

MEDITATION

AWAKENING ISSUE

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95
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AWAKENING



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A Lesson in OJAYA Deep Meditation — by Sukaishi David

Secrets of Meditation Mantras

Empower Yourself with Clear, Calm, Dynamic Energy — in 10-20 Minutes

Is Your Mantra Organic?

And what exactly is a mantra, anyway?

Here are 18 Things You Need to Know:

1. The word *mantra* means ...

“tool of thought.” Throughout the ages, mantras are the #1 tool to attain extremely deep, blissful meditation.

2. *Mantra* is a Sanskrit word ...

... from India. But mantras themselves are not Sanskrit, or English, or any world language for that matter, because ...

3. Mantras are the organic sounds of Nature.

A mantra is a series of simple, beautiful sounds ... whispered by Mother Nature herself. *Mantras are the language of Nature.* Next time you're walking in the forest, listen carefully. Mother Nature is humming all around you with the soothing sounds ... of mantras!

4. Mantras were discovered ...

in the deep green forests by ancient sages as they sat immersed in the tranquility of their meditations. An example of what they heard is the familiar “OM” mantra.

5. Mantras work through their power of resonance.

As you mindfully meditate on the sound of an organic mantra, your consciousness resonates into a coherent state in a mere few minutes. You get infused with peace, energy and renewed enthusiasm.



With just 10-20 minutes a day, the ancient **OJAYA** Armor Technique creates an “armor” of serene energy and core inner strength — to shield and protect you from the stresses of daily living.

6. Mantras are not affirmations

... such as, “May my mind be at ease.” Affirmations have their value, but they lock your mind onto the surface thinking levels and do not take you to the deepest, quiet, blissful depths of your inner Self.

For this, you need a true mantra.

7. Mantras have flavors!

Like music, every mantra vibrates in unique ways for positive effects in your mind, your heart, and your entire system.

8. Mantras pull you inwards.

The pure, soothing resonance of special “Armor” mantras allows you to fully relax your mind and body. With proper technique, these mantras gently guide your awareness *inwards* — a deep, refreshing dive into the calm ocean of your Being.

This exceptional ability to *effortlessly* draw you *inwards* is a key reason why Armor mantras are favored throughout the centuries as the #1 technique for easy, blissful, deep meditation.

9. Mantras penetrate deep.

When you know the ancient, authentic secrets of *correct use*, a potent mantra has immense power to resonate *deep within you* — to cleanse your internal network of subtle nerves, called *nadis*.

10. Mantras remove negative energies and brain fog.

Silent mindfulness of a powerful mantra dissolves the frenzy in your brain and creates a soothing comfort throughout your entire body and being. Your mind becomes clear and calm.

11. Mantras are restful.

Mantras coax you deep within to a profound state of *deep rest* called *samadhi* — that is far deeper than your sleep at night. This exquisite level of rest rejuvenates you with dynamic energy in 10-20 minutes.

12. Anti-anxiety “Armor” to shield and protect you ...

If you feel anxious, there is a reason for it. The classic meditation masters say your inner harmony has become disturbed. They have a simple and easy remedy: the “Armor” mantra.

The ancient **OJAYA** technique uses a powerful *anti-anxiety Armor mantra* that probes your deepest depths with its calm, penetrating resonance. These healing sounds quickly retune and reharmonize your system.

The anxiety dissolves and evaporates.

Ancient sages advise *Armor mantras* as the #1 fastest way to defeat anxiety and empower you with serene energy.

13. Mantra benefits add up!

As you meditate each day with a potent mantra, the blissful energies soon accumulate and strengthen, deep inside you.

14. Mantras are the fast track

... to health, happiness and higher states of consciousness. Far superior to breath practices, *Armor mantras* introduce a *brand new, energizing resonance* into your awareness — *that wasn't there before.*

This power of *energizing resonance* is why meditation masters throughout the ages have declared *mantra meditation* as the supreme inner technology — the #1 *fast track* to health and happiness.

16. Are you a monk?

Most people don't realize that mantras are categorized as “monk mantras” and “householder mantras.”

Householder mantras are for people who want deep inner peace along with outer success in life. These expansive and energizing mantras support the goals of families, the arts and sciences, business people, and those who want to enjoy and share happiness with others.

Monk mantras gradually work to create a detached and reclusive state of mind, and are suited only to people with cloistered objectives.

Big surprise: The ancient sages classify “OM” as a monk mantra (which is why it's most often suggested by monks). Powerful *householder mantras* are advised for people who lead dynamic, active lifestyles ... especially ...

17. The “Armor” Mantra

The **OJAYA** Armor Mantra is known as the “Mantra of Heroes.” In addition to intensive anxiety relief, this rarest class of Armor mantra develops the esteemed qualities of valor, inner strength, emotional balance and heartfelt compassion. This protective mantra aggressively *attacks* and dissolves stress — so you can meet challenges

in your everyday life head-on ... with an armor of clear, calm, dynamic energy.

18. Mantra meditation is ...

... much more than just closing your eyes and thinking a mantra. Without proper technique, the mantra won't resonate for you. It's super easy, but there's an *art* to it!

Learn and master the ancient secrets of the rare OJAYA Armor Mantra technique on our easy Course — 100% online!

YOU ARE DEEP
— like an ocean —

The rare, potent **OJAYA** “Armor” Mantra pulls you gently inwards ... to the quiet, blissful depths of your own inner Self.

Mantra
Mantra
Mantra
Mantra
Mantra
Mantra

Depth of Consciousness

Your Calm, Blissful Depths

15. Armor mantras awaken.

With daily dips into the restful, tranquil depths of your inner Self, something new happens within you ...

... *Your deeper levels of consciousness begin to wake up.* New talents and fresh creative energies emerge inside you as you experience ever deeper revelations and insights. Higher states of realization dawn within your awareness.



Learn **OJAYA** “Armor” Meditation 100% online at:

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A Letter From The Editor

Words by Kevin Ellerton. Photos by Jovanna & Kevin.

Welcome to this extra special 10th issue of Meditation Magazine!

Before starting this issue, I had a clear (if narrow) definition of Spiritual Awakening. But the interviews in this Awakening Issue have given me a wider view, which has helped me see the big picture of our current situation here at Meditation Magazine.

THE UNLIKELY RISE OF MEDITATION MAGAZINE

When I created meditationmag.com back in 2014, it was just a blog. It was a creative outlet for me. I wanted to make the world a happier place through meditation, so I started writing articles. Jovanna and I began interviewing monks, nuns, and spiritual teachers about their awakening experiences, and publishing articles & interviews on meditationmag.com.

By 2016, some of our articles had gone viral. Readers began asking where they could buy “the physical magazine,” and eventually, we took the bait.

We printed our pilot issue in 2018, from our tiny apartment in Greenwich Village. We had no idea how to make a magazine. The layouts were very basic. We printed at an inexpensive local printer, and it came out looking more like a pamphlet than a professional magazine.

Still, we were proud of our art, writing, and interviews, and were thrilled to receive the boxes of magazines from the printer, which stacked up to the ceiling, and nearly filled up our entire apartment. We lugged those fifty-pound boxes around Greenwich

Village, handing out magazines on MacDougal Street, at Washington Square Park, and in the subway station at West 4th. We brought stacks of mags to local yoga studios and cute little bookstores like *Unoppressive Non-Imperialist Bargain Books* in the West Village

(pictured, left). We tried to put our mags on tables at the Whole Foods at Union Square, but the cleaning crew kicked us out.

When we got the news in 2019 that Whole Foods and Barnes & Noble were picking up Meditation Magazine, we jumped up and down with joy. Our second issue was on shelves nationwide, our third was in Canada too, and our fourth was on shelves in thousands of stores in 20+ countries around the world. We went from interviewing local spiritual teachers to world-famous luminaries like Wim Hof, Deepak Chopra, Sadhguru, and Tara Brach.

Meditation Magazine was growing rapidly, and finally making the impact that I had always dreamed of making. Our subscriber base was growing at an accelerating pace through Facebook ad campaigns. The sky was the limit. Projecting that continued subscriber growth would allow us to sustain an increased publishing frequency, we went from printing one, to two, to four issues per year.



Bottom-left: Unoppressive Non-Imperialist Bargain Books. Left: Jovanna holds up our first national issue on MacDougal Street. Above: Kevin finds our mags in a Barnes & Noble (in Miami!) for the first time, in 2019.

UPHEAVAL IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY

When the pandemic hit in 2020, magazine sales plummeted, print ad sales dried up, and shipping blockades slowed delivery times dramatically. Our mags were taking 6+ months to reach Australia/NZ (many mags never arrived), and we lost the majority of our subscribers in the Eastern Hemisphere. In 2021, paper became scarce, and the cost of printing skyrocketed. Our first issue cost us \$4,000 to print and distribute; our fifth issue cost closer to \$40,000. In this global economic maelstrom, we went from profitable and growing fast, to losing money and struggling to survive.

We did our best to adapt and evolve, but these were industry-wide problems that took down a huge number of print magazines between 2020 and 2023, including behemoths like Entertainment Weekly, InStyle, O Magazine, Parade, Allure, Health, Backpacker, Ski, Yoga Journal, and more.

Personally, I take pride in using meditation & mindfulness to find creative solutions to problems and accomplish things that others deem impossible. The fact that our small family-run magazine has survived this long, in a storm that has taken down massive publications, is a testament to the power of meditation.

I am writing this Editor’s Letter on March 31st, 2023. This Awakening Issue was supposed to be on shelves over a week ago, but we have not had the money to print it yet. We need around \$40k, but we have less than a tenth of that in the bank at this point. I have been working non-stop for the past few months, doing everything I can to get this issue to print on time, but things are not looking good. Even if we could start printing today, this issue would still take another 3-4 weeks to reach

our retailers and subscribers, and end up being over a month late.

While I am doing my best to handle these problems calmly, creatively, and effectively, dealing with one impossible situation after another over the past three years has put a lot of stress on my nervous system, which is burning out my brain and eroding my effectiveness over time.

I have a responsibility to deliver magazines to our thousands of subscribers. I have a duty to the friends, colleagues, and subscribers who have invested tens of thousands of dollars to help sustain our company over the past few years. I also have a responsibility to take care of my wife, daughter, and, soon, my aging parents. In 2018, when we started printing, these responsibilities were not in conflict with one another... but the world of 2023 is another story.

During the day, I can manage the stress of these situations through breathwork, meditation, mindfulness, and getting things done. But when I lie down to sleep, and my mind wanders into dreamland, the crushing weight of impossible timelines and financial situations lands squarely on my chest, forcing the breath from my lungs and waking me up multiple times per night.



PHOTOS: UNOPPRESSIVE BOOKS BY BRECHT BUG, JOVANNA BY KEVIN, KEVIN BY JOVANNA



DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL & SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

At *The Awakening Summit* that we held in February, “The Dark Night Of The Soul” emerged as a major theme.

For many of the speakers, Spiritual Awakenings were preceded – and catalyzed – by periods of difficulty, suffering, and darkness. For each speaker, a long period of suffering climaxed in a painful breaking point. That Dark Night Of The Soul subsequently led to waking up to one’s life as it is – suddenly becoming aware of the habituated patterns of thought and behavior, the delusions, the darkness, the problems, and the long-running battles that one has been unsuccessfully fighting – naturally leading to the radical, life changing, often gut-wrenching changes needed to solve (or transcend) those problems once and for all.

Without Dark Nights of The Soul, we would continue plodding stubbornly along the paths that we carve for ourselves. Suffering seems terrible while we’re experiencing it, but it spurs us to make the painful changes that we need to make, to consciously create a better life, a brighter reality, and a happier world.



Well, I’ve been having a lot of dark nights lately. Without the insights I gained through the interviews in this issue, it would be hard for me to see those sleepless nights as anything other than negative, unfortunate suffering. But reflecting on this Awakening Issue, I can take a bigger-picture perspective, to realize that this suffering is actually the catalyst for me to make the difficult, scary, and much-needed changes that will allow me and my family to thrive in the

years to come, put me back in touch with the bliss and love and inspiration with which I founded Meditation Magazine in the first place, and allow me to continue to make the world a happier place through meditation, mindfulness, and spirituality.

Today was the two-year anniversary of the birth of my daughter, Sky. I took a few hours off to celebrate her second year on Earth, and to be present with her for her birthday party. I spent the rest of the day talking to CEOs of larger meditation-related magazine companies, to see if someone wants to merge with, or acquire, Meditation Magazine.

At this point, I still don’t know how we’re going to print this issue. If you’re reading this in print, then I

must have found a way at some point in the (hopefully very near) future. I have several irons in the fire that might bring in the capital we need. Unlike the short-term loans we took last year, these are sustainable, long-term solutions, which involve major changes, investments, partnerships, and acquisitions.

No matter what happens – whether we can afford to print this issue or not, whether we are acquired by a larger company, or find some partner, investor, or strategy that allows us to remain an independent publication – I am committed to fulfilling Meditation Magazine’s responsibilities to all of our subscribers, partners, investors, vendors, and colleagues. As always, I am doing everything in my power to overdeliver, above and beyond our subscribers’ expectations. I will personally see to it that every subscriber receives more value than what they paid for. Even in our worst case scenario (if we aren’t able to continue printing magazines), we will offer subscribers a selection of valuable alternatives, from rare back issues, to digital subscriptions, online meditation courses, and more.

In a conversation with a friend a few months ago, I described our company’s financial situation, and the stress, anxiety, and overwhelm that go along with it, as “dark times.” This Awakening Issue has helped me put this into a much more uplifting context. We are currently moving through a Dark Night of The Soul, and into a period of Awakening. Whatever the next phase of Meditation Magazine may be, I know that it will be even more beautiful, wonderful, and beneficial to the world. With a more sustainable model, we will be able to grow and thrive, and be of service to readers like you in a more powerful way as well. I hope you will bear with us through this period of metamorphosis and awakening, so that we can all make this world a happier place, together. ●

The Awakening Issue

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MEDITATION

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-Kevin Ellerton, Editor in Chief, Meditation Magazine

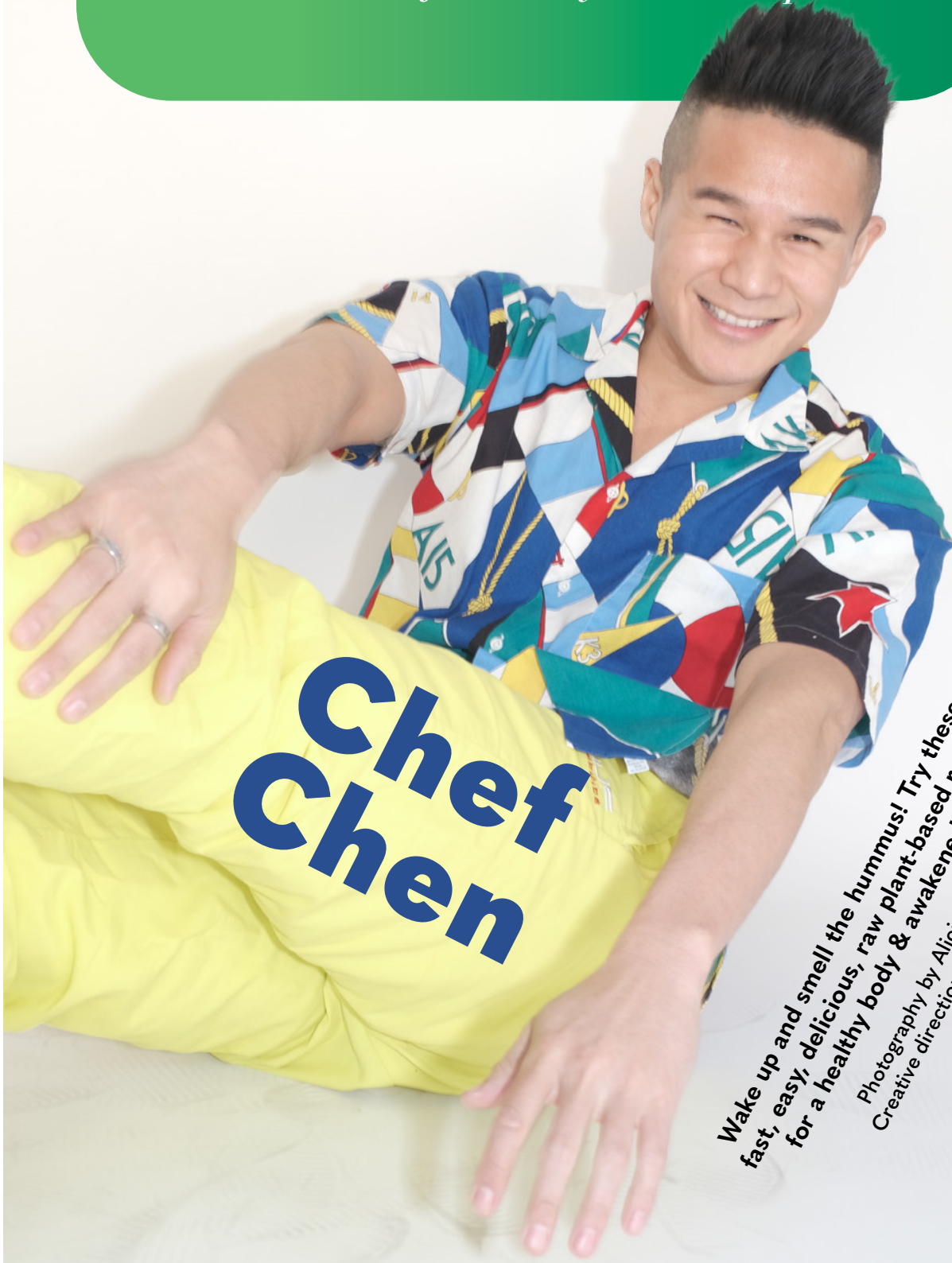


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Prep Time
10 mins
Cook Time
0 mins
Servings 3-5

Superfood Green Goddess Hummus



Ingredients

- 1 small garlic clove
- 1 15 ounce can chickpeas (cooked)
- 1/4 cup lime juice (2 limes)
- 2 green onions
- 2 cups basil leaves
- 1/4 cup tahini
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- 3/4 teaspoon pink himalayan salt
- 1/4 cup aquafaba (can liquid from the chickpeas)

For the garnish

- Olive oil, cilantro leaves, Crispy Chickpeas

Method

1. Peel the garlic. Drain the chickpeas into a liquid measuring cup. Juice the limes. Chop basil into 1 inch pieces, including the greens.
2. Add the garlic, basil, green onion to the bowl of a food processor and process until finely chopped. Add chickpeas, lime juice, tahini, cumin, pink salt, and water from the chickpea can (aquafaba). Puree for 30 seconds, then scrape down the bowl. Taste. If necessary, add 1 to 2 tablespoons aquafaba. Puree for 1 to 2 minutes to come to a creamy consistency. Store refrigerated for 7 to 10 days.
3. If desired, top the hummus with cilantro leaves, a drizzle of olive oil, and Crispy Chickpeas. Serve with veggies, pita bread, or crackers.

Lavender Beauty Zen Smoothie



Ingredients

- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1 drop of CBD oil
- 2 teaspoons of lavender extract
- 1/2 cup of frozen blueberries
- 1/2 cup frozen bananas
- Goji berries

Method

1. Instructions: Relax, Blend, & Recover!

Prep Time
5 mins
Cook Time
0 mins
Servings 1-2

Prep Time
15 mins
Cook Time
0 mins
Servings 10

Mint Chocolate Chip Protein Truffles



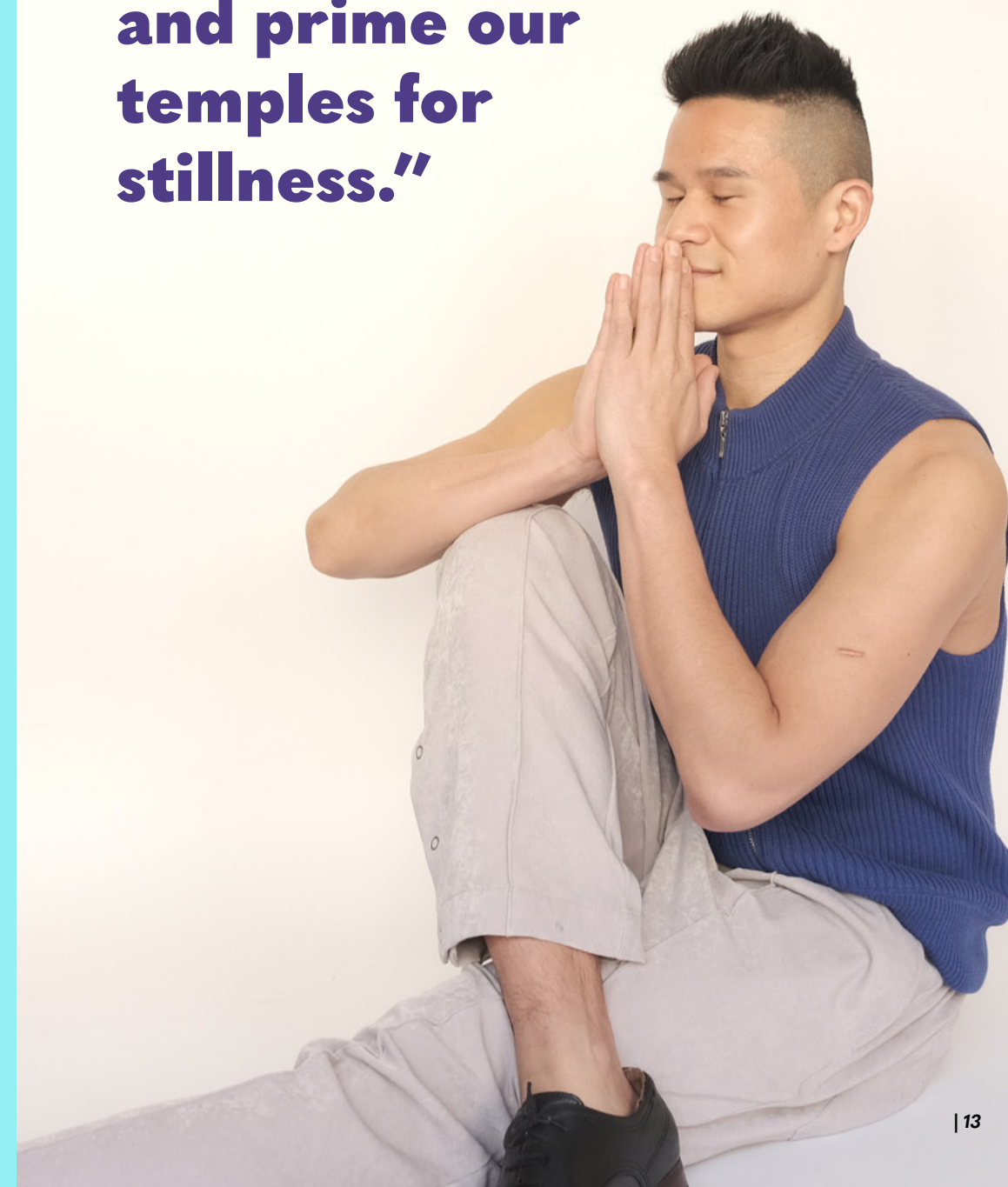
Ingredients:

- 1 cup raw almonds
- 1/4 cup unsweetened shredded coconut (plus extra for rolling)
- 2 Tbsp. maple syrup
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3/4 tsp. peppermint extract
- 2 pinches sea salt
- 1/4 cup cacao nibs
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips

Method

1. Blend all ingredients in food processor. Top with coconut, add fresh mint to serve. Chill in fridge prior to serving.

“Feeling good starts with how we nourish our bodies and prime our temples for stillness.”





