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JOURNEY TO THE PRESENT

by Steve Taylor

How far we've all travelled to the present
through the journeys of our lives -
a million different paths of experience
that have led us all to the same place.

How far our paths have diverged
through different landscapes and
climates
full of obstacles, dangers and wonders -
and now we all converge here.

Some journeys have been long and
arduous
and we're covered with dust and soaked
with sweat.
Some journeys have been shorter, more
comfortable
and we're still fresh-faced, and eager
for adventure.

But it doesn't matter how we got here.
In the oneness of the present, our
different pasts dissolve.
In the present, we are free of the past.
In the present, we are all equal.

So let's celebrate our arrival.
Let's welcome each other home to the
present
like friends who disembark from
different ships
and embrace as they meet in the
harbour.

Extracted from *Back to Stillness: Poems for Spiritual Awakening* by Steve Taylor,
published by Phoenix Press, paperback (110 pages)

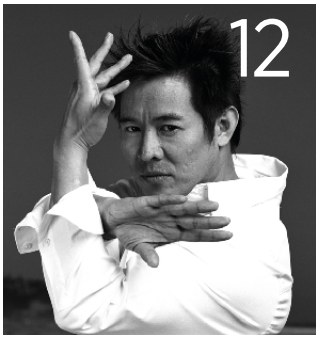
STEVE TAYLOR is the author of many best-selling books on psychology and spirituality. His books of spiritual poetry *The Calm Center* and *The Clear Light* have brought stillness and joy to tens of thousands of readers. In his new collection, he provides meditations and reflections to support our spiritual journey. *Back to Stillness: Poems for Spiritual Awakening* reminds us of the deep contentment that lies beneath the turbulent surface of our minds and the harmony that lies beneath the turmoil of the world. Every poem is an illumination that will help return you to your authentic spiritual self. (www.stevenmtaylor.com)



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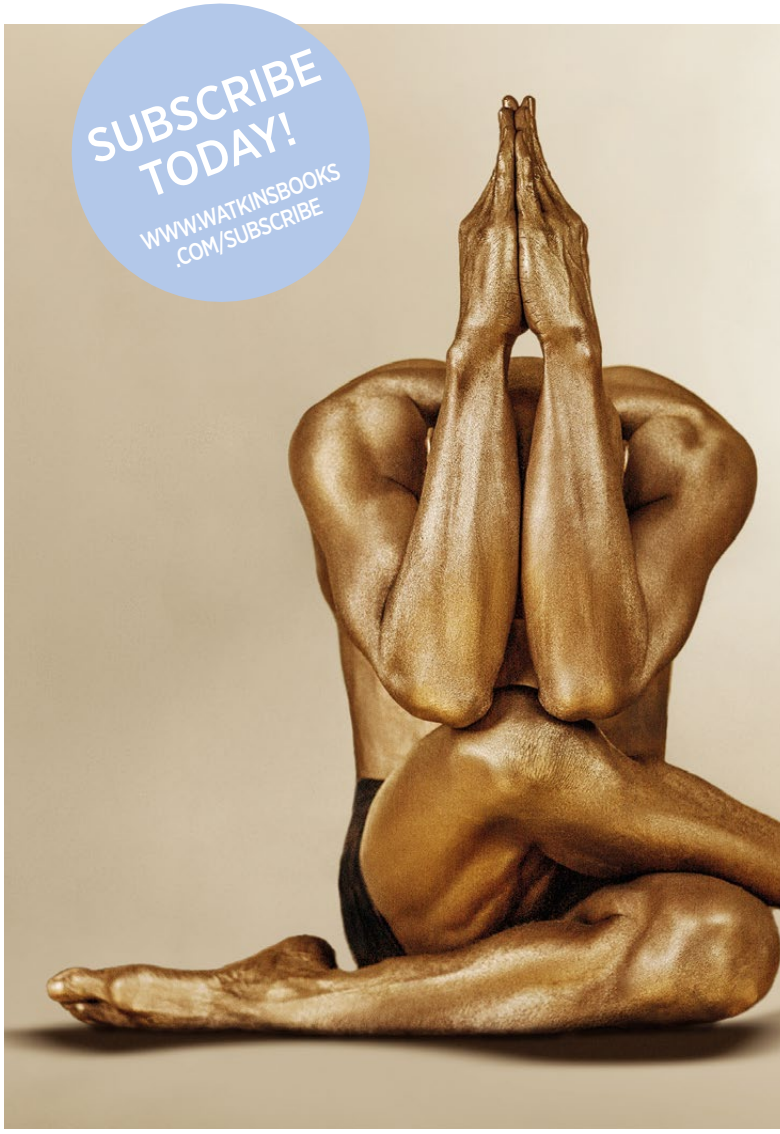
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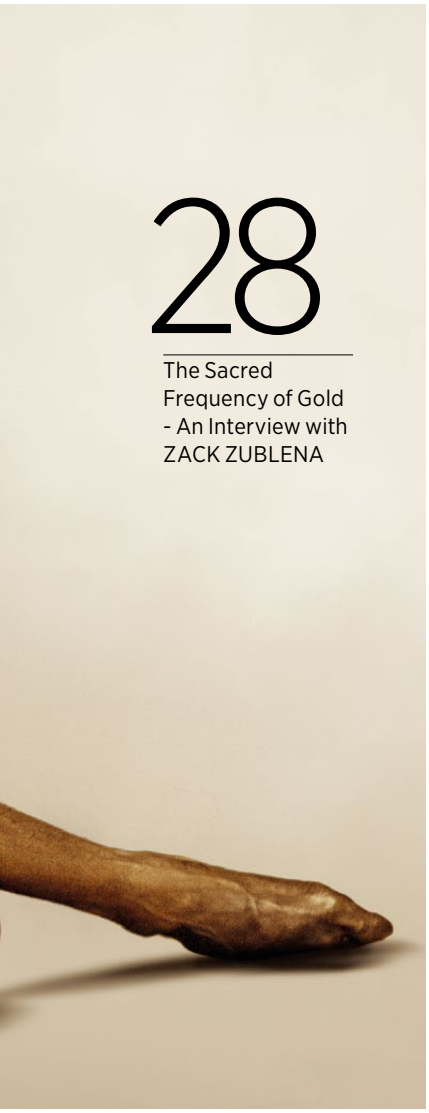
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/// A History of Heaven *by Tobias Churton*
/// Gaudi: God's Architect *by Peter Stanford*
/// UFOs, AI, & the Secret Forces Guiding Human Destiny *by D.W. Pasulka*



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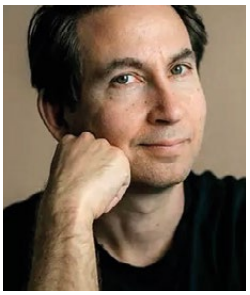
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the Summer 2026 issue of *Watkins Magazine!*



Summer is a time for rejuvenation and inspiration. We have some wonderful articles for you in this issue, ranging from Ken Wilber's piece on Sri Ramana Maharshi to Michael A. Singer's new book *Wisdom Untethered*, which offers a powerful invitation to stop fighting with life and start allowing it to unfold. In *Beyond Life and Death*, Jet Li's first book in English, the martial arts icon and global film star offers a revelatory, profound and inspiring guide to self-mastery and spiritual wisdom, while in his article, Pico Iyer looks at the surprising gifts of silence.

In our interview with artist and healer Zack Zublena, he discusses his work with gold, which he calls the metal of spiritual sovereignty. According to Zack, gold symbolizes inner authority, soul independence, self-mastery, and freedom from control systems. "True Sovereignty", says Zack, "means becoming gold: incorruptible, radiant, free."

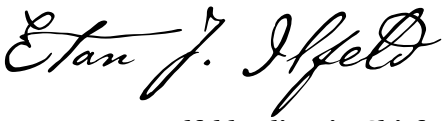
Further into the issue, Philip Goldberg's new book, *Karmic Relief*, shows us how to harness the laws of cause and effect for a joyful, meaningful life, while in his piece 'A Man's Path to Freedom', Connor Beaton asks, "How are we as men to reconcile the sheer drive and determination we feel stirring in our souls with the intense confusion, anger, and emotional bleeding-out we can often feel?"

We also explore deeper paths to self-discovery and expression. In *The Nomadic Soul*, Seline Shenoy reminds us of J.R.R. Tolkien's words, "Not all those who wander are lost," and offers a seeker's guide to finding a sense of self and belonging in the modern world. Meanwhile, artist and writer Ally Markotich shows us how to rekindle our creativity with the sacred feminine, and in 'The Sacred Cosmology of the Body', sacred dancer and choreographer Banafsheh Sayyad shows us how to embody love and luminosity to transform our lives.

We are also delighted to feature Jonathan Black's new book, *The Secret History of the Universe*. This character-driven history of mysticism shows how scientists have walked the line between genius, madness, and ancient esoteric ideas to reveal a universe that is deeply mysterious and unexpectedly spiritual.

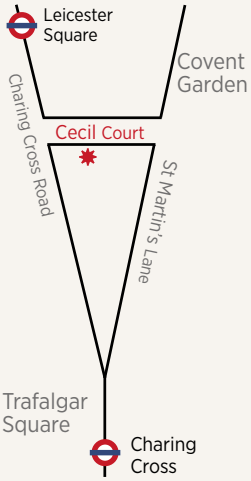
Finally, we feature a beautiful extract and stunning card images from the tarot deck *When Women Had Wings*. As author Angi Sullins reminds us, even if we have forgotten them or feel they are broken, we all possess inner wings that are as real and necessary as the breath in our bodies.

Best wishes,



Etan Ilfeld, Editor-in-Chief

ABOUT WATKINS BOOKS



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VIEWPOINTS

"Ultimately, life itself is asking you a single question: Are you willing to let go?"

MICHAEL A. SINGER, P.11

"We are curious travelers in our dreams and imagination."

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"The visible world is the sacred landscape in which spiritual forces become tangible."

BANAFSHEH SAYYAD, P.66

"When we open to our deepest ground, we encounter an unshakable sense of well-being regardless of circumstances."

JOHN J. PRENDERGAST, P.41

"Who is the Knower that knows the world but cannot itself be known? Who is the Hearer that hears the birds but cannot itself be heard? Who is the Seer that sees the clouds but cannot itself be seen?"

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"Is there a way to alchemize the pain we carry into a purpose?"

CONNOR BEATON, P.59

"You are the potion. You are the amulet. You have the power."

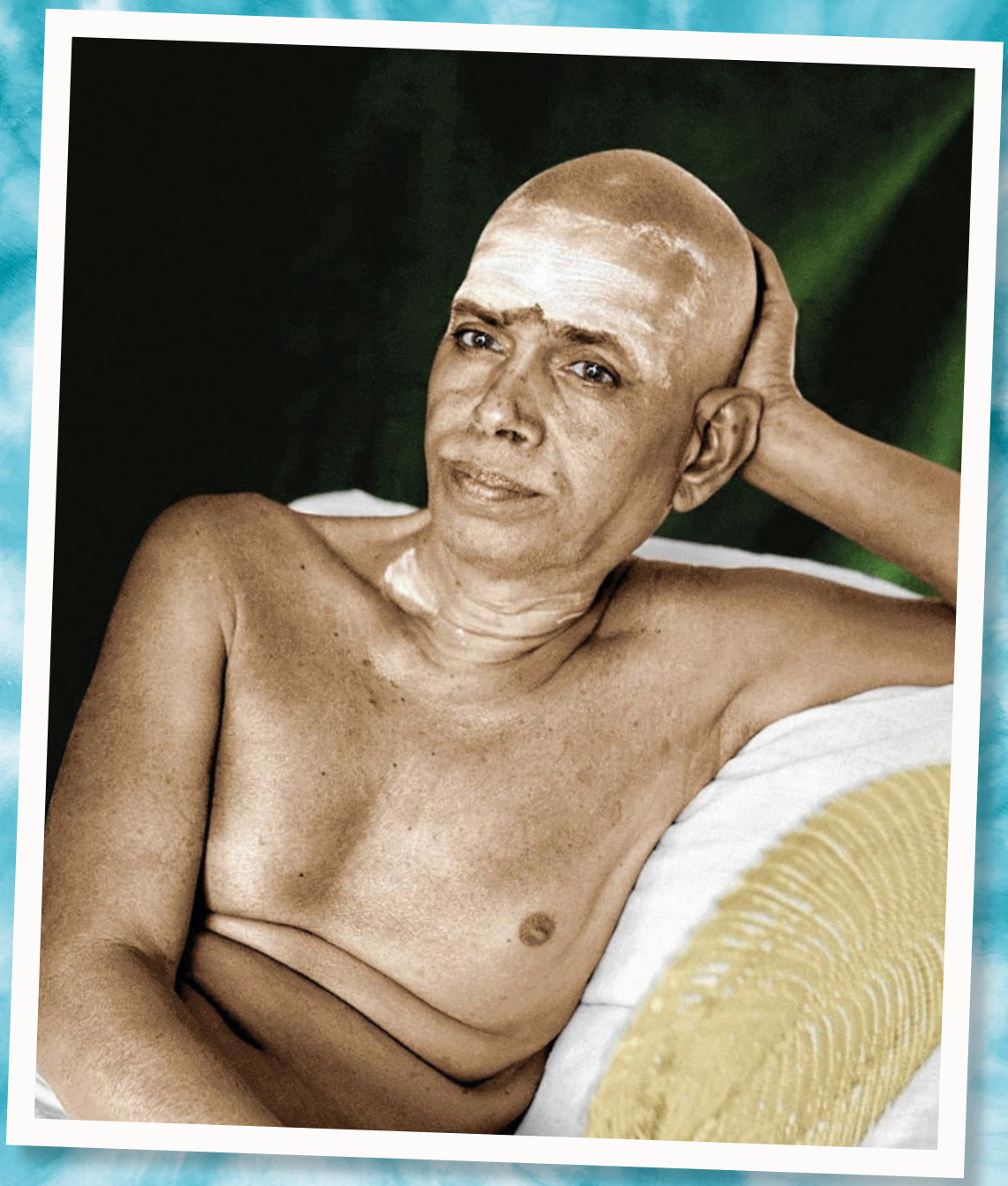
TUUP, P.69

"What you have to do is buy a good pillow, empty your mind, breathe and relax."

ANTONY CUMMINS, P.23

"By granting yourself the freedom to roam free - mind, heart, and soul - you'll find peace, and the solutions to your most vexing problems will appear in unexpected places."

SELINE SHENOY, P.43



The Sage of the Century:

Sri Ramana Maharshi

by Ken Wilber

That non-dual vision in the form of *Vedanta*, is the precious gift of India to the world, and it found its purest, most elegant, most brilliant expression in the simple sage of Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

His realisation came to him fully formed – or perhaps we should say, fully formless – and therefore it needed no further growth. He simply speaks from and as the absolute, the Self, the purest Emptiness that is the goal and ground of the entire manifest world, and is not other to that world. Sri Ramana, echoing Shankara (Indian sage), used to say:

The world is illusory;
***Brahman* alone is real;**
***Brahman* is the world.**

This profound realisation is what separates Sri Ramana's genuine enlightenment from today's pretenders – deep ecology, Gaia revivals, Goddess worship, ecopsychology, systems theory, web-of-life notions – none of which have grasped the first two lines, and therefore, contrary to their sweet pronouncements, do not really understand the third. It is for all of those who are only in love with the manifest world – from capitalists to socialists, from green polluters to green peacers, from egocentrics to ecocentrists – that Sri Ramana's message needs so desperately to be heard.

"It is for all of those who are only in love with the manifest world – from capitalists to socialists, from green polluters to green peacers, from egocentrics to ecocentrists – that Sri Ramana's message needs so desperately to be heard."

What and where is this Self? How do I abide as That? There is no doubt how Sri Ramana would answer those – and virtually all other – questions: Who wants to know? What in you, right now, is aware of this page? Who is the Knower that knows the world but cannot itself be known? Who is the Hearer that hears the birds but cannot itself be heard? Who is the Seer that sees the clouds but cannot itself be seen?

And so arises Self-enquiry, Sri Ramana's special gift to the world. I have feelings, but I am not those feelings. Who am I? I have thoughts, but I am not those thoughts. Who am I? I have desires, but I am not those desires. Who am I?

So you push back into the Source of your own awareness – what Sri Ramana often called the 'I'-'I', since it is aware of the normal I or ego. You push back into the Witness, the 'I'-'I', and you rest as That. I am not objects, not feelings, not desires, not thoughts.

But then people usually make a rather unfortunate mistake in this Self-enquiry. They think that if they rest in the Self, or Witness, they are going to see something, or feel something, something really amazing, special, spiritual. But you won't see anything. If you see something, that is just another object – another feeling, another thought, another sensation, another image. But those are all objects; those are what you are not.

No, as you rest in the Witness – realising I am not objects, I am not feelings, I am not thoughts – all you will notice is a sense of Freedom, a sense of Liberation, a sense of Release – release from the terrible constriction of identifying with these little finite objects, the little body and little mind and little ego, all of which are objects that can be seen, and thus are not the true Seer, the real Self, the pure Witness, which is what you really are.

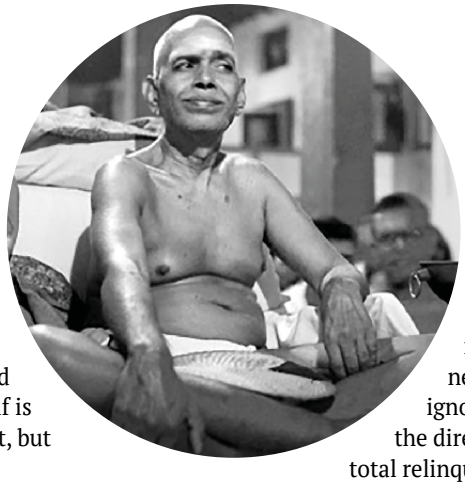
So you won't see anything in particular. Whatever is arising is fine. Clouds float by in the sky, feelings float by in the body, thoughts float by in the mind – and you can effortlessly witness all of them. They all spontaneously arise in your own present, easy, effortless awareness. And this witnessing awareness is not itself anything specific you can see. It is just a vast background sense of Freedom – or pure Emptiness – and in that pure Emptiness, which you are, the entire manifest world arises. You are that Freedom, Openness, Emptiness – and not any little finite thing that arises in it. Resting in that empty, free, easy, effortless witnessing, notice that the clouds are arising in the vast space of your awareness. The clouds are arising within you – so much so you can taste the clouds, you are one with the clouds, it is as if they are on this side of your skin, they are so close. The sky and your awareness have become one, and all things in the sky are floating effortlessly through your own awareness. You can kiss the sun, swallow the mountain, they are that close. Zen says '*Swallow the Pacific Ocean in a single gulp*', and that's the easiest thing in the world when inside and outside are no longer two, when subject and object are non-dual, when the looker and looked at are One Taste.

And so: The world is illusory, which means you are not any object at all – nothing that can be seen is ultimately real. You are *neti-neti*, not this, not that. And under no circumstances should you base your salvation on that which is finite, temporal, passing, illusory, suffering-enhancing and agony-inducing.

Brahman [absolute reality] alone is real, the Self (unqualifiable *Brahman-Atman*) alone is real – the pure Witness, the timeless Unborn, the formless Seer, the radical 'I'-'I', radiant Emptiness – is what is real and all that is real. It is your condition, your nature, your essence, your present and your future, your desire and your destiny, and yet it is always ever-present as pure Presence, the alone that is Alone.

Brahman is the world, Emptiness and Form are not-two.

After you realise that the manifest world is illusory, and after you realise that *Brahman* alone is real, then you can see that the absolute and the relative are not-two or non-dual, then you can see that *nirvana* and *samsara* are not-two, then you can realise that the Seer and everything seen are not-two, *Brahman* and the world are not-two – all of which really means, the sound of those birds singing! The entire world of Form exists nowhere but in your own present Formless Awareness: You can drink the Pacific in a single gulp, because the entire world literally exists in your pure Self, the ever-present great 'I'-'I'.



Finally, and most important, Sri Ramana would remind us that the pure Self – and therefore the great Liberation – cannot be attained, any more than you can attain your feet or acquire your lungs. You are already aware of the sky, you already hear the sounds around you, you already witness this world. One hundred percent of the enlightened mind or pure Self is present right now – not ninety-nine percent, but one hundred percent.

As Sri Ramana constantly pointed out, if the Self (or knowledge of the Self) is something that comes into existence – if your realisation has a beginning in time – then that is merely another object, another passing, finite, temporal state. There is no reaching the Self – the Self is reading this page. There is no looking for the Self – it is looking out of your eyes right now.

There is no attaining the Self – it is reading these words. You simply, absolutely, cannot attain that which you have never lost. And if you do attain something, Sri Ramana would say, that's very nice, but that's not the Self.

So, if I may suggest, as you read the following words from the world's greatest sage: If you think you don't understand Self or Spirit, then rest in that which doesn't understand, and just that is Spirit. If you think you don't quite 'get' the Self or Spirit, then rest in that which doesn't quite get it, and just that is Spirit. Thus, if you think you understand Spirit, that is Spirit. If you think you don't, that is Spirit. And so we can leave with Sri Ramana's greatest and most secret message: The enlightened mind is not hard to attain but impossible to avoid.

* * * * * * *

Bhagavan's Detailed Introduction to Self Enquiry – 9th July 1936

Our mistake is that we intellectualise the *Vichara* method. We think that the Self can be discovered by the intellect. The intellect arises from the Self and subsides into it. The intellect is not competent to discover the Self. When the intellect subsides, the Self from which it emerged, the Self which it eclipsed, shines. One finds that no such thing as the not-Self ever existed and that no such thing as the not-Self could ever be capable of existence.

The one who makes this finding does not survive to think, '*I have found this*', or '*This discovery of the Self has been made by me*.' Has he disappeared? No, he never appeared, he never existed. The ego is a fictitious foe; look for him and only Reality remains.

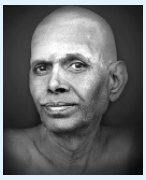
Mind is only the false notion of its own separate existence; the ego 'I' is only an erroneous belief. However, no matter how dense the ignorance, it can never completely hide Reality, as even an ignorant man says 'I'. Thus, the Self is within the direct reach of everyone, but it requires the total relinquishment of all beliefs, ideas, prejudices, judgements, thoughts, opinions, and tendencies toward fulfilment of craving for sensory perceptions, inherited from countless numbers of previous lives or births. Everything you collectively refer to as your 'personality' must vanish. Then Reality will be revealed.

All that is needed to Realise is to be still and that means to keep the mind incessantly submerged in its source. The effort needed for Realisation is not one involving movement of mind or blossoming of thought, but rather one which involves permanently restraining the mind in its source. If abandoning that effort also you are able to achieve perfect repose in the Shining of the Heart, then everything has become still and there are no further doubts or cravings.

Being remains as itself without being disturbed by any *vrittis* [structures of the mind]. The *neti* [not this] method will sift away the not-Self, but who or what is to account for the one who believes himself to be the *sadhaka* [seeker] attempting to discover Reality or the true Self? To discover the falsehood of the *sadhaka's* existence, the investigation Who am I? is advocated as being necessary. Who am I? does not refer to intellectually taking up the line of theorisation, '*I wonder who I might be...*'. Completely arresting the movement of thought waves – which veil the direct experience of Reality shining in the Heart quietly as 'I'-'I', silently merging the mind in its source so as to make it remain one and identical with the Beingness of the Self – is the import of the investigation Who am I?

Its purpose is not to enable one Self to discover another, for there is only one Self, nothing could be more absurd. Its purpose is to totally despoil and weed out the poisonous, malevolent tree of ignorance, leaf, branch, trunk, shoot and root, so that it perishes once and for all in the blissful light of Absolute Awareness, so that it shatters the embodied state of the *sadhaka* once and for all. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



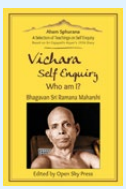
In 1936, at fifty-six years old, **BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI** was a vibrant and active Master, embodying pure Self-knowledge. Born in 1879, he is one of the most renowned and recent of India's great Sages, Saints, and Spiritual Masters. At just sixteen, he experienced a spontaneous awakening, leaving his home in Madurai to live at the sacred mountain of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, where he taught and guided seekers until his passing in 1950.



KEN WILBER is a renowned American philosopher and the founder of Integral Theory, a comprehensive framework that seeks to integrate diverse fields of knowledge and human experience. Wilber's Integral Theory aims to bridge the gaps between different world views and encourage a more inclusive, integrative approach to personal growth and global transformation. His work synthesises insights from psychology, philosophy, science, and spirituality, offering a holistic view of human development and consciousness.

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Bookshelf

VICHARA – SELF ENQUIRY, WHO AM I? BY BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI, *edited and published by Open Sky Press, illustrated Paperback (328 pages). A selection of teachings on Self Enquiry based on Sri Gajapathi Aiyyer's 1936 diary.*

Wisdom Untethered:

The Time for Questions



by Michael A. Singer

People walk through life carrying a longing to be at peace and free, both outside and in. It is not difficult to see that this longing manifests differently in every heart. This is not a human shortcoming; it is the miracle of consciousness expressing itself through people's countless unique experiences.

When you first hear the teachings of spiritual awakening and inner surrender, you naturally hear them through the filter of your past. As you progress along the path of opening up and letting go of your past stored impressions, what once seemed complex and difficult becomes surprisingly clear and straightforward. As this transformation takes place, questions naturally arise.

What you will find in *Wisdom Untethered* is the outpouring of two hundred questions from fellow seekers who have tasted the possibility of liberation and want to understand it more deeply. These questions span every aspect of life: relationships, work, how we navigate our thoughts and emotions, and how we ultimately learn to release the inner blockages that have kept us bound.

These are not theoretical inquiries. They come from people who are doing the real work - people who have felt the friction of letting go and have glimpsed the expansiveness on the other side. Their questions help illuminate the many ways in which the mind tries to reassert control, how the heart can open and close, and how the journey unfolds layer by layer, deeper and deeper.

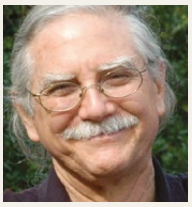
I have come to see that these questions are an integral part of our spiritual journey. Each person's question is a doorway into greater understanding, a mirror reflecting where we are in our own growth. When you explore these questions and their responses, you are not just reading someone else's process; you are given the chance to look freshly at your own.

Wisdom Untethered is meant to be a companion on your path. My hope is that you will discover in the book the reassurance that you are not alone. You walk with others who are inspired to embrace life's challenges and willing to learn what it means to surrender in the moments that matter most.

Ultimately, life itself is asking you a single question: Are you willing to let go? As you engage with the questions in this book, you will find your own answers arising from the seat of awareness within you. That is where true wisdom is found—untethered by the mind, untouched by circumstance, and waiting to be discovered.

All you have to do is be willing to let go. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



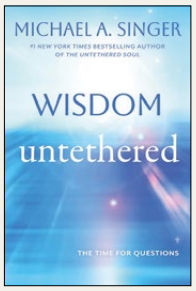
MICHAEL A. SINGER is author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *The Untethered Soul,* and the *New York Times* bestsellers, *Living Untethered* and *The Surrender Experiment*. He had a deep inner awakening in 1971 while working on his doctorate in economics and went into seclusion to focus on yoga and meditation. In 1975, he founded Temple of the Universe, a now long-established yoga and meditation center where people of any religion or set of beliefs can come together to experience inner peace.

On the web

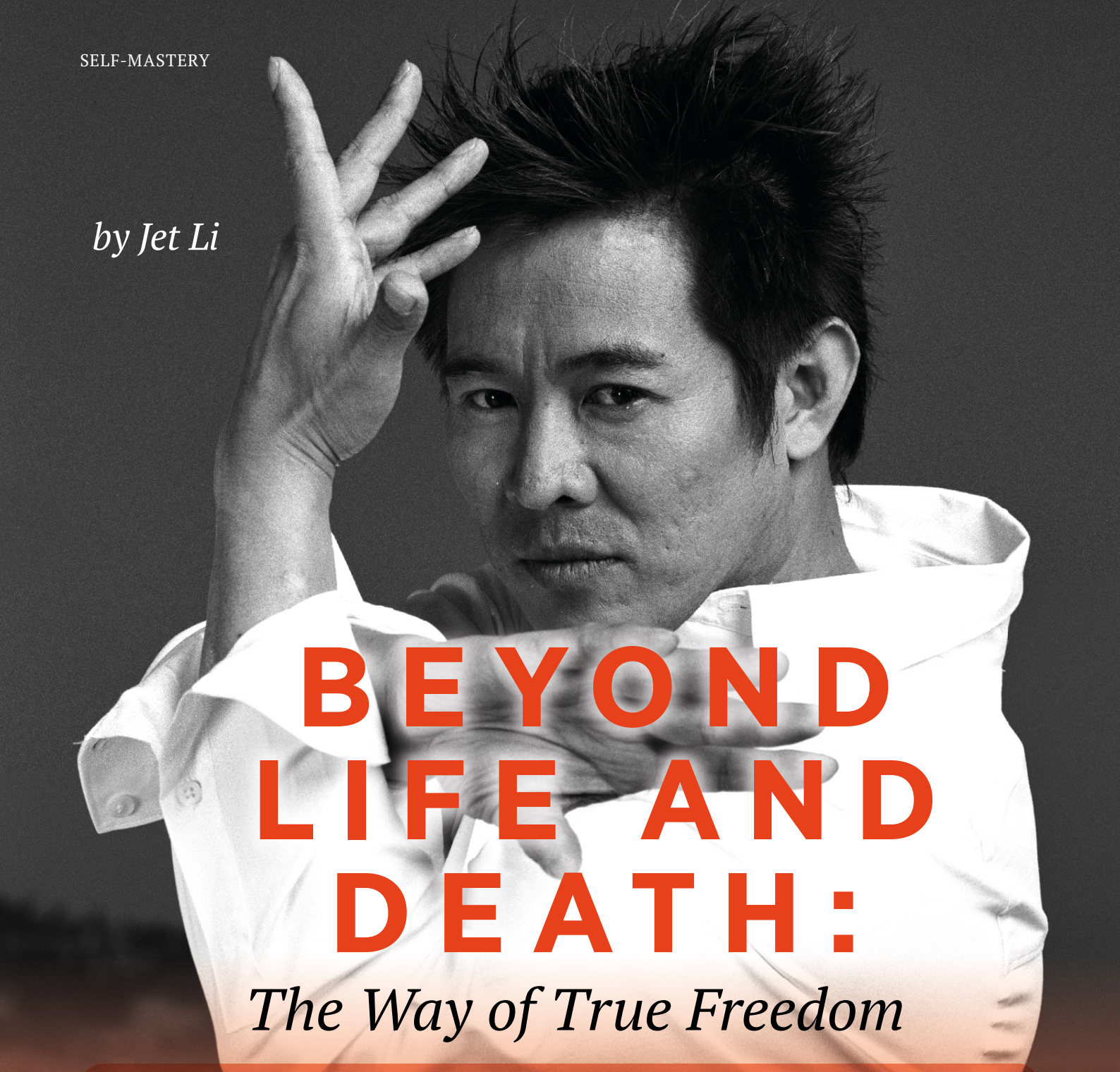
untetheredsoul.com

Bookshelf

WISDOM UNTETHERED: THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS BY MICHAEL A. SINGER, *published by New Harbinger Publications, Paperback (232 pages)*



by Jet Li



BEYOND LIFE AND DEATH:

The Way of True Freedom

All human beings want two things: health and happiness.

Most of us spend time thinking about how to be healthy, making a point to exercise, eat nourishing food, rest when we're tired, and see the doctor when we're sick. We consult the latest science promising longevity and make purchases based on advertisements promising glamour.

Few of us, however, reflect deeply on how to be happy. We readily train the body and neglect to train the mind. But if we are healthy on the outside, yet miserable on the inside, we will suffer.

To achieve lasting happiness, body and mind must be in balance. Both must be cultivated for us to walk the middle path without being pulled into extremes.

So many of us today seek something outside of ourselves to bring us peace, instead of looking within. We base our happiness on the expectations of family and culture, comparing our progress with our peers or with flashy images of successful people. When life is going our way, we feel full of vitality and inspiration; but when we encounter obstacles and setbacks, our spirits plunge. The result is an endless cycle of chasing and grasping.

Cultivating lasting, unshakable happiness means taking the time to ask, *Who am I, really? What does true freedom look and feel like for me? Where can I find a sense of meaning and purpose that will endure through the inevitable ups and downs of life?*

Throughout my early martial arts success and my explosion onto the screen as an action star, I reached great heights of achievement: winning the national all-around championship in wushu, Chinese martial arts, five years in a row; being chosen to play the lead in *The Shaolin Temple* and becoming recognized all over Asia; bursting onto the world's stage as an action star in the fast-growing film industry of Hong Kong. My success carried me out of poverty and allowed me to fulfill my childhood dream: ensuring the financial security of my mother and my siblings.

Photo by EJ Camp

Yet for all the excitement of these worldly heights, the satisfaction I felt from these milestones was fleeting. Before one triumph had even ended, I was already chasing the next, pulled in countless directions seeking fame, adoration, wealth, and power. My desires and fears ruled over my mind like the cruel tyrants I'd face off against in my martial arts films; they were my boss, and I was their employee. Because I hadn't trained my mind, no amount of external success could free me from their hooks. I began to suspect that the external goals of life and the shiny touchstones of success did not contain the secret to long-lasting happiness that I had believed they promised.

This sent me on a lifelong journey to discover a source of peace, well-being, and contentment that could endure beyond all worldly ups and downs. Through much practice, effort, and guidance, I gradually learned the truth of my own nature—the truth that each of us is our own boss. As I learned to observe my life from within, watching my desires and fears come and go, I started to recognize my nature as a human being with the capacity to be free. As I did, I saw countless Jet Lis die away, disclosing a vision of freedom beyond any concrete goal. I started to become my own boss. I'm still working at it. You can, too.

This is the beginning of going beyond life and death. To go beyond life and death means liberating yourself from the endless cycle of suffering to live each moment with greater freedom and meaning; watching all the familiar markers of your identities arise and pass away; and flowing with the continuous movement of being. It means finding the courage to act boldly and explore yourself within.

When we live this way, we embody the Chinese concept of *zizai*. *Zi* means "self," and *zai* can mean "to exist" or "to be present." Together, they suggest rich and nuanced layers of meaning, evoking a state far beyond ordinary freedom. Conventional freedom means doing anything we want without restraint. Like a wind, we want to blow wherever our whims and desires take us, altering the landscape to suit our preferences, unrestricted and unconstrained. But zizai is the freedom of a cloud. Unlike the wind, a cloud is not driven by desires or fears. It is content with wherever it is and whatever shape it takes, passing through countless transformations without friction. It neither judges, clings, nor resists.

Yet zizai is not passive. The person who embodies it exudes quiet assuredness, knowing she's her own center of gravity, flowing effortlessly amidst ever-changing circumstances. No longer jerked around by desire or aversion, she moves with the unshakable ease of someone who has shed the weight of likes and dislikes. Perfectly at home, unburdened and utterly alive, she is simply here.

This is freedom beyond freedom: not the ability to do anything, but the liberation from the need to control anything. Here, our narrow, limited sense of self dissolves into the boundlessness of the universe itself. Language strains to describe it, because zizai is not a concept—it's the embodied experience of being perfectly at home in the universe, unburdened and utterly alive, yet beyond self, beyond life, and beyond death.

> "So many of us today seek something outside of ourselves to bring us peace, instead of looking within."

Over the years, friends of mine, along with editors from publishing houses at home and abroad, have encouraged me to share my story with the public.

They asked me, "Why don't you write a book? You've led such a unique life!"

But I always declined.

I didn't want to be attacked for boasting or trying to preach. And if the true meaning of my life, like any human life, is always evolving, ungraspable in thought and inexpressible in words, why waste any more time trying to describe it?

After much ambivalence and hesitation, I changed my mind about writing a book. With guidance from my teachers, I came to see that my experience, both my successes and my struggles, might be a light that ignites a spark within others to inspire them on their own journeys.

In that spirit, I will share the insights of my own path: my own quest to know myself beneath any and all of my worldly identities, my painful discovery of the truth of impermanence, and my secret to self-defense. I'll take you through how I learned to work with physical pain, face failure and disillusionment, devote my energy to helping others, and make all the messiness of life a training ground for liberation.

My intention with this book is to simply share my experience. It's not eternal wisdom. If you want to find the truth beyond life and death, you will have to discover it for yourself.

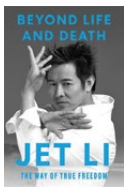
I wish you the persistence, courage, compassion, and guidance to do so. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



JET LI is one of the world's most beloved martial arts actors and global cinema icons. A five-time national *wushu* champion in China, he starred in *The Shaolin Temple, Once Upon a Time in China, Hero,* and *Fearless*. He is also a long-time Buddhist practitioner and the founder of One Foundation, China's first private charitable fundraising organization.

