

## An Invitation

The vision.

Imagine an open-ended body of water, stretching out from land. Several people stand along the shore. They are barefoot, with their toes facing the water. Some have taken a few steps in and gotten their feet wet. Most are standing along the edge where the quiet water meets the beach.

All eyes are on a smiling woman standing in the water ahead of them. I am the woman. I am speaking about how awareness helps us deepen our life experience so that we can be awake and present to all life brings our way. Everyone listening is invited to find out how meditation develops more awareness. The water in the vision represents awareness deepened by a meditation practice.

Feeling joyful and clear, I call to the people on shore, inviting them to join me. “Come on in. The water’s fine!”

I later understood that the people on shore represent readers of this book. Some have already stepped into the water, but are not sure they want to keep going. They are drawn to going deeper, but are cautious, yet interested enough to not walk away.

Others have heard about this place but have never visited here before. They are curious about the possibility of change that lies before them. In the vision these people feel unsure. They put a toe in the water. Then take it out. Then try again.

In addition, the people who have stepped into the water are deciding how deep they want to go. They are wondering to themselves, “Am I deep enough? Should I keep going?”

The purpose of this book is to help people connect with their longing for an awake, joyful life, by passing on what one person has learned from direct experience about awareness and meditation. The title suggests that dropping the word “meditation” is an opportunity to bypass any misconceptions, fears, or reservations about meditation. This whole book is an invitation to think of meditation as a practice we can do to help us find the happiness we want, a practice that gives us the real possibility of having a healthy, balanced, compassionate, and joyful life.

“Come on in. The water’s fine.”

## An Invitation...ix

### Contents

#### Preface...page 17

What do we really want?...Seeking happiness, avoiding pain...  
Wanting it to be easy...Patti's Story...What's in a word...You are invited

#### *Part I: Remembering Who We Long To Be*

#### *Illustration: The Flowering of Inner Growth*

#### Chapter One: Seven Key Elements for Growth ...page 29

- 1. Intention:** A love triangle... Good Intentions help develop discretion... Learning the hard way...Wanting nothing...Feeling open to everything
- 2. Longing:** A personal story...Jackie's story
- 3. Energy:** Shifting attitude, shifting Energy...Finding the Balance... Active Curiosity... When pain is *all that is*
- 4. Roots of Confusion:** Untangling confusion
- 5. Light of Awareness:** Being with *what is*...  
Autobiography in Five Short Chapters...A family mess
- 6. Desire for Change:** Inevitability of change...Opening to change... Naming Practice...Personal check-in
- 7. Balance:** The working world...Balance and Chaos...  
Questions to ponder

#### Chapter Two: The Flower's Six Petals...page 81

#### Blossoming into our wholeness

- 1. Curiosity:** Three and a half hours late
- 2. Humor:** Who's hearing now...Shopping spree...  
From Harper's Index...The drive for success...Four moms...Zen hot dog
- 3. Gratitude:** Painful stuff...Turning the compost

**4. Compassion:** Opening the way...Our stories...  
Ray Charles...Expanding our view

**5. 100% Responsibility:** Forgiving the boss

**6. Creativity:** Hearing in the fog...An experiment

**A Reminder**

## ***Part II: What Gets In The Way***

### **Chapter Three: Exploring Beliefs...page 109**

#### **Growing into a healthy flower**

**1. Belief Work:** Healing with Awareness...The heart attack...  
Noticing and being curious too...Finding a new relationship with thought...  
Family values

**2. Going Deeper:** Exploring blind spots...Hey you! Over here!...  
Late for dinner...Some television history and more...  
Loving enough to let others be... More about Naming Practice...  
Helpful experiences and information

**3. Thoughts as visitors:** Focus and Awareness...  
A lipstick story...Being aware and feeling at the same time...  
No-thought experiences...It's up to us

### **Chapter Four: Fear as Fertilizer...page 139**

#### **Feel the fear and read this anyway**

**1. Everyday Fear:** What is this, really?...A lost child...  
False Evidence Appearing Real...

**2. Learning from Fear:** Feeling and not reacting...  
Fears make us Stop, Look, and Listen...A personal example...  
A frightful hike...When dying is *what is*...  
Fears help wake us up

