentification and suffering, it is desperate to defend its space.

People sometimes say, "Well, I have a family; I have children." Do you believe that your children would be better off with an enlightened parent or a neurotic one? Do you believe that your doubting mind, trying to figure out and create the future, is more reliable and responsible than enlightened love?

People caught in the egoic trap are avoiding what they really want. But so long as there is an experience of separation, there is a correspondingly deep and true longing for union. So long as there is fear and a sense of isolation, there is a deep and true longing to return home.

My counsel is to tell the truth about where you have turned away from the longing for union, so that you can find time for the deep and true call of your heart. Until you allow all the self-betrays to be unveiled in the light, you subconsciously sabotage what you really want. By self-betrayal, I mean every place where you have sold out or settled for something less than the deepest truth of your heart.

Be willing to stay true to your deepest longing for truth in the face of all the subconscious pulls that arise from the ocean of mind, as thought waves try to wash you back into the desires of the subconscious.

In the end, the desire for freedom transcends all other desires. It is the only true desire of a human life.

In the past, becoming aware of this desire was rare. But humanity is now entering a new stage. Either we will evolve quickly or we will destroy the earth. The choice is ours. Now is the time for ordinary people to wake up. There is no need to be a great saint. Simply because you are alive and intelligent enough to read this, you are ready for the next evolutionary leap: from the isolated selfishness that is destroying the world to the bliss of union that holds the healing of the earth. Perhaps the only hope for our planet lies in our willingness to end our personal suffering.

Until the desire for truth, freedom, and love arises in a life, everything is pointless. Life is all about “me” and “my story” of “reality.” Once the desire for freedom arises, it becomes the ground of being, the central axis that life revolves around. This is the beginning of the end. It signals the end of the search and the birth of realization.

Awakening is the end of wanting and the beginning of discovering.

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Spiritual maturity

When you're caught in the enslavement of egoic identification, you're convinced that there is both a me and a world and that

you have to do something to manifest the good and to keep away the bad. This “me” seems to be the ground of your being. This “me” has good times, and this “me” has bad times. You would like to hold on to the good times and get rid of the bad times.

As you mature, you realize that the good times always come to an end. Short-lived pleasures inevitably carry the aftertaste of long-term suffering. Think about it. In examining joys of the past, can you say that your joy ever lasted? In anything you have ever enjoyed, has your joy ever really been enough for you to say you are fulfilled and need nothing more? Circumstances change, and when they do, you lose the emotions and states that were caused by those circumstances. Loved ones die, jobs change, money comes and goes, and with the flow of circumstances, your mind is lifted up and crashed down, over and over again.

Every ego wants to keep the highs and get rid of the lows, but wisdom lies in seeing that you never find true fulfillment, joy, and happiness this way. Causeless joy is unconditional; it is not determined by the ebb and flow of circumstances. Recognizing this is one of the hallmarks of spiritual maturity.

Once you realize the nature of suffering and the possibility of freedom, you become willing to turn away from every idea of who you think you are in order to find the truth. In this truth, you discover the joy that does not fade or change with circumstances.

For most people, “ignorance is bliss.” Most are content to have as much pleasure and as little pain as possible. What they are really expressing is the desire to extinguish self-consciousness and to return to the life of an animal. This is the desire to pull the covers over your head and try to sleep, ignoring the monster that is in the room with you.

But for the spiritually mature, those who are ripe with the readiness to realize the real and the true, this avoidance no longer works. To the degree that you are mature and ready to end your suffering, to that degree you become aware of your deep and genuine longing for home.

We live in exceptional times. No matter how difficult it may have been in the past to realize the original Self, now is the time. No matter where you come from, whether you lead a holy life or not, it is possible for you, right now, to wake up. Be willing to let go of everything you think you know just for one moment.

For one moment, be still. In this moment, space and time open. This opening is your chance to find the answer to the question Who am I.

I am here to tell you that if you picked up this book, if you found your way to these words, you are ready to know the answer to the essential question of your heart. You entered this collective dream with one purpose and one purpose only: to wake up and to realize the truth of the situation—that you are formless, timeless, immortal love and that you're already home.

PART 2

The Nature of Reality

CHAPTER 3

Metaphors for the Human Condition

In Part 1, I told the story of the slave who hears about the freedom train for the first time. Here are some additional metaphors that convey the flavor of the human condition and that set the stage for our exploration of the true nature of reality.