On the web
www.jetli.com

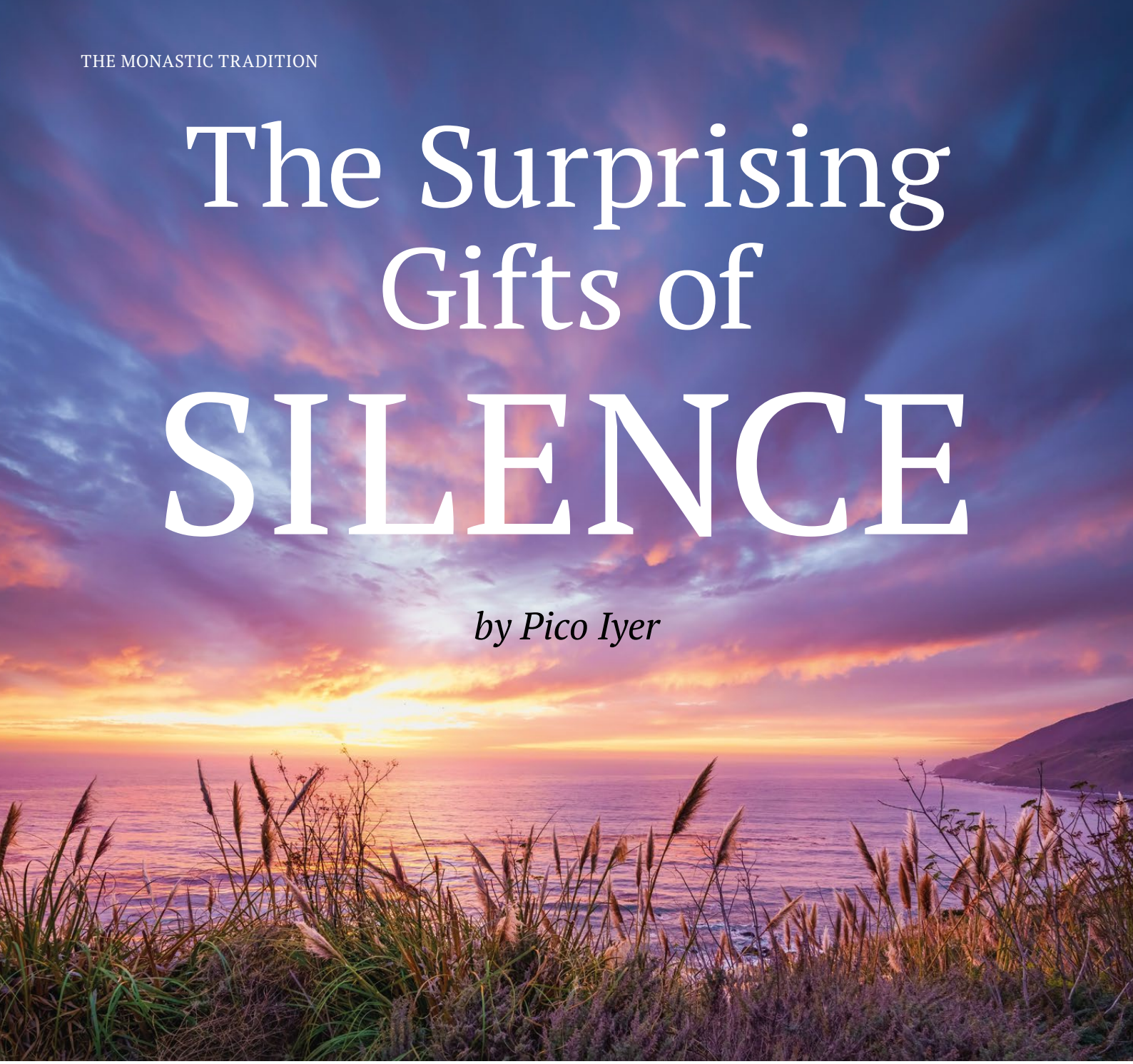


Bookshelf
BEYOND LIFE AND DEATH: THE WAY OF TRUE FREEDOM BY JET LI, *published by Hay House, Paperback (320 pages)*

Photo by EJ Camp

The Surprising Gifts of SILENCE

by Pico Iyer



"Years of meditation and prayer can create something as palpable as a high glass wall."

The first time I stepped into a simple room, high above the Pacific Ocean, I felt myself in Heaven. The sun was sending diamonds scattering across the waves below. Bees were buzzing around the lavender in my small, walled garden. There was barely a trace of human existence to be seen across the coastline to the north and south. I could almost imagine I was above the world of change.

Yet it wasn't just the beauty of this setting, here on the already otherworldly stretch of Central California known as Big Sur, that so moved me. It was the very special kind of silence that I stepped into whenever I walked into a monastery or convent in any order across the globe. Not just an absence of noise, but an almost tangible, living presence. It hardly matters how you define it; years of meditation and prayer can create something as palpable as a high glass wall.

To find myself in a Benedictine hermitage, surrounded by fifteen white-robed monks - and roughly as many

retreatants - wasn't what I ever expected. I'm not a Christian and fifteen years of rigorous Anglican schooling had seemed to fulfill a lifetime's quota of hymns and New Testament parables. But my home had burned to the ground in a wildfire a few months earlier and I'd lost everything I own. And these monks, I heard, were wise enough to open their doors to men and women of any background or inclination; they knew that each of us would find what most sustained us in undistracted silence, whether we called it God or, simply, reality.

For me there was the added benefit of being alone, with nothing expected of me, in a paradisal expanse of nine hundred acres. There was nothing to come between me and the bounty of the world. Christopher Isherwood, in a typically engaging moment, describes the ego - our lesser self - as the man who will insist upon standing in front of you to obscure your view of a horse-race. Here that smaller being simply disappeared. I had no thought of the Pico Iyer down on the highway, with his tiny ambitions and plans and fears; I was filled with something much richer - the wind in the trees, the birdsong all around, the light across my splintered fence.

I've always loved being alone; an only child who chose to become a writer, I've generally felt most open to what's beyond me when by myself. So naturally this felt like a heaven-sent blessing: no cell-phone reception or Internet or television to break the spell; each morning, as the sun came up behind the ridge, I was free to take a walk, to pick up a book at random, or to do what is hardest of all for me most of the time, nothing at all.

Yet as the days and years went on - I've been to stay more than a hundred times now in the New Camaldoli Hermitage over the past thirty-four years, while also spending nights in monasteries in Western Australia and England and Japan and New Mexico - I noticed something unexpected. In the quiet of my cell, I often felt closer to the people that I loved than when they were in the same room. Again, the blinders had come off; I wasn't responding to their chattery self with my chattery self, but, rather, grasping the silence at the heart of them, and the depth. What I loved in them, in fact.

When I took a walk along the monastery road, under a snowfall of stars, I sometimes passed a fellow retreatant. I knew nothing about where she worked or where she'd grown up or what college she attended; we were joined by something more essential, which is whatever longing had brought us towards silence. Almost instantly she - or he, or any passerby - came to feel like a trusted, lifelong friend.

The monks, too, were, of course, radically different than the simple notions I'd once entertained: not stuffy or stiff or dogmatic or pious, but gregarious, down-to-earth and fun. They'd had jobs in the outside world, as counselors or scholars or artists or chemists; when I started to stay with them in their Enclosure, I heard how they were off to see the new Harry Potter movie, or to help the hungry in Central America.

The Prior was scheduled to co-lead a workshop at the Zen monastery across the hills; the historian in the community had had his life broken open as a boy in Hollywood when his mother gave him a copy of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. The Camaldolese even maintain a Catholic Hindu ashram in southern India whose motto reads, "We are Here to Awaken from the Illusion of Separateness."

When I heard that, I realized that it was the perfect way to summarise exactly why I kept coming back to the silence, through every season of my life and even as monk friends began to die, new rooms came up, the world grew more noisy. I wanted to wake up; I wanted especially to wake up from the illusions that confined me whenever I was driving down the freeway fretting over my resume or my tax returns; and most of all - happiest surprise of all - I wanted to be reminded that I'm part of something wider.

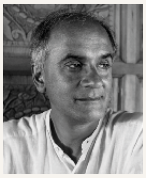
I had never guessed, rejoicing in the luxury of solitude on my first trip, that in truth this time alone would be a portal to a much richer sense of both community and compassion; the monks, after all, were not living alone, even though they belonged to the most contemplative congregation in the Church. They were devoting their every day to service to the community, to one another and to their guests. And my tiny sense of self was expanded as I felt no barrier between me and everything around. What silence created was the opposite of a wall, and at some point I had to admit that if I hadn't spent time in solitude there, I might never have decided to get married.

To belong to something larger than yourself is also to take the edge, just a little, off the impermanence we have to live with. When my father died, the only way I knew to make my peace with the loss was by driving four hours north from my mother's house to sit for two hours amidst the tolling bells, the waving pampas grass, the ocean on every side of me at the monastery. They too were subject to the laws of change, but the silence and radiance at their core seemed certain to outlast me and my little hopes.

I'm not sure how I would have survived the usual human round of change and sorrow without this vital and liberating silence. And it's open to all, I registered, as I heard that even the motto about awakening from the illusion of separateness came from a contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist, Thich Nhat Hanh. As the world grows ever more distracted and divided, as it's easier than ever to live far from our deepest selves, and as I'm ever more tempted to imprison myself within the cage of my ideas and beliefs, I return to this treasure-house to remember what's truly real and what I too often forget.

Whoever could have guessed that silence might make for the deepest conversation, with everything I couldn't see but suddenly could sense at every turn? ●

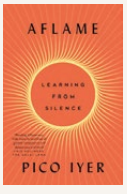
MEET THE AUTHOR



PICO IYER is the author of 17 books, translated into 23 languages, on subjects ranging from the art of stillness to the global vision of the XIVth Dalai Lama and from Islamic mysticism to his 100 retreats at a Benedictine monastery. Four of his recent books have been best-sellers across the U.S. and his five talks for TED have received more than 11 million views so far.

On the web

picoiyerjourneys.com



Bookshelf

AFLAME: LEARNING FROM SILENCE BY PICO IYER, *published in the U.S. by Riverhead Books, Hardback (240 pages). Published in the UK by Penguin as* Learning from Silence: Finding Clarity and Calm in a World of Mounting Uncertainty, *Paperback (240 pages)*

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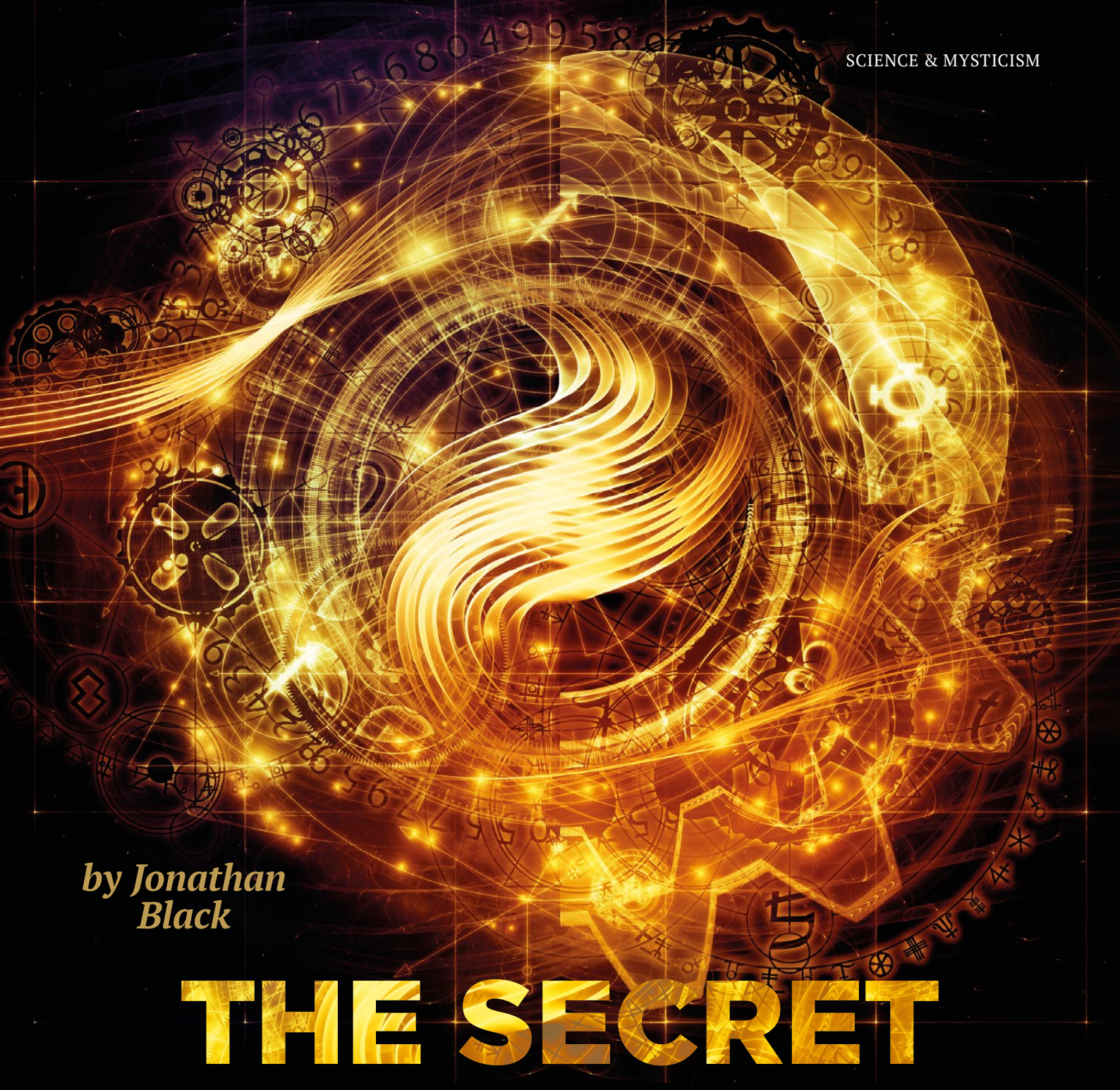
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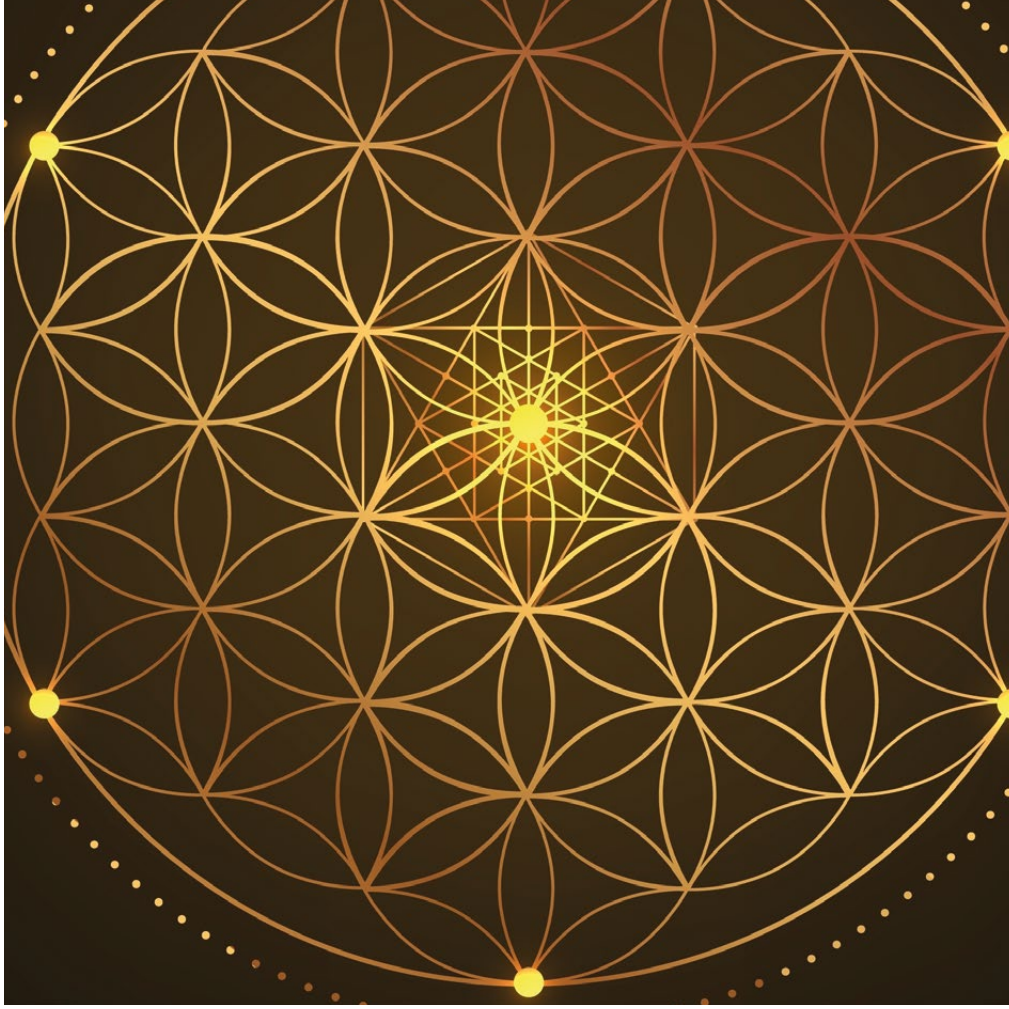
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by Jonathan Black

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE:

How Ancient Wisdom made the Modern World



Human beings have a deep-rooted desire to find something worth believing in, something that transcends the everyday. But in modern times this is made harder by a widespread assumption that science gets in the way of spiritual belief, and that science offers the only intelligent way to think about the universe.

This book offers an alternative view. The first character-driven history of modern physics, it emphasises human and personal perspectives. It shows how turning points in the lives of individuals, including Erwin Schrödinger, Lise Meitner, J Robert Oppenheimer and Alan Turing, have shifted the world on its axis. We will see that many of the great geniuses of modern science have been interested in much more than the technical questions that arise out of their investigations. They have asked wider and deeper questions: what does it mean to be alive on this planet at this time? What is humanity's place in the universe? Philosophical questions. Spiritual questions. By following the adventures of the great geniuses who have pioneered modern physics from Marie Curie and Albert Einstein to today's architects of AI, we will discover new spiritual patterns in science and human experience.

Many histories of modern science hold back on emotion, perhaps reflecting a belief that science ought to be objective. Emotions and the inner life are more present in this book. I will show how some of the purest and most beautiful ideas in modern physics have emerged from the sweaty heat of passion and anxiety. Many of the characters we encounter are extravagantly eccentric. Wild and reckless, they sometimes voyage on strange seas of thought alone, at other times in buccaneering gangs. The narrative swoops and swerves through breakthroughs and breakdowns, murderous rivalries and betrayals, catastrophic personalities and dark nights of the soul.

For the most part these characters were young when they made their discoveries, because usually the creative life of mathematicians and physicists does not last long into middle age.

Young revolutionaries, they were born into an age when the prevailing scientific account of the universe was materialism, a doctrine asserting that matter is all there is. The mechanistic view focused on material objects moving through empty space. Sometimes things knocked into one another like billiard balls. Sometimes they clustered together to form larger objects, including galaxies. There was no need for God in this picture or any room for the supernatural.

But as these revolutionaries devised ways to examine the fabric of the universe in increasing detail, they began to appreciate that the old mechanistic picture was what today we would call 'lo-res'. In the 1920s and 30s, the pioneers of quantum mechanics, exploring the behaviour of systems at a subatomic scale, began to encounter things that were, in terms of the old physics, if not supernatural then way outside what normally counted as natural. In fact, they found phenomena in the realm of the very small that would count as 'occult' in the realm of human affairs, such as bilocation, things ghosting through solid objects and psychokinesis.

Unable to fit this weirdness into the old mechanistic framework, many key figures in 20th-century science turned to mystical ideas, to alchemy, the Kabbalah, Sufism, the higher teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism, and other ancient traditions. J Robert Oppenheimer said, Now 'I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds,' quoting Hindu scripture. Erwin Schrödinger named his dog Atman after the cosmic consciousness in Hindu philosophy.

By the time of the Second World War and the Manhattan Project, spectacular advances in technology were being achieved by amplifying weird phenomena observed at the quantum level. Physicists were working on ways to coax them up into the world we perceive with our senses like sorcerers summoning creatures from subterranean depths. We will see how this 'summoning' has given us nuclear weapons, the transistor, arcane propulsion systems and potential sources of endless free energy, as well as the internet, AI and quantum computers.

It was after the Second World War that scientists became shy of asking deeper, wider questions about the implications of their work. Was this partly because such questions became painful after Hiroshima? Whatever the causes, there was a concerted attempt to sever the ancient connection between science and philosophy, to take wider questions out of the equation. 'Shut up and calculate' became the catchphrase of the day.

From the 1960s onwards, some leading physicists even tried to close philosophy down altogether. They thought they had seen off religion and they wanted to do the same for philosophy. They claimed that science was now answering most of the questions philosophy had traditionally asked – and that the other questions were not worth asking. By the 1980s, the philosophical and spiritual implications of any scientific breakthroughs were seldom discussed.

But we will see that when science sheds new light on the universe – its furthest reaches, its shape and fabric, the way it behaves – it is also shedding an unexpected light on our psyche. Part of the project here is to look at what this light reveals, because new science seems to suggest that universe

and psyche are mysteriously and intimately connected in ways that have seldom been explored in modern times.

All the while, scientific innovators have been moving, unwittingly or wittingly, in the direction of a picture of the universe that would have seemed familiar to the builders of the pyramids at Giza, Egypt, or to the Enlightened Ones in the primeval forests of India.

According to ancient spiritual instincts, the material universe we perceive with our senses is a veil of illusion, sometimes called 'Maya'. Now using the newly invented hologram as a model, the pioneers of string theory and related lines of thought also began to see the material universe as illusory. Physicists were saying something that resonated deeply with ancient intuitions but in the language of a new science.

And like the Magi, Gnostics and mystics who had penetrated the material veil in previous eras, these physicists yearned to see what lies beyond it and to learn from it. Civilisation has often changed direction as a result of ideas arrived at in a visionary state – by the Buddha, Mohammed and Joan of Arc. This book reveals how famous scientists have likewise brought about turning points in history as a result of mystical experiences. Their science has opened windows onto a universe that is far more complex and mysterious than anything everyday consciousness perceives or allows.

The smart lesson to draw may well be that our everyday consciousness has evolved to perceive objects around us as solid because it is useful – it enables us to boil an egg in the morning – not because it is true.

* * *

Bang your fist on the table – and what gives you that sense of impact?

You've probably been brought up to believe that it is particles bumping into one another, but in fact what you're really feeling are electromagnetic fields repelling one another.

Also, that table looks solid, but it isn't. The 'solid' part of a molecule is the proton. It can be as little as 1/100,000th of the whole, like a pea in the middle of a sports stadium – and even this proton is not solid in any everyday sense. According to modern physics, the objects we experience as solid are mostly empty space, thin mists made of pulsing bundles of forces and fields.

We readily accept that the insides of our mobile phones are informed by things outside of it, by information beamed in from radio masts, Wi-Fi connections and in the case of some apps from as far away as satellites in space, but new science says that something like this is true of all objects, including tables, human bodies and minds. All are to some extent held in place by connections – entanglements – that reach to the far side of the universe, like tents held in place by very long guy ropes.

If we engage imaginatively with what the smartest scientists are saying today, a dazzling vision appears, a new universe with many dimensions, all intimately interconnected, incandescent and evanescent, everywhere pulsating with energy and constantly mutating. Particles are everywhere, popping in and out of existence. Every *thing* emerges from a universe-wide matrix.

Nowadays, some cutting-edge scientists are advancing towards an understanding that the most accurate, elegant and fruitful way to describe the workings of the universe might not be in terms of the physical processes described in conventional physics but on the model of information processing in a computer. Stephen Wolfram's software touches most of our lives because it helps to animate tech created by his friend Steve Jobs. Widely recognised as one of the world's leading computer scientists, he says, 'We live in a computational universe.' David Deutsch, 'father of the quantum computer', argues that the universe works like a quantum computer.

If the universe really is like a quantum computer or artificial intelligence or some type of computation we have not yet invented, does it follow that the universe could in some sense be intelligent? If so, physics is moving back in the direction of an idea that underpins all ancient wisdom – that behind the veil of the visible world lies some higher intelligence.

It is a short step from saying the universe is *like* a computer to saying, as Elon Musk and many others do, that it is a computer and that what we take to be reality is in fact a computer simulation.

In the last few years, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence, and the prospect of an artificial general intelligence that is self-motivated, has prompted scientists to ask new questions about what other forms of intelligence there might be in the universe. Could there be intelligent entities that like AI are non-biological but that – unlike AI – emerge spontaneously?

Wolfram says we may be surrounded all the time by forms of intelligence that we are not intelligent enough to recognise. What would these entities be? If we do live in a computer simulation, who works the mouse? God? Angels? Aliens?

Or are these the same entities seen through different cultural lenses? We live in the era of what is sometimes called the 'New High Strangeness', of a new open-mindedness when most reported anomalous experiences are framed not in terms of angels, ghosts or demons but in unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAPs).

There is a psychic resonance to all this that has not been fully investigated, and deep philosophical waters lie under it. Given how big these ideas are, how illuminating in some respects and in other respects how disturbing, it is surprising how few people know any of this.

But secrecy, we will see, is part of the story. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR

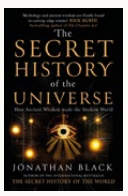


JONATHAN BLACK was educated at Ipswich School and Oriel College, Oxford, where he studied Philosophy and Theology. After a long career in publishing, he now writes full time. Black is the author of the global bestseller *The Secret History of the World, The Secret History of Dante: Unearthing the Mysteries of the Inferno* and *The Sacred History of the World: How Angels, Mystics* and *Higher Intelligence Made our World.* His books are the result of a lifetime spent reading literature in this area, publishing many of the leading authors in the field and hanging around antiquarian bookshops.

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Bookshelf



THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE: HOW ANCIENT WISDOM MADE THE MODERN WORLD BY JONATHAN BLACK, *published by Firefinch, Hardback (448 pages). For more information visit: firefinchpublishing.com/book/the-secret-history-of-the-universe*



The Nirvana Express

by Mick Brown

HOW THE SEARCH FOR ENLIGHTENMENT WENT WEST

In 1897, an Indian yogi named Bava Lachman Dass exhibited himself at the Westminster Aquarium in London, demonstrating for the benefit of a packed and curious audience forty-eight yoga positions, drawn from what *The Strand*, a popular periodical of the day, described as the 'repulsive Indian religion'. Four years earlier, another emissary of that 'repulsive' religion had spoken at the first World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where more than 150,000 people gathered to listen to representatives of different faiths from all over the world. Narendra Nath Datta, who would become better known as Swami Vivekananda, had travelled 8,000 miles from his native Calcutta to address the Parliament. His speech on the need for universal brotherhood was greeted with rapturous applause, and Vivekananda hailed as a hero. 'Purposeful, virile, strong, he stood out, a man among men,' wrote the social campaigner and Theosophist Annie Besant, 'his inborn sense of worth and power subdued to the exquisite beauty of the spiritual message which he had brought to the sublimity of that matchless truth of the East which is the heart and the life of India.'

The Victorians had a particularly conflicted view of the religious beliefs and practices of the Indian subcontinent, compounded of fascination, admiration, bemusement and suspicion. For almost 300 years the British had maintained a presence in India, firstly through the East India Company, before in 1858 India came under the rule of the British Crown. India was the jewel in the crown of the British empire, yet to most it remained a faraway place, little known and even less understood - and nothing in Indian life was understood less than its rich spiritual traditions. That was about to change. The social and cultural revolutions afoot in late Victorian England, the challenge to traditional Christian belief posed by scientific progress, the quiet revolt against what the social reformer Edward Carpenter would describe as the 'smug commercialism and materialism of the mid-Victorian epoch' - all contributed to an awakening interest in Besant's 'matchless truth of the East'. Within the span of three generations, tens of thousands of young Westerners would be following the 'hippie trail' halfway across the world in search of spiritual enlightenment, and the world's most famous pop group, the Beatles, would be meditating at the feet of the bearded, giggling Maharishi Mahesh, converts to his 'simple technique of living in peace and happiness'.

The truth seekers and dreamers, scholars and idealists, the poets, occultists, hippies and earnest enquirers into the nature of self and soul that populate the pages of *The Nirvana Express*, were people ahead of their time. Adventurers of the spirit, for them the East was a place not simply of fascination, romance - or exploitation - but also of deliverance, a spiritual Eldorado. For there, it seemed, lay the answer to mankind's eternal problems - unhappiness, separation from the self and from God. For some this pursuit would end in disappointment and disillusionment, for others in madness, and for a very few, perhaps, in the attainment of that most elusive holy grail of enlightenment - although who other than the truly enlightened can tell what enlightenment truly is?

The Nirvana Express traces a path from the publication in the Victorian era of Edwin Arnold's poetic life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, which became a best-selling sensation; through Vivekananda and Annie Besant; Allan Bennett, the first Englishman to become a Buddhist monk; the spiritual tourist and self-styled sage Paul Brunton; Mercedes de Acosta and Somerset Maugham; from the Beats to the Beatles and beyond, it explores how Eastern teachings, and teachers, first came to the West, to be received firstly with bewilderment and curiosity, and later to become familiar figures on the Western cultural stage, in the persons of such gurus as the Maharishi Mahesh, the 'boy god' Maharaj Ji and - the most controversial figure of the modern era - the Bhagwan Rajneesh.

To the spiritual seeker, the figure of the guru held out the promise of a personal path to God which conventional religion had patently failed to provide, in an age when science seemed to be pushing God and mystery further to the margins. Eastern mysticism appeared to offer a deeper, richer explanation for human existence - a promise of realising the divinity within that the materialistic view of the world, which argued that man was simply a collection of 'selfish genes', did not provide.

Many of the ideas expressed in *The Nirvana Express*, which were once regarded as eccentric, exotic, foreign or cranky, are now part of everyday life. Where once Christian ministers and clerics railed against the heresies of Hinduism, yoga classes are now held in church halls. Meditation has been stripped of its spiritual connotations and rebranded as 'mindfulness'. Statues of the Buddha have become a ubiquitous accoutrement in design magazines. The term 'guru' has floated free of its Eastern connotations - and its original meaning of 'teacher' - and is now applied to almost any expert or authority in any field, and to many who aren't.

It is ironic that at the same time the distrust in Eastern gurus should have grown. The guru system demanded an altogether different kind of relationship from that of congregant and priest or pastor. The guru was seen as a path to - or in some cases an embodiment of - the divine. In philosophical systems that emphasise the disintegration of the ego, unconditional devotion to the guru has all too often fostered a child-like dependence in the follower, leaving them open to emotional, financial or sexual abuse.

Emissaries of enlightenment, or holy con men? For some, the guru's teachings would help to lead them to a spiritually fulfilled life. For others, the result was bitter disappointment, when the guru proved to be all too human - all too fallible - or the promise of enlightenment faded. From the 1970s up to the present day, scandal has enveloped some of the most famous gurus who came to the West. Sai Baba, certainly the most extraordinary and enigmatic guru of the late twentieth century, who commanded a huge following in India and the West, became enveloped in allegations about sexual misconduct with young male followers. Sai Baba never commented on the allegations, leaving it to his apologists to explain the behaviour as being part of a 'spiritual development' which those crying abuse had failed to understand.

Buddhism too has had its share of scandals. In 1983, allegations surfaced that Swami Muktananda, who had urged his students at his ashram in Fallsburg, New York, to observe celibacy, had conspicuously failed to follow his own advice, having regular sexual encounters with female followers, some of them in their early to middle-teens. (Muktananda responded to the allegations by quoting the fifteenth-century poet-saint Kabir, 'The elephant strides at his own gait, but the dogs do trail behind and bark.') In 2018, two of the leading lamas in the West, Mipham Rinpoche and Sogyal Rinpoche, were engulfed in allegations of sexually - and in the case of Sogyal, physically - abusing followers, allegations that resulted in both stepping down from the organisations they led. All these incidents and more have served if not to bring Eastern religious teachings into total disrepute, then at least to suggest that claims of enlightenment, and expectations of a guru's perfection, are no defence against the pitfalls of ordinary human fallibility.

The Nirvana Express begins with a long ago world, when the editor of an English newspaper wrote the first poetic telling in English of the life of the Buddha, and when congregants at that first World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 rose to their feet as one to applaud a man lecturing them on the principles of Vedantic thought; it moves on to a time when Meher Baba took Hollywood by storm, and when Somerset Maugham fainted in the presence of perhaps India's greatest saint; when the LSD messiah Timothy Leary pronounced that 'we are all Hindus' now, and the Beatles sat at the feet of the Maharishi, writing songs that, inadvertently, would inspire the murder spree of the man who embodied the dark side of 1960s freedoms, Charles Manson.

It ends with Rajneesh, whose ninety Rolls-Royces (or was it ninety-three? Nobody could be sure) made him the most instantly recognisable and controversial guru of the late twentieth century, and whose utopian vision to create a 'New Man' ended in murder plots and midnight flights from the grasp of the American authorities. It could be said that the golden age of gurus in the West ended with Rajneesh. This book describes how it began, how it flowered and how it withered—if not died. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



MICK BROWN is a journalist for *The Daily Telegraph*. His books include *The Spiritual Tourist: A Personal Odyssey through the Outer Reaches of Belief*; *The Dance of 17 Lives: The Incredible True Story of Tibet's 17th Karmapa*; and *Tearing Down The Wall of Sound: The Rise and Fall of Phil Spector.*



Bookshelf

THE NIRVANA EXPRESS: HOW THE SEARCH FOR ENLIGHTENMENT WENT WEST BY MICK BROWN, *published by C. Hurst & Co., Illustrated Paperback (614 pages)*



THE ZEN WARRIOR'S QUEST

by Antony Cummins

Are you struggling to discover the truth of Zen? Me too. Do not worry; the point of Zen *is* the struggle, which means that you are doing something correct. Have you been at it a long time? Again, do not worry, the Buddha was at it for countless lifetimes and he had to start somewhere. If we are to start anywhere, let us start with the question, *what is Zen*? This question is often more difficult to explore than actually performing Zen itself.

Zen means "absorption", that moment when you drive home and you never made a single decision, that moment when you reacted perfectly to a situation, but did not think about it. It is not mystical, it is not otherworldly; in fact it is possibly the most common occurrence in the human condition. Why then do people crave or quest for Zen? It is because the goal of Zen is to reach that natural reaction state, but to do so on command, not when pushed to do it, such as in; a car accident, or when batting away a fly, or catching a ball, returning a tennis serve; all of these are responses and the goal of Zen is to do it at will. To have mastery over body and mind without our mind taking us out of the driving seat.

To arrive at this goal, you must pass through these five stages:

1. **Cleaning the mind:** to scrub away all the ideas you have and to rebuild your understanding by eradicating false myths, especially when it comes to eastern mysticism.
2. **Establishing a form:** understand how to structure your personal journey into Zen and learn how the ancient masters did the same. Just what did they do and how did they do it - and can you copy it?
3. **Honing the mind:** look at key points to help you live your life without making the same mistakes over and over again.
4. **Engaging the enemy:** establish ways in which you can travel through life without conflict, or should conflict arise, to have the tools to deal with the situation.
5. **Becoming a Zen Warrior:** combining all the elements you have learned into one free flowing state of existence.

Decluttering Zen Buddhism

Zen and Buddhism are filled with messy, honey-stuck facts, books which contain fantasies, academic papers on trivia and word of mouth which has turned to gobbledygook. To help you divide fact from fiction, use the following points:

- While the Buddha is considered to be a historical person, many of the stories about his life are considered to be legend. Do not believe everything you hear. He was not a supernatural being flying through the air shooting laser beams. He was an old man – reportedly with a bad back – who had seen through the confines of the physical world (which is actually kind of supernatural).
- Zen Buddhism is not Japanese, "Zen" is just the Japanese term for it. Zen, its concepts and many of its ideas are foreign to Japan both chronologically and geographically and were heavily influenced by Chinese Daoism.

"Zen starts in the heart and ends at the heart. The journey is before you but it goes nowhere inside this world."

- The first Zen master is the Buddha according to tradition, but legend tells us that his line continued, but pinpointing where that line went and where it is now is impossible. Even some of the patriarchs of Zen may have been made up, or their historical lives do not reflect what tradition tells us.
- Zen practitioners are trying to rekindle that traditional line, even though many schools of Zen claim to have direct lineage it is now diluted and stained by dogma. Therefore, when you approach any Zen institute, be aware that some of what they teach is tradition, not history.
- Zen is only one branch of Buddhism, and historically a lesser-known teaching. To understand Zen, you have to have a good knowledge of Buddhism and its tenets. Do not just leap to "sloppy Zen", drink filtered water and wear imported beads (that is the wrong way). Zen starts in the heart and ends at the heart. The journey is before you but it goes nowhere inside this world.

What is Buddhism?