### **Chapter Five: Urban Meditator Devours Crocodile and Other Mistaken Ideas About Meditation...page 153**

## **Top 12 Myths**

### **Myth 1: Busy Myth**

Different thought experiences

### **Myth 2: Control Myth**

### **Myth 3: Sitting Still Myth**

### **Myth 4: Must Be Comfortable Myth**

### **Myth 5: Lotus Myth**

### **Myth 6: Monk (Nun) Myth**

Jennifer and Maddy

### **Myth 7: Time Myth**

### **Myth 8: Other People Myth**

### **Myth 9: Space Myth**

### **Myth 10: Religious Myth**

### **Myth 11: Study Myth**

### **Myth 12: Can't Myth**

**A moment of reflection**

## ***Part III: Remembering Who We Really Are***

### **Chapter Six: Beginning the Journey...page 177**

**Awareness:** Noticing *what is*...Noticing thought, clouds moving...

Different tools of Awareness practice...

Practicing means practicing with Compassion

**A natural evolution**

### **Chapter Seven: Awareness and Meditation...page 183**

**1. Taking Five Minutes:** After sitting...In the beginning

**2. Practical Guidance:** Breath practice...Whole body listening...

Pain in meditation...

**3. A Few Words about Teachers:** The stuff in the attic...  
Noticing guidance ... We need to keep going

***Part IV: The Adventure***

**Chapter Eight: Being Open With All of It...page 199**

**Gayle's story:** Why people meditate...A fresh perspective...  
Wanting to be helpful...Working with change...Being flexible...  
Gayle's adventure begins...The real adventure

**Author's Note...**page I

**Acknowledgments...**page III

**Illustrations and Quote...**page VII

**A Short List of Related Reading...**page VIII

**CDs by Padme Nina Livingstone...**page IX

## Preface

### **What do we really want?**

It's been said that the purpose of life is to find happiness. The word "happy" may be freely exchanged with love or joy. Isn't it true we all want to be happy? Don't we want to feel loved and to be loving and joyful?

Isn't it also true, much of the time, we are confused about how to be happy? We try all kinds of ways. We go to college with the dream of finding happiness in our chosen field. We get married thinking the other person will make us happy. We lose or gain weight, thinking our new body shape will make us happy. We buy a new car thinking that the car will make us happy.

Many of the things we desire, even hunger for—our material, sensual, or social goals—get us into trouble because of our attachment to the immediate pleasure they provide, or our ideas of the enduring pleasure we imagine they will give us at some time in the future. It can feel wonderful enjoying the immediate satisfaction of these kinds of desires, like a promotion, sexual intimacy, or a new home. However, the confusion arises when we mistakenly believe that these pleasurable experiences should continue, will be deeply fulfilling, and ensure long-lasting happiness. As our understanding of life deepens, we discover that our hunger for more money, more friends, and more stuff, leads us to perpetual dissatisfaction. We must be willing to look deeper within if we are going to find true happiness.

Looking within is not easy, though; we are often afraid of unexplored aspects of our self. We prefer the continual distraction from our pain and confusion that our habits, and our culture, readily provide. We like the comfortable feeling of sameness; we may even prefer our illusion of sameness and try to avoid change. But change happens. It is inevitable. Have you ever noticed how you want to be both happy and avoid change? Does it work? Without inner exploration, we continue to live confused, distracted lives.

### **Seeking happiness, avoiding pain**

In our human condition, each one of us seeks happiness and avoids pain. We are built that way. It is just the way it is. Unless we develop our capabilities for

knowing what's true, we continue to be confused about what brings us happiness. We also continue to be disappointed and in unnecessary pain.

*Let's Not Call It Meditation* looks at what gets in the way of who we long to be, so we can clear up our confusion about where to find happiness. Personal stories are shared which mirror the challenges we all face in life. Using the image of The Flowering of Inner Growth, we see how our deepest desires for a balanced, loving, and an essentially rewarding life are reflected in the beauty of a flower. Intention, our heart's longing, and energy are underpinnings of our development. Taking 100% responsibility for our actions, we explore aspects of our life with curiosity, humor, gratitude, compassion, and creativity.

We explore what gets in the way of clarity. We take a look at the role of "fear" and pain-producing beliefs in perpetuating our confusion. We show how confusion is created and how we can untangle it. We explore being still, focusing in the moment, and listening with openness to our body/mind<sup>1</sup> experience.