Chicken-dancing

Some time ago, I read an article in the *New Yorker* by Calvin Trillin that evoked a childhood memory. In the 1950s, when I was growing up in New York City, my family would sometimes go to Chinatown. There was an arcade there with three different boxes of performing chickens. For a nickel, a curtain would open in one box, “Turkey in the Straw” would play, and a chicken would come out and dance to the music. If you put a nickel in the next box, a chicken would emerge who played the piano. A nickel in the third box brought out a chicken that played tic-tac-toe with you. At the end of each performance, a slot would open, and the chicken would get some corn.

To some degree, everyone in the world is like those chickens performing for corn. Perhaps the chickens dancing to the music feel superior because they can express themselves with their bodies. The piano players are similarly proud of practicing their art and feel special because of their emotional sensitivity, while the tic-tac-toe players feel superior because they use their minds, not their backs, to get food.

Do you wonder whether these chickens ever feel an existential longing for the flock? Or are they too busy dancing for corn to notice that things are not as they are meant to be? Are they perhaps too smug with corn galore to ever wonder about the true nature of reality?

The three forms of human identification represented by the three chickens—in their physical dancing, emotional piano playing, and mental game of tic-tac-toe—are expressions of our own styles of identification as we chase corn. Each form veils our true identity, our true essence.

A conditioned response, whether it is dancing for corn or putting on a tie and going to work, is first programmed and then internalized, personalized, and made into something special. When something is personalized, it becomes part of an internal story we tell ourselves that explains and rationalizes why we do what we do. When we perform the various rites of chicken-dancing, all human beings think that their performance is special and are hurt when others don't see it that way. By identifying our act as our self, we feel proud or ashamed, lauded or misunderstood, but never notice that all this is taking place as we scratch for corn.

We have been living on a slave planet. Everyone here has been conditioned since birth to personalize the scratching for corn. This is the prison of mind that keeps everyone in line, busy at the food chute, and missing out on life.

Farmers have learned that barnyard music makes animals more docile on their way to the slaughterhouse. In much the same way, we humans are made docile and enslaved by our personalized channels of barnyard music. This is the talk radio that runs in our heads, seemingly nonstop, commenting on "me" and "my" circumstances, deciding which life choice to make, all the while lining up for the corn that leads to slaughter.

Everyone is whistling in the dark and dancing as fast as he or she can on the way to the slaughterhouse. But it is time to stop chicken-dancing, to bring the barnyard music in our head to a full stop, and to discover that which is prior to all movement and all noise. Then when the impulse to scratch for corn arises, we will have a choice whether to follow it again.

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The metaphor of movies

The great Indian mystic and sage Ramana Maharshi often used the metaphor of movies to explain the nature of reality. We enjoy watching a film, yet on a barely subconscious level, we know that what we're seeing is only colored lights. But that level of reality has to be ignored in order to enjoy the experience of the movie.

We laugh and cry and get involved in the movie as if it were real. All the while, it's really just a light shining from a projector. To see this light requires turning our back on the movie. If we're busy identifying with the story of the movie, we don't want to tear our eyes away from the screen. But to perceive the truth of the situation, we have to be willing, for one moment, to turn away from the movie, totally and completely, and to look toward the light.



Our own private movie

We each have our own private movie called *Me and My Life*. The projector is what we call the mind. The mind is a prism; it is crystallized consciousness of a certain density. Light shines through the mind and gets refracted and projected into the world as "me and my objects" or "me and my relationships." For now, let's call the invisible light that shines through the mind to project our world *the light of our soul*.

We each play our part in the world. We live in it and we die in it, again and again. Countless times, all of humanity lives and

dies in this projection we call reality. We humans are terrified to turn our attention away from the movie, let alone to leave the theater. Until one day, through grace, you hear of a world outside the theater. The world outside the movie shatters the wildest imaginings of the mind that is watching the movie. The world outside the movie is beyond the mind's capacity to grasp.



Perhaps another way to experience the metaphor of the movie is to imagine that movies are being advertised for the first time, before anyone has actually experienced one. You don't know what to expect, and neither do your neighbors. Let's suppose that the first show is being promoted like this: "Come sit in a dark room with a hundred strangers and have a vicarious experience that may involve romance, comedy, tragedy, sex, or violence." This kind of advertisement might attract some people to the theater, but not most of the average movie audience.

For movies to work, we have to ignore the fact that we're sitting in a dark room with strangers and focus instead on the story unfolding in front of us. One of the ways we as a group overlook the fact that we're sitting in a dark room is by emotionally bonding together as we become an audience in the theater. We feel connected by the common experience we are sharing together. As a group, we overlook the naked reality that we are strangers sitting in a dark room with colored lights. In the ego structure, denial, as well as ignorance, works in a similar way as we make-believe our story and ignore reality.

When I speak of turning around to face the light, I am not speaking of just one more idea to add to your movie or of changing