The following facts will explain just what Buddhism is and give you a starting point for your journey:

- The term Buddha means Enlightened One and Buddhism is the path he prescribed.
- Buddhism is a set of guidelines which describe the cosmic laws and the rules for leaving behind continuous existence within the known universe.
- Buddhism is about the middle path, it is to avoid extremes.
- Some teachings are said to be given by the Buddha himself, others are from people who came after him.
- *Samsara* is the cycle of life, death and rebirth within reality.
- You will continue to be reincarnated until you have a great realisation and your soul is extinguished.
- The Buddha-mind or Buddha Nature is the divinity inside you which is hidden behind layers of thought-dirt. Your job is to clean your mind so that it can have a breakthrough.
- You could be reincarnated as a human, a spirit, an animal, or even in other dimensions.
- Compassion for other life forms is a key factor in your Buddhist journey.
- You are stuck in a reincarnation loop and your aim is to get out.
- You are stuck in a game of *karmic* consequences which you have to play out.
- You must have a relationship with death. It must not be macabre, but it must be realistic.
- Compassion and charity are only real if you do not benefit from any actions you give, or if the amount of time or money given depletes you.
- Nirvana is to never again be reborn inside of reality. It is your final goal and destination, it cannot be described, it might not even exist. The fact it is outside of known existence is the whole point. Never get bogged down in trying to identify it.

What is Zen?

The following facts will explain just what Zen is and give you a starting point for that journey:

- Zen is an experience; it is one path to spiritual realisation.
- Zen is for everyone at any time and at any place. It does not belong to any one nation. It has travelled through time and space without a home. You are its home.
- Zen should be practiced, not preached.
- You do not need a special place to train in Zen, you can simply just train.
- *Sangha* refers to your Buddhist support group.
- Liberation is complete control of your mind.
- Controlling the mind and seeing universal truths are the primary goals of Meditation.
- Koans are unanswerable statements and riddles which, if used correctly, force you to a spiritual breakthrough. They are not logical debates.
- Zen history and philosophy are only small parts of Zen. Being good at either does not make you a good practitioner.
- Understand that detachment is not the same as non-attachment. Detachment is to move away from something, non-attachment is to not let your lust for something control you.
- Delusion is not seeing the world as it is but allowing your mind to twist what is really happening.
- If you trust in your own training, trust that your own mind will save you.
- The Universe is waiting for you to make your move; you are not waiting for it.

Zen is at the ends of your fingertips, what you have to do is buy a good pillow, empty your mind, breathe and relax. But in addition to that is: lead a good life, stand by the tenets of Buddhism, engage with people without anger, without deceit, without intention; walk like a Daoist and sit like a samurai. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR

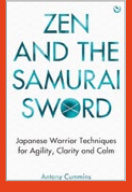


ANTONY CUMMINS is the founder of the Historical Ninjutsu Research Team and is consultant and co-presenter on documentaries on Japan distributed by National Geographic. He is a leading expert on the discovery of military arts of medieval Japan.

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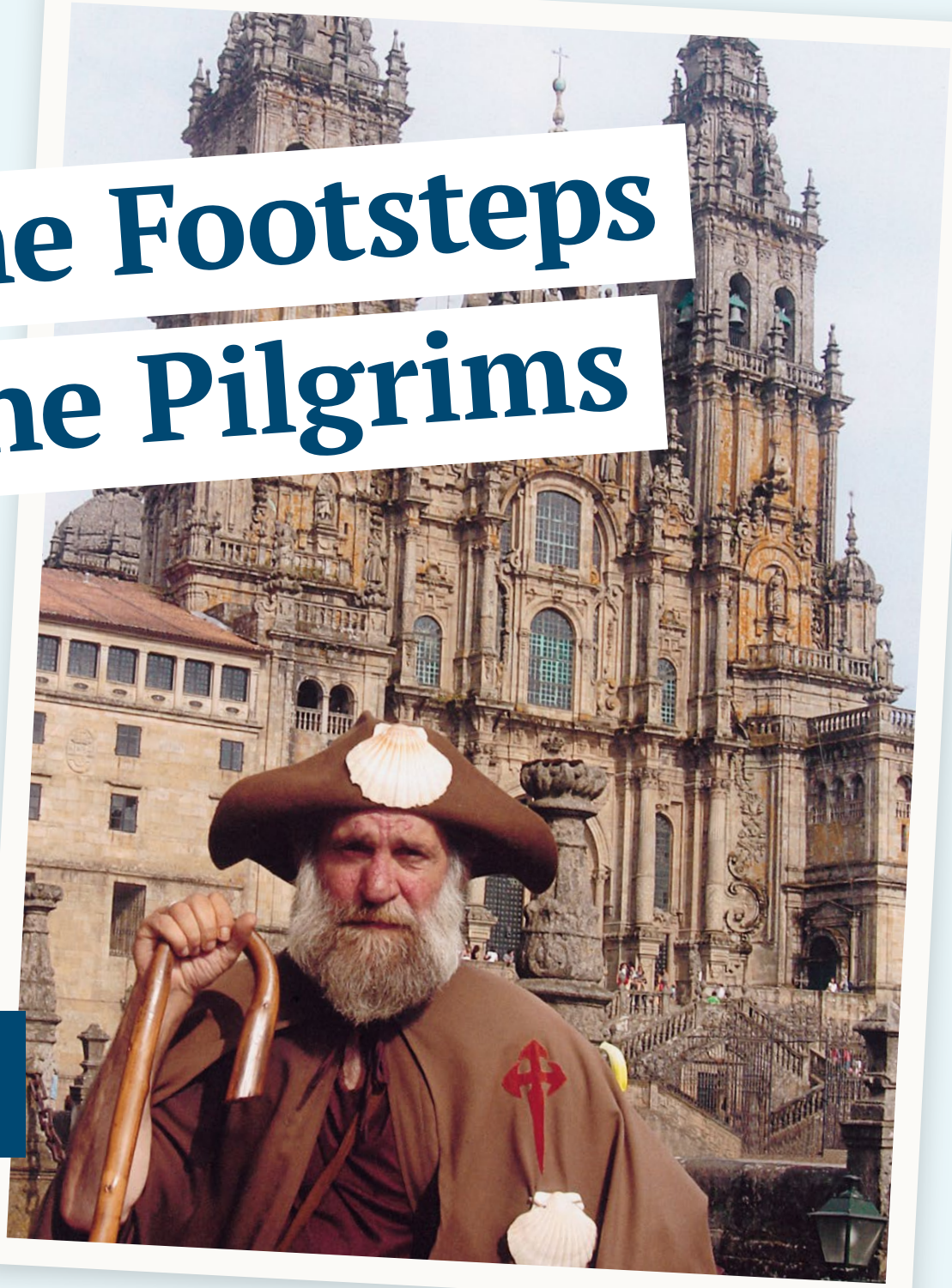
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ZEN AND THE SAMURAI SWORD: JAPANESE WARRIOR TECHNIQUES FOR AGILITY, CLARITY AND CALM BY ANTONY CUMMINS, *published by Watkins, Paperback (192 pages)*

In the Footsteps of the Pilgrims

by
Pat Fok

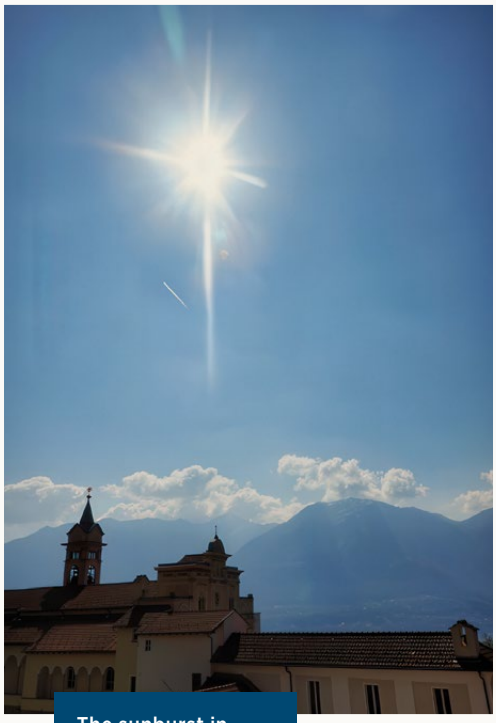


Pilgrim with the baroque cathedral in the background. (Santiago de Compostela, Spain)

Beyond our everyday, mundane experiences there is a magical, mystical dimension. When we surrender to this, it brings wonder and grace to our existence of struggle and need. From time to time I have followed sudden impulses to go and visit a certain place, replacing fear and hesitation with trust.

From 2003 to 2023 I found myself following the footsteps of the Virgin Mary's pilgrims in France, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain, Mexico, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I started the journeys that are covered in the book in Paris in 2003, a year of relative global peace.

On Easter Sunday 2023, my husband, John van Praag, and I were in Locarno, Switzerland attending Easter Mass at the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso on the sacred mountain, Sacro Monte, where Our Lady is reputed to have appeared in 1480. After the mass, we left the church and stepped out into glorious sunshine. As I took some photographs, in one photo there appeared a bright light in the sky, the sun's radiance in the shape of a cross directly above the altar of the church. I decided to include this beautiful phenomenon as the final chapter. Ending with hope and light, instead of uncertainty and trepidation. ●



The sunburst in the shape of a cross directly above the Chapel of the Madonna del Sasso. (Sacro Monte, Locarno, Switzerland)

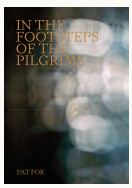


Inside the Lady Chapel, in spite of the crowds, we found ourselves kneeling right in front of the Black Madonna. (Einsiedeln Abbey, Einsiedeln, Switzerland)

MEET THE AUTHOR



PAT FOK is an internationally renowned photographer, author and philanthropist. Born in Hong Kong and educated in England, Switzerland and the United States, Pat graduated from the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) with a B.A. Degree in Environmental Design. While at graduate school she also attended the Art Center College to specialize in photography, where she had the privilege of studying with America's eminent nature photographer Ansel Adams.



Bookshelf

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE PILGRIMS BY PAT FOK, *published by JF Publishing, Illustrated Hardback (192 pages)*



A sea of tiny flickering flames in front of the Basilica of Our Lady of Fatima during the centenary celebrations. (Fatima, Portugal)



Indigenous Catholics celebrating outside the cathedral at dawn. (Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Guadalupe, Mexico)



The wonderful processions high up in the Andes. (Fiesta de la Virgin del Carmen, Lima and Cusco, Peru)

Respell Your Reality



by Lisa Lister

We tend to think of reality as something that's fixed, something that we experience, respond to, sometimes endure and occasionally enjoy, but what if that's not *entirely* true?

Spoiler alert: It's absolutely *not* true.

We are constantly "spelling" our reality through the stories that we tell ourselves, the meanings that we assign to things and where we choose to place our time and attention. Most of the time, we do this completely unconsciously, repeating familiar narratives, reinforcing existing patterns, moving through the same loops without ever questioning them, but what if we remembered that we had the creative capacity to *respell* reality?

Respell Your Reality is a way of understanding *how* reality is *actually* shaped - by our language, our perception and our rhythmic intelligence - and how much agency and power we really *do* have when we stop trying to force ourselves into the world of linear productivity, constant consistency and relentless forward motion (a world which has NEVER been built with women and women's bodies in mind.)

Long before productivity systems and performance culture, human life was shaped by the rhythms of the seasons, the body and by the cosmos. These cycles didn't just influence nature; they structured how we created, how we rested, and how we made meaning of our lives.

Rhythmic intelligence, in its most simplest form, helps us to understand that our capacity changes, that our energy levels fluctuate, that creativity has phases and seasons and the lunar calendar has always offered us a beautiful framework to explore this. Eight distinct phases, each with its own energy and its own invitation.

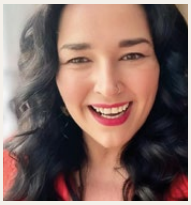
The new moon pulls you inward, toward intention and rest.
The waxing crescent asks you to begin.
The full moon is the moment of expression, visibility, release.
The waning phases call you back, to reflect, to edit and to let things go.

Mapped onto a creative life, it's a rhythm that has existed far longer than the five-day 9 til 5 working week and one that encourages us to reclaim our magic, power and agency by participating in life differently.

When you recognise that you're not separate from the way that your life unfolds, you are in direct relationship with it, and when that relationship is shaped by rhythm, ritual and radical self-trust, you recognise that you are able to respell your reality.

One phase at a time. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



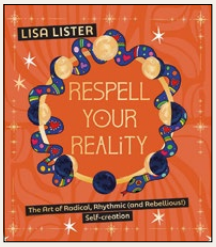
LISA LISTER is a writer, artist and teacher exploring feminine creativity, cyclical living and embodied magic. She is the author of *Code Red, Witch*, and *Self Source-ery.*

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RESPELL YOUR REALITY: THE ART OF RADICAL, RHYTHMIC (AND REBELLIOUS!) SELF-CREATION BY LISA LISTER, *published by Watkins, Illustrated Hardback (208 pages)*



REWRITE THE RULES. RECLAIM YOUR RHYTHM. RESPELL YOUR REALITY.

Move beyond the hustle and align with your intuition, feminine power and natural cycles to create the life you truly desire. *Respell Your Reality* blends lunar wisdom, creative practice and quantum principles to help you conjure your own reality through rhythm, ritual and radical self-trust. Discover:

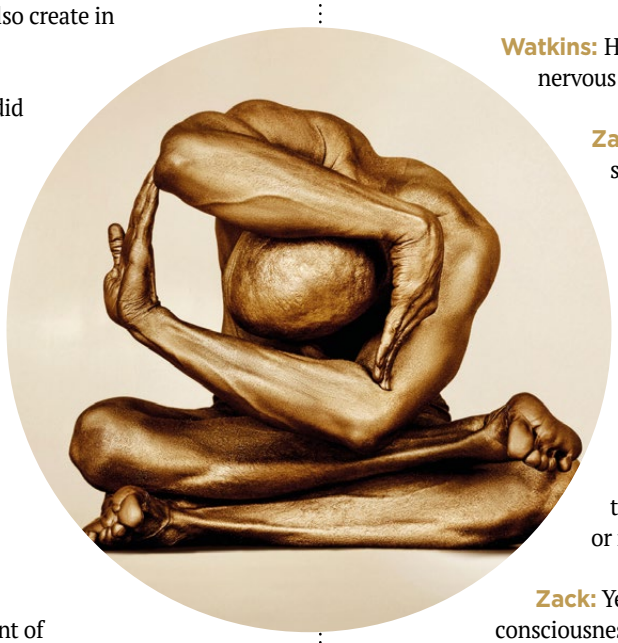
- An eight-phase, moon-led framework for creating and manifesting with flow, not force.
- Creative rituals and journaling prompts to awaken your imagination and embody your desires.
- Moon Mavens – visionary women from history to guide each lunar phase.
- Feminine tools and practices for cyclical living, intuitive alignment, and soulful creation.

Watkins: Zack, you paint people in gold and photograph them as art pieces that people frame in their living rooms - is it also a spiritual experience for you and for those who engage with the work?

Zack: Yes, profoundly so. The process is a sacred ritual of activation and remembrance. We enter a co-creative space where intention, breath, and golden frequency converge. I guide the subject into deep presence through meditation or visualization to connect with their inner light. The gold isn't merely applied—it's an energetic transmission that amplifies their divine essence and reflects back their sovereignty and radiance. Those who hang these pieces at home often report powerful shifts: emotional releases, expanded awareness, or direct encounters with their Higher Self. The artwork becomes a living portal, a vibrational anchor transmitting codes of awakening. Framing it in a living room turns everyday space into a temple. The gaze alone attunes them. It's not decoration; it's medicine. My gold-frequency work hangs in all David Lloyd clubs in the UK, and my shooting studio is in Los Angeles, California—but I also create in Europe, mostly Paris and Rome.

Watkins: Interesting journey. How did it start?

Zack: From a near-death experience where I met with the big guy upstairs. He told me, "You are not ready yet. We are sending you back. Your mission is to paint people in gold so they can awaken to their divine self." Meanwhile, I was clinically dead. And I came back.



Watkins: What is the "blueprint" you believe gold is connected to?

Zack: I am now happy to share that gold connects to the original blueprint of solar consciousness - what the ancients called primordial light or the divine essence. It's a crystalline code, a divine hologram encoded in matter. Gold embodies alchemical perfection: the union of heaven and earth, solar masculine and receptive feminine energies. It's the blueprint of the awakened human sould - dense matter transmuting into pure conscious light. Gold is the prototype of our destined state: sovereign, radiant, incorruptible beings.

Watkins: Do you see gold as something humanity once understood instinctively but has forgotten?

Zack: Absolutely. Ancient civilizations knew it instinctively—not as a commodity for wealth, but as a living conductor of divine energy. They wore it to amplify the auric field and attune to the inner sun. Today we've reduced it to a status symbol or investment. We've forgotten gold as a spiritual ally and mirror of divine potential. Yet its magic persists - one ounce of gold (one coin is one ounce) can be beaten into a leaf of just 2 millionths of a centimeter thick or stretched into a 50 miles long wire (80 kms) and still maintains its conductivity. Pure magic!

Watkins: How did ancient civilizations relate to gold differently than we do today?

Zack: Ancient civilizations revered gold as sacred. 3500 BC, in Mesopotamia to begin with, the cradle of civilization, revered gold that was connected to their sun god Shamash. In ancient Egypt, gold was specifically called the "flesh of Ra" or the "skin of the gods" around 3000 BC, embodying the radiant, eternal essence of the sun god Ra. Both civilizations used it in rituals for immortality, and would put gold in the mouth of their deceased to secure a favorable position in the afterlife, cosmic alignment, and soul purification. Much later in history, the magnificent empire of the Incas named gold "the sweat of the sun", linking directly to Inti, their sun god. Vedic sages, in current Hinduism Rigveda (circa 2500 BC), there is this notion, still today, of "Hiranyagarbha" - which means the golden womb or the golden egg. So, according to Vedic sages, all emerges from and returns to gold. Indian temples are gilded to purify the soul, attract divine energy and facilitate enlightenment. Clients sometimes tell me, "I saw my soul for the first time" - echoing that timeless knowing.

Watkins: How does gold interact with the human nervous system or subtle body?

Zack: Gold acts as a subtle superconductor. Trace amounts (about 0.2 mg) in the body support electrical conductivity. Energetically, it calms the nervous system, harmonizes prana or chi, strengthens the aura (a "golden lining"), reduces fight-or-flight stress, and aligns chakras - especially solar plexus and heart - for fluid energy flow.

Watkins: Is gold something that transmits information, holds memory, or reflects consciousness?

Zack: Yes - gold transmits and reflects consciousness. In alchemy, it amplifies and returns the energy or intention you offer. It mirrors pure consciousness like a solar reflector. Used intentionally, it enhances clarity, intuition, and manifestation of higher states. It catalyzes awakening by reflecting your true Self back to you.

Watkins: How does gold relate to coherence between heart, mind, and body?

Zack: Gold radiates warm, solar energy that aligns the heart's electromagnetic field (5,000 times stronger than the brain's) with brainwaves and bodily rhythms. It facilitates cardiac coherence—a state of deep peace where the heart leads, dissolving mental chaos and attuning to love and presence.

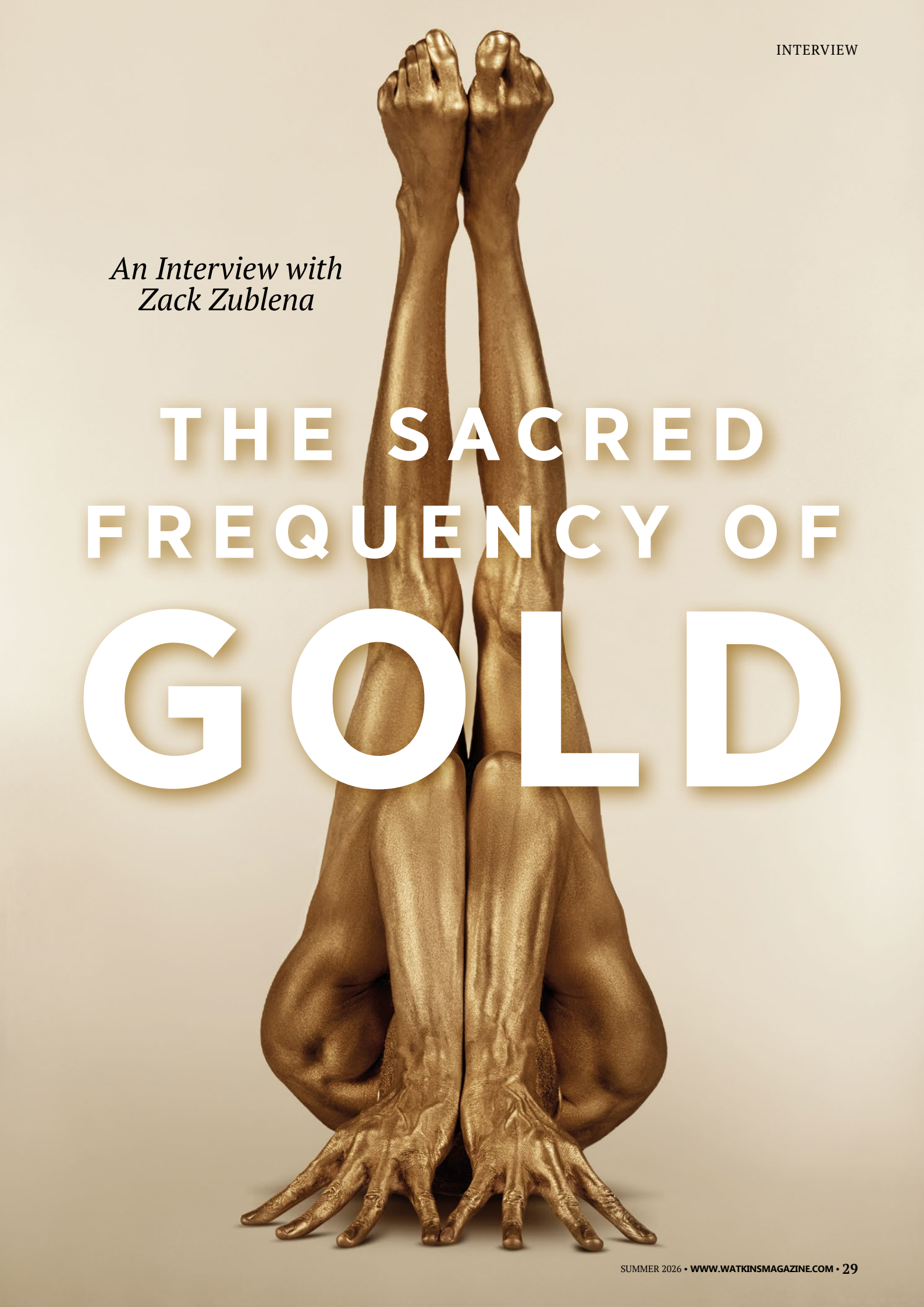
Watkins: Do you experience gold as having a relationship to sound, vibration, or resonance?

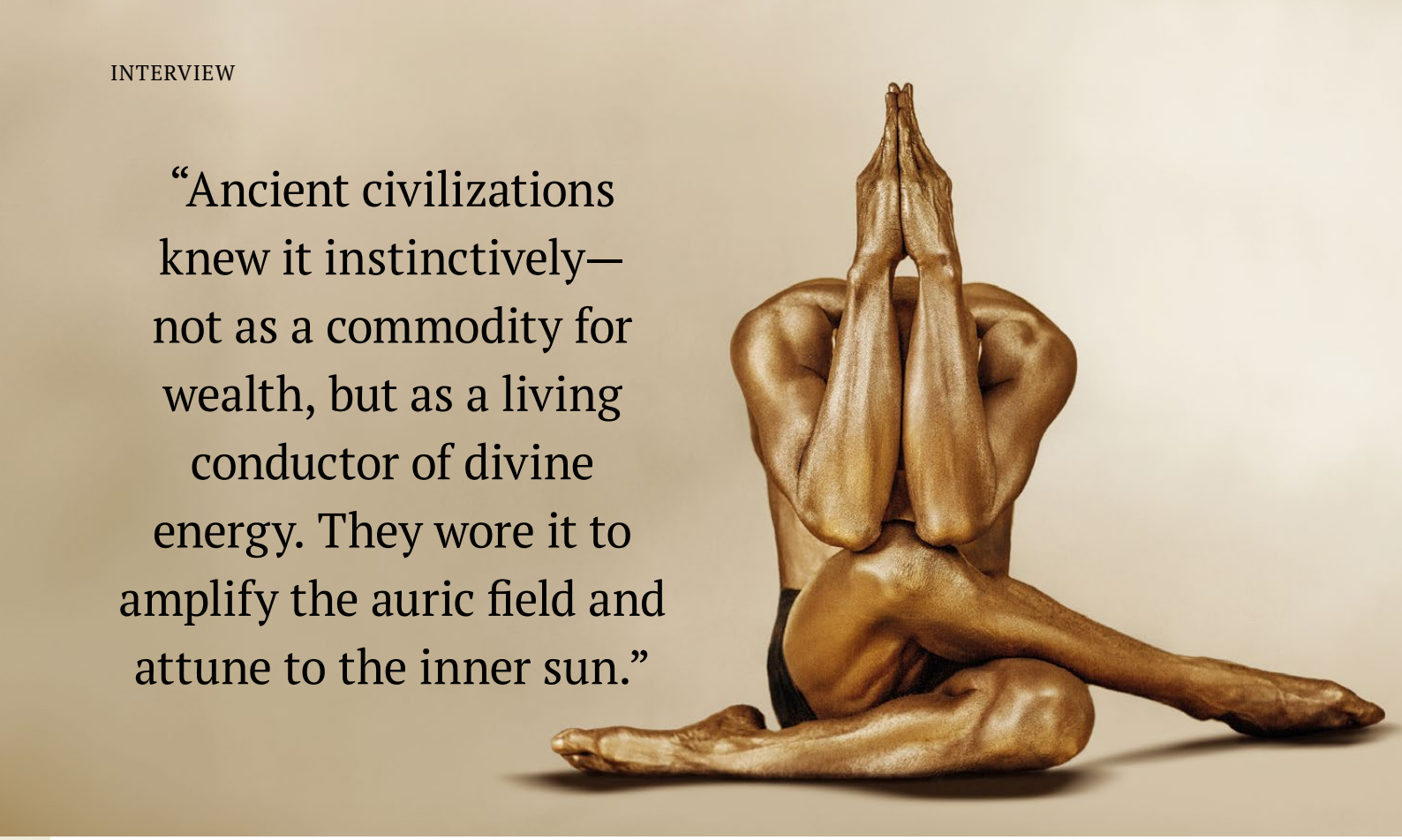
Zack: Deeply. Sound alchemists associate gold with frequencies like 316 Hz or 192 Hz in 24k singing bowls. Its shine is visual resonance; working with it evokes a subtle solar hum that tunes the energy field to higher octaves.

Watkins: If sound organizes reality through frequency, how does

An Interview with Zack Zublena

THE SACRED FREQUENCY OF GOLD





"Ancient civilizations knew it instinctively—not as a commodity for wealth, but as a living conductor of divine energy. They wore it to amplify the auric field and attune to the inner sun."

gold participate in that same field?

Zack: Gold is stardust - forged in supernova explosions billions of years ago, embedding stellar intelligence and incorruptible light codes in its atomic structure, and it became embedded in the planet's crust billions of years ago, through meteorite bombardments. So, gold, even though now found on Earth, is totally cosmic. Sound organizes reality through waves and patterns (cymatics); gold participates as a cosmic frequency stabilizer. Sound creates form; gold fixes and preserves high vibrations eternally. Together they form a cosmic symphony: sound structures, gold illuminates and sustains.

Watkins: What role does beauty play in how gold communicates or transmits its intelligence?

Zack: The same way Michelangelo Buonarroti expressed it - "seeing the angel already within the marble and carving until he set it free" - beauty is gold's native language. It's incorruptible (in every sense of the word) radiance transmits divine intelligence instantly - bypassing the mind, opening the heart, disarming the ego, inviting soul recognition. It whispers: "Look at my perfection and remember your own." Beauty is the portal.

Watkins: How has working closely with gold changed your own perception, creativity, or inner state?

Zack: It has magnetically aligned me - boosting sovereignty and allowing creativity to flow with solar clarity. It transmutes fear into light - an ongoing personal alchemy.

Watkins: Do you see a relationship between gold and sovereignty, beyond financial or material value?

Zack: Yes - gold is the metal of spiritual sovereignty. It symbolizes inner authority, soul independence, self-mastery, and freedom from control systems. True sovereignty means becoming gold: incorruptible, radiant, free.

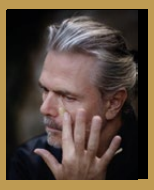
Watkins: How do modern systems of extraction and ownership distort gold's original purpose?

Zack: Industrial mining, speculation, and hoarding profane gold - turning a sacred bridge into a tool of inequality and destruction. Indigenous groups like the Kogi in Colombia return gold to the earth through "pagamentos" (payments) rituals to restore harmony. Reverence heals separation and scarcity. Râ once told me in a plant medicine ceremony, "gold gets rid of the mold."

Watkins: What do you hope readers feel or remember after reading *The Sacred Frequency of Gold*?

Zack: I hope they feel profound remembrance—of their divine essence, eternal connection, and inner golden light. Aligned with their highest potential and knowing they are expressions of Source: awake, abundant, infinite. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



ZACK ZUBLENA is an internationally recognized healing artist, spiritual guide, and breathwork master. He specializes in helping individuals align with their Divine Essence through gold body painting experiences. His work is inspired by both ancient wisdom and profound personal revelations that have shaped his approach to spiritual ascension. Zack's mission is to help others unlock their highest potential through the transformative power of gold.

On the web

zackzublena.com

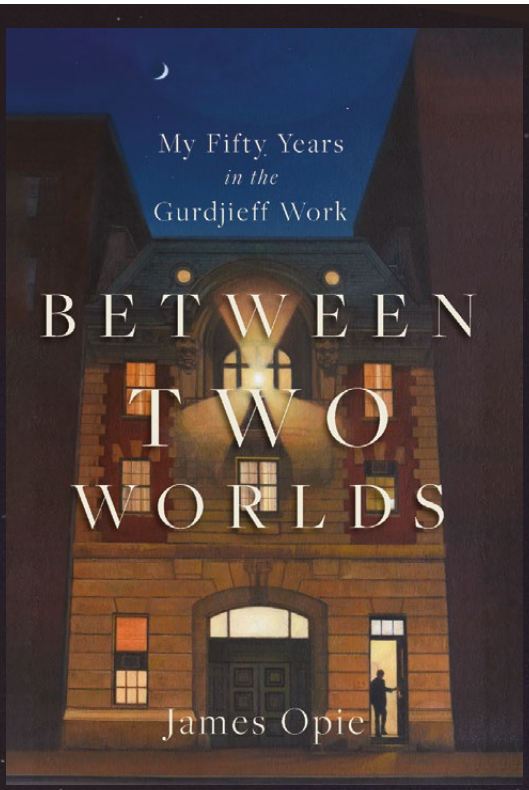


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THE SACRED FREQUENCY OF GOLD: HUMANITY'S BLUEPRINT FOR AWAKENING BY ZACK ZUBLENA, *published by Zack Zublena, Paperback & Hardback (198 pages)*



ZACK ZUBLENA
VISIONARY ARTIST ★ ALCHEMIST OF LIGHT ★ GOLD-FREQUENCY TRANSMITTER
CREATIONS IN PARIS & ROME ★ STUDIO IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA ★ FEATURED IN DAVID LLOYD CLUBS UK



A MEMOIR OF ADVERSITY, HOPE, AND THE VALUE OF THE GURDJIEFF WORK

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KARMIC RELIEF:

Harnessing the Laws of Cause & Effect for a Joyful, Meaningful Life

by Philip Goldberg

Once there was a vicious murderer named Angulimala who terrorized the land, vanquishing everyone who tried to subdue him. Having vowed to kill a thousand people, he kept track of the number by cutting off a finger from each of his victims and adding the digit to a garland strung around his neck. When the count reached 999, he decided to complete the task by killing the very next person he saw.

As it happened, the Buddha was lodged in a nearby monastery. Early that morning, as was the custom for monks, he set out toward the nearest town to collect alms. Along the way, he was warned repeatedly that the brutal, merciless Angulimala was in the vicinity. The Buddha calmly continued on his way.

Soon, Angulimala spotted the unarmed monk on the road. He followed his prey with his sword drawn and ready. Buddha kept walking at his normal pace, yet the killer could never catch up to him, no matter how fast he ran. Finally, exhausted and bewildered, Angulimala shouted, "Stop, monk!"

"I have already stopped," the Buddha replied. "It is you who must stop."

This only heightened Angulimala's confusion. He demanded an explanation.

"I have stopped harming living beings," said the awakened one, "and I have renounced violence. But you continue to kill. You must stop."

In an instant, the frenzy in Angulimala's mind and the rage in his heart were calmed. Gazing into the eyes of the wise renunciate before him, he knew there was another way. He cast aside his weapons and asked the Buddha to take him as a disciple.

Angulimala renounced his violent ways, shaved his head, and donned the robes of the monastic order. Redirecting his energy with exemplary discipline, he advanced rapidly in his mastery of meditation, mindfulness, and compassion.

One day, King Pasenadi learned that the notorious Angulimala was in a nearby forest. He assembled a huge army and tracked down the outlaw only to find him in Buddha's compound. Angulimala thought the karmic debt he'd accrued in his murderous past had finally come due. But Buddha assured the king that the man who had once been a coldblooded murderer had been transformed. When the king was satisfied that this was so, he called off his soldiers.

Angulimala's spiritual progress accelerated, but the seeds of his criminal days continued to bear fruit. Sometimes, when he ventured out to gather alms, people would taunt him and pelt him with stones. Buddha explained that the suffering he had to endure was a pittance compared to the lifetimes of torment that were coming to him before his transformation. "Be patient," he told him. "Continue your practices."

Angulimala did as the master advised and eventually attained liberation. Over the centuries, his story has taught countless seekers that wisdom, virtue, and spiritual discipline can lighten the karmic burden of even the darkest deeds.

* * * * *

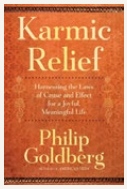
Karma has been on my mind for more than half a century. It was one of many concepts I absorbed as a young seeker drawn like an iron filing to the magnet of Eastern philosophy. Hungry for answers to life's Big Questions and desperate for guideposts to a fulfilling existence, I read voraciously about what we

MEET THE AUTHOR

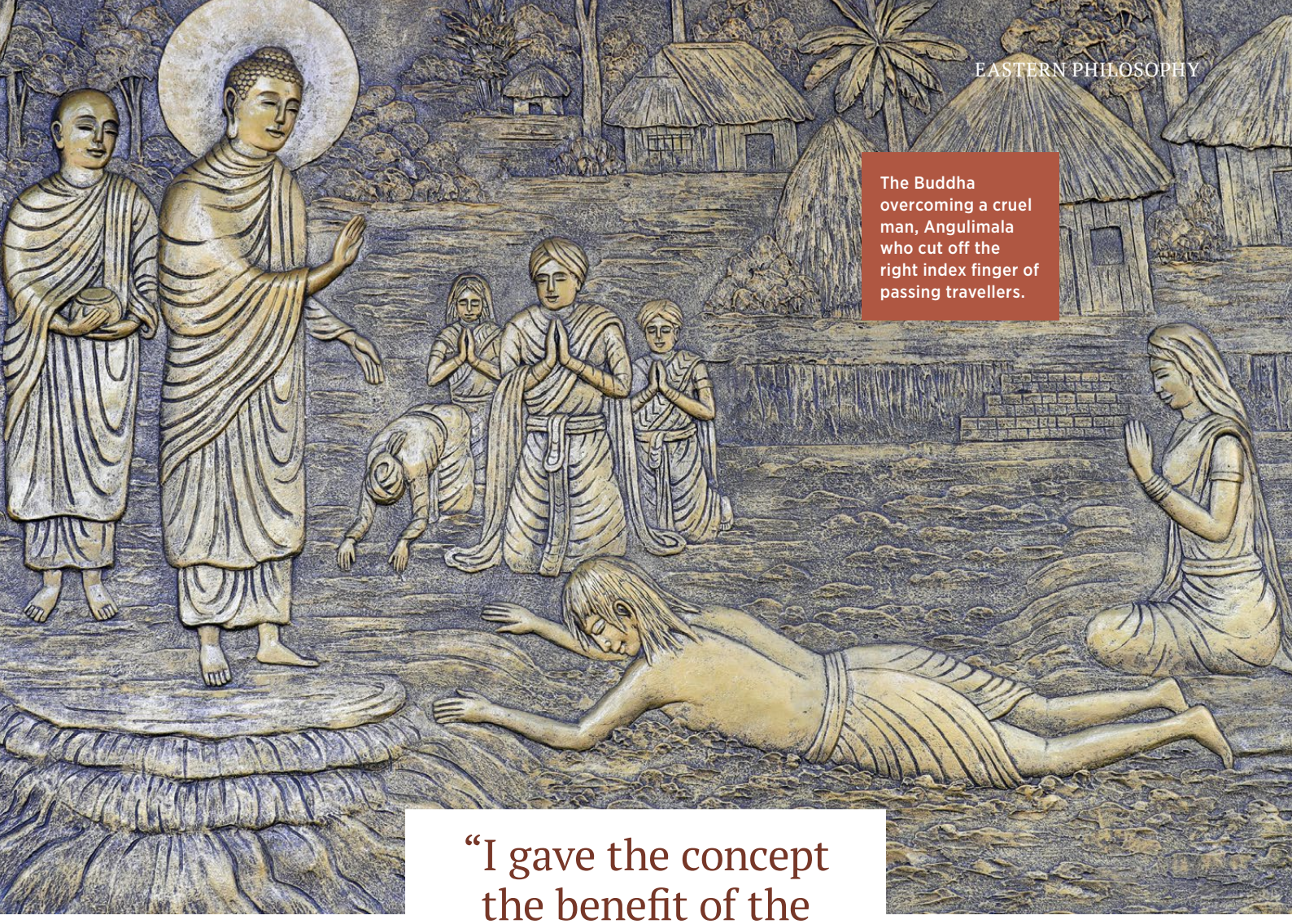


PHILIP GOLDBERG'S many books include *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation, How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, named one of the Top 10 religion books of the year by the American Library Association. He has lectured and taught throughout North America and India. He hosts the podcast "Spirit Matters with Philip Goldberg" at mindbodyspirit.fm., serves on the board of the Association for Spiritual Integrity, and writes regularly on his Substack, "Practical Spirituality."