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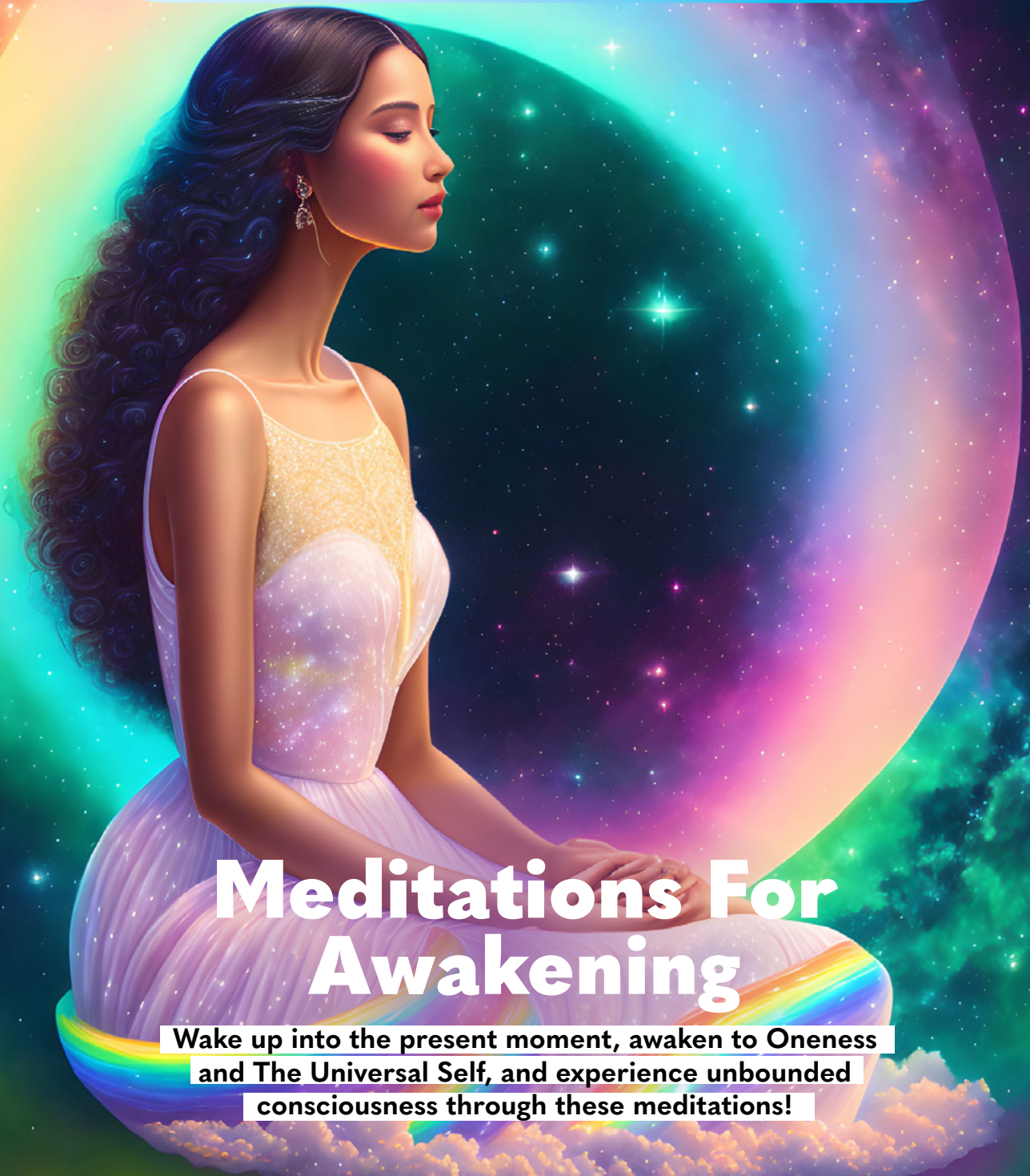
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MEDITATIONS

Guided tutorials to awaken to Reality



Meditations For Awakening

Wake up into the present moment, awaken to Oneness and The Universal Self, and experience unbounded consciousness through these meditations!

In this section, you'll find concise meditations (large colorful title text) alongside detailed elaborations (small body text). We recommend reading the elaborations to make sure you understand the meditations... but once you've got the gist, let go of the details and focus simply on the concise meditations. Enjoy!

WAKE UP

INTO THIS

MOMENT

MEDITATION

ELABORATION

Kevin Ellerton's book, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Awakening*, outlines a multi-step process of awakening from The Thought World to The Present Moment and finally to Oneness. The first step – awakening from Thought to Presence – can be accessed simply by shifting attention from thoughts (perhaps about things in the past or future) to the experience of the six senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought) in the present moment.

Brief introduction to this type of awakening: "Coming to your senses" is simple, natural, and easy. You don't need to do anything, because your senses are already functioning.* This awakening meditation is simply about realizing that you are already experiencing the present moment through your senses, and shifting your attention there.

SIGHT

Notice that you are already seeing. If you are reading this, then you are seeing words on a page. Notice that you are seeing these words in the center of your visual field, but that you are also seeing the page that they are printed on, and even things outside of that. Become conscious of your entire field of vision. Look around and notice the three-hundred-and-sixty-degree world of vision around you.

FORM: Notice the colors and shapes of the objects around you. Look around for a while.

FORMLESS: Notice the empty space between objects. Look around at the space for a while.

ONENESS: Notice that space exists not only between objects, and around objects, but also within objects – permeating objects and underlying them. Even in a location where there is dense matter (like this piece of paper, or a table, or a tree, or your body), there is also space. Take a moment to look at your hand and notice that it is permeated by space, and that it permeates the space that it inhabits.

Relax your eyes, relax your mind, and enjoy the sense of sight.

*If one or more of your senses are not operational (for example, if you are deaf or blind), you may choose to skip that sense, or you may meditate upon it in the same way as the other senses, and observe what arises. We'd love to hear about your experience (and possibly publish it on our website or social media)! Write to us at hello@meditationmag.com

SOUND

Notice that you are already hearing. Become aware of the sounds that are present in your environment. Listen closely and notice the different qualities of sound that exist. The pitch, the timbre, the volume, the rhythm. Become aware of the way that these qualities work together to create the soundscape of your environment.

FORM: Notice the specific sources of the sounds around you. The sound of a bird chirping, the hum of a car engine, the rustling of leaves in the wind. Pay attention to the unique qualities of each sound. Let them tickle and delight your ear drums.

FORMLESS: Notice the silence that exists between sounds. Listen to the silence for a while.

ONENESS: Notice that silence exists not only between the sounds, but also underlying them in the same way that space underlies objects. Notice that the infinite silence beneath the sounds provides the space for each sound to exist, and eventually, to dissolve back into the silence.

Relax your ears, relax your mind, and listen for a while to the sounds and the silence, coexisting as one harmonious whole.

TOUCH

Notice that you are already feeling sensations in your body. Become aware of the sensation of your body making contact with the surface beneath you. Notice the pressure, the texture, and the temperature of the surface.

Move your body slightly and notice the different sensations that arise. Become aware of the way that your muscles contract and relax, the way that your joints move, and the way that your body changes position in space.

FORM: Notice the specific sensations that arise in different parts of your body. The feeling of your feet on the ground, the sensation of your fingers as they touch each other, the way that your clothes feel against your skin. Pay attention to the unique qualities of each sensation.

FORMLESS: Notice if there are any parts of your body where no sensations are arising at all. Close your eyes and observe for a while. →

ONENESS: Take a few minutes to relax your body, relax your mind, observe the body sensations (and lack of sensations), and enjoy the sense of kinesthetic awareness.

SMELL

Notice that you are already experiencing the sense of smell.

Become aware of the different scents that are present in your environment. Pay attention to the way that different scents interact with each other and create a unique atmosphere.

FORM: Notice the specific sources of the scents around you, and pay attention to the unique qualities of each scent.

FORMLESS: When you inhale through your nose, you may notice a scent from your environment... but when you exhale through your nose, is there still a scent? Close your eyes and observe the scent of the inhale and the exhale for a while. Notice if there is some kind of “emptiness” that underlies the sense of smell as well, in the same way that silence underlies sounds.

ONENESS: Take a few minutes to just observe the air flowing in and out of your nose, noticing the scent of the inhale and the scent of the exhale. Notice that both change over time, creating a scentscape that includes both “on” and “off” – scent, and no-scent.

Relax your nose, relax your mind, and enjoy the sense of smell.

TASTE

Notice that you are already experiencing the sense of taste. Even if you’re not eating anything, there is the taste of the inside of the mouth.

FORM: Take a bite of a piece of fruit, close your eyes, chew very slowly, and taste it fully.

FORMLESS: Since we are always tasting the inside of our own mouths, it is hard to experience absolute emptiness in the sense of taste. But we can get a sense for it by noticing: where is the taste of the fruit before the fruit enters the mouth? What taste is there during the experience of the fruit? Where does the taste of the fruit go after it is gone from the mouth?

Through this meditation we can become aware of the emptiness in the sense of taste as well.

ONENESS: Take a few minutes to observe the form and formlessness of the sense of taste, as one unified whole experience.

Relax your tongue, relax your mind, and enjoy the sense of taste.

THOUGHT

Notice that you are already thinking.

Close your eyes and notice that there are already thoughts floating through your mind.

FORM: Notice the specific thoughts in your mind. The memory of a pleasant experience, the worry about an upcoming event, the reflection on a recent conversation. Pay attention to the unique qualities of each thought.

FORMLESS: Listen to the silence that exists between the thoughts. Notice the peaceful, empty, spacious consciousness that provides a space for thoughts to arise and pass away. Allow yourself to sink into the stillness and tranquility of clear, empty consciousness.

ONENESS: Notice that the thoughts that arise in your mind do not wash away or obliterate the peaceful, empty, silent consciousness that surrounds them. Consciousness is always there, underlying the thoughts, in the same way that silence underlies sounds, and space underlies objects.

Take a moment now to close your eyes, relax your mind and body, and observe your sense of thought, as thoughts drift in and out. But instead of following any specific train of thought, keep a big picture view by remaining grounded in the open spaciousness of consciousness. Watch as thoughts fade in and out of existence, in and out of consciousness, in and out of the infinite space and silence that is always there, surrounding and underlying them.

Relax your mind, and enjoy the sense of thought.

ALL SIX SENSES AT ONCE



WAKE UP INTO
THE FULL EXPERIENCE
OF ALL SIX SENSES
IN THIS MOMENT



**MEDITATION
ELABORATION**

Allow this moment to simply exist, without the need for doing or achieving anything.

Let go of the desire to change anything, and simply allow everything to be as it is.

In this moment, there is nothing that you need to do, no place that you need to go, no problem that you need to solve.

Allow everything to be as it is, without the need for judgment or analysis. Simply witness your experience in the here and now.

Allow your thoughts and emotions (even the dark & difficult ones) to come and go like waves in the ocean. Observe them with curiosity and acceptance, without the need to control or manipulate them in any way.

Notice the sensations in your body, the way that

your breath moves in and out of your lungs, and the way that your heart beats in your chest. Allow yourself to fully experience these sensations (even the painful & uncomfortable ones), without needing to change or fix anything.

In this state of non-doing, non-judging, and allowing, you may find a deep sense of peace and contentment. You may begin to realize that everything is already perfect as it is.

Allow yourself to fully embody this state of being, and carry it with you as you go about your day. Remember that in every moment, you have the choice to simply be, to allow everything to be as it is, and to embrace the beauty and perfection of the present moment.





MEDITATION

REST AS AWARENESS

An excerpt from an Adyashanti teaching

Rest as awareness. If you did this one simple thing with any consistency, that would be amazing. Because the hardest thing to do is to stay with one simple thing with any kind of consistency.

It's easy to stay with something very complex. I could give a very complex, complicated, intricate, interesting, maybe even entertaining spiritual teaching, and you could stay with that with such consistency. You could think about it for days or weeks, or you may even be able to think about it for months, and if you were captured by it, you could be very consistent about it.

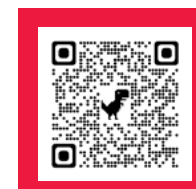
But to give anybody something extraordinarily simple – 'Here's the teaching and the method: rest

as awareness' – it's a little more difficult to have any consistency with that. Because there's nothing for the egoic mind to do. And it gets a little nervous when there's not much for it to do. It gets a little unsettled.

Nonetheless, that's the core teaching. And if you want to call it a technique, that's the core technique. That's it.

If resting as awareness really starts to happen for you, then at some point it will dawn on you that you and awareness are not two different things. You aren't actually somebody who's resting as awareness. That was actually kind of a notion, an idea of 'you.' Actually, awareness is much more what 'you' are than all the ideas that you ever had about yourself in your life.

- Adyashanti



GO TO [YOUTU.BE/HIX_ZK5NN6G](https://youtu.be/HIX_ZK5NN6G)
OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO
WATCH THE FULL VIDEO!

ELABORATION

YOU ARE HERE

Most meditations require you to do something, to know something, to be aware of something, or to experience something. This one does not.

You don't need to do anything in order to exist. You already exist.

You don't need to know anything in order to be here. You are already here.

You don't need to be aware, experience, or even be... because you already are.

No matter where you go, no matter what you do, no matter what your state of mind...

You are here.



WHO

ARE

YOU?

Neti, neti, literally translated as “not this, not this” in Sanskrit, is a meditation practice that comes from the Hindu tradition of Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta.

The core teaching of Advaita Vedanta is that all is One. The idea that “you” and “I” are separate “selves” from the Oneness is an illusion. “The True Self” is called Brahman (The Oneness, The Universe, God, or whatever you want to call it). We are The Universe experiencing itself.

In neti, neti meditation, we let go of our identifications with everything ephemeral, and thereby realize that we are actually Brahman.

How to practice:

Find a quiet place where you can sit and meditate without being disturbed. Sit in a cross-legged position on a cushion or on a chair with your feet on the ground.

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to relax your body and calm your mind. Then, begin to focus your attention on your breath, as it enters and exits your nostrils. Allow your breathing to become slow and natural.

When you feel relaxed and centered, ask yourself the question “Who am I?” as you keep your attention centered on the sensation of the breath entering and exiting your nostrils.

Observe your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and any external objects you may become aware of.

As you become aware of each object, whether it’s a thought, emotion, sensation, or external object, mentally say “neti, neti” or “not this, not this,” detaching yourself from identifying with it.

Continue this process of observing and negating, as you gradually shift your focus inward, searching for the true self beyond the transient objects of perception.

As you practice, you may begin to experience a deeper sense of unity with the underlying Oneness, recognizing the non-dual nature of reality.

Stay with the question “Who am I?” and continue to allow any thoughts or sensations that arise to pass through your mind without attachment.

Finally, when you feel ready, let go of the questioning and simply rest in the stillness and emptiness of your mind. Allow yourself to experience the true nature of the self, beyond all thoughts and beliefs.

When you are ready to end your meditation, slowly bring your attention back to your breath and allow yourself to become aware of your surroundings. Take a few deep breaths and slowly open your eyes.



By regularly practicing “Neti Neti” meditation, you can learn to disidentify from your thoughts and beliefs and experience the true nature of Self – The One Reality – pure, unadulterated existence, consciousness, and bliss.



ALL IS ONE

We often think that we need to do something in order to “become” “one with everything.”
The truth is, everything is already One.
There is no “you” that needs to become one with “everything.”
There is just “everything.”
There is just Oneness.
Take a moment now to close your eyes and realize that you are already The Oneness.

You don’t need to bring the whole Universe into your mind in order to experience Oneness.
It’s not a matter of knowing The Universe, it’s a matter of being it. When you close your eyes, just experience whatever is arising in the present moment.
Whether there are thoughts, or no thoughts... whether there are sensations, or no sensations... it is all a manifestation of The Oneness.
Close your eyes and know that you are already One.
There is nothing more you need to do.

I AM LOVE

As the ego dissolves into the infinite, we realize that we are not separate beings. We are One.

When we rest in the Oneness, we can feel the deep sense of Love at the core of our Being.

Take a moment to rest in Oneness now, and feel the Love at the core of your Being.

Love is our true nature. It is at the core of who we are. But when we get wrapped up in the idea that we are separate beings, separate “selves,” we naturally, unconsciously try to hoard the Love for our individual selves, and our “loved ones.”

The Love that we hoard within ourselves manifests as the desire to preserve and replicate ourselves (survival & reproduction). It drives us to seek out and obtain material things, power, money, and pleasurable experiences for ourselves and our loved ones.

When boundless, infinite Love gets bottled up and trapped within a tiny individual human ego, it becomes a problem. It’s like filling a balloon with so much air that it stretches thin and eventually explodes.

When infinite Love is bottled up within an individual ego, its intensity manifests as obsessive

thinking, wanting, and needing... which, ironically, turns out to be the fundamental source of our suffering in life.

Heart-Awakening, or Awakening To Love, does not require us to generate Love. We are already Love, at the core.

The Love is already there.

As we allow the sense of self to expand, from the tiny individual ego to the Infinite Oneness, the Love naturally expands as well.

Instead of being bottled up, compressed, and intensified to the point of obsession and suffering, the Love expands to its natural size (boundless and infinite), and returns to its natural intensity and temperature.

When Self expands to the entire Universe, so does Love.

This universal, boundless, and infinite Love encompasses this human (the one that you often call “me”), and all other me’s, I’s, and conscious beings, throughout all the galaxies in all the Universes, in all the dimensions, in all the worlds.

Om Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu. All worlds, all beings, happy and free, as One may we be.





FEEL THE

ENERGY

Ananda Mandala, or “Circle of Bliss” meditation, was originally developed by disciples of Sri Amma Bhagavan at The Oneness University in India.

Ananda Mandala takes inspiration from the ancient Agnisar Kriya pranayama (breathwork) technique (which involves deep and rapid belly breathing), and adds kundalini & chakra work.

The deep, rapid breathing, combined with visualizing the chakras and chanting their mantras – starting with the root chakra at the base of the spine, and working our way up to the crown chakra above the top of the head – is a powerful way to activate the nervous system and awaken the energy of Kundalini.

This is an advanced meditation and should only be attempted by those who have already done some work in calming the mind (through mindfulness-style meditations), entering the present moment, and disidentifying with the personal ego.

Since Ananda Mandala is a very intense technique, pregnant women and cardiac patients are advised to refrain from this practice. People with respiratory problems are advised to try it out, but stop if it becomes uncomfortable.

Here is a brief tutorial for practicing Ananda Mandala meditation:

Find a quiet and peaceful place where you can sit and meditate. Sit in lotus, half-lotus, or cross-legged posture. If you can't sit in any of these postures, feel free to use a chair. Make sure your spine is straight and tall throughout the meditation. Take a few deep breaths and relax your body before you begin Ananda Mandala.

FIRST CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the first chakra (the Muladhara, at the base of your spine). Chant that chakra's mantra: “Lam.”

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra

(the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant “Ogum, satyam, om.”

SECOND CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the second chakra (the Svadhisthana, in the genital region). Chant that chakra's mantra: “Vam.”

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant “Ogum, satyam, om.”

THIRD CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the third chakra (the Manipura, in the solar plexus region). Chant that chakra's mantra: “Ram.”

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant “Ogum, satyam, om.”

FOURTH CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the fourth chakra (the Anahata, in the heart region). Chant that chakra's mantra: “Yam.”

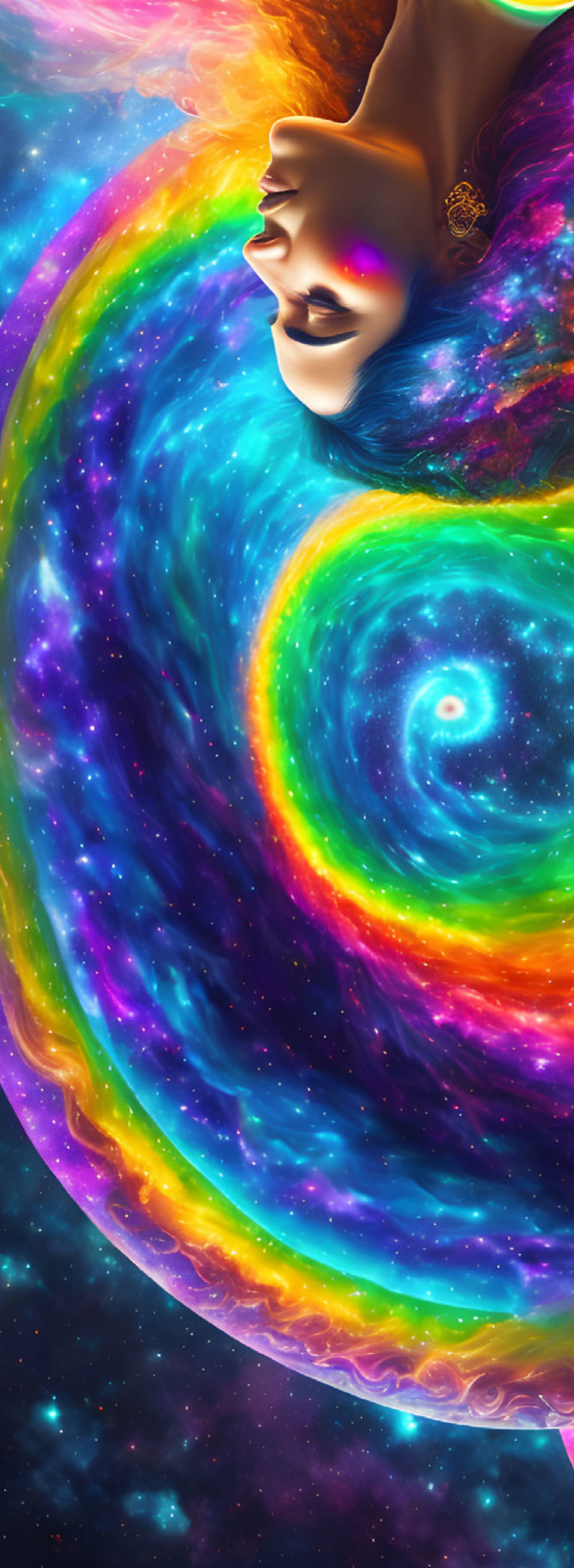
INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant “Ogum, satyam, om.”