By practicing focusing within, we learn to honestly assess what will bring us true happiness. This does not mean we eliminate existing sources of satisfaction, pleasure, or fun. It means we are more honest, compassionate, and clear in each moment. We are present with joy, as well as sorrow. We are alive! Truly alive!

### **Patti's story**

The guidance session was nearly over. Parked near the canal, we sat in the car. It was our first time together and Patti had told me her story. I had mentioned it was time to teach her a simple beginner's meditation.

"I don't meditate. It's not me," Patti exclaimed.

Honoring her resistance, I said, "Let's not call it meditation. Let me teach you a tool that will help you relax and learn how to focus your attention better."

She visibly relaxed. After a brief instruction on counting the breath, we sat still and silent for about three minutes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Body/mind is a term used to include all that occurs within the physical body and the mind. It points to the intimate connection between our response to thought and the physical and emotional sensations in the body.

Afterwards, Patti was smiling and said she had liked it and wanted to meet again.

### **What's in a word?**

The word meditation has become mainstream, and it seems every person who has heard about meditation thinks of it differently. We have hopes about the potential of meditation, and ingrained misconceptions about it too. “Nope. Not me. I could never sit still for an hour” and “It is something Buddhists do.” Or “Wonderful, happy, special people meditate, not me.” “The Dalai Lama meditates... but I can't get my thoughts to stop.”

Meditation is used by most Eastern spiritual traditions to describe practices that help develop clarity, compassion, and awareness. In Western culture, it is often used to describe relaxation and self-hypnosis techniques, awareness practices, and visualization exercises for healing.

In the spring of 2003, I attended a health fair as a vendor. Many people attended a meditation session lead by a Qi Gong<sup>2</sup> therapist, and others attended a meditation session with a Kundalini yoga teacher. By the time they got to my table, I noticed each person thought of their own experience and assumed they knew all about meditation. The different uses of the word “meditation” can create confusion.

Patti was open to dropping the word “meditation.” She had so many ideas about meditation; she would not even try it. It was helpful for Patti to stop using the word and not name the experience at all. The openness created by dropping a word which held so much meaning for her, was crucial to experiencing her inner silence with awareness. In fact, one way to describe meditation is “practicing awareness.” It is a way of discovery, an adventurous journey through personal experience into what the Persian mystic Rumi called “the Sanctuary within.”

Awareness is being open with *what is*. Awareness is also a word for feeling awake on all levels; physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Awake is when we get up in the morning with a clear mind and feel ready for whatever the day has in store. Our eyes, ears and senses are wide open. We notice details of how we are

---

<sup>2</sup>Qi Gong (pronounced chee gong) is an ancient Chinese energy healing practice.

feeling, how clear the sky, or how defined each snowflake. We experience the smiles of others, and the humor in situations with a compassionate heart. Clarity, honesty, compassion, and gratitude are available when we are awake.

Yet, often we feel lost in “cloudy-brain” and experience resistance to our day. Thoughts come and go about all we have to do. We feel stressed even before we get out of bed. This cloudiness is sleepwalking in a state of mild to extreme confusion. It is maintained by our pushing against *what is*, instead of bringing curiosity to our situation, and waking up.

### **Wanting it to be easy**

A seventy-year old woman, Ruth, came to me for guidance. At the end of our session, she wished out loud for a pill for more awareness. We burst out laughing. We laughed at the human condition that desires pills for everything. She laughed, too, at her sense of embarrassment to have said something “silly.” I looked into her eyes, and realized she meant it! She really wished for a pill. She realized practicing being aware takes energy and she had already talked herself out of doing it.

As you read, check into your own prejudices and ideas about meditation. If the word “meditation” is not used, is there more openness? Opening up to your own curiosity, you may discover feeling intrigued. With curiosity aroused, you can continue this adventure and find out for your self what it is all about.

This work has no pill as a substitute for experience. There is no pill for feeling fully alive! It takes energy, focus, and enough healthy desire to nourish the motivation for change. Cultivating awareness can be hard work.

The good news is I’ve never heard of anyone who regretted one moment of more awareness. Practicing awareness is what makes a life truly worth living. It brings authentic, deep happiness to our days.