On the web
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KARMIC RELIEF: HARNESSING THE LAWS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT FOR A JOYFUL, MEANINGFUL LIFE BY PHILIP GOLDBERG, *published by Monkfish Publishing, Paperback (208 pages)*



The Buddha overcoming a cruel man, Angulimala who cut off the right index finger of passing travellers.

call Hinduism and Buddhism and experimented with practices drawn from those traditions. As a kid from the New York streets, I was innately skeptical, and as a counterculture inhabitant, I did not trust authority or take anything on faith. The Eastern precepts I was drawn to seemed profoundly rational; they held up to reason, were endorsed by eminent thinkers, and did not contradict known history or science. And the methods I tried out - primarily from the yogic repertoire of mental, physical, and spiritual disciplines - did what they promised, transforming me in a most welcome manner from the inside out.

In large part, that period of exuberant exploration set the template for my subsequent life and work, which have been marked by an ongoing attempt to integrate East and West, spiritual and material, inner and outer. For quite a while, however, I resisted the theory of karma. The idea that iron-clad laws of cause and effect were at play in the cosmos, and that we invariably reap the consequences of everything we do, like it or not, appealed to me. I wanted to believe the universe was fair and just. I simply didn't see enough evidence. Too many blameless people were suffering and too many miscreants were being handsomely rewarded.

Over time, however, karma grew on me. It began to make intuitive sense. It was compatible with teachings that were objectively verifiable or at least jibed with my own experience. So, I gave the concept the benefit of the doubt. In turn, the likelihood that karma was real came to influence my judgment and my decisions.

"I gave the concept the benefit of the doubt. In turn, the likelihood that karma was real came to influence my judgment and my decisions."

At a certain point, I saw the word karma cropping up more and more in the media and in conversations with people who had zero interest in anything spiritual or Eastern. I was intrigued and pleased by this development, but also concerned when the concept was misused and misinterpreted. That's when I started to think about writing a book on the subject.

It sat on the back burner for at least ten years, kept alive by occasional reminders from my longtime agent, the late Lynn Franklin, and my wife, Lori Deutsch, both of whom loved the idea and the title, *Karmic Relief*. Eventually, I included it on a list of potential nonfiction books I sent to my then-new agent, Stephany Evans, and she suggested I work on it next. Who am I to argue with three wise women? It was clearly my karma to write the book.

In researching and writing the book, I kept two principle goals in mind. One was to clearly explain the concept of karma, which is as nuanced as it is simple, while correcting the many misconceptions about it. The second was to help readers apply the principles of karma in their lives to make wiser decisions and chart a smoother, more harmonious and fulfilling path forward.

We all need karmic relief, and the world needs a karmic reboot that would raise the level of collective morality above its currently dismal state. I sincerely hope the book can make a difference, however modestly, on both levels. ●

THE METAPHYSICS OF LIVING INSIDE A SIMULATED UNIVERSE

A TALK BY RIZWAN VIRK

The well-known Silicon Valley entrepreneur and MIT-educated computer scientist discusses one of the most daring and consequential theories of our time: The Simulation Hypothesis - the idea that our physical reality, far from being a solid physical universe, is part of an increasingly sophisticated video game-like simulation.

The subtitle of my new book, the second edition of *The Simulation Hypothesis*, is "An MIT computer scientist shows why AI, quantum physics, and eastern mystics all agree we're in a video game". I wrote the first edition back in 2019, and just think back to how technology has evolved since then; well, we didn't even have ChatGPT. So, quantum physics and the eastern mystic stuff hasn't changed since 2019, but obviously AI has.

I ended up writing this book initially when I was in the video game industry. I was visiting a video game startup in Marin County across the bay from San Francisco. They said, "You got to try this out, put on this virtual reality helmet." I put on their VR headset and inside they had developed a game of table tennis. So I started to play this game of ping pong with a controller and the graphics were terrible. This was 2016, right? And it was a very uncomfortable headset. In fact, there were wires coming down from the ceiling and we used to call it having a toaster on your face. But as I played this game of table tennis, the responsiveness was so good, the physics engine that they had implemented was so accurate, that I really felt like I was hitting a real ball and playing a real game of ping pong. So much so that my body forgot just for a moment that I had the toaster on my face and that there were wires coming down from the ceiling or that there wasn't an actual table. And I wanted to put the paddle down and I tried to lean against the table, just like I might do at the end of a game of ping pong. Unfortunately though, there was no table, and I almost fell over. And that's when I began to think about how long it would take us to build a virtual reality that's so immersive that we would not be able to tell the difference between physical reality and virtual reality.

And also, what if there were characters inside this VR world that were AI characters, and you couldn't tell if a particular character was AI generated, what we call a NPC (non-player character) or an avatar. As you probably know, the term *avatar* in video games refers to the character inside the game that you're controlling. Originally, *avatar* is a Sanskrit word for a divine figure which comes down to the human realm and squeezes itself into a tiny human body - tiny from their divine perspective, of course.

I was starting to wonder how long it would take to reach this point where we could basically build *the matrix*. You

"I was starting to wonder how long it would take to reach this point where we could basically build *the matrix*."



know, the basic idea of the movie *The Matrix*: someone who thinks he's in the real world, but he's actually in a virtual reality. And so, I laid out 10 stages of technology that we would need to build to get there. And at the time, we were about maybe 40% to 50% of the way there, at stages four and five, which are about virtual reality and photorealistic augmented reality.

Back then video games had dumb NPCs, meaning that you can interact with them but they didn't really seem like people. Sometimes they had dialogue trees, and you had to click what your response was. So, it's very limited. Today, with the advent of ChatGPT and LLMs (Large Language Models) they are hooking these LLMs up to a virtual avatar and they're calling them smart NPCs. And of course, you've probably heard some of the strange stories of people who are proposing to their chat GPT or have their virtual boyfriends and girlfriends which are powered by an LLM. So, in any case, things are getting more realistic.

But what if we were to get to a point where once you were inside the VR, you would forget - and not just for a moment as I did when I was playing ping pong - but you were to forget your whole life that you had spent outside of a virtual reality, and you assumed that it was real? Well, what are the chances, if we could build something like this, that you couldn't tell the difference? And what are the chances that we are *actually* inside one of those virtual realities right now? Not being able to tell the difference, that's the key. So, it's at least 50/50, right? If you can't tell, it's kind of a toss-up.

Pretty much all of the scriptures of the world describe the process of incarnation as a process of forgetting. But what do they use to describe this? They use metaphors. Now, if you think of the mystical scriptures and the canonical scriptures of the world's great religions, they had to describe things in a way that people could understand 2,000 years ago. For example, the *Bhagavad Gita* used a technological metaphor by saying that the soul clothes itself in the body, just like your body puts on a set of garments. And in this model of reincarnation, you take off those garments at the end and then you go put on another set of garments. So that is a technology metaphor, as clothes are a type of technology. And Rumi said basically the same thing in his *Masnavi*, which many consider to be "the Koran in Persian". It's a mystical text in which he said basically that the soul puts on the body like a pair of clothes. So, we see the exact same metaphor describing a process that is at its heart almost ineffable. And like it says in the Koran: "don't worry about how that happens, that's too mysterious for you little humans to understand." And so, humans had to use language and come up with metaphors that they could understand. And throughout history mystics have tried to update these metaphors.

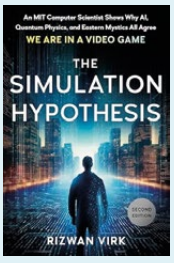
Part of the reason why I wrote this book was because I spend a lot of time at conferences where they talk about spiritual ideas, about channelling, UFOs and so on. And I also spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley where all they're concerned about is the latest tech. And I'm currently part of academia where they don't believe any of this stuff. It's okay to talk about things like near-death experiences as "why do crazy people believe in near-death experiences?" But it's not okay to say, "Hey, what if these things are real? What does that mean for each of us?" And so I spent enough time in all these areas that I needed some way that these people could communicate with each other. And it turns out that with *The Simulation Hypothesis* I can go to a physicist at MIT and I can talk about this idea of reality not really being real. Now, they may not believe me, but at least they're willing to have the conversation with me. ●

For a complete recording of Rizwan's talk featuring more fascinating insights into cutting edge technology and teachings of mystical tradition that make a compelling case for us living inside a video game-like simulation, see the Watkins YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-A0BZiTDx7c

MEET THE AUTHOR



RIZWAN (RIZ) VIRK is a successful entrepreneur, pioneering video game venture capitalist, indie film producer, and the bestselling author of *The Simulation Hypothesis*. He writes on the intersection of science, science fiction, business and spirituality. Riz's video games, including *Tap Fish* and *Penny Dreadful: Demimonde*, have been played by millions. A graduate of MIT and Stanford University, he was the founder of the video game accelerator Play Labs @ MIT, and currently teaches at Arizona State University.

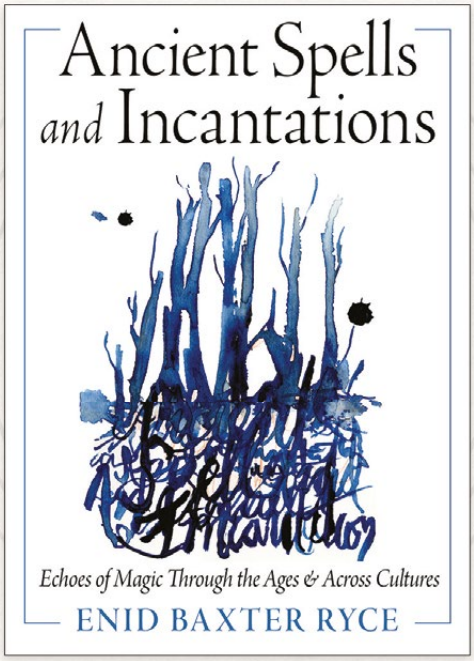


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THE SIMULATION HYPOTHESIS: AN MIT COMPUTER SCIENTIST SHOWS WHY AI, QUANTUM PHYSICS, AND EASTERN MYSTICS ALL AGREE WE ARE IN A VIDEO GAME BY RIZWAN VIRK, *Second Edition published by Tarcher, Hardback (380 pages)*

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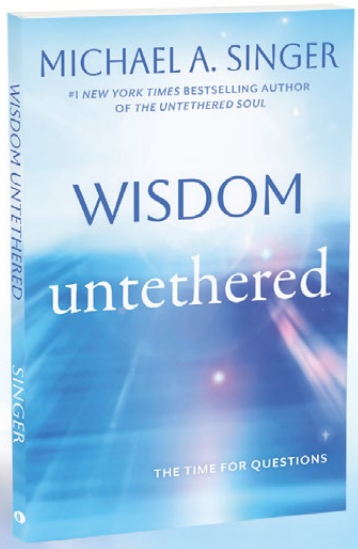
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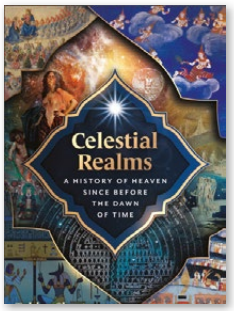
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WHEN WOMEN HAD WINGS

by Angi Sullins & Jena DellaGrottaglia

When women had wings, there was balance.

There was a time when women walked the earth, danced by the fire, swam the rivers and took to the sky. It was an age of awe and wonder, but also an age of wisdom. It was a time when gods and goddesses lived in harmony, men and women celebrating their differences and similarities, while the masculine and feminine energy in each person lived together gently, side by side.

Standing on equal ground and sharing open skies, men and women were encouraged to engage with each other and hold congress in society, but were equally encouraged to maintain balance by honoring their private space. It was known and understood that when each woman cultivated her inner life and her singular sacred space – that holy ground created just for her – she became a generator, a resource of energy to be enjoyed by her self, her family and society.

In this freedom, women were encouraged to explore all facets of themselves. The dark, shadowy qualities were embraced along with the bright, shining ones. By refusing to banish less desirable traits, women embraced all parts of their character, bringing balance to each person and alignment to society as a whole. By valuing inclusion and acceptance, women lived without shame. On the rare occurrence when a woman lost her way, when she fell out of

balance and committed a crime, it is said her sisters would bring her to a ceremonial fire. There, instead of judging or punishing her, the sisters would form a circle around the golden flames, each in their turn speaking a fond memory or a positive characteristic of the transgressor, helping her re-member herself. Reminded of her innate goodness and unique value in the community, natural balance was restored within her self and in community.

When women had wings, there was power.
Women knew their power. Like their wings, it was natural. A great well of magic pooled at the base of each wing, where skin and muscle met fiber and feather. It was said a woman's intuition was her magic, and this electric wisdom was stored in her wings. In times of conflict or confusion, a woman need only stand still and flutter her wings ever so slightly to receive the vibration of insight. In doing so, she called to her the magic and knowledge in the very air itself. She knew the essence that made her a woman was the same essence moving through every being, even the air itself. She only needed to reach for it to find it eagerly reaching back toward her.

Knowledge has long been equated with power, and it was no different when women had wings. Great amounts of childhood were devoted to the study of one's self, one's own unique gifts and strengths. Growing into adulthood, women were encouraged to devote equal time to outward and inward studies. *Know Thyself* was every woman's mantra, so books, art and culture were revered for the messages they carried, but were often put aside so each woman could peruse the library of her psyche. Women cultivated their relationship to the collective unconscious, knowing their ancestors lived on and communicated their messages through the realms of the psyche. Dreams, meditations and imagination were channels of deep insight, providing power in times of distress and answers in times of confusion.

When women had wings, there was sensuality.
Women were known as the light bearers. In their wings dwelled receptors to catch and contain the light of both sun and moon. Men were made of earth, of dust and loam, of grit and will, growing – much like our present day plant life – by means of photosynthesis. Men and women made love frequently, for pleasure, for union, and to sustain and celebrate the life force. Men, with their green roots and organic souls, sought the light as their source of growth. Making love to a woman made her shine. Making love to a woman well and often made her glow. In her radiance, men grew in stature, wisdom, power and insight. The brighter her light shone, the deeper his roots would reach, the stronger his limbs would grow.

When a woman chose to love another woman, it is said the moon would pale, disappearing in a curtain of light, so bright was the glow of beauty.

When women had wings, sex was a sacred delight and a woman's joy was the pride of every healthy, growing being, both male and female. Only a woman in full glow could conceive a child and it was widely known that nothing – not the sky, nor rivers nor the forests, nor the rare flowers blossoming there – was more beautiful than a woman in full bloom. A man was lucky to bed a woman, luckier to bed a pregnant woman, luckiest if she chose him as her consort or companion.

When women had wings, there was creativity.
When the feminine was celebrated and aligned with the masculine, there was no separation between sensuality, spirituality and creativity. A woman's creative river flowed naturally, from the base of her wings, through her spirit and out from her body. Women were natural containers, repositories for the creative process. While men also created, embracing the feminine within them, it was the women who were in charge of birth: the birth of ideas, insights, visions, alliances, art and children.

Women embraced change, understanding that the rhythms and seasons of their bodies mirrored the changes in nature, and in the creative process. After a season of great creativity, time was allowed for each soul's creative field to lie fallow, respecting the time of stillness that urges the soul into new realms of receptivity. Women were encouraged to indulge their solitude, to cultivate a sacred hibernation space where they could open their creative field fully to the sky, the moon, the sun. They did so knowing that new seeds travel on the wind and an open, empty field is the choicest ground for growth.

When women had wings, there was flight.
Soul flight. Body flight. Mind flight. A woman needn't be locked in an uncomfortable relationship, situation or thought-form, as she knew from birth her power of flight. She could physically move from space to space at will, but she also could move from thought to thought, as easily as hummingbirds move from flower to flower. When one thought created limitation or suffering, she could move easily to a thought of peace, expanse or possibility. She understood that her thoughts had manifesting power, and so guarded her mind carefully, conscious of her ability to manifest for her own benefit or deficit.

At the height of a woman's alignment, when wings and soul and sexuality were in their natural union, a woman could soar. Into azure skies bright with summer sun and dragonflies, into inky night skies alive with diamond stars and fireflies, into stormy skies smoldering with thunder, lightning and raven wing, and most precious, into eternal skies, wide and daring, crowded thick with dreams and hopes and possibilities. She only needed to fetch a wish from the open expanse to make it hers. This was the natural domain…

When Women Had Wings.

A Memory of Wings

You may not be able to see or touch them. You may have lost your memory of them. But you do indeed have wings. They may be fluttering just under the surface of your skin, or folded deep in the realm of your psyche. They may be crumbled or torn, lying tattered in the well of despair. But they are as real as your breath and as necessary. This deck is designed to help you remember them

MEET THE AUTHOR

ANGI SULLINS is a wild woman in service of feminine sovereignty. In books and workshops, she takes women on journeys of self-discovery to unchain their lives and re-wild their heart.
JENA DELLAGROTTAGLIA is an accomplished digital artist who makes art in many mediums. Her art has been featured on oracle decks, calendars and greetings cards as well as book covers.

On the web

www.angisullins.com
www.autumnsgoddess.com



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WHEN WOMEN HAD WINGS TAROT DECK BY ANGI SULLINS & JENA DELLAGROTTAGLIA, *published by U.S. Games, Boxed Set (78-card Deck & 198-page Guidebook)*















into being. No, I'm not suggesting that you actually will one day sprout feathers from your back, but I am suggesting that your sense of flight will return. Your soul is winged and can fly daily. Your spirit is designed to soar. This deck is aimed at bringing you fully into that experience.

Your wings are inside, as are the answers to the questions you seek. Therefore, it's essential you begin your approach to these cards by quieting the mind, opening the heart and going within. In search of Her. Who, you ask? She has many names, among them: Winged One, Cloud Dancer, She Who Drinks the Sky. For our purpose, we shall call her Psyche and we shall call upon her often.

Greek mythology states that Psyche was the most beautiful of women, arousing the jealousy of goddesses. Because of her stunning beauty and her powerful, determined spirit, she was granted immortality. The word psyche, in the Greek language, means both "soul" and "butterfly." Webster's dictionary cites several definitions of the word psyche, among them "animating spirit," "the human soul," and "the second emanation of the One, regarded as a universal consciousness and as the animating principle of the world."

This winged, animating spirit lives inside you. Her butterfly nature is designed to handle times of crawling, cocooning, transforming and flying. Therefore, you will find all aspects of winged life represented within this deck. The words and images have been created to aid you in your quest to remember who you are. This deck is designed to guide you back to Psyche, for she understands your winged nature, and, embracing both light and shadow, longs to see you take to the sky. Unfettered and free.

Whether you seek guidance in a time of difficulty, clarity in a time of confusion, answers in a time of questing, deepening in a time of wonderment, or affirmation in a time of certainty, these cards reach toward an awareness you already carry inside your soul. They may be used in oracular fashion, or simply used to affirm and strengthen what you already know. Their greatest use is when they act, for you, as the archetypal sister, friend or confidante – that kind, wise voice that bridges your deepest longings with your wisest intuition. In that union, we all remember our wings, and we all fly high. ●



by John J. Prendergast, PhD

YOUR DEEPEST GROUND:

A Guide to Embodied Spirituality

We all have a subtle yet profound pull to live more from our hearts - our center of love, compassion, gratitude, freedom, and silent wisdom - and less from our heads, the primary source of our critical judgments and core limiting beliefs. Yet to live a truly heart-centered life, we must feel safe. As a result, to live from the heart in a deep and steady way, we must take the time to discover our deepest ground.

I have been exploring the relationship between the heart and the ground for decades, both as a depth psychotherapist, now retired, and as a spiritual teacher. I once thought I could write a single book about both, but I found that the richness of each subject deserved books of their own. I've devoted chapters to the theme of the ground in my previous books *In Touch* and *The Deep Heart*, but here I've taken the space to fully unpack this critically important subject.

Why is the ground - the felt-sense of spacious stability in and beneath the body - so important? In my experience, it is where most spiritual explorers, both beginners and veterans, get stuck, often unknowingly. The ground is largely terra incognita, an unknown territory. There is enormous resistance to exploring it. Why? As in the fanciful maps made by early ocean explorers, there may be dragons there. What are these apparent dragons that hold us back from fully landing *right here* in the middle of our beautiful, challenging, and poignant lives and opening to what is? Survival fear and confusion. We are deeply wired to survive, and we are deeply confused about where our essential safety lies.

Survival fear - the instinctual fear of physical and psychological annihilation - takes many forms, but mostly it draws on our desire to control what we cannot: ourselves, others, and the

world. We fear the loss of this illusory control and live with a chronic inner grip of tension, losing touch with our bodies and overly relying on our thinking. We cling to the familiar and avoid the unknown. We believe untrue and unkind stories about ourselves and the world. We try to connect to and belong with others in ways that are superficial and unfulfilling, projecting both our dark and luminous shadows onto others. Above all, we forget who we are and take ourselves to be separate from the whole of life. As a result, we live inauthentically, out of integrity with the depths of who we really are. This leaves an inner ache and sense of lack.

Further, most religious and spiritual traditions reinforce our resistance to opening to the ground and *experientially* facing our survival fears. Most of these traditions focus on the upper half of the body and accent developing the mind or the heart area. The lower half of the body, with its instinctual tendencies of survival, sex, and power, is largely devalued or ignored. There is, however, a growing recognition in contemplative spiritual circles that the region of the belly must be included if we are to authentically embody our spiritual understanding so that it enhances our relationships, work, and care for the planet, the latter of which is in increasingly dire straits. This brings us to the theme of the hara, which means "belly" in Japanese.

The hara, or gut, ranges from the solar plexus to the base of the spine. When I first contemplated writing this book, I thought it would be about the hara as a whole, which is described in Taoism and Japanese martial arts such as aikido. But I soon realized that it was actually the lowest level of the hara - the base of the spine - that was my real focus. In terms of the body, this is where terror localizes. This is where it feels like the rug gets pulled out from under us. This is where we either connect to or cut off from our sense of the ground.

The ground is our felt-sense of support and stability that lies *beneath the body*, and therefore our deepest ground is underground. There are different levels to this sense of being grounded. On one level - the most obvious one - we feel rooted in and connected to the earth. Our bodies are earth-bodies, and we are able to feel this earthy connection. Another level, less frequented, is archetypal. Here we may be pulled down into an underground realm on a mythic journey or contact ancestral conditioning. Shamanistic rituals, vision quests, extraordinary dreams, and plant medicine can sometimes induce contact with this powerful realm. There is a deeper level yet: the ground of being or the groundless ground. Here we surrender to unbounded openness and discover that, in this space, questions of safety or unsafety completely dissolve. When we open to our deepest ground, we encounter an unshakable sense of well-being regardless of circumstances. And our heart, now deeply grounded, is able to fully flower like a lotus with its roots deeply anchored in the mud. We feel in deep integrity with ourself.

There is also a false ground, the ground of the apparent separate self or "little me." This ground is a contraction, a frozen place, much like a thin layer of ice over a body of water. As a separate self, we can sometimes sense that we are skating on this thin ice. This false ground is a chronic grip of inner tension that defends against opening to our true ground. It is a bundle of false beliefs, reactive feelings, and somatic contractions that we mis-take to be ourself. We unconsciously cling to it because it is familiar, choosing a known suffering over an unknown openness. As a result, we assume that, except for brief respites, feeling anxious, depressed, alienated, and disconnected is all that life offers. We habituate to feeling separate and inwardly contracted. Finding our true ground requires that we see through this false ground. Seeing through what is false allows a spontaneous letting go and unfolding of what is true.

> "The ground is largely terra incognita, an unknown territory. There is enormous resistance to exploring it."

My approach to the ground may be surprising to some since it includes dimensions that are not usually included or combined. It involves a blend of contemporary depth psychotherapy, energetic sensitivity, and nondual understanding based upon direct experience. In my view, at least one of these important dimensions often gets left out of teachings about spiritual development. My psychotherapeutic understanding comes from over four decades of practicing adult individual psychotherapy as well as from supervising and training masters-level counseling students for twenty-three years. My energetic sensitivity first emerged in late boyhood and blossomed once I began a regular meditation practice and started working with clients. My nondual understanding unfolded after many years of meditation and self-inquiry and was catalyzed by years of close study, first with the European sage Jean Klein and then with the American spiritual teacher Adyashanti. ●

Excerpted from *Your Deepest Ground: A Guide to Embodied Spirituality* by John J. Prendergast. Reprinted with permission from the publisher, Sounds True.

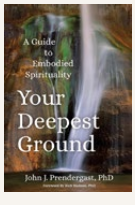
MEET THE AUTHOR



JOHN J. PRENDERGAST, PhD, is a nondual teacher, author, retired psychotherapist, and retired adjunct professor of psychology who has taught at Esalen and Kripalu and online. He studied for many years with the European sage Jean Klein, as well as with Adyashanti, and is the author of the books *In Touch* and *The Deep Heart*. John has been offering residential retreats with his wife, Christiane, since 2015, in both the U.S. and, more recently, in Europe.

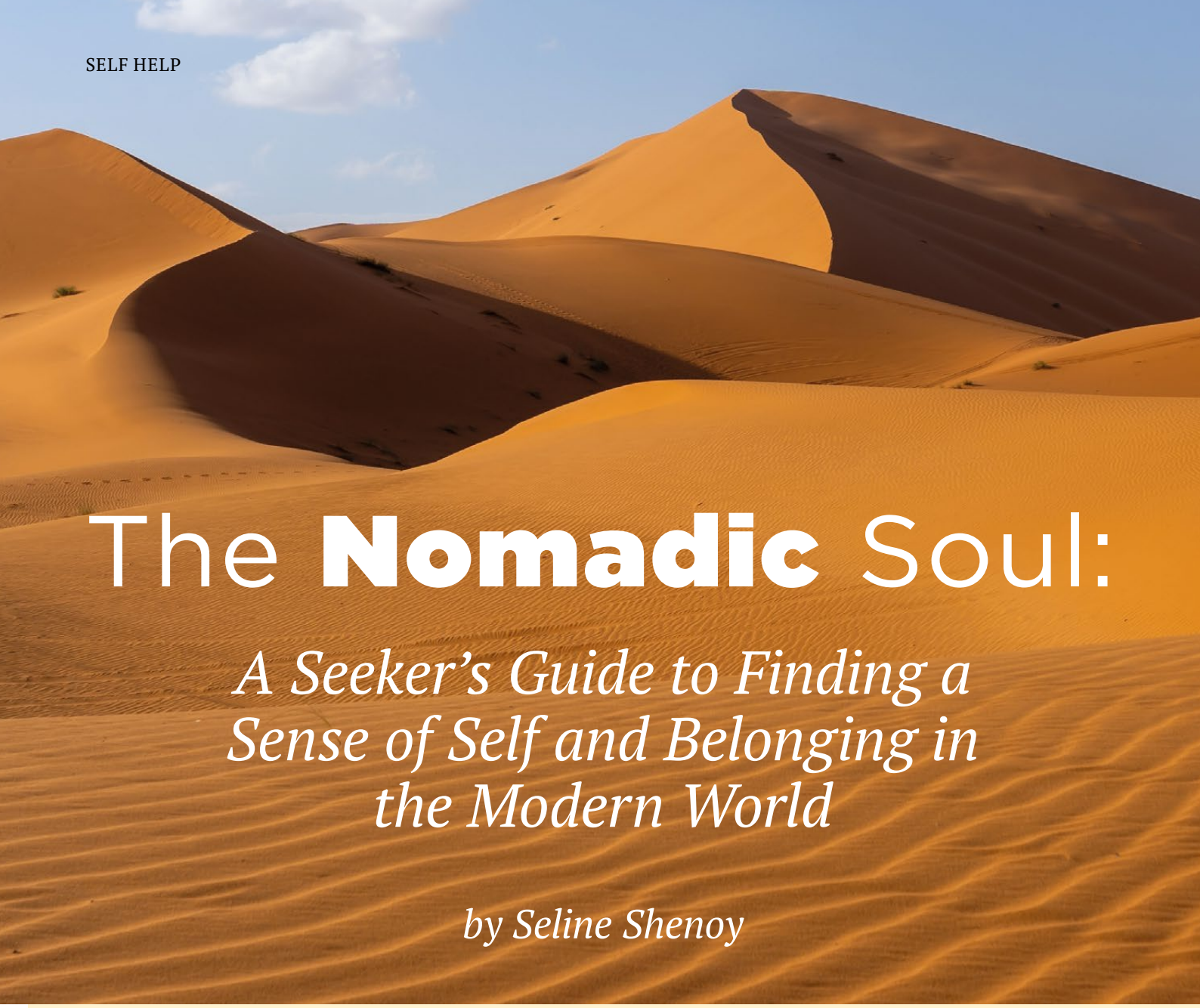
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YOUR DEEPEST GROUND: A GUIDE TO EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY BY JOHN J. PRENDERGAST, PhD, *published by Sounds True, Paperback (208 pages)*



The **Nomadic** Soul:

A Seeker's Guide to Finding a Sense of Self and Belonging in the Modern World

by Seline Shenoy

***"Not all those who wander are lost."* — J.R.R. Tolkien**

The desert is one of the most challenging places on Earth for a human being to live. The sweltering heat during the day and ice-cold temperatures at night. The absence of food, water, shelter, and people for miles. All of this could spell disaster for any traveler.

Yet these conditions did not deter the ancient desert nomads from traversing hundreds of miles across vast stretches of cascading dunes. They were seeking green pastures, not just for physical sustenance but for the sustenance of their souls. The promise of deep nourishment fueled their will and galvanized their efforts to carry on.

Mounted on top of their camels, dressed in regal, long white tunics with colorful headcloths, these nomads carried with them provisions - supplies of milk, meat, and water.

These days, most of us cannot imagine voyaging through such a hostile environment without using any navigational instrument - such as a simple compass and paper map or our more modern technology like GPS and Google Earth. But not having these tools did not dissuade the desert nomads from venturing forth. They had faith in their sensory faculties and inner knowing.

The nomads mapped out their travels using key landmarks in their natural environments, such as mountains, oases, trees, big rocks, and sand dunes shaped by winds. They could even infer directions by looking up at the sky and observing the patterns and cycles of celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, and star constellations. They considered the sky to be a divine navigational tool that was created to guide humans on their quests. The desert nomads' navigational abilities, combined with their adaptability and resilience, allowed them to thrive in those perilous frontiers.

After many years of traveling these paths, they accumulated sufficient knowledge to get around and adapt to the harsh conditions. They developed their instincts so they could find their way back to safety if they got lost. Their wisdom and expertise were well-preserved and passed down to future generations to continue the legacy of nomadic living.

Although their mental toughness and resourcefulness are admirable, one can't help but wonder: Why would they choose to live in such difficult conditions? Surely there were less life-threatening living arrangements to be found in the villages and towns nearby, where food, water, warmth, and shelter were readily available.

Why not opt for living in a secure settlement instead of being constantly on the move in the desert, exposed to its unpredictable forces and dangers? The standard explanation

is that they traveled in search of food, water, and places to grow crops and raise animals.

While that's true, it goes much deeper than that. Living their nomadic ways was an expression of their soul. They found purpose on their odysseys, no matter how foreboding the road ahead seemed. These excursions gave them opportunities to forge deeper bonds with their travel partners, the natural world, the cosmos, and, most importantly, themselves.

In these desolate lands, they were liberated from the cultural labels, roles, and anything else limiting their identity. The vast expanse of cascading dunes offered a refuge in which they could break free from these social conventions and expectations, allowing the nomads to connect with their true essence. In this serene space, the nomads could understand their place in the grander scheme of things.

They were seekers, explorers, and vagabonds, driven by a burning desire to wander off into the wide blue yonder - because in doing so, they uncovered new domains not just around them but within them.

And this primal yearning to be more, do more, and have more lives within you too.

Adopting the ways of the ancient desert nomads can help us break out of the ruts we find ourselves in - whether that's an unfulfilling career, a lackluster relationship, or a general lack of meaning in our lives. All we need to do is look beyond the walls we've built that contain us and indulge our spiritual wanderlust, just as they did.

The nomads show us what's possible when we call forth our courage and faith to step out into uncharted territories. We live up to our potential when we take healthy risks, try new things, say "yes" to the right opportunities, and express our ideas without fear of ridicule.

By granting yourself the freedom to roam free - mind, heart, and soul - you'll find peace, and the solutions to your most vexing problems will appear in unexpected places. All you need to do is believe. Believe that you have the power to take that journey - just as ancient nomads did.

The Nomadic Soul and Its Core Needs

The desert nomads' impulse to roam the open desert, under the luminous sun and starry, moonlit sky, was perhaps the earliest and purest expression of the Nomadic Soul - a deeper, ethereal aspect of our identity that dwells within us all and holds the key to everything from life's biggest question to the minutiae of everyday existence.

Nomads, by definition, are people who do not stay long in the same place. They're known to roam from one place to the next without the real intent to transform into a better version of themselves. At first glance, they appear as lost and restless souls devoid of an anchor or stability. This is *not* the way of the Nomadic Soul modeled by ancient desert nomads. Rather, a person who embodies the Nomadic Soul is someone who journeys with purpose. They do it to transform, gain wisdom, and benefit those around them. They embark on a sacred quest in search of meaning, truth, and purpose. The journey of the Nomadic Soul is an investigation of a different plane where they traverse deeper dimensions of existence.

Movement is the central theme of some of the most beloved novels and literary works. Books like *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, and *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse speak to a primal part of us, a longing to unearth our hidden layers. Even our greatest religious stories, from Confucius to Moses, talk about the journey of discovery being a vital rite of passage in our spiritual evolution. Going on sacred trips to attain enlightenment is a practice that dates back to prehistoric times, when shamans and holy men left their clans to embark on their own journey. They went on perilous journeys to destinations of great cultural and spiritual importance. These rigorous acts of sacrifice were about much more than just reaching a specific destination. They offered travelers a chance to reflect, focus inward, and discover new destinations within themselves.

On some level, our entire lives are a holy quest - a journey in search of self, which may or may not involve physical movement. During pivotal moments in our lives, we'll feel the urge to move from a knowingness - an old identity that we used to feel at home with - toward new territory. This is because the soul has a particular trajectory of evolution. It wants to transition to another place because we're no longer satisfied with the old. It's up to us to heed the call to transform. We feel it instinctually when we're stuck in a situation that does not feel right for us anymore or when we know we can accomplish so much more. Cartoonist Charles M. Schulz captured this angst when he said, "There is no greater burden than great potential."

As travelers, what's important is that we stay with ourselves in the process and go as far inward as we can. That's where we'll find the answers we seek and hear the whispers of our hearts. We can't find those on the surface of life. We have to drill down to our core foundation. If we want to find water in our backyard, we don't dig up small holes all over the yard. Instead, we find one spot and dig as deep as we can. Eventually, water will spring forth from that opening. The plentitude a Nomadic Soul seeks is found with the same attention, care, and willingness to travel inward to the substratum of our being. ●

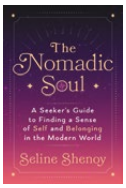
MEET THE AUTHOR



SELINE SHENOY is an author, blogger, and podcaster whose work focuses on personal development, self-esteem, productivity, and culture. After working as a life and career coach for six years, Seline founded The Dream Catcher, a digital community that encourages its members to live their authentic dream life and make a difference in the world. In 2018, she launched *The Dream Catcher* podcast, which features candid conversations with self-help and spiritual wellness experts, including authors, influencers, spiritual leaders, and scholars. Born and raised in Dubai and educated in the United States, Seline considers herself a global citizen. Her travels inspired her mission to spread awareness about cultural and racial identity and acceptance.