FIFTH CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the fifth chakra (the Vishuddha, in the throat region). Chant that chakra's mantra: “Ham.”

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant “Ogum, satyam, om.” →



SIXTH CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the sixth chakra (the Ajna, located between the eyebrows). Chant that chakra's mantra: "Om."

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant "Ogum, satyam, om."

SEVENTH CHAKRA

Breathe deeply and rapidly for 2-3 minutes, with deep inhalations, and fast/forceful exhalations.

EXHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant "Ogum, satyam, om."

INHALE FULLY and focus on the seventh chakra (the Sahasrara, just above the crown of the head). Chant "Ogum, satyam, om."

Tips & Tricks

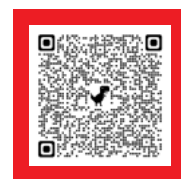
Remember to keep your focus on the breathing, and breathe only through the nose (if possible) throughout the meditation.

You will likely feel dizzy and tingly from the rush of oxygen, and the reduction of carbon dioxide in your blood. You may even have spasms in your hands, your face, or other parts of your body, that makes it hard to move. This is normal and natural, and it is part of the meditation. Enjoy the experience, even if you feel scared. It is healing your body and mind on a deep level.

When focusing on a chakra, focus on that particular chakra. Visualize the chakra as a spinning wheel of energy, and feel the energy flowing through your body.

Ananda Mandala meditation is designed to be practiced once per day, ideally during sunrise or sunset.

Ideally, Ananda Mandala meditation should be done in a group (sitting in a circle, holding hands, as a "circle of bliss"), but it can also be done individually.●



THIS MEDITATION IS MUCH EASIER TO PRACTICE WITH A VIDEO TO GUIDE YOU! GO TO [MEDITATIONMAG.COM/BLOG/CHAKRA-MEDITATION-ANANDA-MANDALA](https://www.meditationmag.com/blog/chakra-meditation-ananda-mandala) OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH!



Featured Yogi

SPINAL TWISTS

Twist your spine to unlock and release the energy of Kundalini!

With Featured Yogis Tara Schulenberg and Britt Deanda

Kundalini Yoga allows you to tap into higher awareness and your meditative mind. With this in mind, you can be intuitive and proactive. You are able to pick up on energetic signals and look at the bigger picture of your life and the circumstances you face. In this frame of mind, you can better pick up on the flow and create "commitments" or "intentions" that align more with your life.

This is a simple Kundalini yoga posture that has tons of benefits and can help awaken and raise the

Kundalini energy that lies in the base of your spine. This posture activates the lower triangle of chakras (root, sacral and solar plexus) and through the breath, twisting movement, and timing, this practice works to strengthen your nervous system on a cellular level, increase your level of self-awareness, and generate a sense of calm and a more balanced control of your body and emotions. Spinal twists can also improve your posture, clear your nasal passages, energize your body, and aid in digestion. →

PHOTOS: ASHLEY STREFF

How to Practice

Starting from Easy Pose (a seated cross-leg position), grasp the shoulders with the fingers in front, and the thumbs in back. Elbows are parallel to the ground.

Inhale and twist to the left, exhale and twist to the right. Breathing is long and deep. Eyes are closed. Continue for 1-3 minutes.

To end, inhale facing forward and bring the elbows upward by the ears. Exhale, relax the breath.



TIPS & TRICKS

This practice can be done any time of the day on an empty stomach, preferably in the mornings.

Try to speed up practice, if you can, to increase energy and flow. No matter how fast you twist, keep the inhale to the left and exhale to the right.

Expand your belly out on the inhale and contract it in on the exhale.

Focus on the breath first, movement second.



CAUTIONS

Do not practice if you have an injury related to hips, spine, neck, shoulders, lower back, or have undergone any recent heart or abdominal surgery.

Not recommended for pregnant women or women on the first 3 days of their moon cycle.

Only inhale when twisting to the left and exhale twisting to the right.



THE BENEFITS

This pose is a gentle yet powerful way of lengthening the spine and opening the ribs and sides of the torso to help calm the mind and energize the body.

This is a great pose to include in your warm-ups before a Kundalini Kriya (a sequence of poses, mantras and breathwork) or meditation.

This practice helps to raise the energy that lies at the base of the spine.

About Britt & Tara

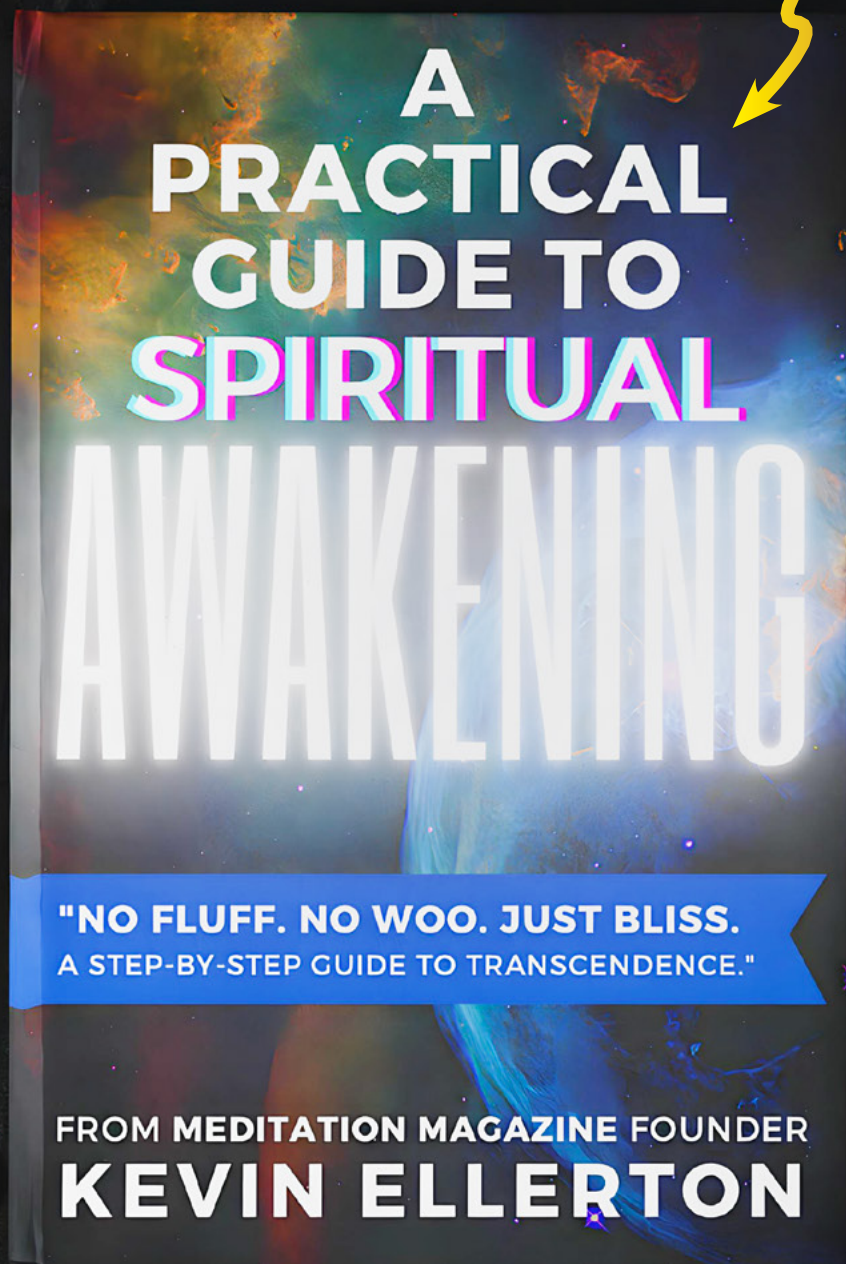
Britt Deanda and Tara Schulenberg are long-time best friends, co-founders of Elevate the Globe™ and their live stream and in-person studio, Studio Intune™. They are certified Kundalini yoga and meditation instructors, reiki practitioners, and healers here to normalize navigating emotions and to raise consciousness on the planet.

They are high-vibrational living experts who pair the energy work of Kundalini yoga with mindset training and cosmic syncing to help people align with their own truth and the best way of living.

The transmission of energy they provide ignites people from all walks of life to uplevel and step into their power as happy, healthy, and abundant lightworkers elevating the globe.

Their obsession is helping people heal to live a life beyond their wildest dreams... to leave the “status quo” behind, and call in a life that’s magical and extraordinary through simple daily habits and shifts in perception! You can follow Britt & Tara on Instagram or TikTok @elevatetheglobe ●

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EXPLORATIONS

Spiritual journeys on Planet Earth (and beyond)

Paths Up The Mountain

Kevin & Jovanna set out on a decade-long adventure around the world to find the meaning of Awakening & Enlightenment.

Words by Kevin Ellerton. Photos by Jovanna & Kevin.

We've written about specific adventures before. We had an article about India & Nepal in the Wim Hof issue, and pieces about Cambodia and Bali in the Universe Issue. But we've never attempted to compile a feature on our entire Paths Up The Mountain journey.

After writing *A Practical Guide To Spiritual Awakening*, Jovanna and I began traveling around the world, interviewing gurus and spiritual teachers about their experiences of awakening and enlightenment.

In 2015, we drove from Miami to New York, where we interviewed Buddhist monks and nuns in the Catskill Mountains. We then flew to Bangkok, and traveled through Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, interviewing Buddhist, Hindu, and New Age teachers along the way.

In 2016, we flew to India. We had our hearts blown open at Amma's Ashram at the southern tip of India, and traveled overland all the way up to Rishikesh in the Himalayas, interviewing Hindu/Yogic teachers along the way.

In 2017, we crossed into western Nepal in a rickshaw from India, and traveled overland all the way through Pokhara, Kathmandu, and finally to Tengboche, the world's highest monastery, 12,664 feet up in the Himalayas, on the trail to Mount Everest.

In 2018, we explored Vietnam, and from there flew to Bali, Indonesia, where we met Punnu Singh Wasu and experienced Kundalini awakening for the first time.

In 2018, we moved to Greenwich Village in NYC, where we printed our first issue of *Meditation Magazine*, and began interviewing some well-known spiritual teachers & leaders. We interviewed Trevor Hall after his show in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

In 2019, we began doing interviews remotely. We spoke with Wim Hof, Rachel Brathen, Deepak Chopra, Sadhguru, Tara Brach, Jessamyn Stanley, Kimberly Snyder, Gabby Bernstein, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Adyashanti, and many more.

In 2021, we had a baby, moved to Florida, and are continuing our adventures here. What comes next? I guess we'll just have to find out!



THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS

EXPLORATIONS



The Catskill Mountains is a region of Upstate New York known for its forested mountaintops, verdant nature trails, and deep blue lakes.

The Catskills is home to several Buddhist monasteries, including Dai Bosatsu Zendo (Japanese Zen), Blue Cliff Monastery (Vietnamese), and Dharma Drum Retreat Center (Chinese Chan).

At left: a wise old rock at Blue Cliff Monastery.

We began our interview series in the Catskill mountains of New York, in 2015, at a Zen Buddhist monastery called Dai Bosatsu.

We could hardly have found a more picturesque location: an immaculate wooden Zendo in a beautiful Japanese monastery nestled among forested mountaintops, with a wooden dock jutting out into a big blue lake that mirrors the sky and the fluffy clouds floating above.

Shinge Roshi, the abbot of the monastery, is the first female Zen master ordained outside of Japan, Shinge was amused by our questions about Awakening and Enlightenment.

“You can’t ask for a description of Enlightenment! It’s something to be experienced. You’re talking about something that can’t be put into words.”

But as I kept pressing, beautiful gems emerged.

“The experience of Enlightenment is an Awakening beyond the Samadhi state. There can be a trigger that breaks open all the need for identification, categorization, definition. From the outside, suddenly you’re inside. And everything’s at once outside-inside-no-gap. So this ‘no gap’ feeling is no longer just a taste on the cushion when you’re in meditation, but really changes your life.”

From (Japanese Zen) Dai Bosatsu, we explored nearby monasteries, including (Vietnamese Buddhist) Blue Cliff (one of Thich Nhat



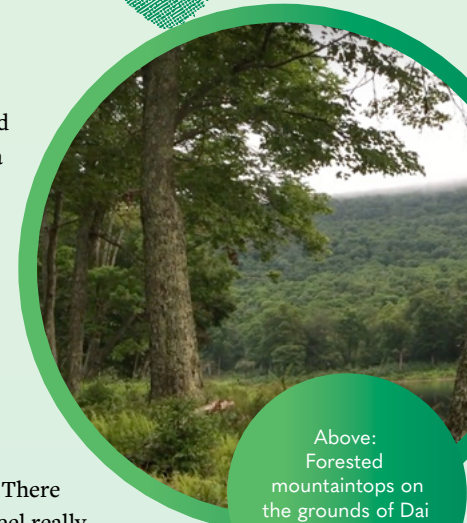
Left: Shinge Roshi talking to Kevin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo.

Hanh’s monasteries) and (Chinese Chan) Dharma Drum retreat center.

“We’re all part time Buddhas,” Sister Ocean explained.

Jean Anselmo elaborated: “The Buddha was a fully awakened one, so awake all the time. We have moments of awakening. There are moments when we feel really connected, when we feel really alive, when we feel really present. And there are other times when we’re not! That’s what human beings are about. So it’s not a destination that we’re headed toward. We’re allowing ourselves to practice [mindfulness & meditation] so that we can be present and awake more often.”

At Dharma Drum Retreat Center, Dharma teacher →



Above: Forested mountaintops on the grounds of Dai Bosatsu Zendo



Right: The bell at Dai Bosatsu Zendo.



Left: Jean Anselmo and Sister Ocean talking about Awakening at Blue Cliff Monastery.

Rebecca Li described Awakening as being awake to what our minds are doing, so that we can make conscious (instead of unconscious) decisions, and avoid unnecessary problems.

“The moment we are able to truly be in the present moment, be truly fully aware... that is the moment that we are clearly aware of what our mind is doing. This allows us to see: ‘OK, I am about to do the things I always do to cause myself suffering. Since I’m seeing that very clearly, I can make the choice not to do that.’”

“It is very different from how we usually suffer,” Rebecca continued. “We are completely confused; we don’t know what our mind is doing, so we just perpetually cause ourselves suffering without being aware of it. When we do things that cause ourselves to suffer -- for example, we say something that we regret afterward -- we become mad at ourselves. It feels like

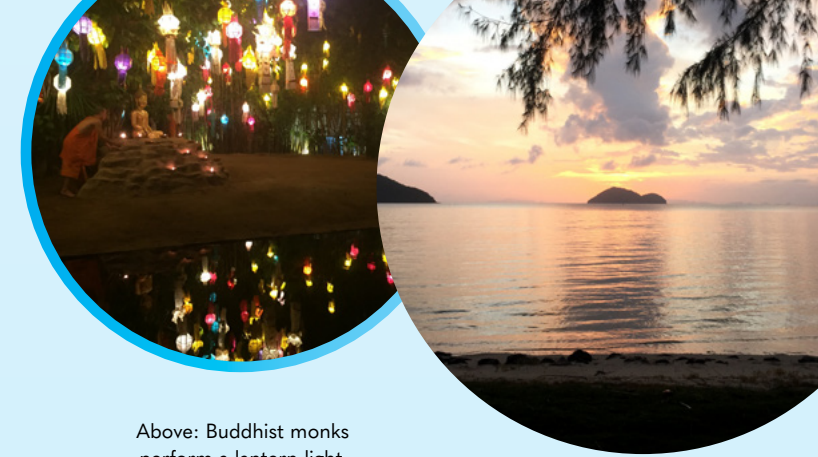
someone else is in control of our minds: ‘I didn’t mean to say that! But if it’s not me, who was it?’ It’s our unconscious habits that are propelling our actions of our minds, our speech, and our bodies.

“Whereas when one is fully present, and fully aware: ‘I know exactly what is arising in my mind. I know exactly what I’m doing when I’m choosing to stay with this thought, or choosing to go forward to say this word. I know it’s me doing this.’ It’s an entirely different experience.”

While Shinge Roshi (the Zen master) did make some subtle references to Oneness and Mystery, most of the Buddhists I spoke with in the Catskills were pretty clear: Awakening is being awake to (and aware of) what is arising in the present moment, so that we can live more consciously, appreciate each moment, respond appropriately to situations, avoid problems & suffering, and make more conscious decisions.



Jovanna walks down the street in Koh Chang, Thailand.



Above: Buddhist monks perform a lantern-lighting ceremony in a cave in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



Above: The view of the Gulf of Thailand from our bungalow in Koh Phangan.

THAILAND



We flew from JFK in New York to BKK in Bangkok without a plan or agenda. After 30+ hours of travel, we were too tired to compare hotels, so we followed the first “travel advisor” who greeted us at the arrivals door and hoped for the best. After a few minutes in a taxi, we collapsed on a creaky mattress in a roach-infested hotel with shady characters roaming the halls and a door that didn’t seem to lock. We piled our luggage in front of the door, and, as we fell asleep, promised each other that we would plan ahead better as we moved forward in our travels.

In the morning we made our way to Khao San Road, Bangkok’s bustling backpackers’ street that I had enjoyed when I’d explored Thailand for the first time in my early twenties. It seemed louder this time, with more drunk tourists and aggressive *kathoey*s grabbing at our arms. Still exhausted, we booked a flight to the Hippy Island of Koh Phangan.

A tropical gem in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Phangan was once a hippie haven, but its famous Full Moon Parties (with their cheap “buckets” of liquor) on the east side of the island have been attracting a more hedonistic crowd of late.

We rented a seaside hut on the (much quieter) west side of the island, where we recovered from our arduous journey and relaxed into idyllic paradise for nearly a month.

We spent our days meditating by the sea, watching glorious sunsets, eating coconuts and mangos from the market nearby.

When one of our neighbors heard that we were interested in Awakening and Enlightenment, she recommended talking to Ishi, the founder of Samma Karuna center for Awakening & Healing, just up the road to the north. So we took the scooter and headed north.

“At some point in my life, my mind became more calm, more quiet,” Ishi began, when I asked him about his experience of Awakening. “I woke up one day, and everything in my life was looking very simple. I had no more problems. My perception of the space was different. I could see and perceive things more in 3D, colors were more bright, I was more alive than before.”

My conversation with Ishi continued to reinforce the idea that “Awakening” means waking up into the experience of being alive, seeing through the clouds of the mind, and engaging with the senses in the present moment.

From Koh Phangan, we traveled up to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, where we explored elaborate Thai temples, enjoyed the “city life” (including ultra-modern movie theaters with beds in them!), and eventually caught the “slow boat” down the Mekong River into western Laos.



Right: Samma Karuna center for Awakening & Healing in Koh Phangan, Thailand (where we spoke with Ishi). Below: Jovanna looks out at elaborate Buddhist temple architecture in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

Western travelers and Laotian commuters share a multi-day journey down the Mekong, in the “slow boat” from Chiang Rai, Thailand, to Luang Phrabang, Laos.

LAOS

The slow boat from Chiang Rai in Thailand to Luang Phrabang in Laos – a multi-day journey down the Mekong River, winding dreamily around hills and mountains – was one of my favorite experiences in all of Southeast Asia.

This was pre-pandemic, when it was still fun to smooch into an old wooden boat with a bunch of hippies and travelers, playing guitar, swapping adventure stories, puffing on peace pipes together while relaxing deeply into The Present Moment. The friends we met on that boat traveled with us through Laos, sometimes meeting randomly in unexpected places, even as far as the south coast of Cambodia.

As wistful as we were to disembark after days of gazing upon the rolling jungles of western Laos, Luang Phrabang was an exciting new adventure, with its old French architecture and delicious French-inspired Cuisine.

We spent weeks sitting in cafes and restaurants by the shores of the Mekong, enjoying chocolate-covered banana pancakes, banana-leaf baskets filled with sticky rice (sooo much more delicious than it sounds), and Mekong river weed (delectable seaweed-like stuff that

often came crispy, with dipping sauces).

But we were on a quest to find the meaning of Awakening and Enlightenment, so we walked around from temple to temple. Our fluencies with the Lao and French languages were rather limited, so it took a while to find a monk who spoke English. Eventually we met a Laotian ex-monk named Nut who spoke enough English to answer our questions.

Nut explained that meditation can help us cultivate calm, avoid creating unnecessary anger and frustration, and live a more present, conscious life. But Nut continued:

“...but the main reason we meditate is to... to make yourself... um... how do you say...?”

As a Laotian native, English was not Nut’s first language. After a long pause, I tried suggesting some words.

“Aware?” Nut’s face showed that wasn’t the word he was looking for.

“Awake?” Nut immediately perked up. “Awake! Yes!” So I asked: “What does that mean, to be ‘Awake?’”

Nut replied: “In terms of Theravada Buddhism, to be Awake is to be aware of your mind and your behavior.

Everything starts with the thought first, and then we take actions. If we start out by being aware [of the thought] in the first place, we won’t have much problem [when we take actions].

“Let’s say you’re going to talk to somebody,” Nut continued, “but you have some problem in your mind, like frustration or whatever. If you’re not aware of [the frustration], a little problem can become a huge problem.”

Nut’s description of Awakening reminded me very much of Rebecca Li’s interview in New York; being awake is being aware of our thoughts and behaviors, in order to live a more conscious life, make better decisions, and avoid suffering.

Luang Phrabang is less than a day’s drive from the Chinese Border, from whence the Chan meditation traditions – and Rebecca Li’s lineage – originate. Coincidence? I think not.

After a few weeks of relaxing by the Mekong, we decided it was time to move on.

Asking around about Awakening and Enlightenment, we met an old Laotian man who told us of an “awakened master” in Central Laos. So off we went, by bus and by tuk-tuk, to find the Awakened One.

After several days of journeying through northern Laos, we arrived at The Awakened One’s compound at dusk. We were quickly greeted by a gaggle of acolytes, wearing ever-present and creepy smiles, who informed us that The Awakened one is the only one in the world who is awakened, and that she and her boyfriend had come to Earth from another planet. We smiled and nodded, knowing that we were in the middle of nowhere in Laos and nobody could come and save us in the middle of the night.

We slept on the floor in a room that seemed like an old jail cell, under a ragged blanket, a feast for the mosquitos that flew in and out between the bars in the windows. When we woke up, we escaped as fast as we could, running along the dirt road with our backpacks bouncing on our backs and our wheely suitcase in tow, and finally hitching a ride on a Tuk-Tuk to the dusty plains of southern Laos.

Southern Laos was much more our speed. We explored ancient stone temples built thousands of years ago, and settled for a few weeks on the hippie island of Don Det in the middle of the Mekong.

Don Det was a dream of dusty feet and water buffalo, hammocks overlooking the Mekong, plant-based pumpkin burgers and cannabis cafes. It was there that we learned of the mystic named Joel Altman, running Hariharalaya retreat center near Angkor Wat in Cambodia.