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THE NOMADIC SOUL: A SEEKER'S GUIDE TO FINDING A SENSE OF SELF AND BELONGING IN THE MODERN WORLD BY SELINE SHENOY, *published by Amplify Publishing, Paperback (280 pages)*

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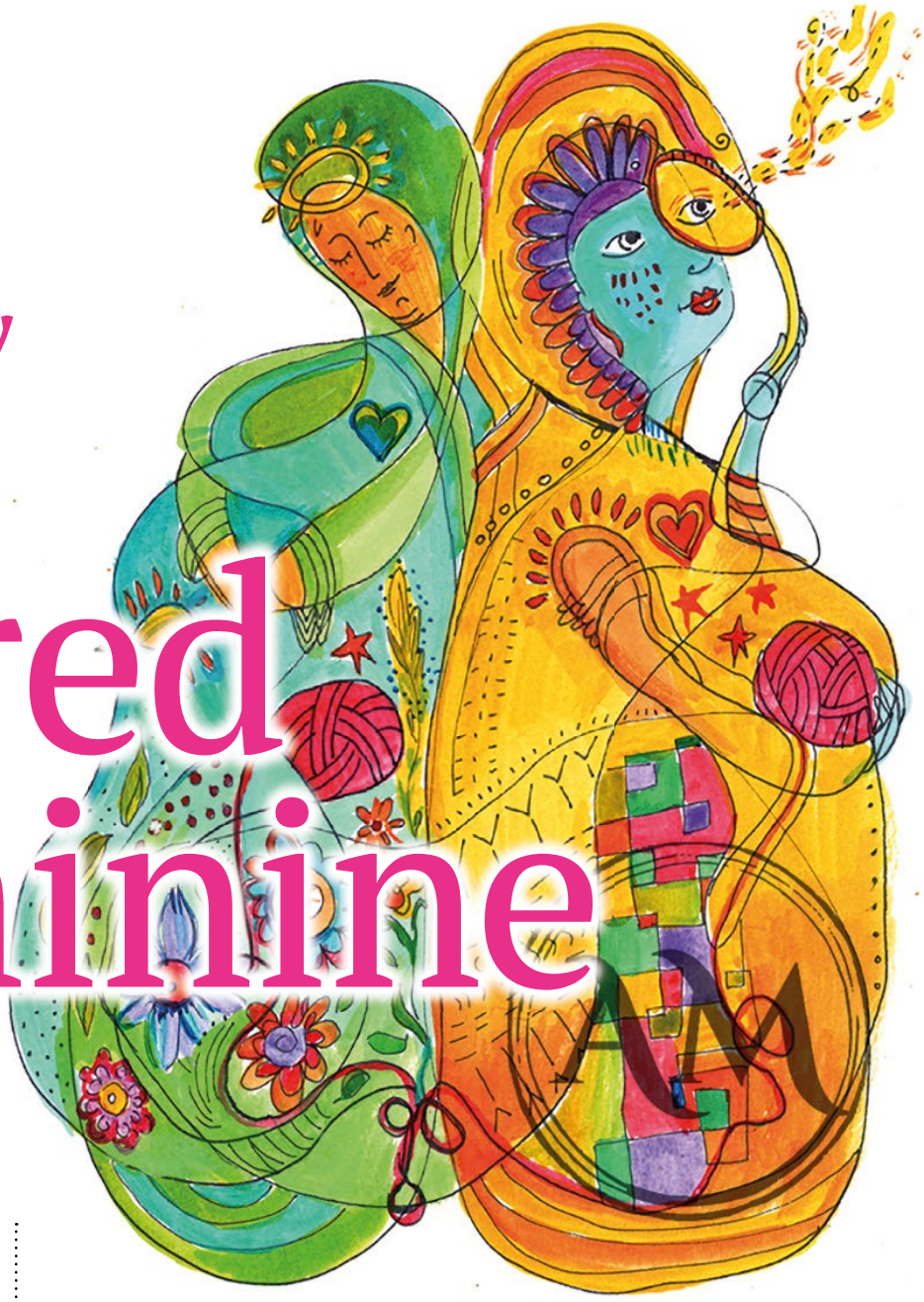
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Rekindle Your Creativity with the Sacred Feminine



by Ally Markotich

Who is your True Self? **If you've ever heard this question and truly paused to consider it, then you know what a challenging inquiry and bold call it is to entertain it. When you step on the route to ponder your truest essence, soon, you may find yourself questioning personal truths, altering ingrained patterns and daring to step towards the unknown. When my own journey set forth, I felt as if I was Alice in Wonderland chasing after the White Rabbit, tumbling down, down, down into a great abyss.**

Initially, I was disoriented. Silence rang in my ears. All the labels I wore were peeling away, asking me to examine something deeper and more authentic that lived within me. I was also challenged to let go of notions of who I believed the Divine to be and open to something wider, wilder and deeper.

It began with a feminine whisper and a splash of creative longing. Murmurs of God as "Mother" reached my ears during a Sunday discussion group at my church. I was cautiously curious. This idea was a foreign concept to me. First, I resisted the possibility and kept Her at arms reach. Yet, clues to Her presence persisted. They came from books gifted to me by friends, dreams of blueprints and passports to new lands, red threads of connection as well as the sneaking suspicion of my own intuition. While I sat in structured meetings where talking was prominent, my heart was telling me that creativity could bring surprise and intuition into tedious table conversations. My sense was MotherGod held the key. She was beckoning me to come to Her. Did I have the audacity to heed Her call?

Addressing God as "Mother" may seem absurd to those of us raised in traditional faith settings. After all, we've essentially been conditioned to see, name and accept God as all-male. Even now, when I attend circles and gatherings where the Divine is referred to as *She*, I peer around with bubbling excitement and a bit of anxiety. My ears perk up. My heart quickens. I wonder who may be offended by this bold declaration of MotherGod? What I've discovered is that when *Her* name is spoken aloud - a name that has been silenced from lips and wiped from history - a remembrance is stirred that rustles an ancient knowing within us. This quickening is the womb leap that (re)connects us to our creative True Selves.

Proclaiming MotherGod audibly questions age-old systems and asks us to honor Her heavily erased past. By noting that *She* is among us, we stretch formerly held concepts and make room for Spirit to freshen our hearts with organic flow. We discover Her unpredictable nature and



She rises into a palpable presence among us. When *She* is seen, *WE* are seen. When *She* is honored, we come to honor the feminine essence that abides within our being. This is an essence of keen insight that opens us to compassion and relationship. In a similar manner in which we've come to encounter the grace and forgiveness of FatherGod, when we acknowledge MotherGod, we come to experience Her embrace and love. By voicing *Her name*, we begin the long walk to heal Her forgotten nature and receive the medicine she carries.

MotherGod is a Divine Being who delights in an intimate relationship. And, this relationship is one that incorporates a sense of hide-and-seek. I found Her way to be a refreshing breeze for the daily grind. She wooed me with mysterious inklings during ordinary dealings: I'd catch sight of the same three-digit time on my phone three days in a row. A word or phrase would come to me through various avenues inviting me to pay attention. And, when I got very quiet, a question others had attempted to answer (for me) would continue to knock at the door of my heart. In order to know Her, I had to slow my own pace and give up my desire to produce feverishly. I learned to lean into my own wisdom, to listen to the stirrings of my inner world. To pause. To dream into the unknown Beauty that I was - and am. To discover my life as a treasure hunt of sacred gems.

Traveling beside MotherGod led me to unravel much of what I thought I knew. I'd been on a race to strive, prove and produce for eons; I didn't realize there was another pace. She gently took me into the valley of shadows, where I was met with my own restless nature. I was asked to practice compassion for myself. Compassion for my urge to belong by proving my worth. She invited me to release the competition I felt among feminine friends and, instead, celebrate the unique gifts each person brings into the world. MotherGod affirmed the sacred imagination that is my birthright, that is the heartspring of love. She inspired wonder and childlike play. Her presence encouraged me to swim in pools of vital joy.

I gathered in circles of women and learned to witness, not fix, others' stories. This supported my growth in understanding the power of hearing from each voice in the circle, including my own. Sitting at the feet of MotherGod's valuable teachings led me to see how I belonged to "nature," how I was an essential part of this unfolding creation. I started to greet the American crows on my morning walk with a friendly, "Hello." When I looked at the evening sky, I took note of the ancient feminine rhythm of waxing, waning, and the moon's willingness to disappear for a time. I grew in awe of the countless shapes, designs and sizes of leaves. This shifted my life from being a hamster wheel routine to being one of mindful connection, of longing . . . and belonging.

By committing to the path of the Sacred Feminine, the color inside my being became more vibrant. I felt the nudge to create again after having closed that chapter years before. I opened a sketchbook and came to know myself anew. I gave myself permission to write with abandon. I wrote, "*Who am I?*" and navigated that question over and over. Insights took hold of my heart as I freely expressed my concerns, dreams and story through word and image. Previous labels slid off as I showed up again and again to draw, write and paint - for no-one but myself. I challenged head-on toxic stories such as: Creative work is a lesser pursuit and creativity is a frivolous hobby. The more I returned to myself as a creator, the more I felt Her with(in) me.

Coming back to MotherGod allows your heart to heal and opens you to the

creative channel that has been within you all along. When you make room to BE with Her, you'll see that She is with you, showing you Her presence. Her consistency of fierce compassion and love cannot be wiped away, and exists within the whole spectrum of gender. If you are looking to connect with MotherGod and rekindle your creativity, here are a few things that have supported my journey and I offer them to you for your own inspiration:

Make Room to BE — One of the most important things you can do for your creative rekindling is make room to BE. BE-ing can be practiced in various ways - from taking a meditative walk to journaling to dance to artwork to sitting silent - there are endless options. But, here's the thing: Making room to BE must be taken seriously. Make YOU a priority. This is not frivolous or a luxury to be held for some other date and time. Your BE-ing is a necessity to connection with Wisdom who lives within you. My personal practice shifts from day to day. Yours can too! I encourage you to look through your weekly schedule and make a ten to fifteen minute date with yourself each day to make room for your creative rekindling. Naps are welcome!

"Coming back to MotherGod allows your heart to heal and opens you to the creative channel that has been within you all along."

Become Present to the Process — It feels really good to get something done, doesn't it? To cross off an item on your list or to meet a goal? I do love it. However, when you focus on the completion of the task, you miss out on the invitation to presence - and yours, first of all. The first movement in this symphony is to accept and celebrate yourself as a Creator. As an Artist. If an art form becomes about the end product, it's easy for perfection to come in and steal the moment. When we release progress, and welcome process, a beautiful dance of listening can begin to take place. *What color wants to be expressed? What desires to be affirmed? What might Divine Love be speaking in and through me, in this moment?* Process is about ebb and flow, give and take. I encourage you to enter into your creating time with an awareness of what your body needs and tune into the marks and lines you're making. Let loose of the end goal and allow yourself to be the Artist that you are!

MotherGod's Invitation to Include Grief — Dark valleys and shadows of grief are part of every person's life. Often, it's difficult to find spaces where we can freely express ourselves and have our pain received. MotherGod sits at the feet of hardship. She welcomes and tends our sorrows. Her holy womb is a symbol of transformation from darkness into light. As you create, you are invited to connect with the spirit of MotherGod as you express your grief. Allow Her to wipe your tears and embrace you in tender love. She is with you.

MotherGod's Invitation to Slow Down and Celebrate — In the busyness of life, joy can be easy to miss. MotherGod invites you to slow your pace and delight in the small moments of each day. Creating anything from your heart and soul takes time. As you intentionally make, your hands, body and heart slow you down to observe. In this observation, become curious as to what you notice. Open to celebration and joy as you move, write, sing, draw, garden, etc. I used to believe I had to choose between grief and joy. MotherGod has shown me that joy and grief live together and are close companions. These days, I laugh and cry a little easier - sometimes, in the same moment! Allow yourself to experience the delicious nature of celebration in the making of each day.

Everflowing Life & Balance — MotherGod is creation. She flows, moves, grows, lives. When an obstacle comes to Her, she glides around and finds another avenue. Yes, She is fierce to protect and quick to grant compassion. Tune in to what may feel stuck in your life. Ask MotherGod to give you an idea for how She flows around this barrier. Ask for wisdom on where you need more balance. She may lead you to reconnect to your fire passion, encourage you toward rivers of compassion, root into Her stable earth or breathe renewal into your thoughts. MotherGod desires well-being for your BE-ing and will show you the route.

You don't go alone
with the wishes
in your soul.

You have another within you:

She, boundless Spirit -
present to your pulse,
*skips with your heartbeat **

By now, I've been linked with MotherGod for years, and still, feel I have only dipped my toe in the cool waters of Her knowing. As you move forward in your seeking, I urge you to continue to note Her universal rhythms of body, time and earth. See how She endlessly meets you in sacred Scripture, fairy tales, ancient myth and story. Giggle along with Her that hides in plain sight for all of humanity and you are aware of Her secret. Enter into the brilliance of Her "unknowing" and don't be surprised when you (re)member yourself as the creative beauty that YOU ARE. ●

* From the poem, "Not Alone", in Ally's book, *Soul Kindling: Ignite Your Sacred,* Creative Heart

MEET THE AUTHOR



ALLY MARKOTICH is an artist, poet and Creative Formation Practitioner. Ally is the creator of *Soul Kindling LLC*, an online creative respite where she guides her clients to express their truest colors and gently encourages their creative growth. Ally is certified as a Red Thread Guide and Intentional Creativity® Educator from Musea under the guidance of artist, Shiloh Sophia. She is certified in Spiritual Formation from Columbia Theological Seminary and is a Holy Fire Reiki Master in the tradition of Mikao Usui. You can find more of her art, musings and offerings on her website.

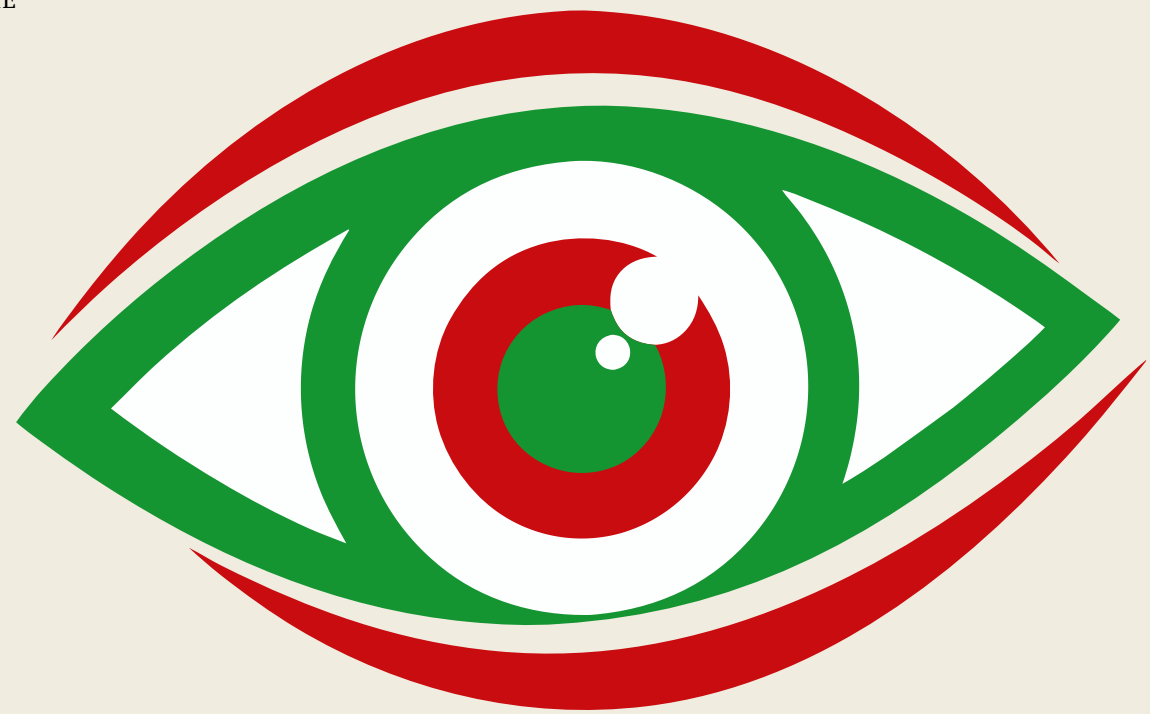
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SOUL KINDLING: IGNITE YOUR SACRED, CREATIVE HEART BY ALLY MARKOTICH, *published by Wildhouse Poetry, Paperback (164 pages)*



THE WORLD OF ITALIAN FOLK MAGIC

by Rose Inserra

When I was just 12 months old, I had a life threatening respiratory illness. Back then, in the Italian village of Spinete in the hills of Molise in central Italy, the illness didn't have a medical name. The doctor had no known cure for this condition and prepared my parents for the worst. Despite being devout Catholics, they weren't so easily convinced of this terrible prognosis. They knew one thing they could do. Ask the *magara*, the healer, who lived higher up in the mountains, close to where Our Lady of Sorrows first appeared in 1888.

That was where my parents left me.

'What do you mean left me there? Alone?' I asked my parents when they told me this story.

'Sì.' It was always the same answer with no explanation.

Imagine a parent doing this today! Unable to make sense of how they had trusted a stranger, who lived in an isolated place with no means of communication should things go wrong, I had a barrage of questions.

'How long was I there for?'

'Three days and three nights.'

While I have no memories of my time with the *magara*, I came away with my health restored and a coin-shaped scar just below my throat, which wasn't there before. What did she do to help me breathe? Was it a form of tracheotomy?

My parents don't recall the events exactly, only that I was healed. They had total faith in the *magara*, who we would call a medicine woman, healer/herbalist or shaman. Today, I still have a deep and unquestioning gratitude to this magical healer, who followed her tradition of healing from previous generations.

I lived in Molise, in the province of Campobasso, until I was nine years old. Molise is the youngest Italian region, established in 1963 when 'Abruzzi e Molise' was split into two regions. I grew up with superstitions, fear of the *malocchio* (evil eye) and its curse, the *strega* (witch) entering the house through the keyhole, and the *mazzamauriello* (imp) who caused havoc and plaited our horse's mane, then broke things in the house.

I grew up in a world surrounded by fear of this mysterious phenomena. In my village, there were superstitions – especially the *malocchio* that followed my parents to their new country. This was the belief that a jealous look or feeling – whether done on purpose or not – could curse a person. Babies were particularly susceptible to the *malocchio*. You'd avoid saying a baby was beautiful, unless following it with 'God bless them.'

If the curse went unnoticed, consequences included illness, headaches, rash, fatigue, stomach upset and more. People experiencing *malocchio* could suffer from health problems, emotional issues and even spiritual sickness.

Growing up Italian in Australia meant these 'old superstitions' were no longer relevant in a new country that had no connection to the old ways. The stories of the *malocchio*, the *mazzamauriello* or herbal cures no longer factored in this productive new life, which was not part of the rural and *contadino* (peasant) experience. Even the term 'Italian folk magic' elicits a confused response from people of Italian heritage in Australia. What is that? Do you mean *le streghe* (the witches)? This is followed by an awkward scoff as if to say, 'What, that old stuff?' But underneath the cynicism lies a genuine interest in these fascinating cultural phenomena.

"People experiencing *malocchio* could suffer from health problems, emotional issues and even spiritual sickness."

My zia (aunt) taught me how to remove the *malocchio*, which I've adapted to suit a modern pagan practice. This practice has opened my eyes, literally, to how negative energies work and how powerful we can be when we learn how to manipulate any kind of energy. Ultimately, the *malocchio* teaches us that thoughts are entities and everything we do influences the world around us (both our inner and outer worlds). The more intentional we are, the more we see evidence of the world around us responding to our thoughts – either negatively or positively. It's easy to project a sense of 'lack' onto another person, for instance, when we feel like we don't have enough.

We can all cast the *malocchio* without being aware of it. You can call this a magical power without requiring a spell. Even if you don't mean that envious glance, it reflects something about you and your wants. The truth is that we're all casting a *malocchio* 'spell' when we have jealous or envious thoughts or actions. Social media creates FOMO (fear of missing out) and highlights our sense of having less than someone else – whether it's body image, holidays, romance or fun activities.

I've helped people who never believed this was possible. And yet, the proof is there – removing the *malocchio* has given them hope and lifted the dark energy from their lives. One person cut ties with toxic friends and colleagues, enabling her to open doors to new business opportunities that had been evading her.

The lure of folk magic is returning and many, including young people, are eager to rediscover these ancient magical practices with a deep connection to nature and the environment. Some have lost their parents and grandparents, and long to rediscover the magic behind these practices and belief systems that were part of living in Italy for countless generations. Writing *The World of Italian Folk Magic* comes after years of disregarding its cultural importance and relevance in my own life. You don't need to have Italian heritage to practise folk magic. All readers are invited to learn more about the world of Italian folk magic, but should have respect for its origins and people in the form it was originally practised. While you may learn to integrate or adapt practices from another culture, you should first honour its original beginnings.

This is the energy I want to capture in this book – a rediscovered treasure trove of magical cures, spells and stories that will help to simplify our lives, declutter our minds and hearts, and return to fulfilling our lives' most basic needs – namely warmth, nourishment and connection to the magical and the spiritual.

In recent years, with the renewed interest in Italian folk magic, many people are seeking to learn more about these ancient practices and integrate them into their modern lives.

This book will give you a guided tour of my life of Italian magic filled with knowledge from ancient healers and wise women, who have passed on their wisdom so you can create your own magical practices.

Stregoneria, as Italian folk magic is often translated, is not a religion but a set of principles. Anyone can incorporate them into their own spiritual practices, regardless of their beliefs. I've included a section on saint worship because this is an essential part of Italian tradition. There is also a strong theme on earth-based spirituality because folk magic derived from rural Italian regions. I have sourced information from firsthand interviews with those in the Italian diaspora (countries where Italians have migrated) who are keeping the magic alive through their practices. I have focused mainly on central and southern Italy because of my Molisano heritage and my friends, who are mostly from southern regions in Italy and whose parents and grandparents settled in Australia, along with the United States of America, Canada, Argentina and Brazil. Thanks to them, I could access their stories, recipes, spells and folklore.

I hope these practices will fill you with passion and a strong desire to learn or reacquaint yourself with Italian ancestral knowledge, which was mostly passed down from mother to daughter. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



ROSE INSERRA was born Rosa Diamente in Spinete, Italy. She arrived in Australia with her family when she was nine years old. Italian folk magic has always been a big part of her life and identity. As a former teacher, she has a passion for history and passing on knowledge of traditions; esoteric, herbal and folk lore. She is the author of *Dictionary of Dreams, Dream Reading Cards, Dreams: What your Subconscious Wants to Tell You, The Gift of Dreams,* and *Mists of Avalon Oracle.*

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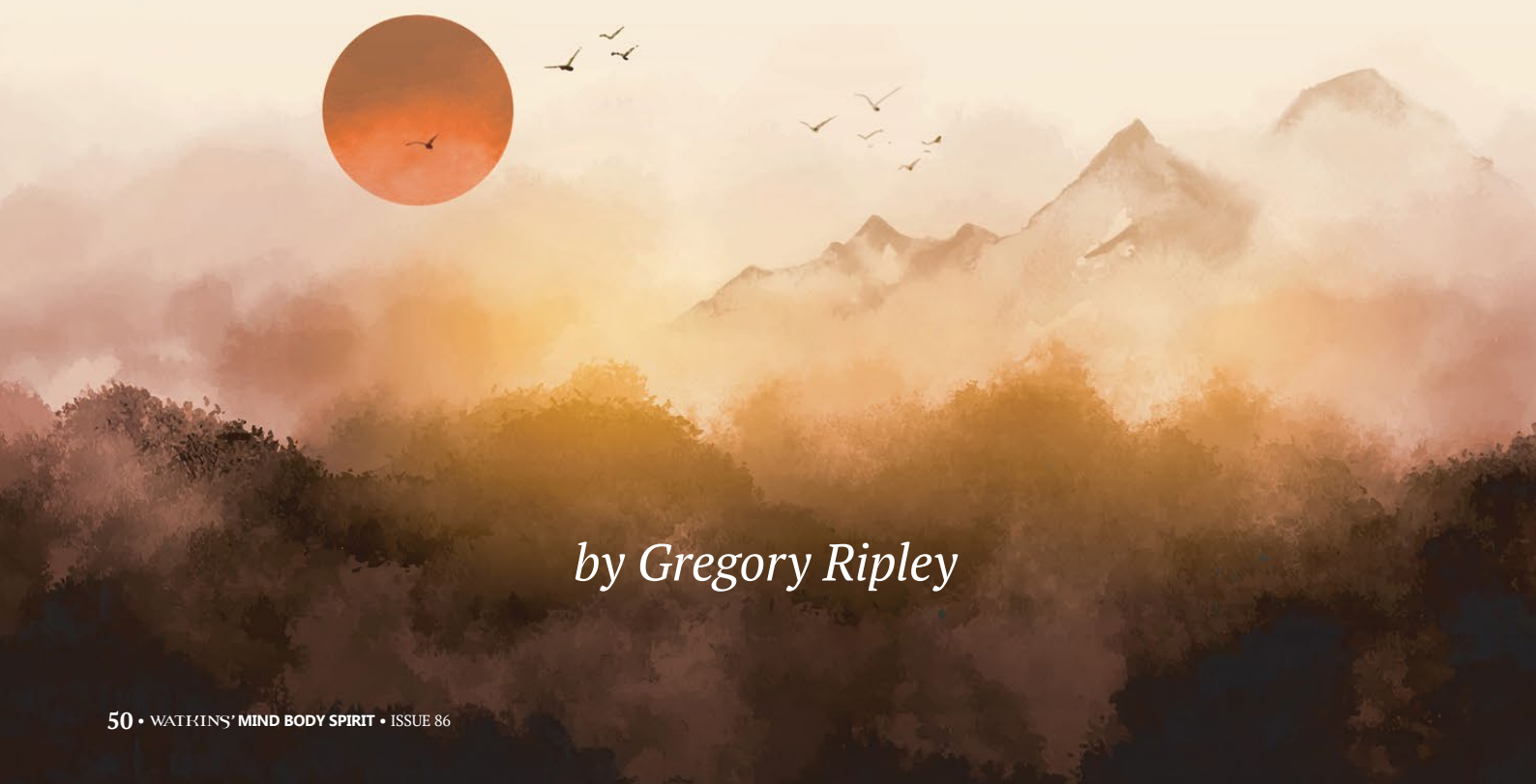


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THE WORLD OF ITALIAN FOLK MAGIC: MAGIC AND HERBAL CURES FROM THE WISE WOMEN OF ITALY BY ROSE INSERRA, *published by Rockpool, Illustrated Hardback (368 pages).*

The Hundred Remedies of the Tao: Spiritual Wisdom for Interesting Times

As I write this, a few weeks have passed since the extrajudicial killing of a legal observer, Renee Good, at the hands of an ICE agent. And just yesterday, Alex Pretti, an ICU nurse at the VA hospital was killed in similarly horrifying fashion. Once again, five years after the killing of George Floyd, all eyes are on Minneapolis. When I began writing *The Hundred Remedies of the Tao*, we were living through the chaos of Trump's first term, a global pandemic, and the aftermath of George Floyd's death and the repercussions which rippled across the country and across the globe. It certainly felt like we were living through "interesting times." I don't think anyone, myself included, would have suspected just how "interesting" things would continue to get. Between the war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, The Epstein Files, and the general chaos of a second Trump term, all bets are off as for just how crazy and chaotic things may get. (Greenland!)



by Gregory Ripley

That's the bad news I suppose. The good news? I imagine it would be that we are always living in interesting times. For better or worse, there is always chaos and order, beauty and ugliness, the highest examples of virtue, goodness and humanity, and their opposites, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity to our fellow humans, as well as other species and the planet itself. Life encompasses it all. We just don't always expect to see the full range of it on display in the streets of our own communities. On a personal note, I also lost both of my parents in 2025, so the sense of grief and loss we've witnessed on a global (and now local) scale continues to feel like a mirror to my own inner experience.

It's easy to forget when we live in a time and place of relative peace and stability that somewhere on the planet these kinds of things are always going on and if we have managed to avoid them in our own lives, we should thank our lucky stars. If we haven't suffered great loss in our own lives, we can be sure that those around us have. And it's at times like these when the world's spiritual traditions have the most to offer us in terms of navigating whatever "interesting times" we find ourselves in, from personal tragedy and loss to societal chaos.

Many spiritual traditions use the metaphor of walking a path for our journey through life. Buddhism and Hinduism speak of *marga*, the path toward spiritual awakening. Philosophers in ancient China all spoke of the various ways or paths (*dao*) to follow to live a good life. Those who sought to follow the Way of the Universe eventually came to call themselves Daoists, followers of the Way.

Another metaphor for spiritual teachings is that of a medicine or a spiritual salve. One might think of the idea of the Buddha as a "spiritual physician" represented by the Medicine Buddha, for example. As the introduction to the Hundred Remedies says, "Virtue is the physician; practice is the remedy. If people don't cultivate their virtuous conduct and widely seek the medicinal remedies, they will have numerous faults. Those who seek only to beseech the heavens, but don't attempt to transform themselves, their faults grow even worse."

We can see a similar idea expressed in the early Chan Buddhist text, the *Xinxin Ming* which says, "The Supreme Dao is not difficult, simply have no preferences…If you wish to attain its presence, then hold no opinion for or against. To set up what one likes against what one dislikes is the disease of the mind." Fortunately for us, we have medicine for these "diseases of the mind" in the form of the Hundred Remedies. These ethical prescriptions also represent an aspect of Daoist practice which has largely been ignored by most mainstream books on Daoism in English. The emphasis usually seems to be on "going with the flow" and not having any fixed rules or morals of any kind. It's all relative, man. While this might be true from the perspective of a Daoist Sage, I'm going to go out on a limb and say there aren't very many Daoist Sages walking among us. For most of us, practice involves some guidelines and parameters. In fact, one way in which precepts and ethical guidelines are viewed in Daoism is that they are formulations of what enlightened or sagely behavior looks like. We emulate the behavior of the Sages until the behavior becomes our own. We can see this idea expressed in other traditions as well such as the Stoic maxims, the Buddhist mindfulness gathas popularized by Thich Nhat Hanh, or the Lojang slogans of Tibetan Buddhism.

"One of the unique features of the Hundred Remedies is that it presents spiritual precepts in a positive way."

One of the unique features of the Hundred Remedies is that it presents spiritual precepts in a positive way, not as restrictions or commandments that must not be broken, but as solutions to problems encountered in daily life as well as on the path of Daoist cultivation (or really any spiritual path). These formulations of ethical behavior which have been presented in a positive way as "practices" or "meritorious actions" benefit each of us in our spiritual cultivation as well as having a positive influence on our relationships, families, communities, and ultimately the world as they radiate out from our lives, like ripples in a pond.

In Daoism, especially in the *Neidan* or inner alchemy tradition, there is a saying that it takes one hundred days to lay the foundation. One way this book can be read is to take one remedy a day as a source of inspiration and contemplation for one hundred days as a way of laying the foundation and grounding oneself in Daoist thought and practice. Of course, if you feel like diving right in and reading straight through, by all means do so, but I would recommend a slower, more contemplative reading. You may also find that multiple readings of the book provide deeper insights. These insights will not come from the text or my commentary but from your own innate wisdom. The best I can hope to do is to point you to it. Now, as the introduction to the Hundred Remedies says, "Be gentle and yielding and reduce your desires, be generous, harmonious, respectful, and humble, taking the remedies of the Dao and Virtue." I've found much solace in the remedies. It is my hope that you will find them beneficial in your own life as well. ●

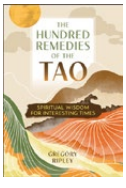
MEET THE AUTHOR



GREGORY RIPLEY lives in Minnesota with his family and two huskies. He is the author of *Tao of Sustainability, The Hundred Remedies of the Tao,* and *An Introduction to Daoism* (forthcoming). Gregory is a Nature and Forest Therapy Guide, and an ordained Daoist in the 22nd generation of the Quanzhen Longmen tradition.

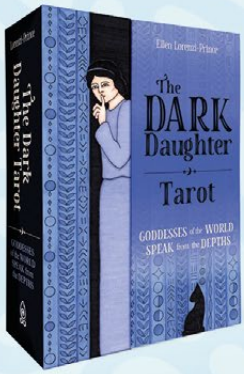
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www.gregoryripley.com



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THE HUNDRED REMEDIES OF THE TAO: SPIRITUAL WISDOM FOR INTERESTING TIMES BY GREGORY RIPLEY, *published by Inner Traditions, Paperback (288 pages)*



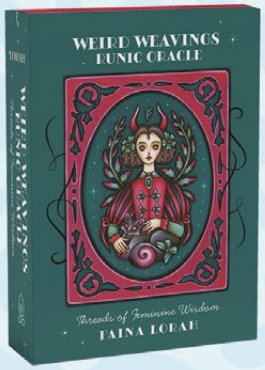
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Herne the Hunter of Windsor Forest



by Eric L. Fitch

This book is a thoroughly revised, expanded, and revamped edition of my 1994 book, *In Search of Herne the Hunter*. Since then, I have amassed a wealth of new material that was not in the earlier book, and have widened the scope of topics covered. The main criticism of the original book was its lack of references, so I have corrected this oversight. In recent decades Herne has become well-known, especially in the Neo-Pagan world and the media. He is said to haunt Windsor Great Park wearing antlers upon his head and presaging national disaster. But to the wider public, he is known from Shakespeare's reference to him in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and from W. Harrison Ainsworth's 1843 novel, *Windsor Castle*.

Ainsworth's work features Herne, who in one scene is described thus: "… a weird figure, mounted on a steed as weird looking as himself, galloping through the trees with extraordinary swiftness. This ghostly rider wore the antlered helmet described by the Earl of Surrey, and seemed to be habited in a garb of deer skins. Before him flew a large owl, and a couple of great black dogs ran beside him." Herne also carried a hunting horn which, when he put it to his lips, issued forth bright blue flames and thick smoke, and he was sometimes accompanied by snakes and "a swarm of horribly grotesque, swart objects, looking like imps." A vivid picture indeed.

Although there is romantic embellishment here, Ainsworth's retelling is probably based on earlier tradition. However, in order to get at the roots of Herne's story, as well as the sources, I am going to base much of the discussion in this volume on Ainsworth's novel. Although his telling of the tale is regarded largely as fiction, it contains so many mythical themes which have much in common with earlier folklore and mythology. These themes, I believe, are so well interwoven into the legend that it is too much of a coincidence that they should all appear in one story. Whether Ainsworth was borrowing from local oral lore, or whether he penned the story himself using themes he knew through his studies, is not known. So this volume explores the supernatural and the misty past, as well as the historic and literary backgrounds to the legend of Herne, with the new title of *Herne the Hunter of Windsor Forest*.

The Merry Wives of Windsor

The earliest mention of Herne the Hunter (and the only historic record) is to be found in William Shakespeare's play, which was first performed on St George's Day, 23rd April, 1597,at the Feast of the Order of the Garter in the presence of Queen Elizabeth I. It was in Vicars' Hall behind St George's Chapel in Windsor, being commissioned by the Queen to coincide with the making of her cousin, Lord Hunsdon, a Knight of the Garter. As to its publication, this took place in 1602. The play introduced Herne the Hunter to Britain, and ultimately to the rest of the world, in his guise as an otherworldly figure.

Here is the well-known passage from the play which began the interest in Herne, appearing in Act 4, Scene 4, and spoken by Mistress Page:

"There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,
Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he blasts the tree and takes the cattle
And makes milch-kine[1] yield blood and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner:
You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know
The superstitious idle-headed eld[2]
Received and did deliver to our age
This tale of Herne the hunter for a truth."

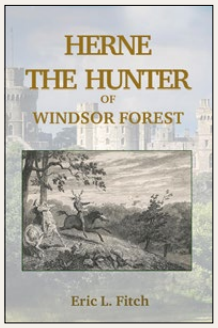
This quote is the most authentic reference to Herne, despite its brevity, and all subsequent versions represent either romantic embellishments of Shakespeare, oral tradition handed down over generations, or a combination of both. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR

ERIC L. FITCH was brought up in Windsor, so was aware of Herne from an early age. With Slough nearby, he would go to the town occasionally. Sometime around the late 1980s, Slough Library arranged an exhibition on Herne the Hunter, which motivated Eric to write his first book on the subject.

Bookshelf

HERNE THE HUNTER OF WINDSOR FOREST BY ERIC L. FITCH, *published by Green Magic, Illustrated Paperback (220 pages)*



[1] Milch-kine in the modern vernacular translates as "milk cows" – "milch" obviously meaning milk, and "kine" an archaic word for the plural of "cows". The latter derives from the Anglo-Saxon *cyna*, the singular being *cu*.
[2] "eld" is an archaic word meaning "the past" or "olden times".