From top: Delicious Mekong River Weed & rice; Jovanna sits in a Mekong-riverside cafe in Luang Phrabang; Jovanna looks out at a waterfall in northern Laos, Kevin sits in front of an ancient temple in Wat Phou, southern Laos.



A funky and artistic sign outside of a guest house on the dusty island of Don Det, Laos, speaks to travelers from around the world.



CAMBODIA

I wrote about our adventures in Cambodia in The Universe Issue just last year, so I won't go into detail here about the temples, the beaches, and the red Cambodian sunsets. For the purposes of this piece, it's more important to understand how our interview with Joel changed our understanding of Spiritual Awakening.

JOEL: The one who is trying to get the realization has to disappear, and then the realization is. When that "I" gets out of the way, then the Enlightenment, or the realization, or this state of Wholeness, is remembered as that which always was and has been and will be.

KEVIN: Which aspect of self needs to disappear in order for the awakening to happen? The Ego (the sense of "individual self" that is separate from Oneness)? Or the actual consciousness?

JOEL: No, the Ego, the individualized self. The consciousness remains stable. But there are depths at which even the consciousness goes back into the seed form!

I was surprised that Joel would say that there could be Awakening, even without our human consciousness. According to all the Buddhists I'd spoken with before, Awakening was all about becoming more conscious! So I asked Joel:

KEVIN: How is it possible to be awake, without even experiencing being?

JOEL: Being is experiencing itself. Being is expressing itself. That's the ultimate wakefulness. Wakefulness is not a personal state.

KEVIN: So then, if Awakening is not a personal state, and Being is experiencing itself, then you could say that when we're not even here – after these bodies die – everything is awake.

JOEL: Everything is already awake right now. That's what they mean that everyone is a Buddha, everything is a Buddha.

KEVIN: So is Awakening about becoming happier in life, or realizing The Truth of The Universe?

JOEL: Realizing The Truth of The Universe, which itself is happiness, contentment, peace, beauty and bliss and all of that. It's just a remembering, a relaxing, back into that which is.

My mind was blown. Joel's concept of Awakening was very different from what I had heard from everyone I had spoken with before. Instead of being about a person becoming aware of the experience of the present moment, it was more like the Universe waking up to itself. Instead of Awakening being about living a happier life, it was more about realizing a fundamental truth of the Universe. This gave us a lot to think about as we wrapped up, edited, and published Season 1 of the *Paths Up The Mountain* documentary series.

While we didn't realize it at the time, we would find, in our travels through India, Nepal, and Bali, and in our interviews with people like Sadhguru and Deepak Chopra, that Joel was expressing Awakening from the perspective of the Hindu/Yogic traditions, while all the teachers I had spoken with before Joel were expressing Awakening from more of a Buddhist perspective.



Top: Kevin and Joel ride around Hariharalaya in Joel's ancient Jeep, that looks like something out of an Indiana Jones movie. Bottom: Joel talking about Awakening.





Left: Kevin's videographer pass at Amma's Ashram in Kerala, southern India. Right: A boat on the Kerala backwater, seen from the roof of a building at the Ashram.

INDIA

We had so many adventures in India and Nepal that it's impossible to fit them into this magazine, so we'll stick to the parts that are most relevant to the Awakening story.

When we landed in Trivandrum, at the southern tip of India, we were shocked at the sheer number of people. The airport reminded me of a packed music festival: we needed to hold hands and push our way through the crowds in order to avoid getting lost. It quickly dawned on us that, compared to our homeland in the western world, India is a truly ancient civilization that was growing for thousands of years before Europeans even knew that the Americas existed.

The cuisine in India has been refined over millennia, with every random restaurant offering dozens of delicious dishes. We had stopped eating meat during our time in Cambodia, so Trivandrum's extensive vegetarian menus were an epicurean delight.

The doorman at our hotel heard that we were interested in Awakening and Enlightenment, so he sent us off to Amma's Ashram, a few hours north along India's west coast, in Amritapuri by the Arabian Sea.

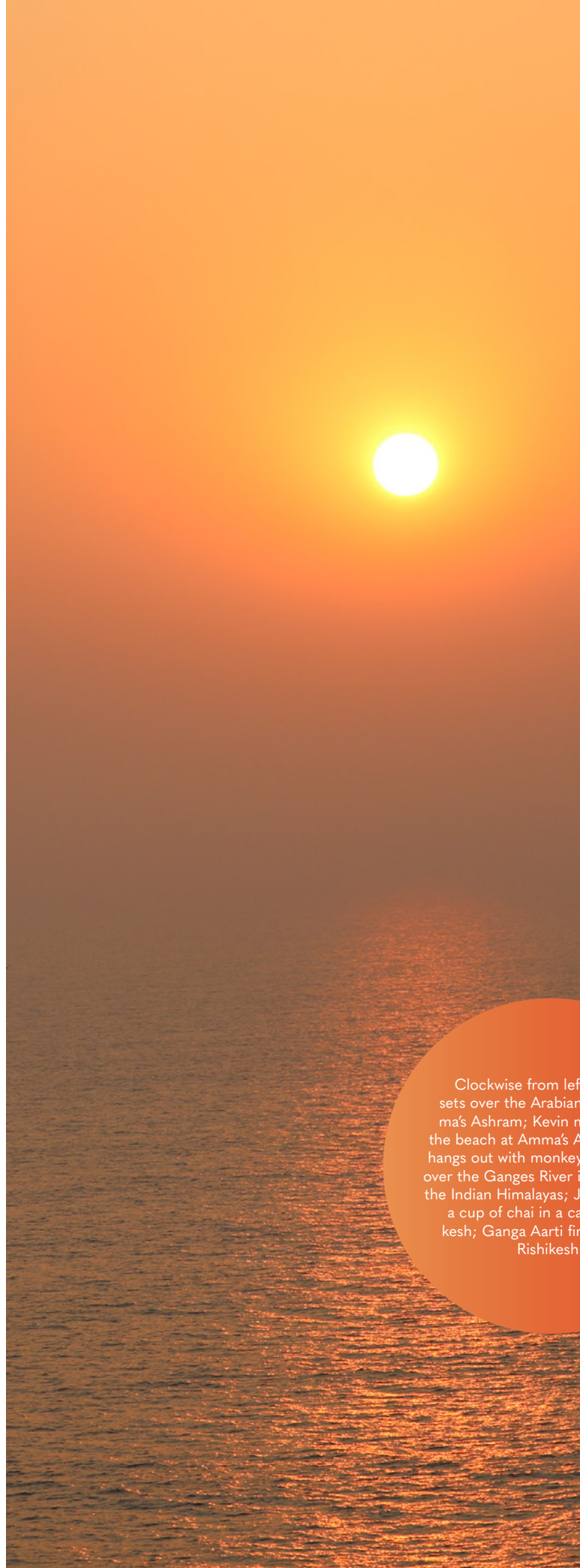
I've written a lot about Amma's Ashram, so I'll focus here on how Amma influenced our understanding of Awakening.

Passing through the gates of the Ashram, Jovanna and I both felt our hearts open in a way that we had never experienced before. While many teachers focus on things like happiness, awakening, and enlightenment, Amma was a different kind of guru for us. Her focus weighs heavily toward interpersonal things like love, compassion, and kindness, rather than on individual happiness & perfection.

After interviewing Amma's ambassador, Shubamrita, it became clear that Amma's Love was flowing directly from her deep realization of Oneness. Check out the Contemplations section of this issue to dive into that interview in more depth.

From Amma's Ashram we traveled up India's west coast, on busses and trains, through Goa and Delhi, to Haridwar and Rishikesh in the Himalayas.

We interviewed yogis and babas along the Ganges River in Rishikesh, who reinforced the concept of Awakening as The Universe Awakening to Itself, and eventually crossed by tuk-tuk into western Nepal.



Clockwise from left: the sun sets over the Arabian Sea at Amma's Ashram; Kevin meditates on the beach at Amma's Ashram; Kevin hangs out with monkeys on a bridge over the Ganges River in Rishikesh, in the Indian Himalayas; Jovanna drinks a cup of chai in a cafe in Rishikesh; Ganga Aarti fire festival in Rishikesh.





A wall mural in Rishikesh, India, expresses the Hindu/Yogic conception of Awakening. As Nisargadatta Maharaj wrote: "I Am That."

We are that ...

Awareness

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NEPAL

People tend to think of Nepal as a land of snow-capped peaks, prayer flags blowing wildly in harsh alpine winds, and rich westerners in puffy, colorful North Face jackets lined up to take the world's most dangerous selfie at the top of Mount Everest. That was our vision too, so we were surprised when we crossed Nepal's southwestern border at Banbasa, to find a land of hot, dry, dusty plains.

Traveling through Shuklaphanta and Bardia, famous for their safaris, rhinos and elephants, we were warned to watch out for tigers as we walked about the towns at dusk. We marveled at large fields of cannabis growing wild on the sides of the road, and the chilled-out attitudes of the Nepali people. But we grew weary of the heat of Nepal's southern plains, so we took the steep, dizzying, and winding road north, toward Pokhara in the Nepali Himalayas.

Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city (after Kathmandu), is a mountain paradise for trekkers, hippies, and mountaineers. Most travelers ignore the noise and smog of the large, bustling city, and make their way to the quiet, clean, beautiful guesthouses and restaurants of Lake Side, the waterfront tourist area overlooking Phewa, Nepal's second-largest lake.

Tourists and locals row colorful boats out onto the lake, surrounded by the majestic beauty of Himalayan foothills. On a clear day, boaters can see the prominent peak of Machhapuchhare in the distance.

The high mountains surrounding Pokhara attract a quieter, more introspective crowd than the tropical worlds we had traveled through previous years. We spent weeks enjoying the comfortable town, before heading off to the west, toward Kathmandu, and Everest.

Unlike Lake Side in Pokhara, Thamel (the tourist area of Kathmandu) is not a clean, quiet bubble of western comforts, tucked away safely at the edge of town. Kathmandu is a major world city, and Thamel is right in the thick of it. Merchants and motorbikes speed past bewildered backpackers, as everyone makes their way through the beautiful chaos of the adventure of life. Large stores sell expensive imported mountaineering gear, with cheap knockoffs of the same items in the bodegas next door. Cute hole-in-the-wall restaurants selling momos and noodles abound.

We enjoyed the chaos of Kathmandu for a while, but the call of Everest was ringing in my ears. We set off on an overland adventure, by jeep and on foot, toward Namche Bazaar (the Mountain Capital), Tengboche (the world's highest monastery), and Everest Base Camp.

I love to talk about teahouses and yack about yaks, but it's a long story (including an emergency helicopter rescue) and we're out of room on this page, that will remain a tale for another time.



Below: a boat crosses Lake Phewa in Pokhara, Nepal. From bottom: Jovanna in a row boat on Lake Phewa; the view north from our room in Tengboche; Kevin & Jovanna in Namche Bazaar; The peaks of Ama Dablam from Tengboche.



A dog looks on as Nepali workers unload supplies from the backs of yaks, along the trail to Everest. There are no roads up here for cars and trucks, so everything (from food and water to clothing and mountaineering gear) is carried, by humans, yaks, and donkeys.





BALI

After our Everest adventure, we spent several months exploring southern Vietnam, and eventually flew to the legendary Indonesian island of Bali.

As we deepened into our plant-based journey, we appreciated Bali's abundance of delicious vegan options -- from the native Indonesian tempeh skewers and delicious peanut sauce, to the hipster-inspired avocado toast and smoothie bowls.

Indonesia is officially a Muslim country, but Bali has managed to retain its Hindu status, rituals and traditions.

The Balinese New Year (celebrated on the same day that some of India's southern states celebrate the Hindu New Year) is called Nyepi, and it is dedicated to silence, fasting and meditation.

The Balinese spend months meticulously building giant, scary demon statues (called ogoh-ogoh), which

they parade around and eventually burn, on the dark and spooky night of Nyepi Eve.

Having brought their demons out into the open and literally burned them in fire, New Year's Day (Nyepi) is spent in peaceful, silent, undistracted meditation.

Monk-like meditative laws are enforced by Balinese Police across the island. Nobody (tourists & Balinese alike) is allowed to go out in the streets, make too much noise, etc.

Strictly speaking, light, fire, electricity, entertainment, traveling, and working are all prohibited on Nyepi. These restrictions are similar to those observed by Buddhist monks; they are meant to create an atmosphere of present-moment-centeredness and meditative consciousness.

After Nyepi, Jovanna and I attended Punnu

Singh Wasu's Ananda Mandala (Kundalini breathwork) class in Bali's world-famous Yoga Barn.

I had always thought of "chakras" as one of those "woo" things that I couldn't quite connect to or understand. But in the circle of Ananda Mandala, the first time in my life, I felt the rush of Kundalini energy rising through my spine, and felt the seven chakras as clearly as I could feel my heart beating or my lungs inflating and deflating with the breath.

The Kundalini Awakening not only helped me clear out deeply repressed emotions through cathartic laughter & sobbing... it also quickly rocketed me into a deep state of presence & Oneness.

Large photo:
A path winds through the lush gardens of the Yoga Barn in Ubud, Bali.

Round photos above, clockwise from top-left: Punnu Singh Wasu at the Yoga Barn; a colorful smoothie bowl geared toward the Instagram crowd in Canggu; a ritual offering on a sidewalk in Ubud; a volcanic rock in the surf at the beach in Canggu; a massive Ogoh-Ogoh towering above the tiny humans on Nyepi Eve in Ubud; a rooster overlooking traditional Balinese architecture in a courtyard in Ubud; purple sunset over terraced rice paddies and jungle-clad peaks on the road to Ulun Danu Beratan Temple in the lush green mountains of Bali.

ONWARD ...

After Bali, we moved to New York City, and settled in a tiny apartment on MacDougal Street, near Washington Square Park.

We interviewed Trevor Hall in Brooklyn, Eric Adams (the first vegan/meditator mayor of NYC) in Midtown, and Ekaterina Ket in the East Village. We printed our first issue of Meditation Magazine in 2018, and, as MedMag grew, we began doing interviews remotely from New York, learning from luminaries like Wim Hof, Rachel Brathen, Sadhguru, Deepak Chopra, Tara Brach, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and many other amazing people.

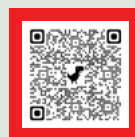
In 2021, we welcomed baby Sky to the world, and eventually moved down to Florida.

For the coming years, we're thinking, maybe, Spain, Portugal & Morocco? Or Panama & Costa Rica? Time will tell! ●

Below: a flock of pigeons circles Washington Square Park in early 2021, as the Empire State Building peeks through the Washington Arch. Right: Kevin, Sky, and Jovanna at the beach in Florida in 2023.



THE TRAVEL & INTERVIEW VIDEOS WE FILMED ALONG OUR PATHS UP THE MOUNTAIN JOURNEY WERE EPIC. WE STARTED OUT FILMING WITH JUST AN IPHONE IN THAILAND, LAOS, AND CAMBODIA... UPGRADED TO A CANON DSLR FOR INDIA & NEPAL... AND FLEW A DJI DRONE THROUGH VIETNAM, BALI, AND NYC. WATCHING THE VIDEOS IS MUCH MORE FUN THAN READING ABOUT THESE JOURNEYS IN PRINT. CHECK OUT [YOUTUBE.COM/KEVINELLERTON](https://www.youtube.com/kevinellerton) FOR ALL THE VIDEOS! WE ARE STILL EDITING SOME OF THE MORE RECENT VIDEOS (INDIA, NEPAL, VIETNAM, AND BALI), BUT IF YOU SUBSCRIBE TO MY YOUTUBE CHANNEL YOU'LL GET NOTIFIED WHEN THEY ARE PUBLISHED!



Awakening Through Forgiveness

Forrest finds a vision of Oneness in Hawaii, through the love and forgiveness of Ho'oponopono.

Words by Forrest Neal

Exhausted after a sleepless night and an early flight across the Pacific, I arrived on Maui just a few hours before the ceremony was scheduled to begin.

I met my teacher and guide, Pihanalani Kamaunu, at Kahului Bay, where we set our intentions for healing and forgiveness, and repeated the Ho'oponopono mantra:

"I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you."

These powerful words of love and forgiveness can heal our relationships with others, and even with ourselves.

After repeating the mantra, we submerged in the bay, to cleanse ourselves of any painful emotions we may have been holding onto. As I slipped under the water, I felt the exhaustion wash away, and immediately began to feel surprisingly clear-minded and present.

In this state of clarity and presence, we traveled to the Wailuku River in the Iao Valley, to set positive intentions for the lives that we would begin living after the ceremony concluded. It was here that I experienced what was perhaps the most beautiful awakening of my life.

As Pihanalani and I walked to the edge of the river, we saw an old Japanese woman, along with her daughter and granddaughter, by the riverbank. They noticed our arrival, but didn't seem to mind that we were there.

Pihanalani and I submerged ourselves in the river, to set positive intentions for the final cleansing process. As I returned to the surface and opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the naked bodies of the women submerging in the river.

My initial reaction was to instinctively look away. Having grown up in a religiously conservative culture in the southern United States, I felt like I had done something wrong simply by seeing what I had seen.

As I emerged from the water, Pihanalani offered to take a photo of me before concluding the Ho'oponopono ceremony with a blessing. I felt overwhelmed with

feelings of warmth, love, and Oneness... but I felt distracted by the images of the women that were stuck in my mind.

Later that night, reflecting back, I realized I'd been socially conditioned to feel like I was a bad person for having seen those women's naked bodies. I realized that there were things in my life that I felt guilty simply for having seen. Once I was able to identify this conditioning, I could finally let go of the unconscious feelings of guilt and self-loathing that I'd been holding onto, and truly forgive and love myself.

In that moment, I felt myself releasing generations of trauma I'd unconsciously been carrying around. I believe that the unconditional love and forgiveness of the Ho'oponopono ceremony laid the foundation for me to have that experience.

Once I let go of my feelings of guilt and shame, I was able to see that my Ho'oponopono experience had been much deeper than I had realized at the time.

My greatest feeling in that moment in the river was a profound sense of Oneness with the Universe. It felt as though the action of entering and exiting the river was a microcosm of the temporary life we live as humans, and that these individuals who were dipping in and out of the river were further along the stream that flows towards a larger body of water: the great Oneness.

I began to realize that what I'd witnessed was a spiritual cleansing ritual that this family had likely been practicing for generations.

It felt as though I'd traveled back through time to an era of primal human nature. For a few moments, I was peering through the eyes of an ancient nomad traversing a magical and mysterious universe. I felt a deep love and appreciation for the temporary human life that I have the opportunity of living.

It was an arduous decision for me to share this experience with others. I worried that some people might judge my experience, or dismiss it as unimportant. But because of how deeply this moment changed my self-perception and perspective, I feel it's important to share the power of these beautiful Hawaiian cultural and spiritual practices of Ho'oponopono. ●

CONTEMPLATIONS

Profoundly insightful articles and interviews



5 Types Of Spiritual Awakening

What is Spiritual Awakening?
In this article we explore five different kinds.

Words by Kevin Ellerton

ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM

When I wrote the book *A Practical Guide To Spiritual Awakening*, it was based on a very powerful kind of awakening that I had experienced.

I had suddenly awoken from the Dream of Thought, into the Reality of The Present Moment. And through long-term exposure to the present moment, I began to awaken from being a “separate self” into the realization of Universal Oneness as well.

I had been reading books from people like Eckhart Tolle, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Pema Chodron, and practicing meditation with monks in a Buddhist monastery in Thailand as well. Everything that I learned from these sources indicated that this was it – waking up from Monkey-Mind to Present-Moment-Awareness (and ultimately to the realization of Oneness) was the Awakening.

The word “Buddha” literally means “awakened one.” “Buddhism” is literally all about waking up. So, if Buddhists said that “awakening” was about waking up from the dream of thought to the Unified reality of the present moment, who was I (or anybody else, for that matter) to say otherwise?

Well... when I finished writing the book, I started looking for powerful quotes about Awakening that I would sprinkle throughout the chapters to support my definitions and assertions.

The quotes I found from Southeast Asian Buddhist sources generally aligned perfectly with the book. But quotes I found from other sources (Hindu/Yogic, western, Christian, new age, Taoist, and even Zen) did not quite match up.

While Southeast Asian Buddhists tended to focus on awakening from thoughts to presence, Taoists and Zen Buddhists tended to focus more on the “mystery” of it all (The Tao, The Oneness, etc).

These East Asian traditions were not too far removed (geographically or philosophically) from the

Southeast Asian monastery where I had my presence/oneness awakening experience, so I was able to find some quotes from these sources that fit reasonably well into the book.

But as I moved farther afield – to India, Europe, and the western world – the quotes I found about Spiritual Awakening began to diverge significantly from what I had written about.

In India, they talked about the Realization of The Self (The Universal Self, Brahman). Now, this is similar to The Oneness, The Dao, or whatever you want to call it. The difference is, in India, mystics talked about doing more than just realizing or perceiving Oneness – they talked about *being* it, and actually *identifying* with it. This was quite a departure from the Southeast Asian Buddhists I had learned from, who fundamentally asserted that there is no “self” at all.

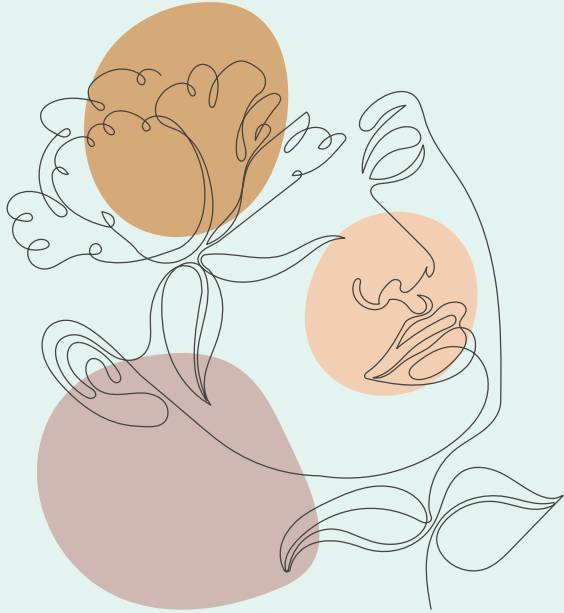
So, even between Buddhists and Hindus – traditions that evolved very closely together, that are really similar in terms of practicing meditation and “realizing Oneness” – there are different kinds of Awakening. They’re very similar. One could even make the argument that they are “the same Awakening, expressed in different ways.” But after practicing in both traditions for many years, I have come to understand that “realizing Oneness” and “identifying as The Universal Self” feel distinctly different in their own ways.

The realization that there might be more than one kind of Spiritual Awakening set me on a decade-long quest to interview gurus, mystics, meditators, and spiritual teachers, about their experiences of Awakening. That journey led to the development of the Paths Up The Mountain documentary series, and ultimately, to *Meditation Magazine*.

During the journey, I discovered that, while there are a handful of common types of Spiritual Awakening, people who use the words *Spiritual Awakening* in many different ways.

“While there are a handful of common types of Spiritual Awakening, people use the words ‘Spiritual Awakening’ in many different ways.”





Here are just a few of the the kinds of awakenings that people experience:

- 1. Present-Moment Awakening**
The experience of waking up from the dream of thought into the Reality of The Present Moment.
- 2. Oneness Awakening**
A recognition of the interconnectedness of all things and the Oneness of the Universe.
- 3. Universal-Self Awakening**
A dramatic shift in identify, from individual “self” (ego) to Universal Self (Brahman).
- 4. Love Awakening**
Awakening from the mind to the heart, usually following a Oneness awakening, leading to greater compassion, kindness & love.
- 5. Kundalini Awakening**
The experience of an intense release of energy that rises up through the spine, leading to spiritual transformation and union with the divine.
- 6. The Awakening Journey: Dark Night of the Soul → Alignment/Authenticity**
A period of deep spiritual crisis, marked by feelings of despair, disconnection, and a loss of faith, that ultimately leads to profound transformation and growth.
- 7. Cosmic Consciousness Awakening** - The realization of the cosmic consciousness that is the soul or spirit of all conscious beings.
- 8. Shamanic/Psychedelic Awakening** - A journey into the spiritual realms through shamanic, psychedelic, or entheogenic practices such as drumming, chanting, and plant medicine, leading to new experiences of consciousness and perception.
- 9. Psychic/Mediumship Awakening** - The

- sudden realization of psychic abilities, such as clairvoyance, clairsentience, clairaudience, and/or the ability to communicate with spirits.
- 10. Channeling Awakening** - The realization of one’s ability to channel divine wisdom and guidance from higher realms of consciousness.
 - 11. Quantum Awakening** - The realization of the quantum nature of reality and the interconnectedness of all things at a fundamental level.
 - 12. Energy Awakening** - The realization of the power and nature of energy, leading to new levels of understanding and awareness.
 - 13. Lightworker Awakening** - The realization of one’s calling to serve others through spiritual work and healing.
 - 14. Parenthood Awakening** - Awakening into a new sense of self, as a parent who is no longer primarily concerned with one’s own needs, but the needs of another human being.

If I were inclined to become a guru, believing myself to be “right” while others are “wrong,” I might tell you that “This one type of awakening is The True Awakening, and all other types of awakening are inferior, illusory, or false.” Many spiritual teachers talk that way. But this attitude marginalizes and alienates people who have had their own powerful awakening experiences. I prefer, instead, to affirm and celebrate all kinds of spiritual awakening – rejoicing in the kinds of Awakening that I personally resonate with, along with the kinds that I don’t particularly resonate with.

In this feature, we will be exploring the five types of Awakening that I have found, in my journeys, to be the most common, and the most fundamental:

- 1. The Awakening Journey (from social conditioning to authenticity, alignment & purpose)**
- 2. Present-Moment Awakening**
- 3. Oneness (or Universal Self) Awakening**
- 4. Heart Awakening**
- 5. Kundalini Awakening**

TYPE 1

The Awakening Journey



Awakening FROM: A belief system or lifestyle that no longer resonates, does not work, or is spiritually unfulfilling for you.

Awakening TO: Belief systems or lifestyles that are more meaningful and spiritually fulfilling for you.

Feels Like: Coming into alignment with your life’s purpose, finding meaning in life, and becoming a healthier, happier human being.

How To: Become aware of the pain in your life, and critically examine why you are living in the way that you are.

When putting together The Awakening Summit for this issue of Meditation Magazine, I searched on YouTube for the words “Spiritual Awakening.”

I found many videos on the subject, with the main theme centering around what I have come to describe as “The Awakening Journey.”

This type of awakening can be thought of as “awakening to the spiritual side of life” or “awakening from one’s social/cultural conditioning, into alignment with one’s unique meaning & purpose in life.”

The Awakening Journey is a lifelong process that often involves other (more specific) types of awakening (present-moment, Oneness, etc) along the way.

Many of the YouTube videos I found emphasized “the seven stages of awakening.” The exact stages tended to vary from description to description, but they generally went something like this:

- 1. Dark Night of the Soul:** A deep and painful experience of spiritual crisis, often characterized by feelings of despair, disconnection, and a loss of faith in one’s current belief structure or lifestyle.
- 2. Spiritual Awakening:** A shift in consciousness and a realization that there is more to life than what is experienced on a surface level, leading to a search for deeper meaning and purpose.
- 3. Struggle and Resistance:** The individual often resists the spiritual awakening, because it challenges their beliefs, values, and sense of identity.

4. **Breakthrough:** This stage involves a breakthrough in the struggle and resistance, where the individual gains new insights and perspectives, leading to a deeper understanding of the self and the world.
5. **Surrender:** The stage of surrender involves a letting go of control and a trust in the divine or higher power, leading to a greater sense of peace and acceptance.
6. **Awakening of the Heart:** This stage involves a deepening of the spiritual awakening, where the individual experiences a greater sense of love, compassion, and connection to others.
7. **Integration:** The final stage involves the integration of the spiritual awakening into all areas of life, leading to a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment, and a contribution to the greater good.

I invited several of the most passionate and well-spoken YouTubers to The Awakening Summit, including Chrisspy, Stephanie Martinez-James (The Spiritual Latina), and Charlene Lizette, and they generally talked about this process, as it unfolded in their own lives.

Chrisspy had a near-death experience that catalyzed her awakening journey. For Stephanie it was the realization that she was unhappy in her high-flying career. For Charlene it was a mental breakdown.

All three of these women went on to examine their life choices and make major changes to live more in alignment with their “authentic selves,” more in-line with what they felt to be meaningful and purposeful in their lives. They also went on to have various “specific” kinds of spiritual awakenings along the way, including present-moment awakening, ego-dissolution and awakening to Oneness.

Hearing about the journeys that others have gone through caused me to reflect on my own journey. I can see that it started long before the flash of Satori in Borders Bookstore, when I read a paragraph in *The Power of Now* and awoke, for the first time in my life, from The Thought World to The Present Moment. It didn't start when, in the Buddhist Monastery, I stopped resisting my thoughts, and realized that they too were part of the perfect Unity of Existence.

My “Spiritual Awakening” journey started many years before that, when I was nineteen years old, in Rabbinical School in Jerusalem, and lost my faith in the dogmas of Judaism. Losing my faith in religion

(Dark Night Of The Soul) left me feeling empty of meaning and purpose, causing me to spiral into nihilism, anxiety & depression... which ultimately led me to find meditation, the present moment, Oneness, boundless Love, and all of that awesome stuff.

Perhaps the most popular author who talks about Awakening As A Journey is Dr. Shefali Tsabary.

The cover lines on her book, *A Radical Awakening*, are: “Turn pain into power,” “Embrace your truth,” and “Live free” – powerful expressions of The Awakening Journey.

I reached out to her for comment, and she replied with the following beautiful email:

DR. SHEFALI'S EMAIL:

There comes a time in the life of a human being, when one is ready to discard the old ways and enter the new. These moments are often marked with pain and discomfort. Because of this, we often try to shun them, or push them away. But it is precisely during these moments of inner and outer chaos that we have the potential to awaken.

We all yearn to be free, yet we feel encased in our daily lives, consumed by fear and unworthiness. To awaken and evolve means to deeply understand ourselves. This involves befriending parts of ourselves we may not want to see, especially our pain.

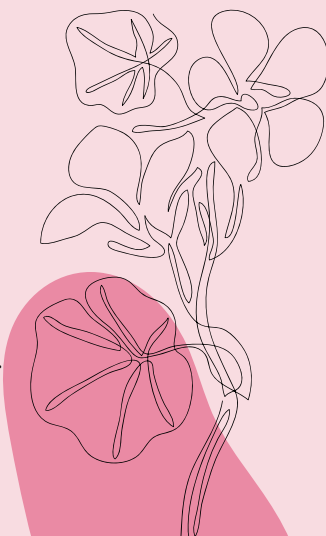
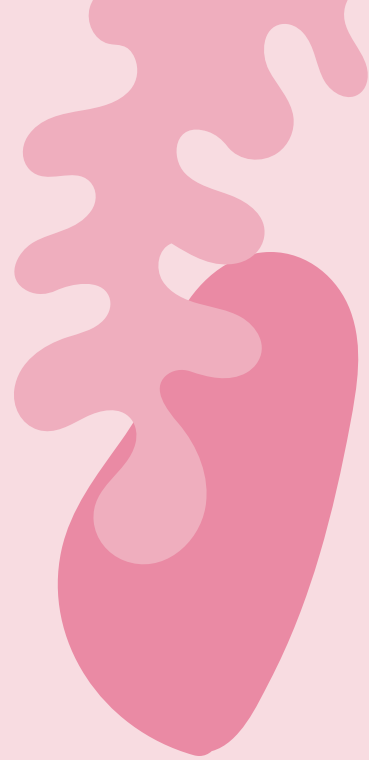
When we fully accept our pain for what it is – without sugarcoating it, and certainly without apologizing for it – and observe the many ways we have co-created it, we can begin to transform the pain into wisdom.

Understanding our pain is not easy. Yet, it is by using our pain as a portal for transformation that we truly awaken to our most authentic selves.

You see, as young children we were often disavowed and disregarded for who we most naturally were. As a result we began to wear masks to gain recognition and worth. These masks helped us with a temporary sense of relief and comfort, because they fed us with a few crumbs of external validation and approval. But because these masks are not our true self, they eventually begin to crack and fade away, leaving us once again feeling dismantled and disoriented.

Most of us go through our entire lives cycling through these ups and downs, unaware that we are caught in a pattern of unworthiness. We don't realize that it is our inner unworthiness that creates and perpetuates these cyclical patterns, so we keep reacting to the outer world. The more we react to the outer world, the more our cycles of cyclones continue.

And then one day, perhaps, a time in our lives



“There comes a time in the life of a human being, when one is ready to discard the old ways and enter the new”

arrives where the pain is simply too much to bear. It is here that we are given the invitation to break the cycles of unworthiness and awaken. It is here that our greatest portal of transformation arrives. Of course, it is up to us to heed the invitation to change and allow the pain to take us into healing, to recover the authentic self that we left behind.

This is what awakening means. It is our right to enter into this more aligned state of being. It is unto ourselves to grant ourselves this right. It is my hope that every human allows themselves the opportunity to be reborn into who they once were - their authentic selves that they left behind on the sidewalks of childhood.

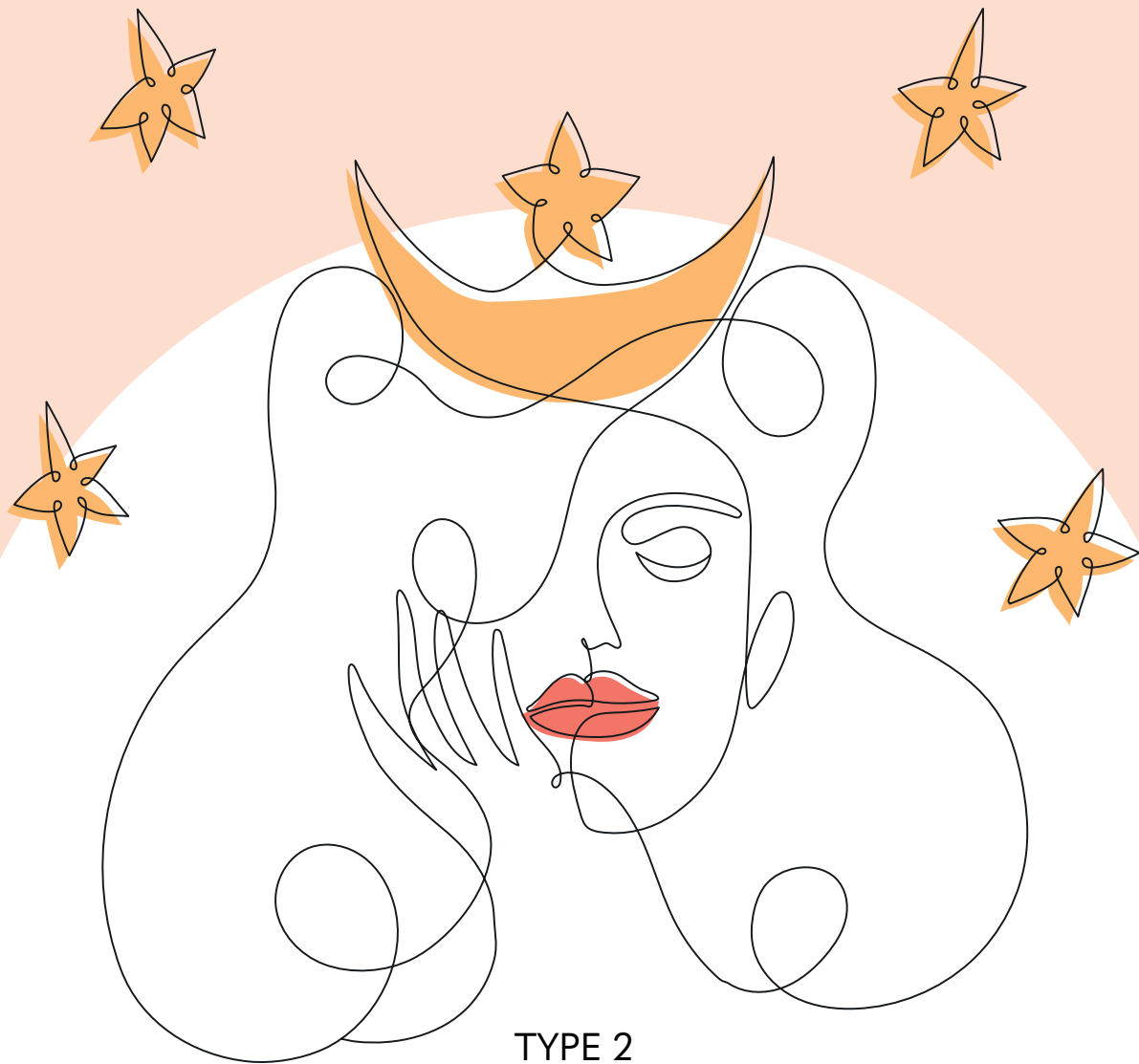
DR. SHEFALI'S MEDITATION:

As you close your eyes and settle in on your breath
Remember that you are not your roles
You are not your roles of the parent or the daughter or the career person
You are not your roles of the good one, the successful one or the savior
You are not your roles of whoever culture expects you to be
You are simply your breath.
You are simply energy.
You are simply YOU.
As you sit here now, relax into the knowing that who you are, as you are, is enough right now
You are just complete, whole and worthy as you are - without needing to prove a thing
You are allowed to be yourself without judgment or pressure
You are allowed to be authentic without shame or blame or guilt
You are allowed to be YOU because who you are is enough

PHOTO BY KERSTI NIGLAS



Renowned author & psychologist, Dr. Shefali.



TYPE 2

Awakening To The Present Moment

Awakening FROM: The Thought World

Awakening TO: The Present Moment

Feels Like: Rising above gray clouds into colorful clarity

How To: Engage with the senses, quiet the mind, meditate

Awakening from The Thought World to The Present Moment is extremely simple, and also extremely powerful.

Have you ever heard the phrase: “Get out of your head?” That’s what this type of awakening is all about: getting out of your head, and into The Present Moment.

As babies, before our frontal lobes mature into powerful thinking machines, we live fully in The Present Moment. Here and now is all that exists.

But as we develop the capacity to think about things that are outside of our present-moment experience – memories of the past, plans for the future, or people who are not physically present with us – our attention begins to shift away from the vibrant, living Reality of what we are experiencing in The Present Moment, to the gray, cloudy, imaginary reality of The Thought World.

Thinking and imagining are not bad things; we need them in order to survive! We need to think about the past in order to learn from our mistakes. We need to think about the future in order to plan ahead, improve our life circumstances, and head off problems before they happen.

As children growing up in the modern world, we are taught how to think – but most of us are not taught how to keep the thinking process under control. As we grow, we move more and more into The Thought World, until, at some point, we become so immersed that we forget about The Present Moment altogether. This process of “getting lost in the thought world” is preventable. There are movements around the world that are bringing mindfulness instructors into elementary schools to help kids realize that they can shift their attention out of their thoughts and back into the present moment whenever they want to.

But for those of us who grew up without this type of instruction, we can find ourselves – as I did in my early twenties – in a dark, gray world of swirling thought-clouds, with barely a glimmer of The Present Moment shining through to light up the darkness in the eye of the storm.

I’ve written about the moment I first opened Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power of Now* in a Borders Bookstore. His simple instructions to step out of The Thought World and see The Present Moment were all I needed. Suddenly, instead of seeing all the things

that were swirling around in my head, I was seeing the bookstore around me, in ultra-HD crystal clarity. It felt like I was seeing clearly, for the first time in my entire adult life.

It literally felt like waking up from a life-long dream. And it happened in an instant.

If you are feeling anxious, depressed, stressed out, overwhelmed... it’s likely that you’re lost in The Thought World. All you need to do in order to awaken to the present moment is just realize:

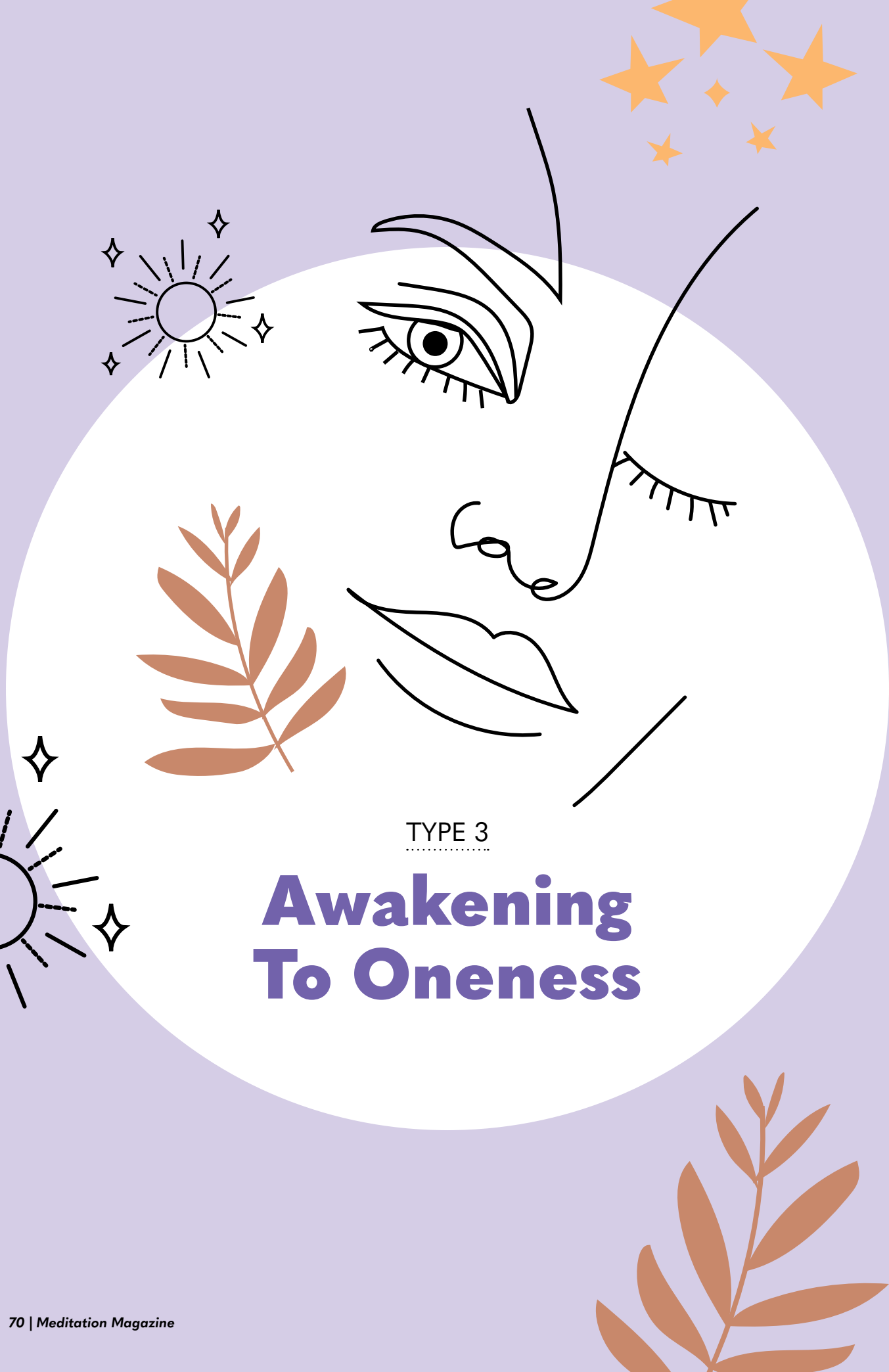
1. These thoughts only exist in your mind.
2. The thoughts are clouding your vision because your eyes are subtly focusing on them (instead of the world around you). Refocus your eyes now on the colors, shapes, and clear empty space of the world around you.
3. The noise in your head is distracting you from hearing the world around you. Refocus your hearing on the sounds (and the silence) around you.
4. The thoughts are also distracting you from your other bodily senses (smell, taste, touch) – engage with them now by noticing what you are smelling, tasting, and feeling in your body.
5. When you’re lost in thoughts, you’re even distracted from being aware of the thinking process itself. If you take a step back from whatever it is that you’re thinking about right now, close your eyes, and just watch the thoughts popping in and out, you’ll see that they, too, are arising in the present moment.

For a more in-depth tutorial, see the “Awakening The Six Senses” Meditation at the beginning of this issue.

Present-Moment Awakening can also be described as “being here now” or “coming to your senses.”

Actively engaging the senses can be helpful if you want to quickly & powerfully awaken into the present moment. But this “active” method does take some effort, which is energy-intensive, tiring, and difficult to sustain for the long term.

Therefore, it is easier and more powerful, in the long-term, to focus on cultivating a calm and quiet mind, by letting go of fears, desires, and attachments. When the mind is quiet, no effort is needed to “peer through the clouds,” because the clouds are already cleared, and the attention is resting effortlessly in the present moment. For more on how to cultivate this, check out my book, *A Practical Guide To Spiritual Awakening*.



TYPE 3

Awakening To Oneness

Awakening FROM: The illusion of separation

Awakening TO: Universal Oneness

Feels Like: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss

How To: There are many methods to catalyze the Realization of Oneness, including (but not limited to): self-inquiry meditations like Neti, Neti; Oneness meditations; samadhi/concentration meditations; spending time deeply immersed in the present moment; kundalini yoga/meditations; repeating mantras like Aham Brahmasmi (“I am Brahman”); and much more.