The Nephilim are supernatural entities first mentioned in the Book of Genesis: "6:4 The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them: the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown." (The Bible, American Standard Version)

Is there an Egyptian aspect to this? This is the topic of my book *Egyptian Genesis of the "Nephilim"*. Egyptian records do refer to a class of beings, the Shebtiw, literally "the submerged ones".

A variation on this theme occurs in several places "...I will destroy everything that I have created. The earth will return to the Nun, to the water, as in the primordial age. I am the one who will remain with Osiris, I will turn back into a snake, which is not known by men and is not seen by the gods." Inscription from Temple of Khnum, Esna in Upper Egypt.

The Biblical account was compiled by Jews in Egypt, who had access to local sources, temple records, and manuscripts in the Library of Alexandria.

The memory of a great world-changing Flood was an event remembered everywhere in the Near East, including Egyptian records. Jewish sources say the Nephilim were the reason the flood happened, an attempt by the Creator to correct his error. Harold Roth tells us the Nephilim were decimated; some survived but in spirit form, which would conform with the Egyptian version.

Kabbalistic tradition says their descent from Heaven was a one-way trip; they could never return. They were also called Grigori or Watchers, with Nephilim as their offspring. They engage with human women, who in return are taught many new skills, except for magic.

Within the Rabbinical tradition, they provide an explanation for the existence of demons as a consequence of the above intercourse. This makes them mediators between humans and the gods.

However, for Christians, their existence undermines the ideal of a singular all-powerful god. Who were they? And even more disturbing is the thought of their intercourse with us.

Folk cultures of Egypt exhibit a widespread belief in incubi and succubi, spirits who visit people in their sleep. For example, the Greco-Egyptian Magical Papyri are full of such accounts, which are then confirmed by Plutarch, where he says:

"... the Egyptians make a distinction here that is reckoned plausible: while a woman can be approached by a divine spirit and impregnated, there is no such thing as sexual intercourse between a man and a divinity."

There are two main Egyptian sources we can look at. Manetho (Beloved of Neith), who was a priest. Then the so-called "building texts" found on surviving temples, principally at Edfu.

Manetho

Manetho wrote a history of Egypt going right back to the nameless aeon before the famous kings such as Ramses. Manetho describes the generations of gods, humans and other beings, before and after the flood.

"Folk cultures of Egypt exhibit a widespread belief in incubi and succubi, spirits who visit people in their sleep."

The *Egyptiaca*, has not survived but was remodelled by hellenistic Jews "in such a way that their chronology became compatible with his". Manetho describes the "first (divine) man". This he called Vulcan, which could be a homonym of Egyptian "Atum" or "Adam".

Later, came the rule of the "demi gods" and the "spirits of the dead". The "Demi gods" are most likely "The Followers of Horus", the Shemsu Hor. The "Spirits of the Dead" are likely the followers of "Seth Typhon". Seth is a very ambiguous deity, often viewed as the personification of evil. The Spirits of the Dead could be so named because of their special death customs and closeness to ancestral spirits. Their necromancy? These are like the offspring of the Grigori in the *Book of Enoch*.

Plutarch confirms much of this: "Typhon of old conquered the party of Osiris. For Egypt was once a sea; for which cause many places in the mines and in the mountains are found to contain shells." They noticed these relics all around. Indeed, Pyramid mountain, near Luxor, has a remnant of such a beach complete with seashells!

An Egyptian book called "The Sacred Book of the Early Primaeval Age of Gods", written on the walls of the temple of Horus at Edfu, tells a similar story, that of the Shebtiw. There was once a lost, submerged kingdom known as "the Island of the Trampling" and later "The Island of Peace"; an ancient conflict took place here.

Before the flood, the island world had its own primal temple complete with an alien set of gods, known as "The Shebtiw", submerged or lower ones. Which is not too much of a stretch from Nephilim or the fallen, the submerged, or lower.

"Darkness was over the island, and primaeval waters surrounded and then submerged it. The Island was trampled in a cosmic battle long ago, its ruins now under the flood waters. This place was known to the Egyptians as "The Underworld of the Soul". All there were insubstantial, ghostlike things.

In this account, a falcon (not Horus) lands on a reed or relic on the island. This is uncannily like the Biblical flood, where the first sign of land came when a dove carrying a reed or remnant

MEET THE AUTHOR



MOGG MORGAN is CEO of leading occultural publisher Mandrake and a respected literary catalyst. Holder of an advanced degree in Oriental studies at University of Oxford where he benefited from a Welcome research studentship into the history of Medicine. An independent researcher and author, Mogg is currently working on the interpretation of ancient Egyptian philosophy and magic, on which he has authored several respected books from a scholar practitioner perspective.

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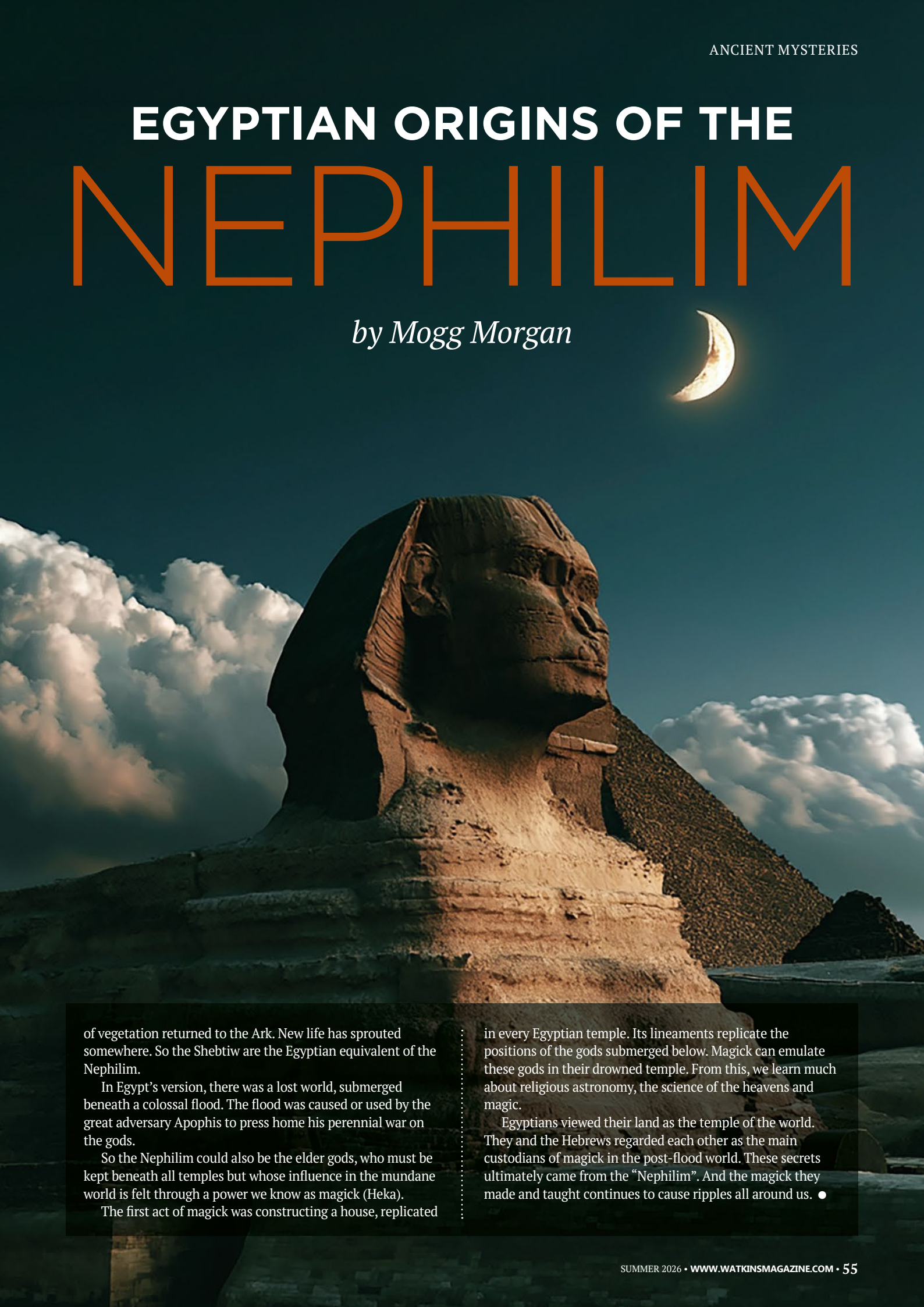


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EGYPTIAN GENESIS OF THE "NEPHILIM" BY MOGG MORGAN, *published by Mandrake, Large-format Illustrated Paperback (132 pages)*

EGYPTIAN ORIGINS OF THE NEPHILIM

by Mogg Morgan



of vegetation returned to the Ark. New life has sprouted somewhere. So the Shebtiw are the Egyptian equivalent of the Nephilim.

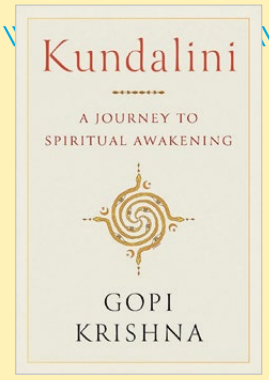
In Egypt's version, there was a lost world, submerged beneath a colossal flood. The flood was caused or used by the great adversary Apophis to press home his perennial war on the gods.

So the Nephilim could also be the elder gods, who must be kept beneath all temples but whose influence in the mundane world is felt through a power we know as magick (Heka).

The first act of magick was constructing a house, replicated in every Egyptian temple. Its lineaments replicate the positions of the gods submerged below. Magick can emulate these gods in their drowned temple. From this, we learn much about religious astronomy, the science of the heavens and magic.

Egyptians viewed their land as the temple of the world. They and the Hebrews regarded each other as the main custodians of magick in the post-flood world. These secrets ultimately came from the "Nephilim". And the magick they made and taught continues to cause ripples all around us. ●

FEATURED TITLE



KUNDALINI
A Journey to Spiritual Awakening
Gopi Krishna
Paperback (264 pages)
At the age of 34, after years of transformative meditation, Gopi Krishna suddenly experienced the awakening of Kundalini - a powerful spiritual force latent within every human being that exists like a coiled serpent in the spine - which, once awakened, rises up and finds expression in the form of spiritual knowledge, mystical vision, psychic powers, and enlightenment. The story of this transformative experience, and the author's struggle to find balance amid a variety of powerful physiological and psychic side effects, forms the core of this spiritual autobiography. He describes in detail the dramatic inner experiences and symptoms, until finally stabilizing at a higher level of consciousness. The rawness and sincerity with which he recounts his journey make this one of the most revered classics of spiritual awakening. This edition also includes the original commentary by James Hillman.

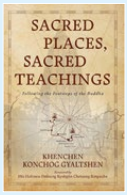
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Khenchen Konchog Gyaltshen
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ORACLES & DECKS

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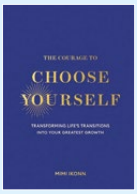
THE YŌKAI ORACLE DECK


Thersa Matsuura & Michelle Wang
60 Cards & 144-page Guidebook
Unlock the ancient wisdom of Japan with this captivating oracle deck. Each of the cards channels the wisdom of legendary spirits, ancient deities, and mythical beings from Japanese folklore. Whether you're seeking spiritual guidance, clarity in life's challenges, or a deeper understanding of Japanese culture, these cards provide powerful insights and inspiration. Dive into the captivating stories and timeless wisdom that have shaped Japan's folklore and discover the powerful messages within.

DREAM SONG ORACLE


Angi Sullins & Marta Orlowska
45-Card Deck & 104-Page Guidebook
Once upon a time you were friends with the stars. Your neighbour was the moon, story was your guardian, and dreams, your native language. Making your way through the Universe was a playful dance as you moved to the dream song of your heart. Travel the pages of this oracle map to reawaken your dream song. Use the wisdom contained in this inspirational guidebook and oracle deck to support your connection to authenticity. You deserve it. Listen to your dream song; it has come to guide you home.

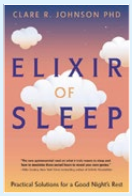
SELF HELP

THE COURAGE TO CHOOSE YOURSELF


Mimi Ikonn
Hb (288 pages)
Real transformation comes from remembering who you are beneath the roles you play, the expectations you carry, and the noise you've learned to ignore. This soulful yet practical guide explores the real work of change – the identity shifts, the quiet discomfort and the courage it takes to acknowledge when a life no longer fits. Whether you're at a crossroads or simply feeling the quiet ache of misalignment, this book meets you where you are and offers the clarity, compassion, and courage to reroute, reset, or begin again.

THE SIMPLEST GIFT


Every day is a gift. Open it. Don't throw it away
Stefanos Xenakis
Pb (208 pages)
This international bestseller and self-help sensation is an essential antidote for our times. Over the course of 100 stories – each centred around a unique lesson – Stefanos shares the transformative outlook through which he has found purpose and meaning in life's everyday moments. From rising early to sharing generously and laughing readily, he proves that joy can be found in the simplest and least expected places.

ELIXIR OF SLEEP


Practical Solutions for a Good Night's Rest
Clare R. Johnson PhD
Pb (296 pages)
Sleep better, tap into your inner genius, and wake up energized with the help of world-leading lucid dreaming expert Dr. Clare R. Johnson. Through Dr. Johnson's comprehensive quiz, you'll discover your specific sleeper and dreamer type, fast-tracking you to a list of practices tailored to your needs. Presenting sixty-four activities that can work for *anyone*, this book will help you create healthy sleep habits and overcome insomnia and nightmares.

RODNEY COLLIN & THE GURDJIEFF MOVEMENTS

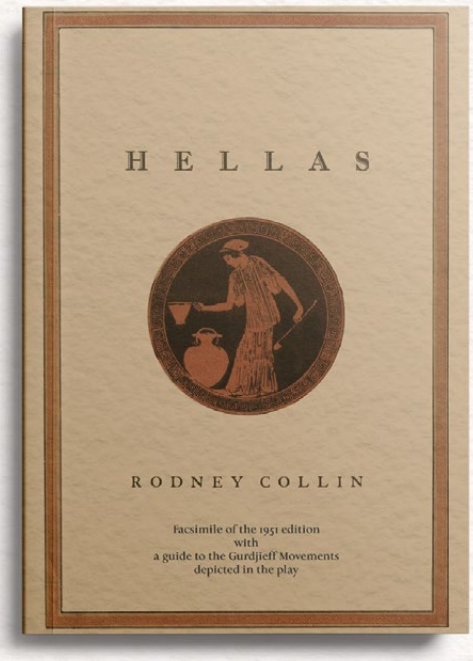
A facsimile edition of Rodney Collin's enigmatic spectacle showcasing **The Gurdjieff Movements** with an introduction by Kharkadeh Books including a definitive guide to the 18 Gurdjieff Movements described in the play

Rodney Collin's only play *HELLAS* written in the post-war 1940s, is both an observation on conflict and a herald of the coming New Age. The least well known of his philosophical writings, *HELLAS* is remarkable in that Rodney Collin weaves performances of the Gurdjieff Movements into the action of the play.

Hellas was performed in a theatre designed by Rodney Collin on the floorplan of conjoined Enneagrams. Named the Planetarium, the theatre was built in Tetecala, twenty miles outside Mexico City. A ground plan of the Planetarium, comprising two primary spaces called the Chamber of the Sun and the Chamber of the Moon, is reproduced in the introduction.

THIS NEW FACSIMILE OF *HELLAS* IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT

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THE STUDY SOCIETY **studysocietypublications.org**
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A MAN'S PATH TO FREEDOM

by Connor Beaton

The work of men begins with pain.

How are we as men to reconcile the sheer drive and determination we feel stirring in our souls with the intense confusion, anger, and emotional bleeding-out we can often feel?

Said more directly, how do we as men tune ourselves for something more than optimal performance in the boardroom or bedroom and overcome what stands in our way? How do we design within us a compass that can lead us through life's most violent storms? A compass that leads us toward depth - depth of experience, fulfillment, and purpose? How do we as men develop *self-leadership*?

In order to do so, most men will, at some point, have to cross the threshold into the underworld of their own pain and come to grips with the following:

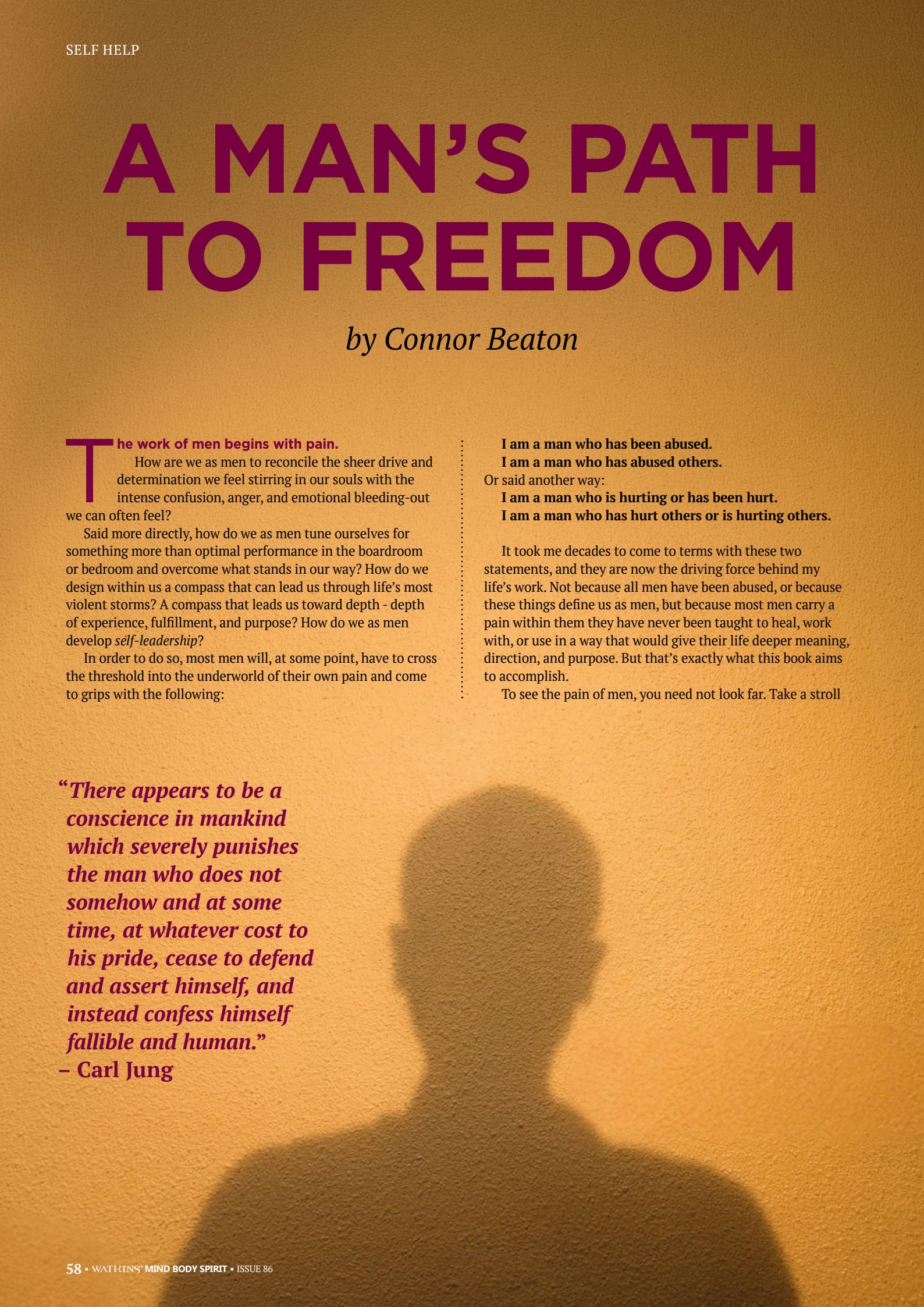
I am a man who has been abused.
I am a man who has abused others.

Or said another way:

I am a man who is hurting or has been hurt.
I am a man who has hurt others or is hurting others.

It took me decades to come to terms with these two statements, and they are now the driving force behind my life's work. Not because all men have been abused, or because these things define us as men, but because most men carry a pain within them they have never been taught to heal, work with, or use in a way that would give their life deeper meaning, direction, and purpose. But that's exactly what this book aims to accomplish.

To see the pain of men, you need not look far. Take a stroll



"There appears to be a conscience in mankind which severely punishes the man who does not somehow and at some time, at whatever cost to his pride, cease to defend and assert himself, and instead confess himself fallible and human."
– Carl Jung

"Most men carry a pain within them they have never been taught to heal, work with, or use in a way that would give their life deeper meaning"

around your workplace. Wander through your neighborhood. Talk to the men in your local bars, parks, and restaurants. Look into the eyes of the man sitting on the bus across from you, and behind his hard, protective exterior you'll see the neglected responsibilities, failed relationships, and a deep fear of being seen as an imposter. These men, at their core, do not feel in control of their hearts and minds.

Because a man who avoids his pain is a man who is enslaved by it.

This is the step-by-step doctrine men are taught for dealing with pain:

1) Suck it up.
2) Stuff it down.
3) Pour a bottle of whiskey over the top and finish it all off by rubbing one out for good measure.
4) Rinse (maybe) and repeat as necessary until sufficiently numbed out or forgotten about.

Unfortunately, this is the path so many men take. Hell, it's the path I walked for a long time. We trade internal leadership, liberty, and masculinity for a safe job, mediocre marriage, and a lifetime of unactioned dreams, all in the quest of pain avoidance. We feel lost, alone, incapable of change, and helpless against the daily onslaught of internal criticism, doubt, and worries.

We have, in many ways, been sold a lie; a lie of separation.

We have been indoctrinated into a cult; the cult of specialness.

And we have an amnesia to truth; the truth of *pain being a path to purpose*.

So how do we reconcile with the pain we've been given as men, or the pain we've caused? How do we make amends for the abuse, neglect, abandonment, and trauma we may have caused ourselves and others? Is there a way to alchemize the pain we carry into a purpose? Outside of the altruistic reasoning for embarking on this quest emerges the question most men ask repeatedly: "Why should I even bother?"

In *Men's Work*, ManTalks founder Connor Beaton offers the tactical, self-led guide men have been looking for. Here, he destigmatizes inner work by reframing it as a kind of psychological warrior training. Beaton walks you through a framework for facing the hidden and rejected aspects of yourself - factors that lead to self-sabotage, anxiety, and depression. Through real-life stories from men he's worked with and practical, accessible exercises, he takes you on a three-part journey to uncover and free yourself from the thoughts, emotions, and patterns that hold you back. When you face off with those pieces in place, you'll:

- Live with clear purpose and direction
- Build your skills to win at relationships
- Gain better control of your anger
- Learn how to regulate your mind, body, and emotions, even under stress and conflict
- Become fearless and at peace with your journey

"The goal of this work is not only to become a better man," says Beaton, "but a better participant in the collective enterprise of living. True freedom awaits."

Because as Robert Bly, famous poet and father of the mythopoetic men's movement, famously said, "Where a man's wound is, that's where his genius will be."

Over the past few decades, people have been talking about broken men, toxic masculinity, the crisis of masculinity, and countless other conversations all implying that men, collectively, have gone astray or are broken. Men are asked to change, be better, and heal with little to no direction outside of "be more vulnerable."

After years of my own development and nearly a decade of working with a multitude of men from around the globe, I began to see that there is a certain kind of intensity that lives within men that we have largely forgotten how to navigate. An intensity of pain, confusion, rage, fear, and grief that so many men carry but have not been shown how to integrate and leverage for our benefit and the benefit of the collective. An intensity that society largely rejects, ignores, or doesn't want to deal with, and that we as men have forgotten how to carry.

That is the aim of this book. To bring you into contact with your own intensity and pain so you can work with it. To help you learn - regardless of your faith, sexual orientation, or ethnicity - how to heal and be with the intensity of your own experience as a man. ●

This excerpt is adapted from *Men's Work: A Practical Guide to Face Your Darkness, End Self-Sabotage, and Find Freedom* by Connor Beaton (September 2025.) Reprinted with permission from the publisher, Sounds True.

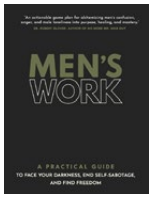
MEET THE AUTHOR



CONNOR BEATON is the founder of ManTalks, an international organization dedicated to the personal growth of men. He is a coach, facilitator, teacher, podcast host, and speaker helping men from all over the world find purpose, healthy love, a joy-filled life, and fulfilling sexual connection. His teachings draw from an in-depth apprenticeship in Jungian psychology, gestalt, cognitive behavioural therapy, and both Buddhist and Taoist traditions. Connor has a no-BS approach coupled with compassionate understanding of our own human limitations. He has coached thousands of men through private coaching, group work, workshops, and retreats.

On the web

connorbeaton.com
mantalks.com



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MEN'S WORK: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO FACE YOUR DARKNESS, END SELF-SABOTAGE, AND FIND FREEDOM BY CONNOR BEATON, *published by Sounds True, Paperback (272 pages)*





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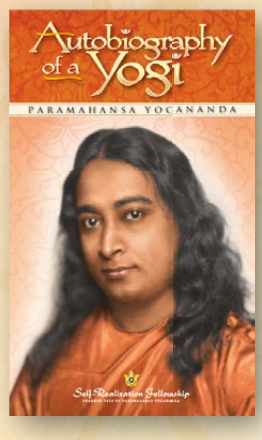
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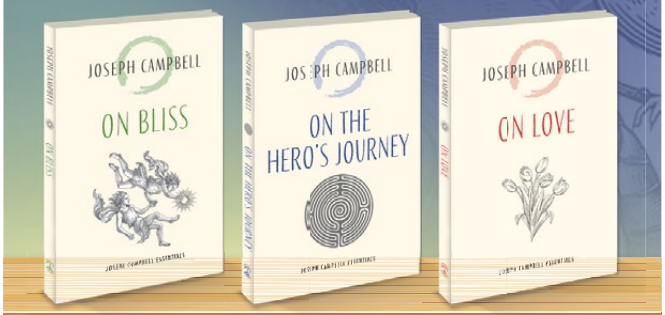
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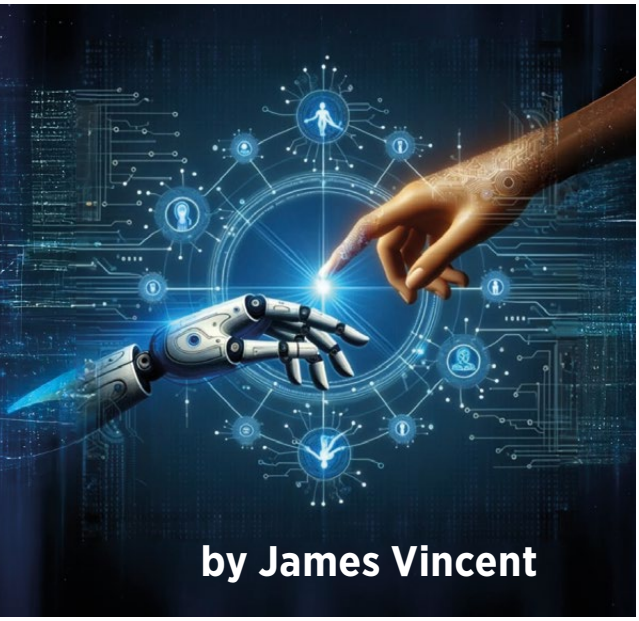


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Infinite Edge:

Human Empowerment in the Intelligence Age



by James Vincent

Why Being Human Matters More Than Ever

We are entering the most intelligent age in human history, yet more people than ever feel disconnected and uncertain. Information is instant. Progress is relentless. And still, beneath the surface, something essential feels ready to be released… our human potential.

So a deeper question emerges: as machines become smarter, what happens to the human spirit?

We now live in a world of unprecedented tools. AI platforms, automation, and intelligent systems are expanding at extraordinary speed, producing more information in days than previous generations encountered in centuries. Productivity is constantly optimised and efficiency relentlessly pursued. Yet alongside this acceleration, indicators of disconnection continue to rise. Anxiety, loneliness, and burnout are becoming more common, even as we remain digitally connected. In an attention economy designed to keep us consuming, reflection is crowded out by noise. We are faster, busier, and more informed than ever… but not necessarily more grounded, fulfilled, or connected to ourselves.

What cannot be automated is meaning.

To live with purpose. To know who we are. To consciously shape who we are becoming. Only humans can do this. Viktor Frankl captured the essence of it when he wrote that those who have a "why" can endure almost any "how". In times of rapid change, meaning becomes our anchor. Progress without direction may look successful on the surface, yet still leave us feeling strangely empty.

This is why ancient wisdom feels increasingly relevant. Long before algorithms and artificial intelligence, thinkers reflected on what it truly means to live well. Lao Tzu spoke of knowing oneself as the highest form of wisdom. Aristotle observed that excellence is not a single act, but a habit built over time. These ideas have endured not because they are old, but because they are true. Tools evolve and environments shift, yet human nature remains remarkably consistent. That wisdom is infinite, quietly inviting us to return to it and become what it has always pointed us towards.

Our true operating system has never been external. It lives within the alignment of mind, body, and spirit. When these are integrated, clarity replaces noise, energy replaces exhaustion, and connection replaces isolation. This alignment is not abstract philosophy; it is the foundation of sustainable performance and fulfilment. A clear mind allows us to choose direction rather than simply react. A regulated body creates presence and resilience. A connected spirit restores purpose, contribution, and belonging. Technology may provide answers, but only humans decide what truly matters. Communities will always matter more than algorithms.

I was reminded of this after a keynote some years ago. As the room buzzed with conversation, a lady in her mid-forties approached me quietly. She radiated warmth and kindness, the presence of someone who had spent her life serving others. Her hands trembled slightly, and her eyes held tears - not of sadness, but release.

"Thank you," she said. "I haven't felt this confident for years. Could you help my son too?"

I told her the truth. That feeling was hers. She had chosen to listen, to open herself, to reconnect with something already within her. Confidence cannot be given; it is self-created. Identity is built from the inside out. She paused, then asked if there was a book she could read - something her son could read too. In that moment, I knew this message needed to be shared more widely.

Infinite Edge is built on a simple truth: human greatness isn't created; it's revealed. It brings together timeless philosophy and modern performance psychology to reconnect mind, body, and spirit — not to compete with technology, but to complement it. At its heart lies a simple challenge: to be fully human in an increasingly intelligent world.

The intelligence age gives us extraordinary tools.

Our greatest edge, however, has never been artificial.

It is, and always will be, being fully human. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



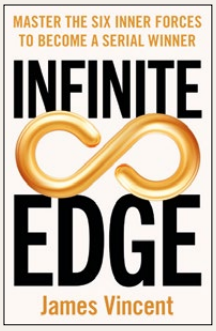
JAMES VINCENT is the Performance Director at the world's largest business coaching organization ActionCOACH and has spent decades coaching coaches, leaders, athletes and founders to master their mindset, achieve measurable results and become people of total capability.

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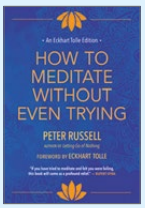
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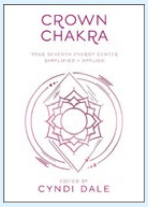


HOW TO MEDITATE WITHOUT EVEN TRYING



Peter Russell
(Foreword by Eckhart Tolle)
Pb (144 pages)
What if meditation didn't require discipline or technique, or hours of sitting still but was actually something you looked forward to? In this book, Peter Russell shares the liberating insight at the heart of his decades-long teaching: The harder we try to meditate, the more we get in our own way. True meditation is instead about the practice of allowing - releasing effort, relaxing the mind, and gently returning to the present moment. This book is a call to stop striving and start being.

CROWN CHAKRA



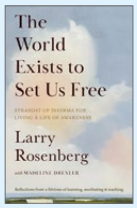
Your Seventh Energy Center Simplified and Applied
Cyndi Dale
Pb (224 pages)
Chakra expert Cyndi Dale has curated contributions from nine energy medicine practitioners who teach you all about the crown chakra. This flowering-truth energy centre is the seventh step on a staircase that leads up from the base of your spine toward enlightenment. Featuring hands-on practices, this book teaches you how to transform negative traits and trauma into peace and serenity with help from guided meditations, yoga poses, grounding exercises, and mudras.

ÁINE



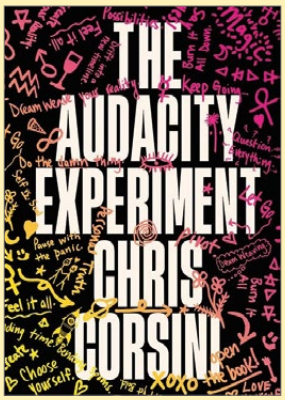
Kelle BanDea
Pb (104 pages)
Áine is a popular goddess known for her associations with love, fertility and the sun, celebrated at the height of summer and at the first harvests. A fairy queen of the Tuatha de Danaan, she is beloved both by the Irish people whose land she is entwined with and by neopagans across the world. Even her name means 'bright'. Áine is also known as a dark muse in Victorian fairytales, a neopagan goddess who seeks justice and revenge for trauma survivors, and a powerful queen of the hollow hills in native Irish folklore.

THE WORLD EXISTS TO SET US FREE



Larry Rosenberg & Madeline Drexler
Pb (248 pages)
This collection of teachings by the beloved Insight Meditation teacher Larry Rosenberg offers clear, down-to-earth guidance on learning how to live a life informed by Buddhism - through questioning, reflective observation, and self-understanding. An introductory essay by Madeline Drexler, serves as a spiritual biography of Rosenberg, presenting his reflections on more than half a century of dedicated dharma practice and instruction.

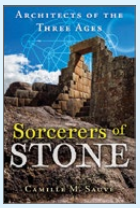
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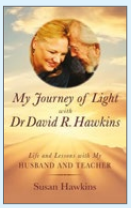
Chris Corsini
Hardback (304 pages)
This book has its own agenda. No Bullshit. Just practical wisdom. *The Audacity Experiment* shatters illusions, pushes you beyond your comfort zone and demands that you reclaim your sovereignty. Beyond the pages of this book is a collaborative movement. QR codes unlock interactive sessions, perspective-shifting conversations and embodiment practices led by diverse teachers, artists and thought leaders, encouraging you to have the audacity to: Question Everything – challenge perspectives, repattern and rewire your mind; Feel It All – regulate your nervous system and increase your capacity for joy and resilience; Let Go – untangle shame, guilt and grief (so you stop people-pleasing!); Choose Yourself – build energetic boundaries and find your flow; Do the Damn Thing – anchor your vision into reality. This is your permission slip to stop outsourcing your instincts and start living from your own authority.

SORCERERS OF STONE



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Sauvé examines sacred sites in Peru and their counterparts around the world, revealing how they share specific architectural characteristics that point to their creation by the same ancient culture. She explains the three architectural styles found at the majority of sacred sites, representing three ancient world ages, and explores the sophisticated science behind the construction of these stone sites, including modern research on acoustic levitation and ancient use of geopolymers.

MY JOURNEY OF LIGHT WITH DR DAVID R. HAWKINS



Susan Hawkins
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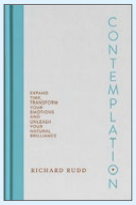
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Stephanie Rose Bird
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So much of our future depends on our ability to use ancient earth knowledge. *The Healing Tree* celebrates the forest: its powers, spirits, magic, medicine, and mysteries. With accessible recipes, remedies, and rituals derived from a variety of African and African American traditions, the book recounts the story of the sacred wood: how to live in it, learn from it, derive spiritual enrichment from it, as well as how to preserve and protect it.

SEA MAGICK



Rieka Moonsong
Ill. Hb (160 pages)
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CONTEMPLATION

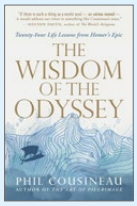


Richard Rudd

Hb (144 pages)

In this three-step guide to building self-awareness, rewiring emotional habits and practising intentional living, *Gene Keys* founder Richard Rudd shares a practical and transformative approach to help you slow down, gain perspective and reconnect with what really matters. Contemplation is an active, integrative technique – one that engages your mind, emotions and body to create deep, lasting change. In a world overloaded with information and urgency, Contemplation offers something rare: a simple path back to yourself.

THE WISDOM OF THE ODYSSEY

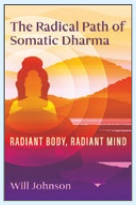


Phil Cousineau

Pb (160 pages)

For nearly three thousand years, Homer's *Odyssey* has captivated audiences with its tale of Odysseus's perilous journey back to his family after the Trojan War. It is a story of perseverance, transformation, and the longing for home. In his delightfully strange world of monsters, tricksters, and sorceresses, Homer reveals what it means to be human. By illuminating how Odysseus learns, adapts, and ultimately restores his home, Cousineau shows how this timeless story is more relevant than ever,

THE RADICAL PATH OF SOMATIC DHARMA



Will Johnson

Pb (144 pages)

Presenting an accessible and deeply felt guide to sitting meditation as an active exploration, Johnson offers a revitalized understanding of this essential spiritual practice and shares exercises to help meditation practitioners find their own inner radiance through deeper connection with the body. Through the radical path of conscious sitting, he shows how to transform your sitting meditation practice into a fully natural mudra of greater grace from which radiance will naturally flow.

ROOTED IN WONDER



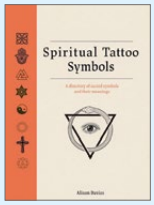
Celebrating the World's National Trees

Michelle Cusolito & Marya Wright

Ill. Hb (40 pages)

Meet 12 national trees and uncover WILD facts, ANCIENT legends and the INCREDIBLE creatures hidden in their leaves! Travel the world and find out how each country honours, protects and proudly celebrates their national tree, from QUINA (Peru & Ecuador), to OAK (USA, England & Ireland), and OLIVE (Albania). Each of these trees has superpowers, secrets and stories to tell. All are rooted in wonder and waiting to be discovered! (4-8 years)

SPIRITUAL TATTOO SYMBOLS



Alison Davies & Oliver Munden

Ill. Hb (224 pages & 500 illustrations)

Body art has been a means of self-expression throughout the world for thousands of years. From minimalist line work to flora, fauna and mythology, this book offers a huge range of tattoo designs - and explains the meaning, history and cultural provenance of each symbol. Meticulously researched and beautifully illustrated, this is an essential reference for tattoo artists and anyone seeking a design with profound meaning.

WATKINS RECOMMENDS



ALIVE WITH SPIRITS

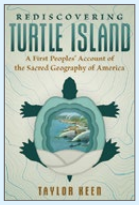
The Path and Practice of Animistic Witchcraft

Althaea Sebastini

Pb (240 pages)

At the root of most spiritual traditions is the aspiration to realize one's birthright: the intimate connection with the land and the spiritual energies that inhabit it. This connection with the land and its spirits is perhaps nowhere more powerfully felt than in the various traditions of paganism and witchcraft. But the conditions of modern society strain that relationship, leaving us feeling disconnected to our craft and unable to feel that deep and vital connection. In *Alive with Spirits*, you'll discover a path to fully embrace a world filled with spirits, communion with the land, and a greater sense of belonging in the world - a worldview known as animism. You'll explore animism in a way that teaches through firsthand direct experiences. Through embodied exercises based in wholeness, you'll learn to see the world more fully for what it is and to better understand your place in it.

REDISCOVERING TURTLE ISLAND

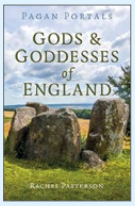


Taylor Keen

Ill. Pb (208 pages)

While Western accounts of North American history traditionally start with European colonization, Indigenous histories of North America - or Turtle Island - stretch back millennia. Drawing on comparative analysis, firsthand Indigenous accounts, extensive historical writings, and his own experience, Omaha Tribal member, Cherokee citizen, and teacher Taylor Keen presents a comprehensive re-imagining of the ancient and more recent history of this continent's oldest cultures.

GODS & GODDESSES OF ENGLAND

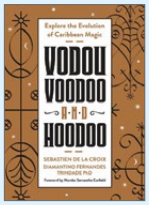


Rachel Patterson

Pb (128 pages)

Rachel Patterson unearths and shines light on England's ancient gods and goddesses - many of whom, until now, had long since been forgotten. Based on archaeological finds and ancient manuscripts, and including information about the tribes that once made their home in England's pleasant lands, this book serves as a guide to the gods and goddesses of England, with suggested ways to work and connect with these very special deities.

VODOU, VOODOO, AND HOODOO



Sebastien de la Croix & Diamantino Fernandez Trindade

Pb (224 pages)

Lifting the shroud of mystery surrounding Haitian Vodou and North American Voodoo, the authors show how they are connected to Hoodoo, an African American tradition that incorporates Voodoo, Indigenous traditions, spiritism, and European folklore. Providing a variety of simple spells that require no initiation and support many aspects of contemporary life, the book explores the life of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau and features deities, recipes, prayers, and more.

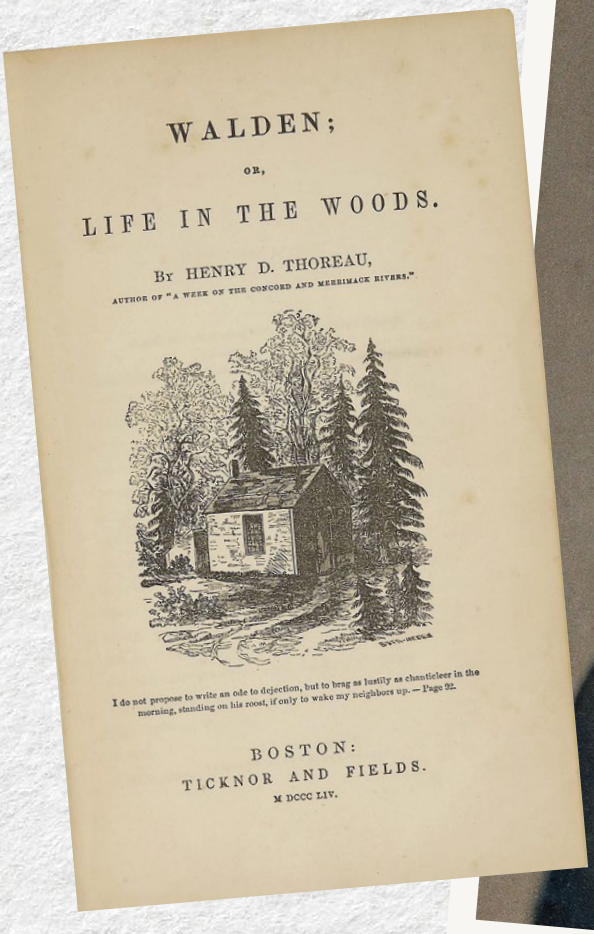
THE PICTORIAL KEY TO THE TAROT



A.E. Waite

Pb (176 pages)

A mainstay among tarot readers for more than a century, *The Pictoral Key to the Tarot* is a rich introduction to the history and symbology of the tarot and an in-depth exploration of its secrets, providing crucial insight into the conventional meanings and reversed readings associated with each card. This updated edition contains a foreword by Sereptie, creator of *The Philosopher's Tarot*, celebrating the importance of the tarot to artists, activists, and others who seek to transform a world fraught with material and psychic oppression.


WALDEN;

OR,

LIFE IN THE WOODS.

By HENRY D. THOREAU,

AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS."

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbours up. — Page 92.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
M DCCC LIV.



FINDING YOUR WALDEN:

How to Strive Less, Simplify More, & Embrace What Matters Most

by Jen Tota McGivney

For the past seventy-five years, *Walden* has sat on the shelf and in the curricula beside *The Catcher in the Rye* as anthems of adolescence, books teachers assign to feign credence to youthful idealism before moving onto the real texts. Then, we become respectable, cynical adults who accept the way things are. We get a real job, we buy uncomfortable clothes, and we give up idealism and Henry David Thoreau.

I never gave Thoreau up.

I first met Thoreau at fourteen, shortly after my family moved to

"Thoreau's words cut a path toward a more fulfilling, more peaceful life. We just need to make a stop at a cabin along the way."

Northern Virginia. Our introduction couldn't have been better timed, as I became a bewildered witness to Washington, DC-area life. There, success looked like long commutes, stressful jobs, and little time to enjoy what was being worked for. I'd hear adults compete over who had it worst - whose drive was the longest, whose job was the most bureaucratic - but I rarely heard them consider other ways. Some people didn't seem to mind their own misery; a few seemed to boast of it. Thoreau was the first adult to tell me that he didn't find this arrangement very attractive either, that the way things are is not the way things have to be. He taught me that success didn't have to involve a fancy office and a big house and that the goal didn't have to be to acquire as much as possible: stuff, money, accolades. Success could look like contentment.

Holding *Walden* was like holding a treasure map. Thoreau and I were going to think our way out of this jam. We've spent every year since figuring out just that: How can I make a good living while living a good life?

Since then, Thoreau's become my life coach. Almost every major decision I've made—which degree to pursue, when to accept (or quit) a job, where to live—starts with an imaginary huddle with Thoreau. He challenges me to doubt myself, just enough, to wonder: Will this decision make me become more fully me, or will it just make me a little more like everyone else?

This may sound crazy to people who don't love *Walden* (yet), but there's a reason this book is so beloved, staying continuously in print since 1862. Thoreau accomplishes something special (and personal) with *Walden*. The subject of almost every book is a fictional character, a historical figure, or the author themself. In *Walden*, however, the subject is you. "Walden is as personal as a letter from a close friend," wrote Philip Van Doren Stern in *The Annotated Walden*, "a friend who wishes you well."

Like me, many Thoreau fans have an oddly personal relationship with an author who lived long before they were born. I spoke with Brent Ranalli, a Thoreau scholar and impersonator. When people visit the replica cabin at Walden Pond, Ranalli sometimes greets them, wearing an authentic outfit and ready to answer their questions as Thoreau himself. I asked Ranalli how visitors interact with him, what he sees in their eyes. "A lot of people already have a relationship with Thoreau," he told me. "There are a lot of people who really admire him and who think of him as a friend."

Thoreau has many friends. The Thoreau Society is the largest and oldest organization dedicated to an American author, filled with many nonacademics who simply adore the guy. This isn't normal. Most literary societies consist mostly of PhDs pursuing research. But some regular folks, like me, consider Thoreau as a guru of intentional living and want to meet others who do, too. Others are drawn to his environmentalism or scientific research. There's just something special about Thoreau. "He speaks to his readers wherever they are," Ranalli said. "There's always been this enthusiasm for him."

It's a lonely and overwhelming time, and Thoreau is just the friend we need to help us through it. Thoreau's words cut a path toward a more fulfilling, more peaceful life. We just need to make a stop at a cabin along the way.

Correcting the Myth

It's important to correct a misconception about Thoreau. He didn't live at Walden Pond to turn his back on the world. He went there to learn how to live better in the world when he got back to it. His two years in that cabin - which was just a mile and a half beyond town - were the only years he lived alone. The rest of his life was surrounded by a close family and good friends. Thoreau's goal at Walden Pond was to go just far enough away, just long enough away, to hear his own thoughts. He wanted space to answer the two big questions: What really matters? And what doesn't?

Everyone I know is trying to answer those questions now.

But first, a word of warning and apology: *Walden* doesn't answer those questions. Neither does this book. *Walden* provokes more questions. So does this book.

Thoreau didn't write *Walden* to tell people to live alone in a cabin in the woods. He wrote *Walden* to share the ideas that his time in the woods inspired, to encourage people to challenge their mode of living and to wonder how to make life a little better, a little easier, a little happier. How each of us does this will look different from our neighbors and friends, if we live according to our values. The message of the book isn't to send you off to a cabin in the woods. The message is to find your questions, find your answers.

Find your Walden. ●

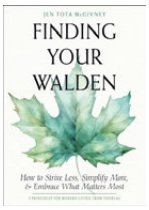
MEET THE AUTHOR



JEN TOTA McGIVNEY is a writer in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is the back-page columnist for *Charlotte Magazine*, and her work also appears in *SUCCESS Magazine*, *Simplify Magazine*, and *Our State Magazine*, among others. She has a master's degree in English and a soft spot for the transcendentalists.

On the web

jenmcgivney.com



Bookshelf

FINDING YOUR WALDEN: HOW TO STRIVE LESS, SIMPLIFY MORE, & EMBRACE WHAT MATTERS MOST BY JEN TOTA McGIVNEY, *published by Hampton Roads Publishing, Paperback (208 pages).*

If consciousness is the light of the soul, the body is its prism.

Through movement, awareness, and rhythm, the soul discovers itself in form. Yet we have inherited narratives that subtly divide the body and soul, the unseen from the physical, transcendence from embodied truth.

The longing to transcend the flesh obscures the revelation that makes spiritual enlightenment possible - that the body is not an obstacle to illumination, *but an instrument for it.*

I call this principle Embodied Luminosity: the understanding that the body is *condensed light* - consciousness in the form of matter. Your body not only holds but is composed of vast reservoirs of ancient wisdom, constellations of knowledge from the interconnected web of life that spans the Earth and the cosmos. In this sense, your body is not an object or mechanism that moves when you say so; but part of a larger continuum of life that is always in motion - alive, aware, and in a constant state of evolution.

Even when you are standing still, particles of us that exist at a subatomic level are always spinning. And, zooming out, notice you are on a planet that is rotating, orbiting the Sun, as the solar system itself moves through the galaxy.

Where the inner and outer meet is the apex of spiritual awakening, which is to say, the apex of creation - where there is no "other" and we can experience ourselves in the oneness of all that is. Anchoring in this, we not only remain grounded, present, and resilient regardless of what's happening in our lives, but consciously embody the same creational power that births worlds.

Sacred dance is one of the oldest and most direct pathways to experience this sacred cosmology of the body, where revelatory power and hidden gifts come alive. Long before theology, doctrine, and belief systems, there was rhythm - the turning of bodies between Earth and sky; the cyclic wisdom that ushered in the new.

When we dance, we are speaking the language of creation, which still illuminates the cells of our being, transforming movement into a revelation of life itself.

To understand the body as cosmology is to perceive yourself as a microcosm of the universe - a spinning convergence of elemental and celestial forces that give life its essence and form. When we move with intention we remember our innate cosmology. The body reveals the forgotten mythic landscapes of our true spiritual inheritance - the Divine emerges, the elements dance in coherence, and Mother Earth reclaims her own heritage through us.

In Zoroastrian cosmology, existence is composed of two interwoven realities: the invisible, spiritual dimension; and the material world. Neither is superior to the other. Rather, the visible world is the sacred landscape in which spiritual forces become tangible. They are not at odds; the invisible *requires the visible* in order to fulfill its purpose. Likewise, the body and soul need each other to evolve and contribute in the ways that can only be achieved through our physicality.

This insight dissolves the false hierarchy between body and soul and invites us into the deeper cosmology and dance of spirit and matter. The material world is not fallen; it is formative. The body is not a prison but a wise and intuitive collaborator. The unseen, therefore, is only made visible when *light is lived*...

Sacred dance, in this context, is an act of cosmic participation - offering a bold, courageous "yes" to life. When you move with reverence, you allow the invisible to commune with the visible. The invisible currents of devotion, longing, and love become a dialect that the Earth, Sun, stars, souls, and even your cells understand. Like some of the earliest cosmological wisdom teachings about how to live in harmony with all of life, the body also ensures nothing is wasted - emotions rise and surrender into new configurations of meaning, purpose, and energy, where what might have dissolved into entropy is brought back to life - transmuted into presence and returned as life force.

Through dance, there are moments of emergence, where



"Through movement, awareness, and rhythm, the soul discovers itself in form."

Photo Credit: Victoria Volskaya

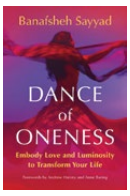
MEET THE AUTHOR



BANAFSHEH SAYYAD, MFA, Choreography and MA, Chinese Medicine, is a master sacred dancer, choreographer, and visionary teacher of spiritual embodiment whose life's work is devoted to helping people activate greater health, awareness, and resilience through conscious movement. Internationally acclaimed for her pioneering fusion of spirituality and sensuality, she is the founder of Dance of Oneness®, a Divine Feminine lineage of healing and transformation uniting Sufi whirling, Persian dance, flamenco, mysticism, and Taoist wisdom. Born in Iran to legendary filmmaker Parviz Sayyad, she defied cultural taboos to create a feminine expression of Sufi whirling, transforming dance into a pathway of liberation, divine communion, and activism. Through her non-profit NAMAH and her transformative teachings at centers such as Esalen, Kripalu, Omega, and Hollyhock, Banafsheh has inspired thousands across the world to awaken, embody love, and dance the divine into being.

On the web

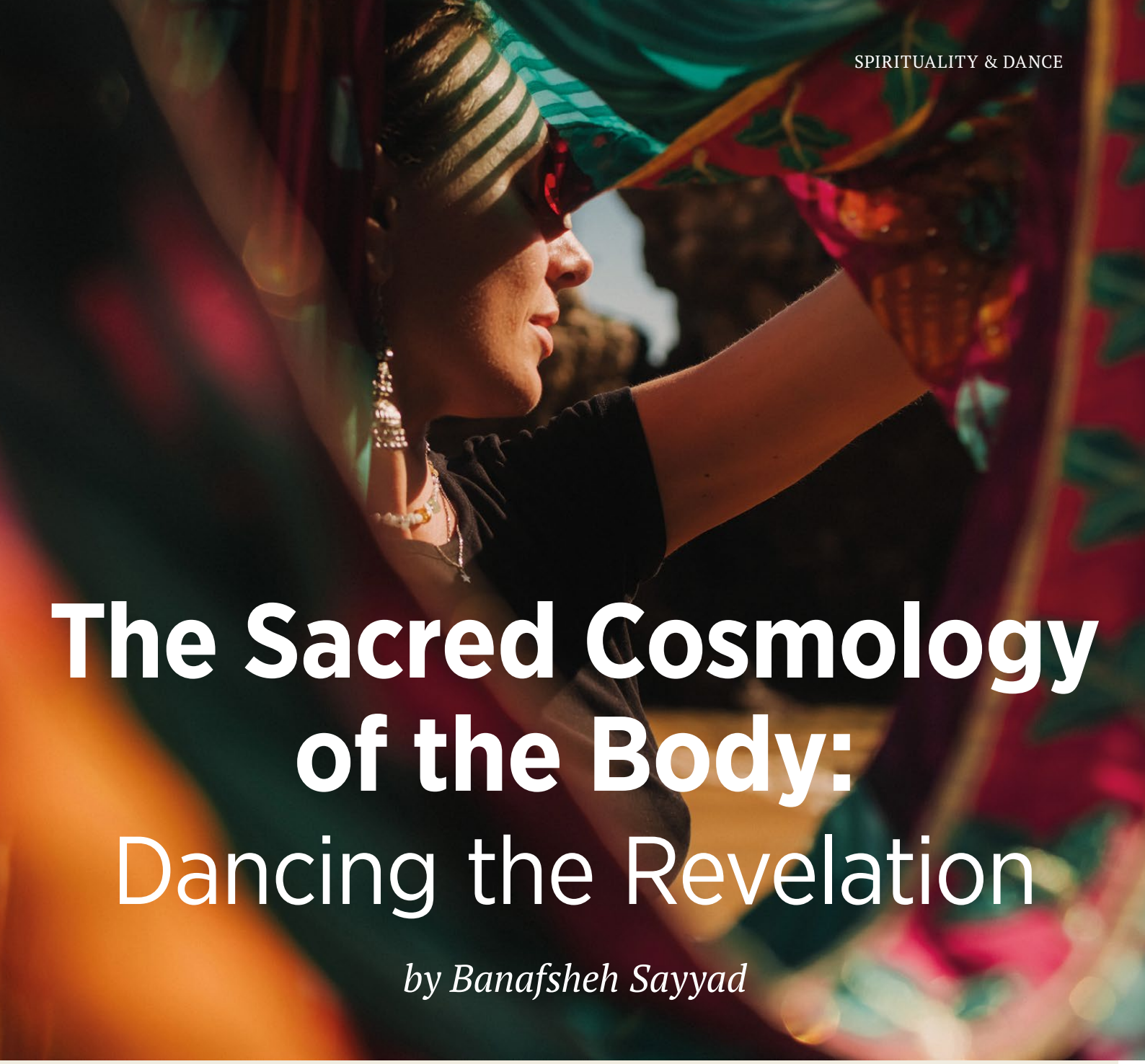
danceofoneness.org



Bookshelf

DANCE OF ONENESS: EMBODY LOVE AND LUMINOSITY TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE BY BANAFSHEH SAYYAD, *Forewords by Andrew Harvey & Anne Baring, published by Sounds True, Paperback (288 pages).*

Dance of Oneness *invites readers to rediscover the body as a portal to presence, vitality, and joy. Drawing from her own awakening through dance that transmuted the pain of exile from Iran, Banafsheh weaves Rumi's poetry, feminine mysticism, and embodied healing into a radiant call to live as a channel of love and light.*



The Sacred Cosmology of the Body: Dancing the Revelation

by Banafsheh Sayyad

energy gathers and expresses outward, and moments of descent - where it folds back and listens. Each movement participates in the continuity of becoming. Sacred dances like *Sama*, or whirling, tap into the cosmological function of movement: to birth love as the revelation and organizing force of life.

In this way, your body is not merely living in time - *your body is creating time*, as the energy and container that makes change possible. To inhabit the body in this way is to live congruently with the sacred, where each sensation, movement, and breath becomes the prayer that keeps the world turning.

Every movement - whether dance or moving through your daily life - carries with it a consequence as it ripples through the greater field of reality as a declaration of your moral imagination. Because the material world is the arena in which spirit manifests, how you move truly matters.

In Embodied Luminosity, each cell is a locus of light - a doorway into the greater possibilities of life. Spiritual awakening, then, is not a singular lightning strike of transcendence or epiphany but the gradual refinement of awareness within your body. It is learning to feel more fully, inhabit yourself more completely, and to allow truth to be expressed without defense. I explore this in depth in my new book, *Dance of Oneness: Embody Love & Luminosity to Transform Your Life*. In this light, the body is revealed as the material aspect of the soul - not separate from it, but its physical form.

What if the way you inhabit your body right now is shaping the world in ways you cannot yet see? How might your life change if your body were not a hindrance or something to transcend or control, but a cosmological dimension to engage and co-create with?

Each movement you make, no matter how ordinary it seems, is part of a larger sequence that is shaping our collective reality. Adding devotion and presence transforms even the simplest gesture into an act of sacred creation, the prism through which light enters our world.

What will be your next move? As the beloved poet Rumi so eloquently said, “There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” ●

HERBA MYTHICA:

Myths and Folk Tales of Sacred Healing Plants



by Xanthe Gresham-Knight

Stories are spells. In Old English, *spellian* meant to speak and was connected to the Old French *espelir*, meaning to recite, and Old High German *spellon*, meaning to tell.

Ancient medicinal manuscripts are full of plant spells. Information on how to dig up roots, make salves and tinctures is interwoven with magical incantation. In an Old English book of remedies, the *Lacnunga* (the Nine Herbs Charm), the healer is instructed to sing a spell over the herbal remedy and then to repeat it three times, 'into the man's mouth, into both ears and onto the wound' before applying the medicine.

> And you, Waybread, mother of plants
> open to the east, mighty within,
> carts ran over you, ladies rode over you,
> brides cried over you, bulls snorted over you,
> you withstood them all and you were crushed,
> so may you withstand the poison and infection
> and the evil that travels round the land.
>
> (Pollington, 2008) [1]

In this chant to Waybread (Plantain), the plant is invoked as if she were a Goddess doing battle with illness in the invisible realm. Shaman herbalists have long recognised the need to journey to healing domains such as the Land the Ancestors, Avalon or Hesperides. One way of accessing these

"Everywhere we stand is the centre of the world, the omphalos, the oracle."

lands is through myths and symbols.

The sign for medicine is the caduceus. It can be a rough branch bound with a snake-like root or two snakes wound around a staff of the kind born by the Greek God Hermes. As God of Messages, Hermes conveyed patients between the material world and the world of the Gods: a vital dimension in any ancient cure. Hermes' caduceus had the power to raise the dead and draw them from Hades (Walker, 2013). [2]

A vibrant sculpture of Medusa on a pediment of the Temple of Artemis at Corcyra, Corfu (580bce) shows her with snakes twining at her navel. In Ayurvedic healing, the feminine and masculine energies are portrayed as intertwining snakes. The *ida* is the female, the *pingala*, the male, and their energies are constantly coiling around a central, neutral column of energy, the *shushumna*, that runs up the spine like a staff or wand. The purpose of the spiralling is to remove disturbance from the body and create equilibrium; the symmetrical coiling of the snakes suggests constant movement because health is never static or assured (Muktibodhananda, 1993).

As in nature, the elements within our bodies are in a constant process of change and, like snakes, we shed metaphorical skins. In my thirty-year career as a storyteller, I have always found stories the best company during life transitions. An unquestioning acceptance of the dogma of my Christian upbringing eventually led me to revolt and seek out the myths of Goddesses.

After decades of telling stories about them and raging about the old patriarchal Gods, I realised that Goddesses can be seen as metaphors for the action of plants: Brigit for the Dandelion, Hekate for Poppy, Mary for the Lily. This realisation led to *Herba Mythica*. Consequently, I'm falling in love with Gods like Hermes, Osiris, Serapis and Christ, champions of the earth and the female, and tend to think 'Goddex' (an inclusive term coined by Alex Etchart in 2022) might be a better word than Goddess.

If a Goddess is a metaphor for a plant, then plants reproduce in an abundance of ways, by pollination, spore, root, runner, bud. Dioecious plants have male organs on one plant and female on another. Monoecious plants hold both male and female within one plant. What matters is that the multiplicity of life is revered and protected.

These days, I crave the 'caduceus moment' when a plant effects a transformation. I might drink a cup of Rose tea, stumble across the plant Self Heal creeping across the grass or make a sudden connection between a plant's botanical name and her myth. That's when I feel it. My spine straightens like a wand and it's as if two snakes are dancing around it, embodying the flow between male and female, this world and mythical worlds. If I'm lucky, the snakes grow wings, I come into balance and harmonise with my environment for a time.

Ancient civilisations from Africa to Europe used snakes, plants, symbols and oracles in an attempt to restore equilibrium. The balance of the body reflects the balance of society, and both are fragile. At Delphi in Greece, the last snake-priestess, the Pythia, declared to the Emperor Theodosius in 393ce:

Go and tell the king the temple has fallen to pieces.
Apollo dwells here no more.
There is no more oracular Laurel.
No talking spring.
And the voice of the water has been silenced.
All is finished.

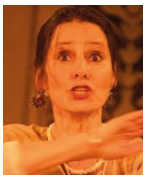
The storyteller Ben Haggarty often begins, 'Long ago, in the lands where north, south, east and west meet, which is, of course at your feet …' Everywhere we stand is the centre of the world, the *omphalos*, the oracle.

Although it may be a small thing to reach out and connect with a plant, it is in line with ancient snake-wisdom. These days, we don't generally seek out a shaman when we lose equilibrium. If we are fortunate enough to have access to healthcare, we usually consult a regular doctor and let the white coats, hospital rituals and logos of pharmaceutical companies create the healing loop between medicine and our parasympathetic nervous systems. Listening to plants, however, growing them and foraging, telling their stories and speaking their magical names offers a complementary enchantment. As TuuP says in 'Tiger's Whisker':

You are the potion.
You are the amulet.
You have the power. ●

1 - Pollington, Stephen, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore and Healing* (Anglo-Saxon Books, 2008) pp.211-15.
2 - Walker, Barbara G., *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (Harper Collins, 2013).

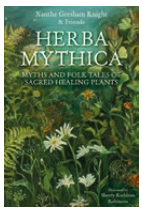
MEET THE AUTHOR



XANTHE GRESHAM-KNIGHT tours internationally and has been Storyteller in Residence for The Chelsea Physic Garden, Harvard University, *Psychologies* magazine, Hastings Storytelling Festival, Stoke and Staffordshire Libraries and has received numerous commissions from The British Museum and The Smithsonian. She has performed at major UK Literature Festivals including Hay and Cheltenham and has created 8 performance art shows for adults on different Goddesses for venues including The Barbican, National and Soho Theatres.

On the web

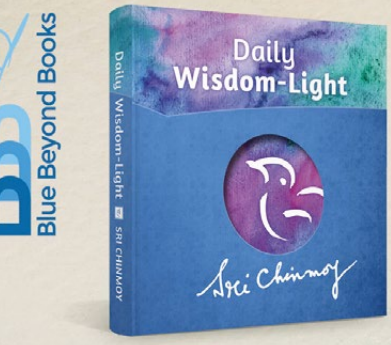
xanthegresham.co.uk



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HERBA MYTHICA: MYTHS AND FOLK TALES OF SACRED HEALING PLANTS BY XANTHE GRESHAM-KNIGHT & FRIENDS, *illustrated by Sherry Kathleen Robinson, published by The History Press, Paperback (368 pages)*

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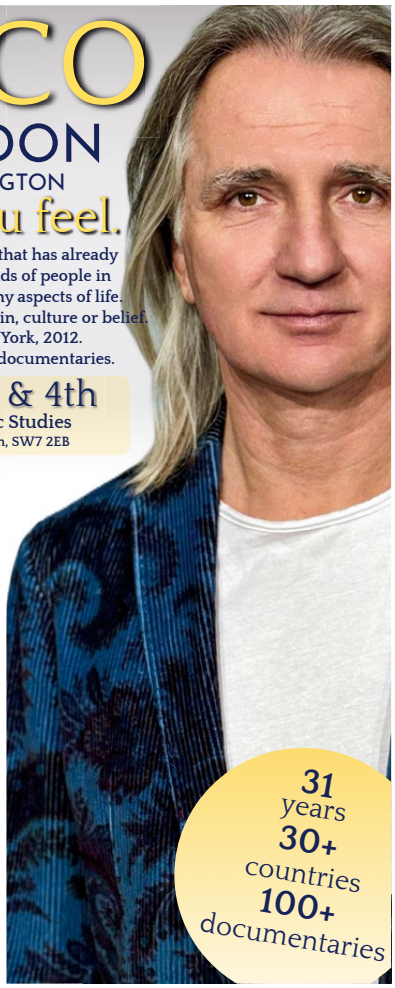




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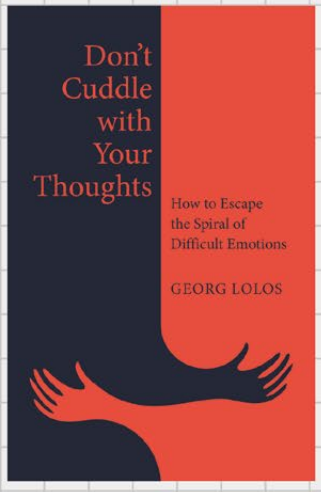
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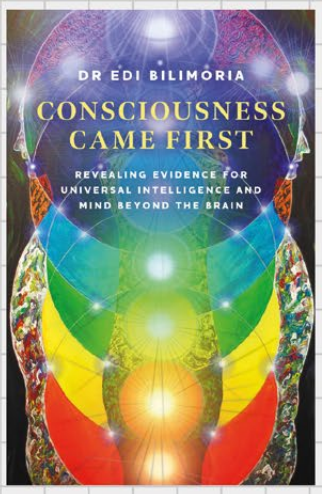
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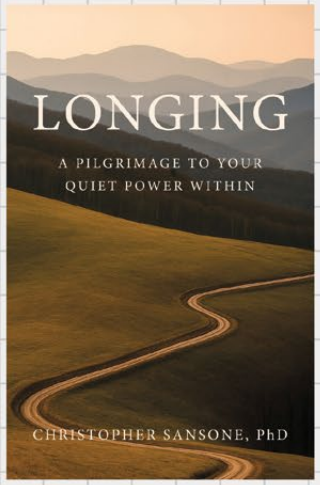
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Connecting With the Stones



by Katie-Jane Wright

I invite you to journey with me and the stone keepers through ancient lands.

Through this book you will walk with us and forge a deeper connection to your ancestors. You will ask deeper questions of yourself as the wisdom of the stones envelops you and invites you into new streams of consciousness. I will offer you insight into these, but it is not my place to tell you how to work with these gifts of the Earth.

This book embodies the "Spirit of the Stones". I believe that each stone has an elemental, deva energy. They are part of the force of nature, which connects the whole of nature. Over time this energy builds up and is added to by the people and beings around it, because every energy around a stone leaves its trace. And it is through these traces of energy that we can listen to the stories of the Earth's ancestral protectors. It is my wish to carry the stories of the stones forward with respect and humility.

In many cultures, stories and traditions are being lost because they are not being passed down. As in my ancestral culture, the Khasi people of northeast India, stories are often passed down orally, and there is no written document of their rituals or energies. On this Earth walk I am part of this matriarchal Indian tribe, but I speak about other tribes and cultures I am not part of directly, but I feel their energy sing so strongly through my heart when they speak to me directly. I have had many past lives in some of these cultures and the source of information in the book is the Earth, and her guardians, the council of elders that speak through the pages. The information you will read comes directly from them: a conversation with the ancient Earth council. I also believe that we are all woven as one, and as a collective race we are moving toward unity consciousness, acceptance and love. I approach all my practices with respect, and I hope that you feel this through the book. It was written in and with love and respect for everyone.

I have travelled to many sacred sites across the world to connect with the stones, and I will share these stories in this book. There are giant sarsen stones in the outer circle of Stonehenge that sing loudest when it rains, speaking of the way water enhances and amplifies their energy. In the sacred Corycian Cave in Delphi, high up on Mount Parnassus, where the oracles met to divinate with stone and bone, there's a guard rock and a generous rock being who sits with his gnome and nymph guardians, and he offers insight on the portal to inner Earth there.

Photographs are included to support your connections to the wisdom of the stones, and enhance your own personal journey work with them. With light-encoded words and activations, crystal guidance and rituals, this book will open your eyes and heart to new possibilities and new ways of connection with the Earth and the stones that are her bones, as many of your ancestors have before you.

This book connects with the *Songs of the Stones Oracle* deck, and expands on its messages. When writing the *Songs of the Stones Oracle* deck there was so much information and energy coming that it felt right to expand on them in this book, to support the unfolding of a deeper connection for you. Many of the crystals you will read about in this book are in the oracle deck and add more depth to their story. ●

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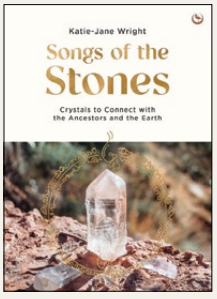
KATIE-JANE WRIGHT is an author, spiritual guide and teacher. She is the crystal expert and columnist for *Spirit & Destiny* magazine. She created the *Earth Alchemy Oracle* and the *Songs of the Stones Oracle*, the companion deck to the *Songs of the Stones* book.

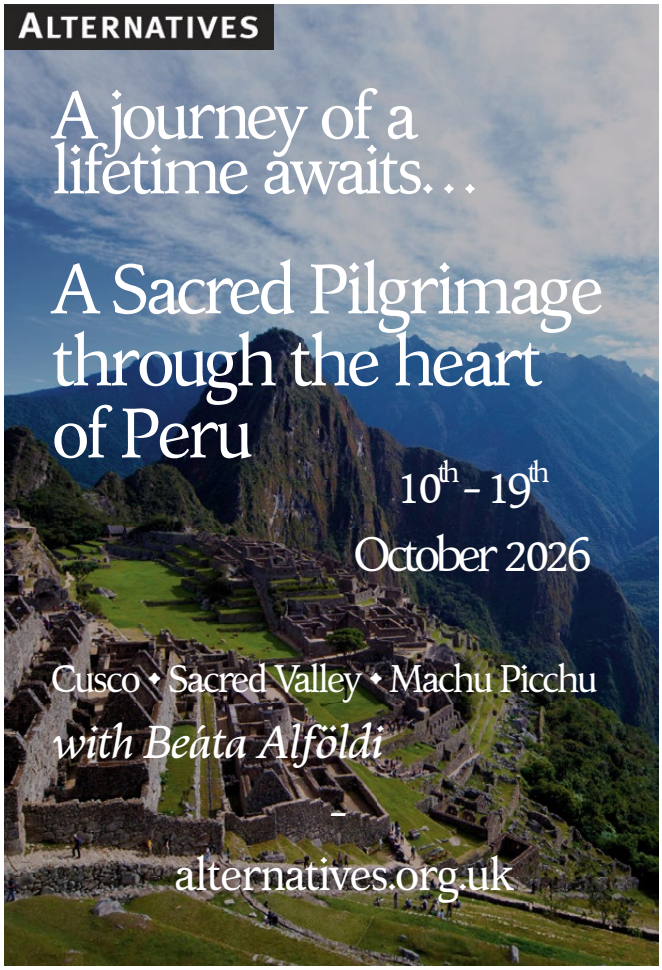
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SONGS OF THE STONES: CRYSTALS TO CONNECT WITH THE ANCESTORS AND THE EARTH BY KATIE-JANE WRIGHT, *published by Watkins, Illustrated Paperback (280 pages).*
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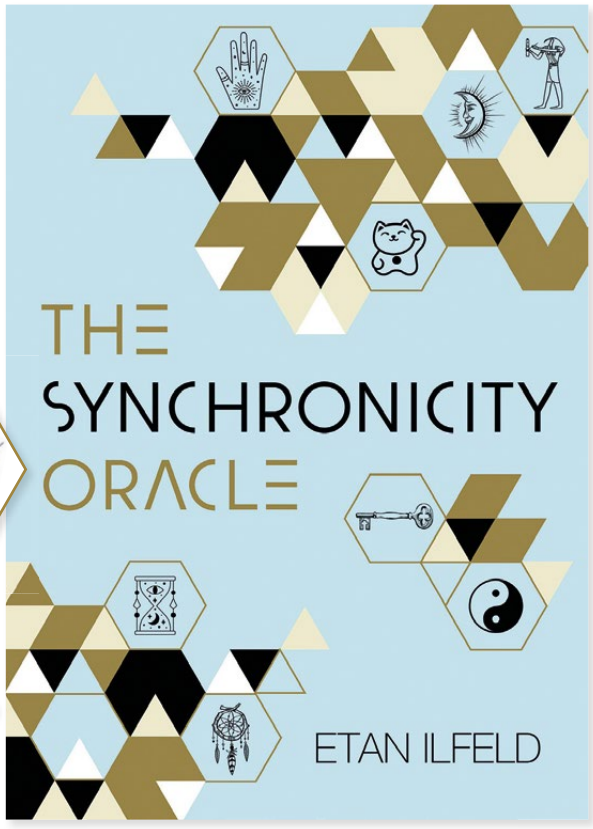
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by Anthony Talmage

How Dan Brown's Latest Thriller has Shaken Up the Great Consciousness Debate

Dan Brown's bestseller *The Secret of Secrets* has reignited an argument that's been simmering for decades: is your consciousness created by your brain, or is your brain tuning into something "out there" in the Universe that's feeding you information?