When I interviewed Punnu Singh Wasu about Awakening and Enlightenment, he said that the experience of an enlightened being is comparable to the experience of a baby:

“When you see a child lying peacefully,” Punnu began, “and the child is opening his eyes and looking at the light, the child becomes the light, and the light becomes the child. There’s no labeling there. There’s no saying, ‘This is light, this is lamp, this works through electricity.’ The child doesn’t know. So is the experience of an enlightened being: there is no labeling there. The experience, the experiencer, and the object being experienced, is One.”

When we are born, we experience a unified world of undistinguished, undifferentiated sensations. But over our first few days, weeks, months and years, we begin to distinguish and differentiate between sensations, experiences, and objects, in order to get a grasp of “what is going on” and be able to function in the world.

Over time, distinguishment and differentiation leads to understanding and conceptualization (this is yellow and this is purple, this is heat and this is cold, etc). We begin to discriminate between things that are “good” and “bad,” and develop preferences between things we like or dislike. We begin to identify ourselves – this is “me,” and this is “you.”

These processes of distinguishment, differentiation, conceptualization, understanding, discrimination, and identification are important in our development as human beings. If we didn’t do these things, and just continued to live in an undifferentiated baby-like experience, we would not be able to function. We would not be able to obtain the resources and conditions that we need to survive, and we would quickly perish.

So these processes are not “bad” or “problematic.” They are useful tools that help us stay alive. The problem is that, if nobody points out to us that these processes are just subjective mental processes (rather than “Objective Reality”), we naturally begin to

weave our newfound concepts and preferences into a conceptual framework of “Reality.”

As children, our brains are not developed enough to understand the difference between subjective cognitive processes and Objective Reality, so we naturally assume that our conceptual framework for Reality is equivalent to Objective Reality.

At some point along the way, as our brains develop, we begin to realize that our conceptual framework for Reality is not completely “objective.” For example, a child who believes that “chocolate is better than vanilla” may be surprised when some of her school-mates assert that “vanilla is better than chocolate.” We begin to learn about “opinions” relatively early on. It takes longer to learn that “facts” may also be somewhat less than “objective.”

In adolescence and young adulthood (or sometimes later in life), we begin to realize that even factual Reality may not be as objective as it seems. We learn in physics classes that the objects we see around us are actually made up of atoms that are 99% empty space. We learn that the colors we see around us are only our brains’ interpretations of specific wavelengths of light, and that different animals (and even different people) see colors in different ways. We realize that even something as seemingly concrete as “my body” is not so clearly defined – it can also be seen as a collection of cells, a mass of molecules, an amalgamation of atoms, or even simply as a system of energy, vibrating at particular frequencies, that is fundamentally continuous and integrated with the rest of the energy of the Universe.

While we may learn these things intellectually, these new understandings don’t always permeate to the level of day-to-day perceptual experience. So while we may know intellectually that yellow can be perceived differently by different people, we still see a banana and believe that it is yellow. While we may know intellectually that our human bodies are literally continuous with the energy of the Universe, we still perceive *this* body as “me,” and *that* body as “you.” Our feelings and behaviors in life tend to flow from these deep-rooted beliefs and perceptions (that developed in childhood), rather than from the more mature intellectual understandings we have learned along the way.

Awakening to Oneness is the deep realization – on a perceptual, experiential, and feeling level – that the “objects” we see in the world around us, including our “selves,” “our own” bodies and minds, are all simply the energy of the Universe, swirling and flowing and condensing as one, eternal, continuous process.

This doesn’t mean that “objects” don’t exist, or →



“Let go of concepts of body/mind/consciousness, and just rest as the energy of the Universe”

that the “individual self” is “false” or “an illusion.” Seeing the world as made of separate objects is one (perfectly valid) interpretation of Reality. We need to differentiate between objects sometimes, in order to survive and thrive.

The perceptual process of differentiation and objectification is not the problem. The problem is our deep-rooted belief that the world of differentiated objects that we create in our minds is synonymous with “Absolute Reality.”

We already know, intellectually, that differentiation and objectification are just perceptual processes that happen in our minds, and that the objects we see around us are just our brains’ subjective interpretations of the energy of the Universe.

Awakening to Oneness is just taking the next step, and integrating these intellectual understandings into your day-to-day feeling, perception, and experience of life.

There are many meditations that you can use to Awaken to Oneness. Perhaps the simplest and most direct is as follows:

1. Close your eyes, and feel your body/mind/ consciousness simply as energy that is continuous with the energy of the Universe.
2. You may feel sensations in your body, thoughts in your mind, etc. You may feel “boundaries” where “your body” meets “the rest of the Universe” (feet meeting the floor, etc). Instead of thinking about these sensations, differentiating them,

conceptualizing them, and creating objects in your mind, just feel all of the sensations (including the processes of differentiation and objectification) as part of the energy of the Universe – as the way in which the Universe is experiencing itself at these precise points in the space-time continuum.

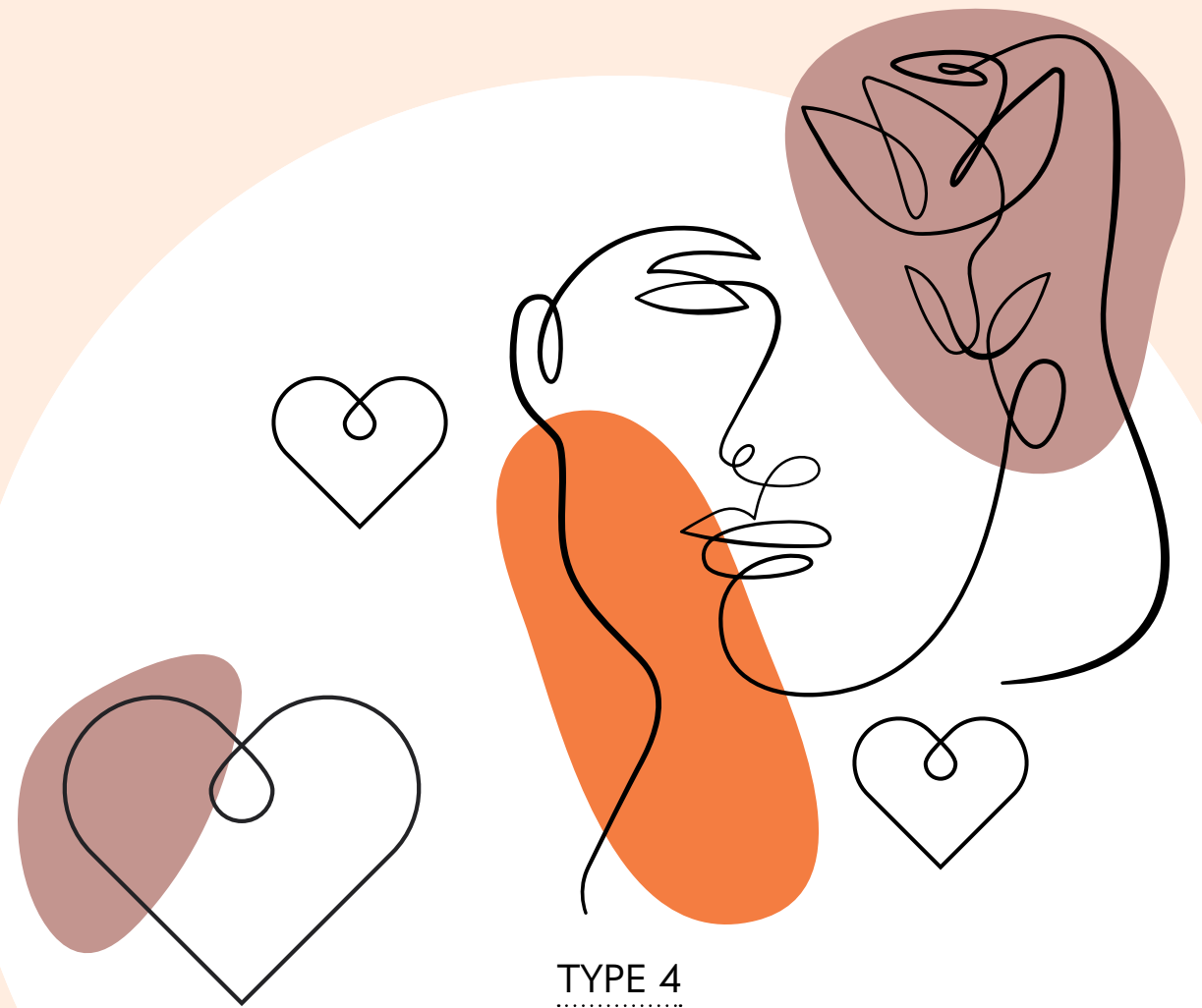
3. Let go of concepts of body/mind/consciousness, and just rest as the energy of the Universe.

The longer you practice this type of meditation (or others, including present-moment meditations, concentrative/samadhi meditations, neti-neti meditations, and many more), the more you will integrate the realization of Oneness into your perceptual/feeling day-to-day experience.

Notice that Awakening to Oneness is not about going back to the experience of being a baby. A baby cannot distinguish between things, cannot objectify reality, because she hasn’t learned how to do that yet. That’s why babies cannot function in the world and survive on their own.

An adult who awakens to Oneness has access to both modes of perception. She can shift between objectifying/differentiating mode and subjectifying/unifying mode, at will, as needed, so she can function effectively and live a healthy life in the world, while also experiencing life with the jaw-dropping, mind-blowing, wonder-struck awe of a newborn baby.

For a much deeper dive into this type of awakening, check out my book, *A Practical Guide To Spiritual Awakening*.



TYPE 4

Heart-Awakening

Awakening FROM: Selfishness & neediness

Awakening TO: Love & generosity

Feels Like: Warmth, love, connectedness and unity

How To: There are many methods to catalyze heart-awakening, but the most powerful way is to begin with Awakening to Oneness. Then heart-awakening flows naturally.

When Jovanna and I arrived at Amma’s Ashram in southern India, we both felt the powerful love energy opening our hearts, as soon as our rickshaw passed through the front gate from the town of Amritapuri. It

happened in a moment; I can still feel the “opening” sensations in my heart-center when I think back to that day.

The Ashram is full of empathy, love, and compassion, because that is Amma’s core teaching. Love is embodied in the behaviors and facial expressions of the thousands of people who live within the community. It radiates outward to the people in the surrounding towns, and creates a sense of peace, compassion, and togetherness for many miles in every direction.

I was granted an interview with one of Amma’s →



Shubamrita, at Amma's Amritapuri Ashram.

chief ambassadors to the western world: Shubamrita.

When I asked about Awakening and Enlightenment, Shubamrita smiled at me and said:

“Amma’s message to humanity is to awaken to their True Self and to realize who they are, in Reality. We all have certain wrong notions about ourselves. We feel ourselves confined to this identification, to the body mind and the intellect. True Nature is much beyond that, and the goal of Amma is to help us, to awaken us to that reality of who we are.

“We think we are just this limited individual, but in reality, we are much more than that. We love to say, ‘Who am I? I’m just a drop in the ocean,’ but as Rumi puts it, we are not really a drop in the ocean, we are also the ocean in the drop.

“The role of masters like Amma is to awaken to this infinite source of strength and love that we have within. That in reality is also the purpose of life, because then you experience true freedom. All the boundaries that you have that you feel are limiting you, they just kind of wane away, and you are able to be in that state of happiness and bliss all the time.”

From this answer, it seemed like Shubamrita was talking about Awakening to Oneness – or, in the Hindu conceptualization, Awakening to The Universal Self (not only realizing Oneness, but realizing that we ARE the Oneness). But Shubamrita continued:

“Along with [that realization of Oneness] comes certain things, which are also a big part of Amma’s message.

“Amma is somebody who spreads the message of love and compassion all over the world. When you get closer to your True Self, automatically you start becoming loving and compassionate. Because as you get closer to who you are in reality, you see yourself in everybody. And when you see yourself in everybody, you cannot do anything else but love and serve.

“So this compassion that we see from Amma, that is flowing boundlessly, it comes from that vision of Oneness, where she doesn’t see anybody as separate

from her, and that keeps just flowing and flowing without a stop. So it is this vision of Oneness that makes compassion complete.”

At this point, it seems that Shubamrita is saying that love and compassion are natural by-products of Awakening to Oneness. So, we might think that we should just focus on Oneness, and let the Heart Awakening arise in its own time.

But the message that Shubamrita conveys for Amma does not end there.

“At the same time, Amma also stresses that we shouldn’t be waiting until we gain that realization [of Oneness] to be compassionate. Sometimes compassion is also the way. You try to be consciously compassionate, and that helps you to grow as well, and that really helps you to realize that the other person is not separate from you. So compassion is the path as well. Love and compassion are big parts of Amma’s message.

“To sum it up, it is to know who you are, and also to be loving and compassionate to people. And that’s what Amma does through her life, also. To every person who is coming to her, she is giving them this message in her own way, and guiding them towards the goal of self-realization or God-realization, whatever you call it.”

So, the Heart Awakening can arise as a natural by-product of Awakening To Oneness, but it can also be cultivated through the intentional practice of empathy, compassion and loving-kindness.

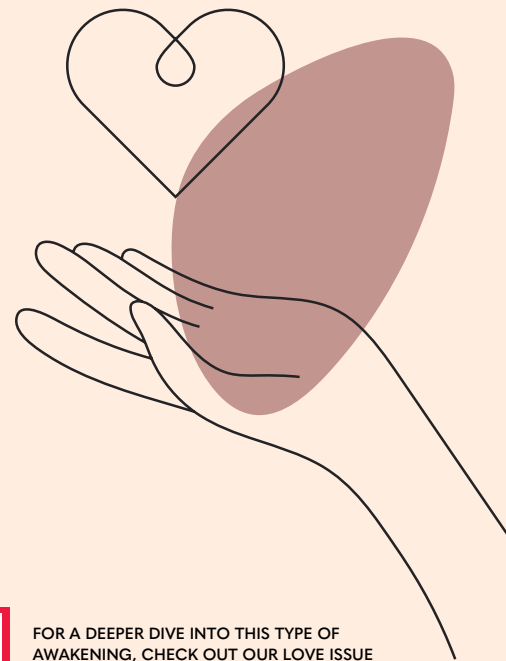


PHOTO: KEVIN ELLERTON



FOR A DEEPER DIVE INTO THIS TYPE OF AWAKENING, CHECK OUT OUR LOVE ISSUE OF MEDITATION MAGAZINE (SPRING 2023), OR SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW TO WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH SHUBAMRITA!



TYPE 5

Kundalini Awakening

Awakening FROM: Insensitivity to the energy in the nervous system

Awakening TO: Sensitivity to the energy flowing through the nervous system

Feels Like: Electricity flowing through the body, mainly through the spine, from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. Some people see rainbow colors, feel massive waves of emotion, shake uncontrollably, or have other experiences.

How To: Kundalini yoga, kundalini meditation, and other methods can catalyze kundalini awakening.

When I was nineteen years old, I began to question

the assumptions underlying the dogma of my Judaic religion, and embarked upon a Journey of Spiritual Awakening that I am still exploring to this day.

Over the course of this path, I have experienced powerful moments of awakening to The Present Moment, to Oneness, and to Love.

I never really thought about Kundalini until I experienced its blissful rushes in Punnu Singh Wasu’s Ananda Mandala class at The Yoga Barn in Bali. In that class, I could feel the energy surging through my body, and even through my hands, into (and from) the hands of the people around me.

That was a very powerful class for me. While →



Nhi Nhi Le standing on a lotus in Bali.

life-changing experience of energy moving up my spinal cord. It felt like a serpent of energy was coiling up through my energy centers. I was witnessing an infinite array of colors and geometric shapes. It was psychedelic and electrifying. As the intense rush of energy surged from the base of my spine up to the crown of my head, it unleashed a force that felt orgasmic, blissful and transcendent. Every single cell in my body was dancing.

“I was obliterated into nothingness. From nothingness, I became everything. The journey was out of time, space and place. I felt whole, empowered, blissful and at peace. I am unsure how long it went for - perhaps a minute that felt like eternity.

“Prior to that night, I had never heard of such an experience. I had no idea it was a Kundalini Awakening until I asked the Balinese High Priest.

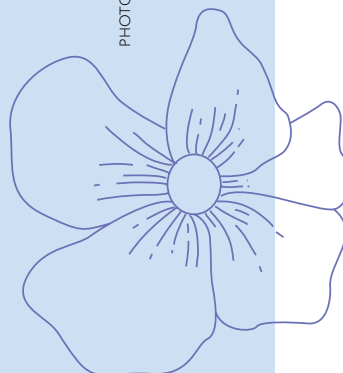
“The Kundalini Awakening that night felt like an ascension process, and my integration afterwards was the path of descension. It took me some time to integrate everything.

“But right after the awakening, I could hear a ‘voice’ nudging and ushering me to do things completely out of my comfort zone. The voice told me I should upload a guided meditation online and begin my path of being a meditation teacher. Although I was nervous and scared about how I would be received, I did it anyway. Within three years, I grew a meditation community of over 12,000 people on the *Insight Timer* app. I’ve been able to collaborate and work with numerous companies, held incredible workshops and masterclasses, hosted over 150 live events, facilitated over 100 Theta Healings for souls all around the world, and held a nourishing wellness retreat.

“My Kundalini Awakening has given me strength and courage to go after what my heart desires, in order to elevate so I can be of greater service to humanity. It has blessed me with unwavering grace, and expanded my capacity to love others and to feel worthy of being loved in return. As I have experienced the touch of Light/Source, I recognize it is not separate from me: I am the Light. I am everything, and everything is me. I am interconnected with all things and beings. The ‘I’ no longer exists... it is ‘We’ who does.

“I believe that in life, we go through a series of awakenings with some being more profound than others. Being present, with a sense of open-heartedness, is the portal to awakening. We are awakening through so many moments in our day to day lives, bringing us closer to remembering who we truly are, at our core essence. Like the jewel in the lotus... we are the jewel.” ●

PHOTO: NHI BY JULIEN MELOT, SUNRISE BY ZOH



other meditations took me into bliss over the course of hours (or years), this felt like a rocketship into ecstasy, presence, and Oneness. Instead of starting with presence and going toward oneness and bliss, this kundalini meditation took the opposite path: start with the ecstatic bliss of a super-charged nervous system, and use that as a doorway to presence and Oneness.

For me, while this “Kundalini Awakening” was very powerful and blissful, it came after I had already become quite familiar with presence, Oneness and Love, so it was not very life-changing. It has put me in closer contact with the energy in my body, and that often makes me feel good. I enjoy those rushes that flow through my spine on a day-to-day basis, and can activate them by focusing on those sensations, contemplating Oneness, and things like that.

For some people, though, Kundalini Awakening can be the spark that ignites the powder keg of Presence, Oneness, and Love.

Nhi Nhi Le, one of the panelists who spoke at The Awakening Summit, had a powerful Kundalini Awakening that rocketed her into Oneness. Here is how she describes it:

“In late 2020, while exploring spiritual practices with a High Priest in Bali, I was initiated with my own *Phurba* - a triple sided Tibetan ceremonial dagger that symbolizes the world’s axis, uniting all three worlds together. It is a spiritual tool used to conquer evil spirits and negative energies, transforming them into positive forces.

“After a deep ceremonial fast to connect me with my dagger, one night in my sleep, I had a powerful,

becoming familiar

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From an early age, Punnu was practicing yoga, meditation, kirtan, healing modalities and spiritual techniques alongside numerous Indian masters. Punnu shares his profound knowledge and experience through trainings & courses. A student of the world, Punnu is known for his humor, his zest for life, and his ability to combine ancient Indian teachings with modern day living.

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ADVERTORIAL

Here’s a soul-igniting question for all of you women who are feeling stuck, living on auto-pilot, and struggling to make a change in your life without feeling guilty...

Have you fully stepped into finding your voice, and living the life that lights you up -- even if it’s not “the norm?”

Or are you still neglecting your needs to make others happy, and hiding parts of yourself because you’re afraid of disappointing others, being judged, or what people may say?

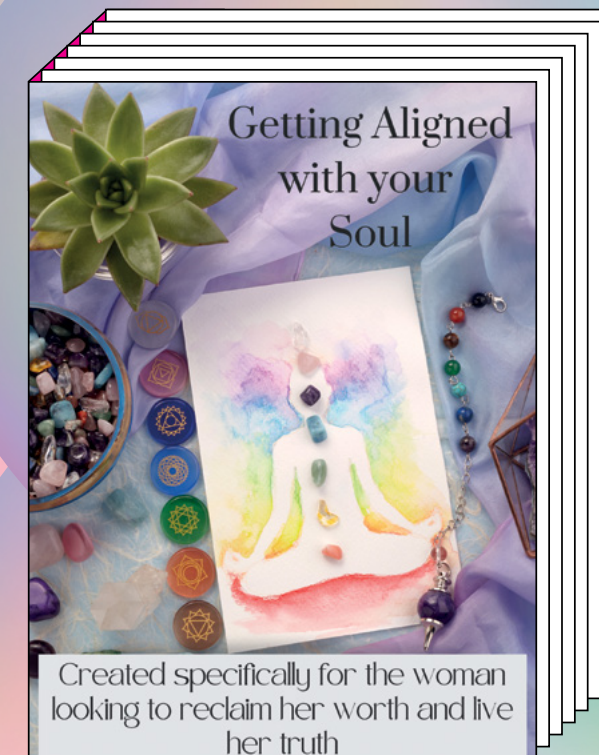
If you knew you could successfully own who you are and what you want, and explore something different, without the second-guessing, guilt and insecurities standing in your way...

...would you finally feel confident to break out of the box you have outgrown, and step into that version of yourself who inspires others to do the same?

#REALTALK. It is time for you to begin reclaiming your worth, and give yourself the love you deserve. Here is a way for you to implement that. ►



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3 Things I Learned

From Meditation Magazine's Awakening Summit

On Feb 26th, 2023, Kevin Ellerton & Dr. Jenelle Kim hosted Meditation Magazine's inaugural Awakening Summit. They interviewed seven powerful speakers about Spiritual Awakening.

Words by Mark Van Buren

As an avid spiritual seeker, Buddhist practitioner, author of multiple books on meditation, and editor at Meditation Magazine, I am very familiar with the word "awakening."

I have my own understanding of "awakening," based on my own experiences and beliefs... but I have also heard the term used in a variety of ways by hundreds of teachers throughout dozens of traditions. It seems that awakening is not simply

defined, nor is it one thing in particular.

Some use the word "awakening" to refer to an experience of a deeper reality. Some refer to an opening of the heart. Others understand awakening as the unfolding of a new way of being in the world, a journey of waking up from an inauthentic life to an authentic one.

With all these different definitions and understandings, it may seem as if awakening is a subjective experience that's unique to each individual. However, awakening in all its forms seems to share some common threads.

No matter how it's explained, spiritual awakening appears to be profound and

transformational for those experiencing it, forever changing the way we move through life, freeing us from separateness, and connecting us with all things.

In an attempt to expand my own understanding of awakening and to clarify exactly what it is, I decided to join Meditation Magazine's Awakening Summit with a beginner's mind, to see what others had to say.

The first discussion group (Panel One) consisted of four highly influential women talking about their own personal journeys of spiritual awakening:

Speaker 1: Chrissy

Beauty influencer's perspective on life changes after near-death experience

Chrissy, a popular beauty influencer with over five million social media followers, had a near-death experience in 2021. This experience changed her perspective and caused her to take a year-long break from social media to explore introspection. In a late 2022 video, Chrissy recounts an experience of present-moment awakening when she chose to listen to her soul rather than her mind's conditioned habits.

"I said, 'OK, what does my soul want?' and I was like, 'I just want to clean my house and listen to music!' So I did, and I had the best day ever!

"And I was like, 'How did you just have the best day of your life, and you just was in the house with Chihuahuas listening to music?' It was literally the same songs, on the same playlist. And I realized that I was

taking music for granted.

"I felt this sort of gratitude, not for what I had, but because I was alive. I was breathing. This music was here all along, and I took it for granted! My body was here working for me all along, and I took it for granted.

"In that moment, it was like I was experiencing the fullness of life. Like this moment that I've been waiting for, thinking it was going to be like, some big event... here it was, all of a sudden, out of nothing, of just pure appreciation.

"For the first time, I was experiencing unconditional love for myself. I was more identified with myself who was in that room that night that was like, 'Yeah, everything's f'd up, but you're okay. This part of you is okay.'

"As I became more identified with my soul, all the things in my life that were stressful and needed to change were still there. They just didn't have the same hold on me.

"And I always thought, 'I'm too sensitive. I need to be tough. I need to be strong. I need to avoid my emotions, avoid suffering.' And because I'm so sensitive, I had to invest a great deal in numbing down all my sensitivities. But whenever you deny something, it just clings to you even further. And once I started allowing myself to be just exactly as I am, it was like everything started to fall into place."

Chrissy spent that introspective year reading books and listening to talks by people like Deepak Chopra, Ram Dass, and Paramahansa Yogananda, and diving

deeply into the spiritual side of life.

She spent time contemplating her decade-long career as a beauty influencer and considered whether to leave it all behind, but ultimately settled into a more holistic and integrated perspective.

"I was very critical and judgmental of social media and the role it plays in our mental health. I had to turn away from it, and I wasn't sure if I was ever going to come back. But now, that's not where I've landed. I'm at a place of such gratitude for social media.

"I've learned that social media is a tool, and a tool is neither inherently bad nor good. It depends on the way you use it. I had to go on that path to arrive here, to a place of gratitude and accepting social media for what it is and putting my awareness in the good.

"How could I say that social media is this evil thing when it's the same place that I went to after my near-death experience, where I found comfort because people were sharing their stories? When we connect in a real way, we heal. That's why I'm thankful to be able to share."

Chrissy's massive social media following had previously only known her as a makeup artist and beauty influencer. Chrissy wanted to share her awakening experiences openly on social media, but her publicists and managers advised against it. They wanted her to have a "vulnerability moment" and then go back to being "an aspirational influencer," focusing on helping people get what they want in the future, rather than just appreciating what they have in the present moment.

But Chrissy knew that she could not go in that direction. It would not feel authentic to her soul. After a year of social-media silence, Chrissy bravely released a deeply raw and vulnerable video talking about her awakening experience, pulling zero punches. Where will her path lead next? Only time will tell.

PHOTO: CHRISSY

"For the first time, I was experiencing unconditional love for myself."



Speaker 2: Charlene Lizette

Three awakenings are better than one... right?

Her new lifestyle led to an unwanted sexual experience, which brought her to yet another awakening.

“Once I came home and I washed him away, and everything cleared itself off of my body, I realized that the trajectory I was on in my life was so self-destructive, all because I didn’t love myself, all because I didn’t know how to value myself. I didn’t know my self-worth, and I didn’t know how to honor and respect who I truly was, so I kept trying to fit into places where I didn’t belong.”

These introspective realizations guided Charlene to a Buddhist teacher, whose impact on her was profound.

“He helped me understand what consciousness and awareness is. He helped me to understand what it meant to step out of the ‘self,’ and really stay present and absorb and observe things as they are rather than what I wanted them to be. It was through having a mentor that I was finally able to tap into the world of spirituality and understand what it meant to embody love and be love.”

But this second awakening, like the first one, was short-lived. Charlene felt pressured again to fit in and tried to live a “normal” life, finding a partner and having a child. But this path was not in alignment with Charlene, and it did not last long.

Charlene’s third awakening was catalyzed by the darkness in the dissolution of her relationship with the father of her child, and the major life transformation that resulted. Following

her angels’ guidance, Charlene started a YouTube Channel (which now has over 135K subscribers) to help support those experiencing similar awakenings.

Charlene’s story highlights the fact that an awakening experience doesn’t guarantee a permanent, life-changing shift that fixes all of a person’s problems. Like most of us, Charlene embodies the truth that our journey isn’t always a straight line, but more of a winding staircase where we loop around to old ways only to be awakened by life and reminded once again of our higher purpose. There are many twists and turns, successes and failures, and moments of falling down and getting back up, but ultimately life has its way of returning us back to our path.

"I was finally able to tap into the world of spirituality and understand what it meant to embody love and be love."

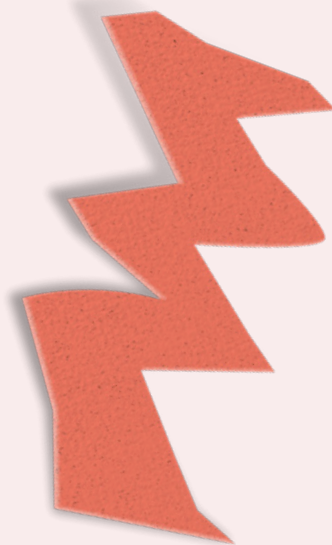


PHOTO: MAYA SHERWOOD

Speaker 3: The Spiritual Latina

Motherhood is the most intense awakening

The next speaker was the creator behind The Spiritual Latina brand, Stephanie Martinez-James.

“My story began in childhood. My parents immigrated from Mexico, and there was a lot of trauma in our lineage that unfortunately got passed down. I grew up in a very conflicted household. There was a lot of violence and abuse. I believe that that’s when my awakening started because that was when the darkness started for me.

“Around the age of seven or eight, I saw things that a child probably shouldn’t have seen, that completely altered the way that I viewed myself, the way that I viewed sex, and the way that I saw the world. I saw a lot of darkness, and that led me to a journey of darkness.”

Like Charlene, Stephanie experienced an unwanted sexual experience that led her down a path of self-destruction. She turned to novelas (Spanish soap operas) to find a new way of living.

“I was sold on this dream that you see on TV, of these famous people that are so happy and have all this money. I started to see the money, fame, and success, and I wanted that because I wanted to escape the life that I had.”

In the hopes of escape, Stephanie moved to California to pursue an acting and modeling career. Her career blossomed quickly. Stephanie was making more money than she ever had before, but her inner life was deteriorating.

“In California, I just lost myself. I spent about 10-15 years indulging in self-destructive behaviors, alcohol, substances, drugs, and toxic abusive relationships. I kept repeating these patterns not understanding that I was allowing them to happen because I wasn’t setting boundaries for myself; because I didn’t love myself.” Stephanie eventually had a transformative message come to her in a dream where she realized that if she kept living this way, she would, in her words, “end up dead or in jail.”

“I slowly started losing my passion for my [high-paying] job, because... money wasn’t enough. [I realized:] I’m burnt out and my health is struggling. I want to have a baby but there’s no way that I can do that right now because of my lifestyle.”

This realization led Stephanie to begin working with a shaman who introduced her to peyote and ayahuasca. When speaking about her first aya ceremony, Stephanie remembers: “This was the first time that I addressed all the trauma I was carrying. It was a very difficult, intense, hard, painful healing journey.”

Aya and peyote helped Stephanie to make sense of her pain, connect with her purpose in life, and manifest her ability to conceive and have a son. “Pregnancy and motherhood is probably... the most intense spiritual awakening that you can ever experience because you are literally a portal for this soul coming from the spirit world.”

“My son is the most beautiful blessing in the world, and now I understand why I went through everything that I went through. I don’t think I would have had I not gone through all of it.”

PHOTO: KYLE JAMES

Speaker 4: Tara Schulenberg

A spontaneous Kundalini Awakening

The final speaker in Panel One was Tara Schulenberg, a Kundalini Yoga Instructor who co-founded the Elevate the Globe Kundalini Yoga community and the Intune Kundalini Yoga app. Like Charlene and Stephanie, Tara spent many years running away from herself and her life.

“Anytime I felt an uncomfortable feeling or whenever I had to face myself, I would run away and oftentimes I would actually physically move across the country. I was not okay with myself because I had no idea who I really was and I didn’t really understand what society wanted from me.”

After many years of deep unhappiness, Tara had her first awakening.

“I remember at one point I stood in front of the mirror after I’d just cried, and my spirit came through and said, ‘You have to learn how to let go of things that are not good for you’. At that moment, I knew what I needed to do. I knew I needed to leave the bad relationship I was in. But it was the hardest thing in my life because I had this

feeling: ‘If I leave him, I’m going to be alone for a long time.’ And at that time I didn’t know how I was going to do that. I didn’t want to do that. It was very, very scary, and I was in a deep place of desperation and darkness.” In an attempt to pull herself out of this dark place, Tara tried talk therapy and experimented with astrology. It was also during this time that Tara’s friend Britt invited her to take some Kundalini Yoga classes. Tara recalls a powerful kundalini experience in her very first class:

“The first move we did combined spinal twisting with the breath. I remember just feeling all this tingly energy in my body. The instructor explained that if you’re feeling that, you’re actually re-patterning your auric field, re-patterning your body, and opening your heart. I remember having this lightbulb moment, like, ‘Holy crap! This is a therapy I can do for myself!’”

After committing herself to Kundalini Yoga, Tara’s spiritual perception became stronger, and she had another deep awakening experience.

“I saw four [angelic] beings walk into the room and open up my heart. One of them told me that ‘It’s time to open now,’ and I just started speaking for about an hour and a half. I wrote down everything. [The beings] basically showed my friend (Britt Deanda) and me that it was time for us to come together and create something.”

This moment of awakening led Tara and Britt to create Elevate the Globe and Intune.



PHOTO: ASHLEY STREFF

Speaker 5: Dr. Robert Svoboda

What constitutes “Spiritual Awakening?”

Panel Two’s first interviewee was Dr. Robert Svoboda, author of several books including *Aghora* and *Kundalini*. He was the first Westerner to be licensed to practice Ayurveda in India. Dr. Svoboda’s writings about his mentor, Aghori Vimalananda, have introduced the Aghori traditions of India to the Western world.

Kevin: “What constitutes spiritual awakening?”

Dr. Svoboda: “As I was taught by Vimalananda, and in my own personal experience, it’s not like you are asleep one day and completely awakened the next day.

“The word we commonly use in Sanskrit [for being asleep] is that one is completely overtaken by dullness, or *tamas*. And that means you’re stuck in your own self-definition. The way that you were brought up... the little box that people put you in, is the box that you tend to stay in.

“And when that box first opens, it is an Awakening, because suddenly you realize that there’s more to reality than you thought there was. But that’s only the first stage.

“Then [awakening continues] over a period of time. It was a long period of time in my case. I continue to find myself becoming more and more awake in different ways. And this is after, what now, 50 years?

“This Awakening is very much like being a human being. It’s a process. We experience ourselves as being integrated organisms on a moment-to-moment basis, but we’re being transformed, millisecond by millisecond. And that transformation usually is something that is not explicit to us until we start to redefine ourselves in a way that makes it more explicit.”

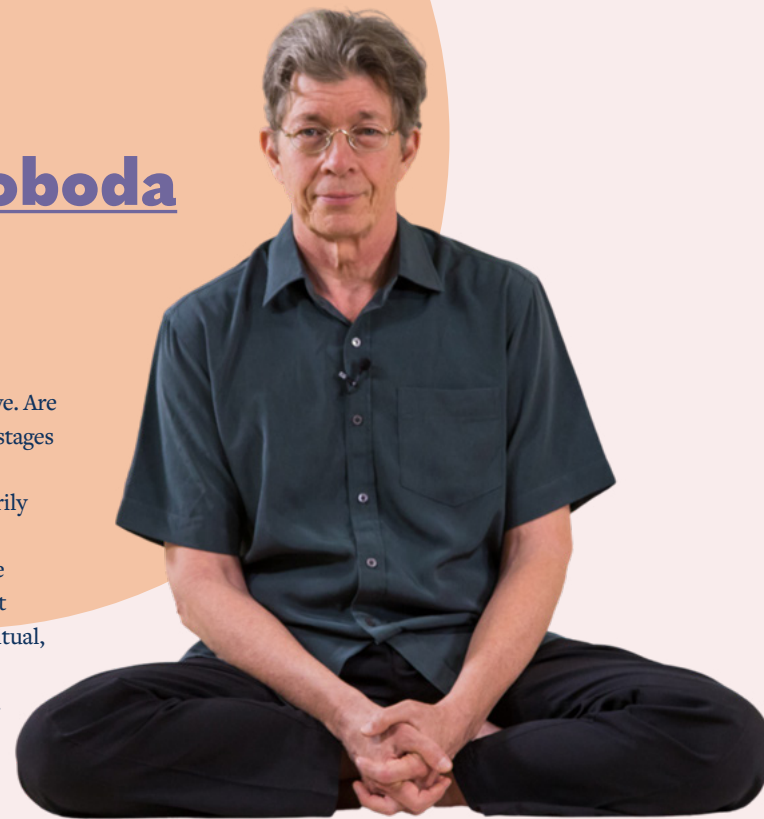
Kevin: “I’ve been interviewing gurus for a decade and asking about their awakening experiences. I’ve identified four categories:

Kundalini, Presence, Oneness, and Love. Are these distinct awakenings, or are they stages in a journey?”

Dr. Svoboda: “They’re not necessarily stages. They would be different kinds of Awakening in the sense that they’re different parts of your reality. Not just your physical organism, but your spiritual, your pranic, your mental organism. They’re different parts of your reality. Eventually, you want your entire reality to become awake and connected to that undifferentiated thought-free reality of awareness.

“An initial awakening is going to be kind of temporary. In my case, when I was sixteen years old, it was a Kundalini Awakening. I had no idea what Kundalini was. It took me years until I had a context for that, and found a way to start to work with that energy. But Kundalini is one manifestation of Shakti out of many different manifestations. Shakti means energy, Shakti means power. Shakti means the ability of Consciousness to manifest itself in this world of name and form and Duality.

“If you were connected to Oneness indefinitely, then there is not going to be any reality of your individuality anymore. So there’s always got to be some kind of relationship between that ability that you as an individual have to connect to Oneness, and the reality of you as an individual. Meaning... by definition, you (as an individual) are part of Duality. You are temporarily separating your awareness from all of the other awareness in the cosmos. So there has to be a relationship created between that experience of Oneness and the experience of Twoness, if you’re going to be able to continue as an



individual. If you simply become awakened and connect to that reality [of Oneness], you’re not going to be able to remain a human being any longer.”

Kevin: “Is the ultimate spiritual journey about merging into Oneness while still maintaining a human identity, or are there different kinds of awakening experiences for different people?”

Dr. Svoboda: “There are, in my experience, absolutely different kinds of Awakening.

“For example, if you talk to a sincere devotee of Krishna, they will say they have no desire whatsoever to connect to the Oneness. They want to remain separate from Krishna so that they can enjoy being connected to Krishna, and enjoy the experience of there being that Duality.

“So it depends very much on how you define your goal. And at least in India, and at least from Vimalananda’s point of view, there is no end to the number of goals, the type of goals, the directions you might go into. It’s up to you to decide what direction you want to go into, and then go in that direction.”

Speaker 6: Nhi Nhi Le

At the base of it all was just love.

Next on the panel was the popular Insight Timer meditation teacher, Nhi Nhi Le. Nhi described a powerful experience that she had in her sleep during a period of fasting and spiritual practice:

“All I felt was this energy rushing from the base of my spine to the crown of my head. I was seeing geometry and colors. It felt like bliss, like an obliteration of my entire being, and that experience really opened up my gifts, my creativity, and the remembrance of what I’m here to do. And at the base of it all was just love. The only word that I kept hearing was love. And I knew I had to share it.”

This awakening inspired Nhi to continue doing years of deep spiritual work and a commitment to a life of service – spreading the love she connected with and continuing to share her heart in the most authentic way.

Nhi explained that you don’t just have an awakening experience and then magically all is well. Awakening doesn’t solve all our problems. The laundry still needs to get done. Difficulties arise. We still need to take care of our lives.

“The awakening experience doesn’t make life all rainbows and butterflies! Awakening brings us back to shadow work and is always teaching us how to embody what we [have learned]. Have we really learned our lesson? Or are we going to go back to our old ways?

“The awakening is always reminding me: ‘How much are you embodying who you really are?’ and not seeing the dark as something bad, but really as a powerful teacher that’s there to open us up to more light.”

Kevin: “You said that the awakening is embodying who you really are. So, who are you, really?”

Nhi: “There is this part of us, this Eternal spark of incandescent light, that is so unique. So, the ‘me,’ the ‘I,’ that awakens is coming back to that remembrance, to unveil that Eternal

Spark, that genius inside of me, of each of us, that separates us, that makes us so unique, that we carry in our DNA... and being able to share that with the world.

“That part of me that wakes up is that God self, that Source self, knowing that I’m not separate from anything else, not separate from the flower, the butterfly, this laptop, and all of you [who are listening to and reading these words]. We’re so interconnected, and when we awaken to that, we truly are able to serve from such a space of love and devotion.”

Kevin: “So... it sounds like you’re saying that you are that ‘unique spark’ that’s separate from everything, but you’re also talking about interconnectedness, and how we’re not separate from anything. How does that uniqueness and interconnectedness go together?”

Nhi: “I love to see it like a grand orchestra, and everyone is their own instrument. One person is a violin, one person’s the piano, one person’s a trombone... and we are playing this beautiful, musical song. I really see it like that.

“So my mission is: how do I refine myself? How do I keep my own self sharp and be able to show up, and heal myself in a way that I contribute to this musical Grand Orchestra in an empowered way? Yes, we are our own vessels, but we play this bigger role in this Cosmos. So that’s how I see the separateness and the interconnectedness.”



PHOTO: JULIEN MELOT

Speaker 7: Miaoming

How can I be of benefit to others?

“Finally, there is a letting go of all concepts and identifications, and all that is left is love, compassion, and kindness.”

The last speaker was Juemiao Miaoming, the spiritual leader of the Heart Chan movement in the US. Miaoming received heart-to-heart transmission from the 85th Patriarch of the Order of Chan in 2011.

During the Awakening Summit, Miaoming shared a personal story about awakening to love.

After giving a Dharma talk in a stadium in Taipei, Miaoming was seated in a car, en route to a meditation center a few hours away.

“Just as we were ready to leave,” Miaoming remembers, “they opened the door, and asked a young girl, who was probably twelve or thirteen years old, to sit [next to me]. There was a really powerful negative energy when she sat down.

“They introduced us as we started to drive. The driver told me that this young girl that just sat down beside me had a very close relationship with her mother. They did everything together. And her mother died yesterday, very tragically. She was having a very difficult time dealing with the situation, and they thought maybe I could help her to deal with that situation.

“It was incredibly overwhelming. What could I possibly say to this person, that might ease her pain? I felt grief before. I’ve felt very profound grief. I’ve had the opportunity to speak at funerals and with hospice patients. I felt that loss and that fear. But this was different. This was powerfully different. It wasn’t just grief, it wasn’t just a broken heart. It was a shattered heart. She was just completely shattered.

“I asked if we could take a moment to just breathe first, to just share the breath. As we started to do a very basic, very fundamental breathing technique, there was this overwhelming sense of peace and calm and a sense that everything is really going to be okay.

“This isn’t coming from me, and it’s not coming from her. We both looked at each other and shared a facial expression – the

eye contact – are you feeling that too?

“There was an acknowledgment that we could feel this incredible sense of nurturing, of love, of compassion, of a sense that everything’s going to be okay. That you’ve always been loved, you’re going to continue to be loved... that this doesn’t go away, it’s not something limited only to a physical body, it’s much more powerful than that. It clearly transcends physical life, and that the spiritual essence is incredibly powerful and always with you.

“As we felt that, as that sense became so powerful, I could feel her releasing. Almost like that shattered heart was starting to come back together to some extent.

“She started to talk. She started to share some experiences that she and her mother had had. But the sense was kind of like ocean waves. There would be a calm, and she would share an experience. And then there would be this feeling... “but we won’t have that again.” And the grief would come in, and be incredibly powerful. And then it would dissipate. Maybe she’d share a humorous anecdote, and we’d laugh.

“There was a sense over time that there was a calming and a settling. And there was this feeling that everything was going to be okay.

“When the ride was over and we got out of the car, she looked at me, and she said, ‘I’m gonna be okay.’ And

I could feel that she was.

“I have, from that day, expressed such a profound sense of gratitude that I was allowed to be a party to that. There was nothing ‘for me’ in that. There was nothing that I did, other than be a witness to that experience. Just the gratitude of having been able to experience that is really quite overwhelming.”

Miaoming’s story was a powerfully emotional moment to conclude The Awakening Summit, with everyone – the hosts and panelists – taking a few moments of silence to gather themselves.

Miaoming’s story highlighted the fact that while awakening may initially be self-centered (“How can I be free of my suffering? What can I gain?”), it tends to transition toward an other-centered attitude: “What can I offer the world? How can I be of benefit to others?”



ILLUSTRATIONS: FREEPIK.COM. PHOTO: HEARTCHAN

TL;DR:

3 Things I Learned From The Awakening Summit

I came into the Awakening Summit with a sense that I “understood” what Awakening was... and for exactly that reason, the Summit has been quite an eye-opening journey.

After hearing all the speakers, one thing seems clear: Awakening is not simply defined. Whether it be visions of angels, an intuitive voice from within, a moment of profound presence, a near-death experience, or even a coincidental meeting of a teacher, guide, or new spiritual practice, it’s clear that anything can become the catalyst for a lifelong path of awakening.

Here are the top three things that I learned from Meditation Magazine’s Awakening Summit:

1: THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF AWAKENING.

Not only are there different types of awakenings, but also many different things one can awaken to. Our own personal awakening is unique to each one of us and depends on what we need to learn, and what our heart is calling for us to follow.

2: NO MUD, NO LOTUS.

Thich Nhat Hanh said, “No mud, no lotus.” Oftentimes our pain can be a catalyst for awakening. Many of the speakers in the summit had painful experiences that opened them to new paths to walk on. It was the deeply painful moments that made them seek a new direction.

I’m reminded of young Siddhartha before he became the Buddha, leaving the comfortable walls of his palace only to see aging, sickness, and death for the very first time. These shocking and terrifying sights were followed by seeing a wandering monk meditating on the side of the road, showing Siddhartha a new way of relating to his life.