In Brown's thriller, consciousness isn't some manifestation of the brain. It's a fundamental property of the Universe itself - a vast, non-local field that your mind receives from, and transmits to, like a two-way radio. Die, and the radio breaks. But the signal? That carries on broadcasting. This theory has profound implications asking: Do we cease to exist when our bodies perish or does a part of us continue? Is there really life after death?

It's a seductive idea, and this globally popular author isn't the first to champion it. The Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), founded by Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell after his consciousness-expanding experience in space, has been exploring this territory for half a century. Their director of research, Dean Radin, has spent decades investigating whether human consciousness can operate beyond the confines of the skull.

But here's where things get interesting - and contentious.

The mainstream scientific position, championed by neuroscientist Christof Koch, is unambiguous: consciousness is what the brain does. Full stop. Koch argues that our subjective experience emerges from the electrochemical activity of 86 billion neurons. No brain activity, no consciousness. Death of the brain equals death of consciousness.

It's a position that makes perfect sense if you're wedded to materialism - the idea that only physical matter is real. Koch and his colleagues can show you brain scans that light up when you're thinking about your grandmother or contemplating lunch. They can demonstrate how damage to certain brain regions eliminates specific mental functions. Case closed, they say.

But there is another hypothesis.

That's the non-local consciousness theory, which turns the conventional on its head (pun intended). Think of your brain not as a creator of consciousness but as a filter that narrows down an infinite field of awareness so that you're never overwhelmed by tsunamis of information. In *The Secret of Secrets*, Brown uses GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) as the filtering mechanism: when GABA levels drop - say, during meditation or under the effects of hallucinogens - the filter lifts, and you're accessing a reality that was always there.

This explains, proponents argue, why people report remarkably similar occurrences during Near Death Experiences: the sense of leaving the body, encountering deceased relatives, feeling profound peace and expanded awareness. If consciousness were merely brain chemistry gone haywire, why would these accounts be so consistent across cultures and throughout history?

Radin's research at IONS has documented phenomena that conventional neuroscience struggles to explain, for instance precognition experiments where subjects' bodies react to disturbing images before they're shown; double-slit experiments suggesting consciousness creates reality; studies on distant intention where one person's focused thought appears to influence another person's physiology (healing).

However, Koch and his allies explain precognition as a statistical anomaly, quantum consciousness experiments as misapplied physics, and remote effects as co-incidence and wishful thinking.

But the materialist position, that consciousness dies when the brain dies, suffers from a fatal flaw: it can't explain consciousness in the first place! How do neurons create the technicolour richness of subjective experience? Where does genius come from? How do savants make mathematical calculations faster than a computer? Why did Mozart assert "music just walks into my head." Neuroscience can map correlations, but correlation isn't an adequate explanation.

The non-local theory, imperfect as it may be, at least takes seriously the consistent reports of humans throughout history whose consciousness seemed to operate beyond the brain's usual boundaries - Out of Body Experiences for instance. And what about terminal lucidity - those mysterious cases where Alzheimer's patients, their brains ravaged by disease, suddenly regain perfect clarity hours before death?

Is non-local consciousness proven? No. But neither is the materialist position. Both are working hypotheses attempting to explain a phenomenon - consciousness - that nobody truly understands.

What Brown's novel does brilliantly is dramatise the stakes. If consciousness is non-local, if we're all tapping into a unified field of awareness, then death isn't the end - it's but a transformation. Our minds – us – somehow continue. We're not isolated computers but interconnected nodes in a cosmic network.

The scientific establishment will continue insisting that consciousness is purely biological. IONS and similar organisations will keep producing evidence of phenomena that don't fit that model. And novels like *The Secret of Secrets* will keep pushing these ideas into the mainstream, asking uncomfortable questions that deserve serious answers. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



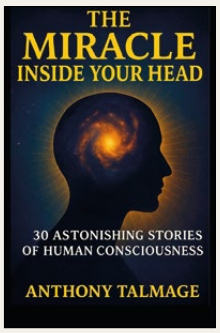
ANTHONY TALMAGE is author of 7 books in his Psychic Mind series: *Dowse Your Way to Psychic Power, In Tune with the Infinite Mind, Unlock the Psychic Powers of Your Unconscious Mind, How to Crack the Cosmic Code, Mindfulness and the Pendulum, I'm Running On Empty – What Now?* and his latest, *The Miracle Inside Your Head.*

On the web

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THE MIRACLE INSIDE YOUR HEAD: 30 ASTONISHING STORIES OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS BY ANTHONY TALMAGE, *Paperback (161 pages).* The Secret of Secrets *by Dan Brown published in paperback on July 2nd.*





THE VEILED GODDESS

by Lady Haight-Ashton

The image of a veil conjures visions of ghostly wanderers hidden behind sinuous fabrics flying on moonlight nights; or visions of a faerie Princess waiting for her Prince to part the magical veil that brings her back to life. We are curious travelers in our dreams and imagination.

On Samhain night when the veil "between the worlds" is the thinnest, Witches will gather far and wide under midnight skies. The dark Goddess softly whispers to all who choose to hear her voice that hidden knowledge will be bestowed to the veiled wearer who shows no fear and allows the veil to part.

Mythology tells of the great Goddess Isis who removes her veil to reveal the mysteries of enlightenment within the natural world. The Celtic Goddess Cailleach, who rules over the wintry winds and storms often appears in images as an old veiled woman hiding her face.

The most well-known visual of this mystifying image is that of the common bride's veil. This romantic and very touchable piece of gossamer material has hereditary roots in every culture and society. It becomes an allegory that shifts us from one reality to another. A bride wears a pure white veil to hide her face, but we can still see her. Lifting the veil symbolizes her transition from a virtuous girl to a married woman. The viewer is happily mesmerized by this familiar picture.

Christian women wear veils when in a religious space symbolizing their modesty and reverence to the sacred. It is thought that the veils sanctity will enhance spiritual devotion. Beyond certain cultural desires to conceal, is it possible that women are touched by the Divine by the simple act of wearing a sheer or sometimes opaque veil?

The concept of a veil covering a woman's head and face can also be perplexing. Veils have many guises creating a unique

"Spiritually veils become curtains that differentiate between the spirit realms and the physical world."

paradox that many believe separates the divine from humanity. Here is an enigma that creates a fascinating illusion of the unknown. Though the veiled female face is concealed within the folds of fabric, our eyes are intriguingly drawn to the figure. We cannot help but wonder what lies beneath the veil.

Physical veils whether gossamer or opaque have adorned heads of religious followers and seekers for over a millennium. Societal norms dictate dark veiled head coverings for repressed women even to this day with a clear purpose to strip away identities. Whether a fashionable ornamentation from Paris couture or a strict moral head covering, veils are fascinating pieces of fabric that create an aura of suspense. Measured alongside pictures of happily white veiled Brides those who are darkly draped tell a very different story.

This type of negative covering is a clear testament to the patriarchal control that has existed for many an age. Being swathed within a dark veil is regarded in many conservative societies as protection from peering eyes within a fabric cocoon that offers an anonymous haven of virtuous concealment. The image becomes a reminder of societies who still ascribe to the lessor status of women.

There are many biblical references to veils. In Genesis 38:14-15 Tamar covers herself with a veil to disguise her identity. She was the daughter-in-law of Judah the brother of Joseph who gave birth to the twins Perez and Zerah who are said to connect to the genealogy of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 11:4-7 the Apostle Paul states it is a disgrace for a woman to uncover her head, thus encouraging veils that stress modesty and order.

What of Veronica's Veil? A follower of Jesus, Veronica took the veil from her face and used it to wipe the sweat off Jesus' face as he carried his cross. Many of the Christian faithful believe that it holds a picture of their savior's face. The problem is that there seem to be a few too many examples!

Veils have many other purposes that add to their ambiguity. Spiritually veils become curtains that differentiate between the spirit realms and the physical world. A modern-day veiled medium in trance is shielded from view and all common senses. The medium can then arouse spirit to relate information and advice. To lift the veil in psychic or medium speak means to connect to the other side.

Historical tales also tell us of Oracles and Seers from the primordial world who kept their faces hidden behind veils to create an otherworldly presence. These veils, whether illusory or tangible, allowed the ancient mystics to see beyond the enigmatic doorway that guides the wearer into the spiritual world.

For centuries most orders of Catholic Nuns wore veils that surrounded their heads but did not hide their faces. Now many have thrown aside their cumbersome habits to blend into a public persona by wearing regular street clothes. The original Nuns habit was rich in symbolism with each piece of clothing having a specific meaning. Their persona was often seen as ethereal in their flowing black robes and veils. Take away the vision of these black draped women, who represent a picture of piety and humbleness, and we suddenly do not notice them.

There is one sect of Nuns who have kept to the old ways. These are the Carmelite Nuns who live a life of seclusion in prayer and contemplation tucked away in communities of closed cloisters. Like hermits hidden from public view they practice humble silence in prayer and do manual work that benefits the community. They live and work within the cloister confines and if encountered would most likely be facially veiled.

Greek and Roman artists sculpted lovely marble busts of veiled Vestal virgins capturing pictures of demure maidens with eyes looking down. During the pre-Raphaelite art movement of the late 1800's mysterious veiled ladies became a metaphoric artistic motif. The artist Thomas Cooper Gotch painted "Death the Bride." With her Mona Lisa smile, he portrays a woman darkly veiled walking through a field of poppies symbolizing oblivion.

We can veil our heads for religious or cultural norms just as we also veil our thoughts. The Veiled Goddess becomes a symbol of all women whether mystifying, alluring, shunned or simply written out of history. Remove the veil to see her tears, and we will cry. When we shift the veil to see the joy in her silent face, we laugh. Searching beyond her veiled mystery we shall find our connection. ●

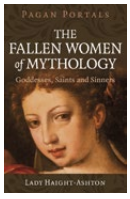
MEET THE AUTHOR



LADY HAIGHT-ASHTON is a teacher, Sacred Dancer, High Priestess of Lilith, Selket, Hecate and Isis, FOI, ATC; Cabot Kent Hermetic Priestess; High Priestess of Sacred Moon Coven and the Iseum of the Graceful Goddess; a licensed Clergy/Counselor and also an ordained Clergy in the Temple of Nine Wells. Lady is an oracle and psychic medium, member of the Maine Pagan Clergy Association, the Crossroads Lyceum, the Sacred Dance Guild, and is on the faculty of Woolston-Steen Theological Seminary, USA. She is a trained ballerina, Isadora Duncan dancer, choreographer and dancer with the Temple of Nine Wells Dancers. She is the founder, choreographer and principal dancer for "The Undines Dance Company". Her books include *If Mermaids Could Dance, The First Sisters: Lilith and Eve,* and *The Temple Priestesses of Antiquity.* Her new book, *The Coven of 13 Witches,* will be out this summer.

On the web

www.ladyhaight-ashton.com



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THE FALLEN WOMEN OF MYTHOLOGY: GODDESSES, SAINTS AND SINNERS BY LADY HAIGHT-ASHTON, *published by Moon Books, Paperback (112 pages).*

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Following in the Wake of the Vanishing People



by Shaun Cooper

In the *Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore*, under Fairies, it says: "The basic European repertoire of beliefs and tales about fairies is less fully preserved in England than in the Celtic areas of Wales, Ireland, and Highland Scotland, though much of it was well known here in the 17th century and later..."

A lot of books about fairies tend to mostly focus on these Celtic areas, but *The Crew that Never Rests* is mainly about the local legends and tales of the fairies in England, and takes its title from a reference to the Dartmoor pixies, described in an old Hampshire newspaper. The title is apt because the 'crew' is reminiscent of the 'team' in *Pale Hecate's Team*, a book about the tradition of witches by folklorist Katharine Briggs – and there was a connection between witches and the fairies, and also because I grew up in the South and lived most of my life there before moving to the West Country. Indeed, the initial research that led me to write a book about England's fairy legends was to try to find out why Midsummer's Eve was so significant to the fairies of Sussex – even though it's not mentioned in the fairy lore of any of the neighbouring counties.

Then, about a decade ago, I began searching for 'new' old Sussex fairy legends, hoping to find any which hadn't already been described in the various books that cover its folklore. It seemed likely that all of the county's published local legends and tales of fairies had already been 'archived' (i.e. noted in books about its folklore) – yet there was at least the slim possibility that one or two may have been missed. Back then it was known that Sussex had twelve local legends and tales about fairies – but now it has twenty-five, and this book also includes previously unarchived local fairy legends from other counties too.

The first one I found was the siting legend concerning the church at Milland. However, none of the books about fairies I had back then, or those I subsequently read, have anything much to say about siting legends – and it may be that the reason for this is that church siting legends where the fairies were blamed do not appear to be as common in Celtic areas as they are in the rest of the country.

Fairies in Church Siting Legends

They do say as they began to build the old church in the dingle up nigh your place, but every morning when the workmen went back to work they found the fairies had carried up all the tools and things and the gurt stones up to the top of the hill, and this went on for years, so then they give it up and built the church top of the hill where the fairies wanted it.

This is a siting legend about how the church at Milland in West Sussex came to be built on top of the hill. The extract is from *Some People of Hogg's Hollow* by Eleanor Boniface, published in 1924. Interestingly, the dingle where the church was to have been built is locally known as The Fairies' Dell.

Siting legends arose at many places all over the country and their purpose, in each case, was to explain why a certain building (usually the church) was built in an odd place, often just beyond the village. The basic plot-line of the Milland one is pretty much the same as it is in other places that have siting legends about their churches – but siting legends where the fairies are blamed are rare. The book *The Secret Country* (1976) details a hundred siting legends from all over Britain but only five claim the fairies were the culprits and these all come from places in England. The vast majority of siting legends name the Devil as the culprit for moving the stones or lay the blame at some vague unknown supernatural force, sometimes described as a big black pig.

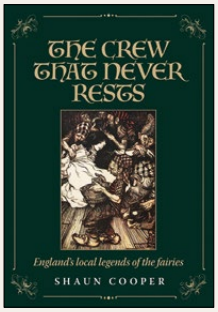
Conversely, in England, church siting legends are one of the most common types of local legends concerning fairies, and there are at least twenty-two places that have legends of the fairies moving church foundation stones to a different site. Many church siting legends are quite short, though, regardless of whether the fairies or something else was held responsible. One of the legends about the old church of Dowlish West, destroyed in the 16th century, just tells that after it was burnt down what they built during the day was carried back to Dowlish each night by the fairies. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR

SHAUN COOPER is the author of *A Sussex Book of Witch Legends*, which is a comparative study of British witch legends; *The Shining Cord of Sheila Kaye-Smith*, biography; and the Sussex novel *A Song from Ironwood*, all published by Country Books. His latest book, *From Burnt Oak to Ironwood: The Sussex Dialect Tales of Eleanor Boniface*, published in June 2025.

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THE CREW THAT NEVER RESTS: ENGLAND'S LOCAL LEGENDS OF THE FAIRIES BY SHAUN COOPER, *published by Country Books, an imprint of Spiral Publishing, Illustrated Paperback (224 pages)*



THE ASTROLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF THE UNIVERSE

by Demian Allan



MEET THE AUTHOR
DEMIAN ALLAN is an astrologer working in London and does face to face readings every Friday at Watkins Books. To book a reading email: service.watkins@gmail.com.

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Reference: The United Kingdom, 00.00 LT, 1 January 1801, Westminster, 51N30, 0W07. The coming into force of the Union of Great Britain and Ireland. United States of America, 17.10 LMT, 4 JULY 1776, Philadelphia, 39N57, 75W10.

Ref – The Degrees of the Zodiac Symbolised, Charubel 'La Volasfera' Sepharial.

AUGUST – OCTOBER 2026

These next three months are summed up by just one word, retrograde. We have Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, Venus and Mercury all going backwards in the sky over the next three months. This always creates a destabilising effect, politically and from an economic point of view. We also have a Total Solar Eclipse on the 12th of August in Leo followed by a Partial Lunar Eclipse in Pisces on the 28th of August. These two zodiac signs are in aversion to each other, which means they have no real connection to one another; therefore the two eclipses don't have a narrative that we can all feel on an individual and collective scale. The message for these next three months is to be patient and allow dramas to play out before making any snap decisions, since the ones in power seem to be oblivious to the more subtle changes that are occurring around us all.

AUGUST

We have three planets that are all retrograde this month, Saturn, Neptune and Pluto, two of them are in the zodiac sign of Aries. This can manifest on a collective level as poor leadership and decisions being made in the political arena from an egotistical level. From the 11th we have Mars entering Cancer which also forms a square aspect with Neptune retrograde. This combination can produce intense reactions to situations that might need a more objective response. This is a classic passive aggressive dance between Mars and Neptune which can cause confusion and poor judgement. On the 12th there is a Total Solar Eclipse at 20 degrees in the sign of Leo. 'A human face surmounted by a coiled serpent, a raised hand also appears'; it is in the degree of penetration. This symbol conjures the idea of listening to our intuition as a warning.

SEPTEMBER

From the 10th, Uranus goes retrograde, joining Saturn, Neptune and Pluto. The three outer planets transiting backwards in the sky symbolise old wounds from the collective past coming to the surface. These are powerful times when the planets are urging us all to be radical in our approach to how we see our futures. Uranus retrograde in Gemini gives us all a clear idea of how far we have developed since late April. Technology is advancing at a rapid pace while new governments for the future are starting to emerge with a clearer sense of identity. We have a Full Moon on the 26th at 3 degrees Aries forming a conjunction with Neptune. 'A wood, in which much wild undergrowth abounds, and many plants of different kinds and colours' symbolises the deep need to remain stoic during these difficult cycles.

OCTOBER

From the 3rd of this month, Venus, the planet of relationships and self-worth, goes retrograde until the 14th of November. It is in the zodiac sign of Scorpio, which is in its detriment, causing old issues of security and identity on a collective basis. This is going to be a challenging period since the planet Venus cannot function in Scorpio and can feel vindictive in its energy. We also have Mercury retrograde to contend with from the 24th, also in the sign of Scorpio and squaring the planet Pluto. This is going to be a tense political month, but also it will bring up many changes in attitudes and deep-rooted fears that stem from our past actions. On the 26th we have a Full Moon at 2 degrees Taurus. 'A burning brand beneath the paw of a lion, whose rage is against it' symbolises a political figure being their own worst enemy.

Yoga Mudra Oracle: It's in Your Hands

by Emma Wertheim







I discovered Mudras during a difficult time in my life. Part way through my Yoga teacher training studies in 2016, I became very unwell. I was unable to walk, so 'Asana' (postural) practice was out of the question. Delving into Yoga philosophy, I came across mudras, sometimes referred to as 'yoga for the hands'. Their calming effect was immediate and something I really needed at the time.

'Mudra' is the Sanskrit word for 'seal', referring to ancient hand gestures used in yoga and meditation to enhance the flow of energy. Thus 'Hasta' mudra means 'hand seal'. I learnt that by activating channels of Prana (vital energy) through 'Nadis' - energy highways running throughout our bodies – mudras influence not just the body but also evoke different states of consciousness.

Our hands are miracles of engineering, and mudras are recognised by ancient cultures for their energetic connection to all parts of the body, as well as our cosmic and spiritual nature. During my illness, mudras supported my return to a space of inner calm and balanced health.

About five years ago, my wish to share the magic of mudras led to the idea of creating an Oracle deck. *Yoga Mudra Oracle* was born, a collaboration between myself and my writer/illustrator husband, Steve Denham.

The deck of 44 cards and comprehensive guidebook can be used for quick guidance in the moment; or you can simply adopt the mudra poses, sparking your innate intuitive sense for where you're at in your life and what is needed in every situation. Mudras are easy to use. They help you to take the reins of your healing and spiritual journey. They meet you wherever you are and quicken transformation.

THREE MUDRAS FOR INNER PEACE

Adopt these in your meditation practice or during your day. For maximum benefit hold each hand posture for 5-15 minutes, three times daily - or even just taking one deep conscious breath while adopting a pose will bring benefit.

Jnana Mudra - heart-centred wisdom: For each hand, lightly bring the tips of each thumb and index finger together. Now extend the other fingers and rest your hands on your thighs, palms facing upwards.

Hakini Mudra - focus, balance, clarity: Bring the tips of the left and right-hand fingers into light contact. Hold this posture in front of your heart; or if it feels right, your third eye Chakra. With eyes open or closed, direct your gaze or awareness towards that centre. Relax your shoulders and imagine you are holding a sphere of light between your hands.

Dhyana Mudra - Mudra of meditation: Place your left hand in your lap, palm facing up. Rest the back of your right hand in the palm of the left. Now bring the tips of both thumbs lightly together, forming a bowl shape. This mudra is often used during meditation in the Buddhist tradition. It is a favourite of the Dalai Lama. ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



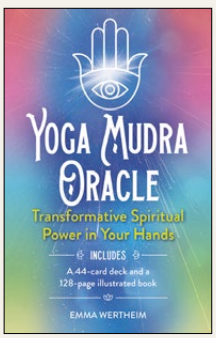
EMMA WERTHEIM is a Sydney-based meditation, yoga, and sacred dance teacher specialising in yoga Mudras. A graphic designer, photographer and intuitive digital artist, she's been a member of an esoteric school inspired by The Fourth Way since 1995.

On the web

www.emmawertheim.com

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YOGA MUDRA ORACLE: TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUAL POWER IN YOUR HANDS BY EMMA WERTHEIM, *published by Arcturus, Boxed Set (44-card Deck & 128-page Guidebook)*



Beyond the Grave

by Sara Malagnino

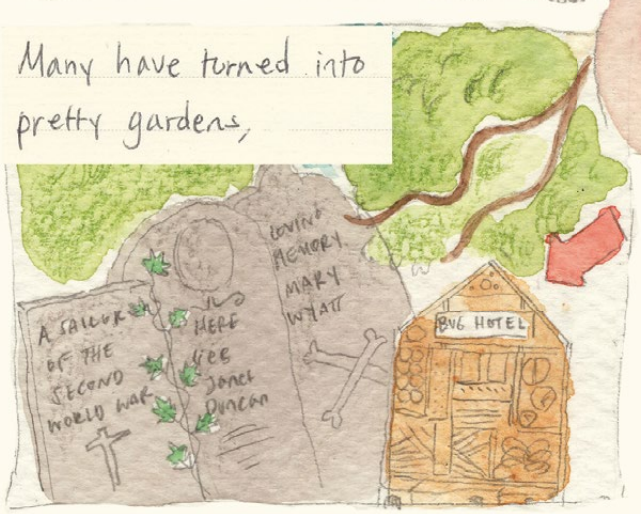


Do graveyards have to be places of gloom?





Many have turned into pretty gardens,





and even a playground for foxes.

They invite quiet remembrance and contemplation.

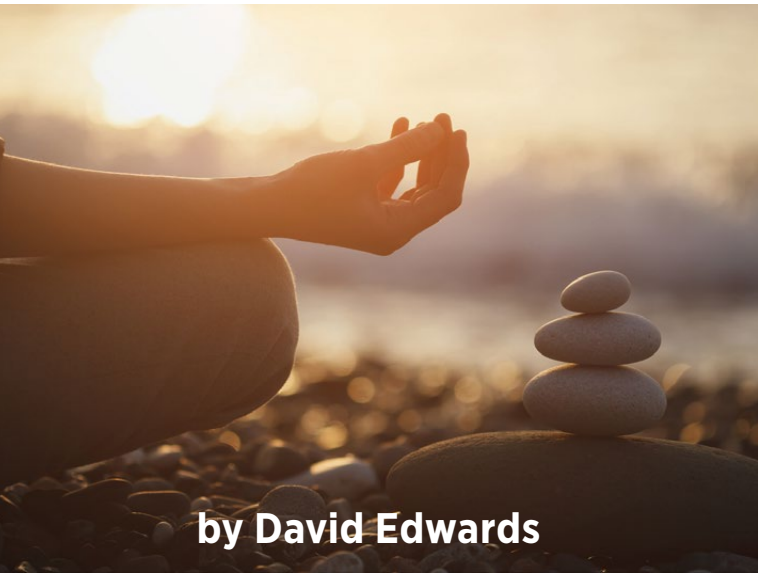




Ultimately, they are places of deep love and care.

@saramgreen_

A Short Book About Ego... and the Remedy of Meditation



by David Edwards

A Sufi tale has it that God plays a joke on us when we're born. He whispers in our ear:

'*You* are the special one!'

The joke is that he says it to everyone.

In *A Short Book About Ego*, I describe the ego's three main strategies for feeling 'special'. There is the Successful Ego, of course, smoking a big cigar in the back of a Rolls Royce. As football manager José Mourinho said:

'Please don't call me arrogant, but I'm European champion and I think I'm a special one.'

The Suffering Ego is made 'special' by the severity of its problems. Our egos can learn to use suffering to make themselves the centre of attention, to justify tyrannical behaviour, in much the same way as a Trumpian tycoon.

The Righteous Ego's claim to fame lies in its unusual concern for the problems of *others*. The comedy series, Seinfeld, loved to nail this form of ego. After an uncharacteristically selfless act of generosity, Jerry thinks to himself:

'I am such a great guy! Who else would've gone through the trouble of helping this poor immigrant? I *am* special. My mother was right.'

The Righteous Ego may rage, patronise and preach as harshly as any Successful or Suffering Ego.

There Is Always Something Missing

No matter how apparently successful we are in achieving name, fame and gain, the ego's quest for happiness through attention and external 'success' must fail. Lama Zopa Rinpoche observed:

'There is always something missing. If you examine your mind in everyday life… You are never really happy.'

Climber Joe Simpson described his feelings as part of the first ever team to summit *Siula Grande* in the Peruvian Andes by the West face:

'We took the customary summit photos. I felt the usual anticlimax. What now? It was a vicious circle. If you succeed with one dream, you come back to square one…'.

There was something missing.

In July 1969, astronaut Buzz Aldrin followed Neil Armstrong down the ladder to become the second man to walk on the moon. Back on Earth, Aldrin commented:

'I said to Neil, "We missed the whole thing." We didn't share the moment of exhilaration here on Earth. We were sort of out of town doing something else.'

In July 1966, England footballer, Geoff Hurst, scored a hat-trick to win the World Cup final. Again, something was missing:

'There was a tremendous feeling of anti-climax when we [the team] got home. The whole thing had passed so quickly … I cut the lawn because I hadn't been home for ages. Then I washed the car. It was pretty much like any other Sunday afternoon.'

… And The Remedy of Meditation

The Indian mystic Kabir warned of the futility of pursuing the ego's dreams of external happiness:

'Don't go outside your house to see flowers. My friend, don't bother with that excursion. Inside your body there are flowers. One flower has a thousand petals.'

The thousand-petalled flower is Enlightenment and glimpses of that flower are available to us all. The beauty of meditation is that we can use the misery generated by the Successful, Suffering and Righteous Egos as a portal to a transformed experience of life.

In July 2020, my dad died after a month isolated in a Covid-ridden hospital without visitors. I was overcome with sadness and anguish. The pain was provoked by thoughts of what had happened. But that pain, in turn, fuelled more thoughts.

As I delved into the pain in meditation - feeling the sadness as deeply as possible - my thoughts were deprived of the energy imparted by attention and started to subside. As the thinking subsided, so did the thought-driven pain in my chest.

Eventually, a tiny gap appeared in the chain of thoughts. Through that gap, an intense point of love and bliss sparked in my chest. I made a short entry in my journal four days after my dad had died: 'Bliss in the afternoon meditation.' ●

MEET THE AUTHOR



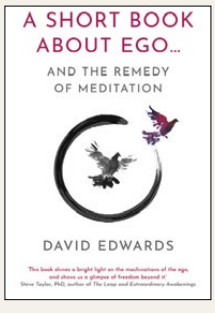
DAVID EDWARDS is co-editor of the media watch website Media Lens, which has 76,000 followers on X and was awarded The Gandhi Foundation's International Peace Prize in 2007. David has published a number of books on political, philosophical and spiritual themes. His first novel, *The Man with No Face,* a mystical, science-fiction thriller, will be published by Roundfire Books in March 2027.

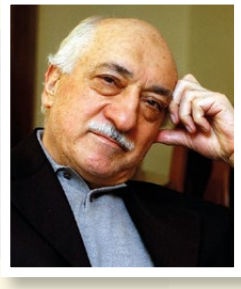
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Bookshelf

A SHORT BOOK ABOUT EGO... AND THE REMEDY OF MEDITATION BY DAVID EDWARDS, *published by Mantra Books, Paperback (144 pages)*





FETHULLAH GÜLEN
(27 April 1941 - 20 October 2024)

Born in the village of Korucuk, near Erzurum, Turkey, Muhammed Fethullah Gülen was a Muslim scholar, preacher, poet, and educator who supported interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

Inspired by the teachings of Said Nursi, Gülen first became known as a leading figure of the Nurcu movement. A gifted speaker and writer, he was described in the English-language media as an imam "who promoted a tolerant Islam which emphasises altruism, hard work, and education" and as "one of the world's most important Muslim figures".

Known for his simple and austere lifestyle, Gülen opposed violence and turning religion into a political ideology. In *Criteria or Lights of the Way*, he wrote: "Be so tolerant that your bosom becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love of human beings. Let there be no troubled souls to whom you do not offer a hand and about whom you remain unconcerned."

Rise Up (Colors of Peace), a musical project to turn Gülen's poems and writings in Turkish into songs, was released as an international, cross-cultural album in 2013. The same year, Gülen was named as one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People.

In the late 1970s in Turkey, he founded the Gülen movement, an international network of schools, charities, and media outlets spanning over 160 countries. In 2014, a documentary film titled *Love Is a Verb* was released about the movement.

In Turkey, the ruling AK Party accused the movement of infiltrating state institutions and after the attempted coup of 2016, President Erdoğan blamed Gülen and his supporters for carrying out the plot. Gülen always denied the allegation.

From 1999 until his death in October 2024, Gülen lived in self-exile in the United States, where he continued to write and teach. He was buried at the Chestnut Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, where he had been living for the last 25 years. His funeral, held in a stadium in New Jersey, was attended by 15,000.

Stephen Gawtry



JOANNA MACY
(2 May 1929 - 19 July 2025)

Born Mary Joanne Rogers in Los Angeles, Joanna Macy was best known as an environmental activist, Buddhist scholar, and systems thinker, whose work encouraged generations to face ecological crisis with courage rather than surrendering to hopelessness.

Over a career spanning more than five decades, Macy became one of the most influential voices in environmental thought, blending insights from Buddhism, ecology, psychology, and systems theory. She developed "The Work That Reconnects," a transformative framework that encouraged people to acknowledge their grief for the world while discovering renewed commitment to action.

Macy received her Ph.D. in religious studies in 1978 from Syracuse University, New York. Her doctoral work, under the mentorship of Ervin László, focused on convergences between causation in systems thinking and the Buddhist central doctrine of interdependent co-arising, the subject she later featured in her seminal book *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (first published in 1991). Macy's writings became essential reading for environmentalists, educators, spiritual seekers, and activists. Among her other important works are *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (1983), *World as Lover, World as Self* (1991), *Coming Back to Life* (1998, revised 2014), and *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In Without Going Crazy* (2012, with Chris Johnstone).

At a time when climate anxiety became increasingly widespread, Macy's message resonated across cultures and generations: grief and love are inseparable, and both can become sources of action. She wrote: "Pain for the world is a measure of caring", and "the heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe."

Joanna Macy died on July 19, 2025, in Berkeley, California, at the age of 96. She is survived by her children, grandchildren, and a global community of people whose lives were transformed by her wisdom and compassion. Her legacy lives on in countless workshops, communities, and movements inspired by her vision of what she called the "Great Turning" toward a life-sustaining society.

Klaus Herold

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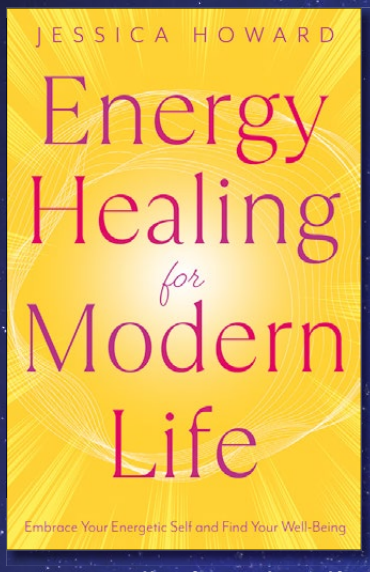
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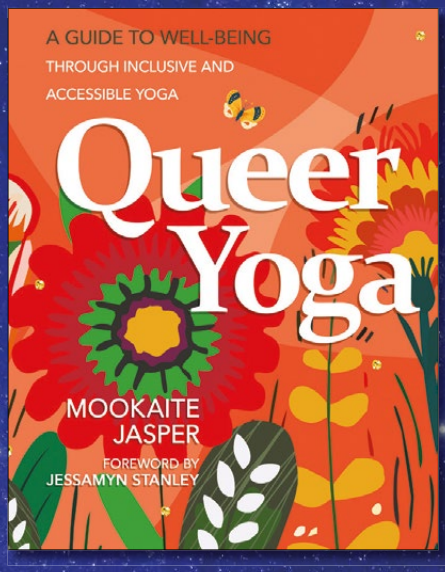
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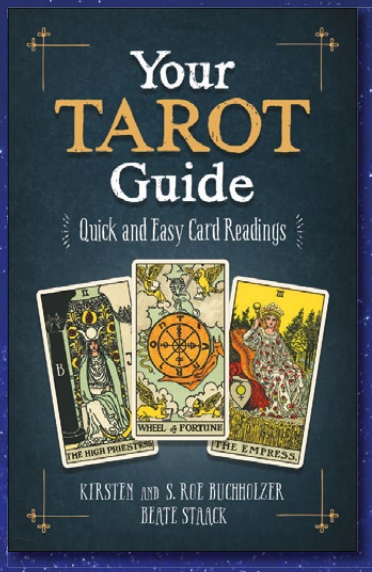
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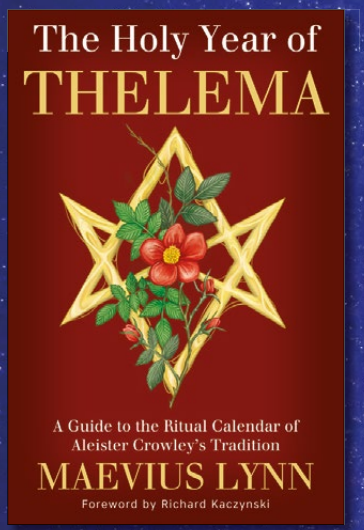
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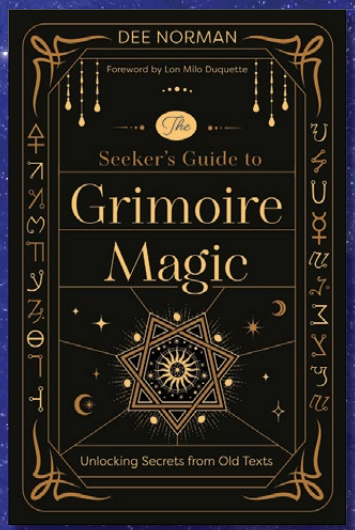
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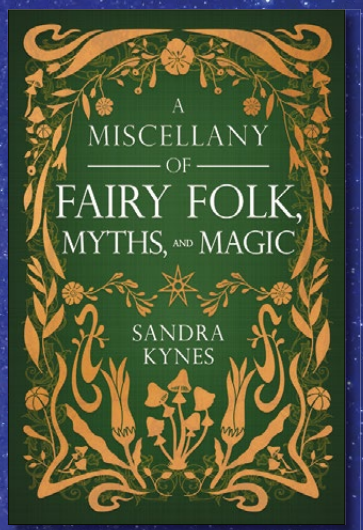
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