I also recall the story of the parting of the red sea in the Old Testament, where Moses and the Israelites were trapped between the red sea and the incoming army of Egyptians. In their moment of despair, God helped Moses part the sea, allowing him and his people to move safely down an unknown path in the direction of a new life.

Based on these ancient stories, along with those of the speakers today, it seems that awakening can come from our darkest moments. In that darkness, when it feels as though there’s no way out, all of a sudden, a new way arises that ultimately leads us toward a path of freedom.

3: AWAKENING IS NOT THE END.

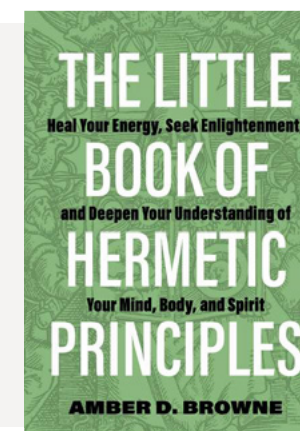
Spiritual Awakening doesn’t magically save us from our lives. Instead, there’s an ongoing unfolding of learning, deepening, and cultivating. Whatever it is we wake up to, what’s clear is that we’re being asked to try our best to embody whatever it is that we have experienced, and walk in the direction we’re being called to move toward with an open heart, a willingness to learn, and a desire to love ourselves and others – trying our best to be a light in the darkness. ●

IF YOU WANT TO WATCH THE AWAKENING SUMMIT YOURSELF, GO TO [YOUTUBE.BE/MXZHSPLWYNQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMXZHSPLWYNQ) OR JUST SCAN THIS QR CODE!



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An Interview With Adyashanti

Dive deep into consciousness, awareness and enlightenment in this fascinating conversation between Kevin and Adyashanti.

Words by Kevin Ellerton. Photos by Steve Kurtz.

When we considered who to interview for The Awakening Issue, Adyashanti was at the top of our list.

There are many spiritual teachers in the world today, but there are few who radiate the energy of awakened consciousness.

That energy – that you can feel emanating from those beings who are deeply immersed in Presence and Oneness, as they allow beautiful words to flow from stillness/Source rather than from ego/mind – is electrifying. It can pull your mind from thinking to presence, from ego to Source, in a split second, far more powerfully than the most meticulously crafted string of words or ideas.

In my early spiritual explorations, I spent a lot of time watching YouTube videos from teachers and guides who radiated the energy of awakened consciousness. Alan Watts, Ram Dass, and Adyashanti were among my favorites.

So, I was very excited to hear that Adyashanti (or “Adya,” as he is known to his students around the world) was available for an interview. I always jump at the opportunity to meet the people who have most powerfully influenced my own spiritual journey, and Adya did not disappoint.

We spoke for over two hours, got super deep into the nature of Awakening, Enlightenment, Self, and Reality, and had a lot of fun along the way.



Why it's important to define our terms



Kevin: There are a lot of spiritual teachers who don't get precise in definitions. One of the things that I like about your teaching is that you tend to be precise about things.

I think that's really important in our day and age, because things move into this Western world that we're living in through the gates of Science, and there's nothing that scientists hate more than an ill-defined term, right?

Adya: Right! It's important. That's why I make an attempt to be as clear as I can. Because there's a lot of confusion in spirituality, and a lot of terms that are used

in very different ways.

And even though I'm often talking about getting underneath the conceptual mind and all that, I'm a huge fan of clear thinking.

If your mind understands what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how you're going about it, I found that it can kind of go... [Adya exhales deeply]... "Ahhh. Ok."

We do have these western minds that want to understand, that probably aren't going to accept everything on faith. Nor should they!

It's important to understand what we're doing, so then we can let that go, and move on. But that's such an important base to start from.

It's important to understand what we're doing, so we can let that go and move on.

The difference between consciousness & awareness

Don't go for wild states of consciousness. The real Enlightenment, that has to do more with awareness.

K: So Consciousness would be more directional, and Awareness would be omnidirectional?

A: Right. [Another way to look at it is that consciousness] is having a specific experience.

You've probably heard "Enlightenment is not an experience," even though we are always talking about experience. The reason they're saying that is because it's not necessarily a higher or lower Consciousness thing... it's the awareness of all that.

Like right now, your awareness, my awareness, everybody that might be listening to this now or anytime in the future, the awareness that's just here... it's constant, isn't it? It's like the sun.

And within that – even right now: you, me, anybody listening – our state of consciousness inside of ourselves is mercurial. It's always changing.

And yet awareness is just shining the light on all of that. Both of them are very important.

Kevin: What's the difference between Consciousness and Awareness?

Adya: I will use them synonymously until I'm at a certain depth. Then I start to distinguish them.

If I'm really getting specific, down in the weeds into deeper experience – and this is just the way I use these terms...

Consciousness is almost always upon contact. We think of "states of consciousness." Our consciousness can change from happiness to sadness, connectedness to disconnectedness. These are all states of Consciousness, right? Consciousness is moldable, changeable, never really standing still.

This is just the way that I am using these words. That's always an important qualifier, because other people might use them differently.

Awareness, in the way I use it, is not changing. It doesn't go through different states. It's not a high state or a low state or a blissful state or any other state. It's the awareness of those states.

We're experiencing this awareness continually. For all the searching we do for it! [Adya chuckles]

I often say to people "It's not a special thing. Go towards your garden variety awareness. Let's crack that open. Don't go for wild states of consciousness. Those are out there, but the real Enlightenment part, that has to do more with awareness."

You could think of awareness as like the sun shining. It's just there. It's always there.

Consciousness is more like a flashlight. We can shine it at different things, do different things with it, but the whole time we're fiddling around with our flashlight... there's the Sun just illuminating the whole thing.

So when I'm being precise, that's how I'll distinguish Consciousness and Awareness.

K: So aside from being directional versus omnidirectional, it seems like consciousness is also more of a limited kind of thing, like an "Atman" (individual soul), whereas "awareness" is more Universal, underlying everything, like the "Brahman" (Universal Consciousness).

A: Yes, yes. And since you're using the terminology, like Brahman and Atman, one of my favorite old spiritual teachers who's no longer with us, Nisargadatta, had a wonderful way of putting this. He said:

[Adya paraphrases]: "When you die, everything associated with Consciousness stops. It's the Awareness that's continuing."

This has a lot to do with our instinctual fear about death. To the extent that we are identified with our consciousness, it's terrifying, because we have an intuition, we know, that's coming to an end. And that's scary, right? And yet there's the awareness of that.

You know, there's lots of ways to think about it. If you go to India, and they start talking about "Pure Consciousness"... they're kind of using that term in the way that I'm using the word "awareness." They distinguish "Consciousness" and "Pure Consciousness." "Pure Consciousness" is consciousness without a subject or object.

That's great, but I think it's a little philosophical for where most people are. I'm trying to go at this a little more experientially than philosophically.

Even when we are lost in thought... we are still one.

Kevin: Sometimes we have to get a little philosophical to be able to define terms precisely. Thank you for engaging in that analytical stuff with me. I know that's not so much fun sometimes.

Adya: I don't mind at all, my friend.

K: I think we both prefer just diving into that deep sea of Oneness, so we'll get to that in a second...

A: But we're doing that, by the way. We're doing both! You can have a philosophical exploration, but you can do so from an experiential basis. You can use your mind, but you really have it connected, and referring back to that connection, so it just doesn't start to get lost in its own little abstraction.

K: Yeah! I think that's so powerful and important for us to remember. And even when we are thinking and distracted, even when we forget that we are the Oneness, we still are it.

A: Absolutely! Right! If it's all One, it's all One. Period. No matter what. It's not "One" when these [specific] conditions are met. Even when your mind's going a little nutty and you're having a tough day, and nothing's going right, and you feel about as enlightened as a stone, you know, at the end of the day, that's as much life, existence, suchness, as anything else. As human beings, we don't prefer to be in that state [of distraction and separation], but we never get away from Reality. But boy, we can really feel like we do.

Even when your mind's going a little nutty and you're having a tough day, and nothing's going right, and you feel about as enlightened as a stone... at the end of the day, that's as much Life, Existence, Suchness, as anything else.

What does awakening feel like?

K: What does Awakening feel like?

A: It does feel like waking up – like literally from sort of a dream – because it is! We're waking up from the dream that we've constructed of ourselves.

It doesn't mean that we don't exist or something, it just means we don't exist as the construct in our mind. And boy, when awareness or consciousness wakes up out of that, it really feels like when you wake up in the morning.

It also feels like an immense relief. I remember for me, it felt like I just put down a 150-pound backpack that I didn't even know I was carrying all my life. [Carrying around the ego] becomes so habituated. That's a lot of psychological and emotional weight.

So there's a sense of lightness, of expansion, of appreciation for life.

Spirituality can sometimes seem almost life-denying, because we're letting go of thought and attachment and grasping and all

this stuff. But if it goes right, it's not pointing us into a life-denying place, it's actually almost the opposite: a profound intimacy and connection with life.

It does feel like waking up – like literally from sort of a dream – because it is! We're waking up from the dream that we've constructed of ourselves.



Who are "you?"

Hindu mystics claim that Awakening lies in the realization that "You" are not separate from the Universe... "You" are the Universe, experiencing itself.

Buddhists, on the other hand, claim that the ultimate Awakening is realizing "anatman" -- "no self." Far from being *everything*, "you" don't even exist.

Are these Awakenings compatible? Or contradictory?

Many meditators interpret the Buddha's teaching of "no self" to mean that the individualized, egoic self does not exist as a separate entity from the rest of the Universe. This interpretation is compatible with the Hindu view; if there is no "self" that is separate from The Universe, then You *are* The Universe.

But the Buddha was more of a psychologist than a metaphysician, so it would be inconsistent for him to make an ontological statement about the non-existence of "self." A psychological interpretation of "no self" (that would be more on-brand for The Buddha) may be that we should "stop engaging in the psychological process of self-identification."

Letting go of the sense of self completely, simply experiencing the flow of Existence, without holding onto any concept of "me" or "I," means we are not identifying with anything at all... not even The Universe.



Kevin: Many people interpret "anatman" to mean "there is no separate self." But lately I've been thinking that maybe the Buddha meant that we should just STOP the whole process of identification completely. Not just to stop identifying as the ego self, but even to stop identifying as what the Hindus call "The True Self," or "Brahman." Like, even when you get to that most Ultimate level of Reality, don't even identify with that. What do you think about that interpretation of "anatman?"

Adya: Right! That's the deeper realization of no self. It's just: you're not identifying.

That which is compelled endlessly [to identify itself] -- even after deep Spiritual Awakening experiences, often -- that thing is still trying to identify itself. It's just going Cosmic now. Which is fine, that's part of the path, that's part of our unfolding. And then, at some point, that which is compelled to define -- even if it's in the highest spiritual state -- that just drops off.

Then, I go, "Okay, this is the core of the self: the thing that's always endlessly trying to find the right identity for itself."

And we use that, right? We can't just dismiss it and try to do an end run around it. We're utilizing that: "What are you? What are you? What are you?"

Nisargadatta's whole entire teaching was just: "Dwell in the sense of 'I

Am,' and that'll get you to Universal Consciousness and connection." And every once in a while, he just sort of did the microphone drop. Like, at the end of that teaching, he'd say... "and what we're aiming for is beyond that. That's only going to be there as long as you're breathing."

But that's the path. And if we go [along the path, the need to identify will eventually] just fall off. It's not important to me whatsoever to say that I'm conveying "The Buddhist Teaching" or whatever. Teachings are dualistic by nature, because language is dualistic by nature. I'm all for what works in peoples' experience.

K: I remember hearing in your interview with Sounds True, that you talked about an awakening experience you had, where you were looking around, and you realized that "everything is I." Even the toilet you looked at was "I." Everything was "I."

A: [Laughing] I tested it. I specifically looked at the toilet, saying, "Hmm, let's see how well this works." Sure enough... [both laughing]

K: That is a very powerful, beautiful way of experiencing.

When we look around and see that everything is "I," it feels like Unity and Bliss. And also, there's a personal aspect to it, because, if everything is "I," there's still a "self" there.

But sometimes, when I play with this perspective, I drop that sense of self that comes with the "I" at the end of "everything is I" ... and then, it's just: "everything is." It feels different to me, when I do that. The difference is... when it loses that "I," and the personal aspect goes away, an identification falls away. It's a thought, an idea, a belief that falls away... the belief that there is something called "I." And when that falls away, the "I" falls off of the "Experiencer," and it's just "Experience."

A: Yes! It's just Experience!

K: So I wanted to get your perspective on these two states. Because they're very similar, but they're two slightly different ways of experiencing the same Reality. So I want to get your take: is one of those states "Awakening" while the other is not?

A: Nope. I would put them both in the category of Awakening.

If part of awakening is waking up to unity... just because a unity experience has a little bit of "I" in it, we can't just discount the unity experience, right? It's real and it's legitimate. And, you know, the thing is... there is development after awakening. There's a lot after awakening. But we're not going somewhere that we don't know. It's like you're just getting more and more used to the territory that you're in, or that you are. But we do see more, and get more and more clear, and this goes on without end.

But I do get the "I" thing. It is different. Because when that little [impulse toward identification] stops, even if it stops briefly, at that point, you just realize... "Oh! That was just unnecessary."

But it's not like you'll never [experience the "everything is I" perspective] again, you know what I mean? If you go back, and go, "Hmm, what if that 'I' is the universal suchness of everything?" You'll find that, "Oh yeah! That's still there to be experienced... and I also realize that there's something just a little click deeper than that."

K: I guess the reason I'm asking these questions is that -- if you look

at the history of these two states of consciousness...

The Hindus seem to have gone toward that "I" as "the best" state. And there are reasons that I can sometimes prefer that "I" over the "no self" as well. It feels more warm, personal, embodied, and it feels more like love and bliss. Those are things that I feel more when I am playing with the "I" of "Being Brahman."

But when I drop the "I," and it's just experience, there's more peace, more rest, more clarity, more relaxation, because I don't have to hold onto a sense of identity at all. And if you look at the Buddha, it seems like he was saying: "This is better. No self! No self!" But the Hindus were saying "Yes Self. Self is good!" [both laughing]

What do you think? Do you think one of these states (True Self vs no self) is better than the other, or higher, or truer, or anything like that?

A: No. No. I get where your question is coming from, but the way that I look at it now is: it's "map-making." A teaching is map-making. As soon as you open your mouth, it's map-making. The Buddha made a map that really corresponded to his experience, and the Hindus made a map that corresponded to their experience. But it kind of gets tricky, because the maps can start to inform our experience. If we had a map in our consciousness for thirty years and we have an experience, there's a great likelihood that the map is going to be influencing that experience too.

But they're all just part of the greater human psyche.

I have never come upon a path that I think just has something really profound to offer everybody in whatever state they might be in. There are so many paths because there are so many different ways of coming about this, for different people and the way they're hooked up. I don't want to shove every single person into the same box.

Let's say somebody has had a lot of trauma in their life. I see this all the time. Somebody has some trust issues, or intimacy issues, and they're terrified to let their guard down. If I'm going to meet

someone in that state, I'm probably going to be going like, "Let's have more orientation to that 'I,' to the best version of that."

For now. Because it's all about timing. It's medicine, right?

If someone's despondent, they've just lost somebody in their life, life looks bleak and hopeless -- you're not necessarily going to hit that person with, "Well, let's just tear apart every belief you have today."

But if somebody came to me and said, "Adya, I just want the truth, man... whether it's good, bad, or indifferent, I don't know why, but I just gotta know it. There's nothing I can do about it." Okay, then we're in a different arena now. You're doing okay, we're not having to stabilize you as a human being. So we can start taking the deep dives.

I'm trying to give you a sense of why I have, I think, a big view of teachings and approaches. Because at the end of the day, it's a particular person, in a particular room, with themselves, trying to utilize a particular teaching. What is the right teaching, for that person, at that moment? If a Hindu-oriented teaching works, by God, I'm going to use that. And if the more Buddhist-oriented teaching, if that's where somebody is, let's use that.

Let's not limit ourselves from what the world has given us, this immense variety of perspective and experience, even on the experience of Oneness. Let's utilize all that. It's all medicine. Why would we keep most of our medicine cabinets closed and locked because they have a different name on them? Because it's not me, it's you. You're the one that's going to be feeling: "Is this working? How's the medicine going down?" And if it's not going down well, just remember: there are other medicines out there in the spiritual toolkit.

I can't tell you, Kevin, how many hundreds of people I meet that have just banged away at something that hasn't really worked for them. But they just think, "Well, an enlightened master said this is the way." And so... it was the way for [that particular enlightened master], and maybe for some other people, but what's it for you? You're the one that gets to make that decision, not somebody else. Don't put that in somebody else's hands. Your life is yours.

Are Awakening & Enlightenment reserved for “special people?”

Kevin: I think people often shy away from talking about Awakening and Enlightenment, because it sounds like ego, right? People think that Awakening and Enlightenment are only for special people, so if you're talking about those experiences, it sounds like you think of yourself as some kind of special person.

But when I hear you talk, I always get the impression that Awakening and Enlightenment are normal, natural things that anyone can experience, rather than some high and mighty thing.

Adya: One of the biggest barriers we have in spirituality, and to Awakening, is all the centuries of teaching around specialness.

And when we think of enlightened beings, you know, they've usually got some fancy robes on, so they look like monarchs. Which hits some gene in us, apparently, because it happens all over the world, right? They look like kings and queens, and then we think, “Well, that's the model.” But that's just the person who got up there on stage. There's probably a hundred and fifty or more that were never dumb enough to get on stage. They thought, “Are you kidding? All that trouble? I think not!”

[both laughing]

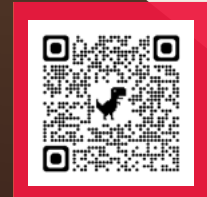
It's why I put my Buddhist robes away a long time ago. The first year that I taught, I had my Buddhist robes on. And that's fine. I love the tradition, and people that are dedicated to upholding that. That's part of the ritual. But the more available and down to earth we can make this, [the better]. Because all those centuries of rarity, thinking [Enlightenment] is the rarest thing in the world, that hasn't helped us. It's a big barrier.

It's one of the earliest things I saw teaching: if I could get someone to consider that it's actually possible for them, that was immense. ●

One of the biggest barriers we have in spirituality, and to Awakening, is all the centuries of teaching around specialness.



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PlayWilder: Sustainable Toys

Sky loves to climb and slide on her eco-friendly PlayWilder Montessori gym!

Words by Jovanna Benavente

One of my earliest memories is from when I was six years old, at recess. I remember seeing so many of my classmates hoisting themselves onto the climbing dome, swinging around so gracefully, with so much confidence. I would just stand there and watch, imagining that one day, I might be able to do that too.

My parents never encouraged me to face my fears, because they were trying to protect me. As refugees from Cuba, my family had been through too much; no one could handle another trauma, even if it was just a broken arm. My grandparents always warned me of the dangers that lurked around every corner. That all pervasive anxiety followed me to the playground. The climbing dome was just the first of a thousand life experiences that I held myself back from, all for the sake of staying in my comfort zone.

When Sky was born, I knew that I didn't want to pass on my fears to her. I want to safely support her in doing age appropriate activities, at each stage of her life, that will bring her joy while also pushing her out of her comfort zone.

As a mindfulness and movement teacher, I love how our PlayWilder Montessori play gym instills genuine presence and physical confidence in my child. She began using the gym in December of 2022, when she was only twenty months old. In the beginning, she had no idea what she was doing. She had never done anything that required her to figure out how to move so many parts of her body at once, and in such different ways than she was used to.

It only took her a few weeks to learn how to climb her indoor gym. Now when she goes out into the world and sees something that looks fun to climb, she goes right for it! I know that may not seem like a big deal to some people, but I can feel my inner child beginning to heal. I know that when the time comes, Sky will be one of the first to climb the dome at recess, and show the other kids that they don't need to be afraid. ●



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The Peak Of The Spiritual Path

Closing thoughts on The Awakening Issue

Words by Kevin Ellerton

We often come to meditation and spirituality with the intention of helping ourselves. We want to transcend anxiety and depression. We want to increase our powers of creativity and concentration. We want to improve our wellness, and live happier, healthier lives.

At the beginning of the spiritual journey, we often think of Awakening as the ultimate goal, the highest level, the peak of the mountain, the “destination” of the spiritual path.

But as we become more peaceful and happy within ourselves, the need to strive for “more” and “better” and “higher” begins to dissolve.

When we no longer need to focus so much on ourselves, we begin to look around, and we see the world around us more clearly. We see all the “beautiful” things -- glistening raindrops in a spring sunshower, white fluffy clouds floating in a deep blue sky, leaves floating in an autumn breeze. But we also see more clearly the suffering in the eyes of the people around us.

As we evolve on our spiritual journeys, we become less focused on increasing our own happiness, and more involved in bringing love and light into the lives of others.

Ironically, it is often through the very experience of Awakening that we realize it was never really the point of the journey. In those moments of transcendence, we realize that experiencing transcendent states within our own individual beings is a beautiful thing, but there are many other beings in the world, and we are all of them. All of them are experiencing Existence, feeling happy and sad, pleasure and pain. We want them to feel happy too, so we do our best to be of service and benefit to others.

Without empathy, compassion, and kindness, Awakening is empty.

A person who is fully Awakened, who knows The Ultimate Truth of Reality, but acts coldly and cruelly toward others, is called a sociopath.

In contrast, a person who is Unawakened, Unenlightened, and has no conception of The Truth of Reality, but always treats others with love and kindness, is called a saint.

Love -- not Awakening or Enlightenment -- is the ultimate goal of the spiritual path.

In the service of Love, Awakening and Enlightenment are extremely powerful stepping stones. Once our own cups are full, we are able to share more freely and abundantly with others. And perhaps more importantly, when we realize that

there are no “others” (that we are all One consciousness, One spirit, One experiencer), the boundaries between “self” and “others” dissolve, and loving-kindness flows boundlessly from our hearts, in all directions, out into the world, into the hearts of all beings.

While Love may be The Ultimate, it is also fundamental. We should not wait for Awakening and Enlightenment to shift our focus to empathy, compassion, and loving-kindness. We can (and should!) focus on love and kindness from the very beginning of our spiritual paths.

Perhaps Shubamrita encapsulated it best, in our conversation at Amma’s Ashram:

“It is this vision of Oneness that makes compassion complete. At the same time, we shouldn’t be waiting until we gain that realization to be compassionate. Sometimes compassion is also the way. You try to be consciously compassionate, and that helps you to grow as well, and that really helps you to realize that the other person is not separate from you. So compassion is the path as well.”

Dear Reader, if there is one thing you take away from Meditation Magazine, I hope that it is this:

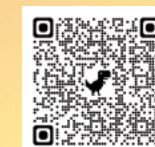
Treat the people, animals, and world around you with love, compassion, and kindness, as much as you can, whenever you can.

May all beings be happy and free ♥



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