

FREE MEDICINE

MEDITATIONS ON NONDUAL AWAKENING

PIR ELIAS AMIDON



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A Note to Those Who Open This Book

THIS BOOK IS A COMPANION FOR THOSE whose deepest desire is to experience first-hand the good news at the heart of reality. This good news is not hidden — it's revealed in the ceaseless spontaneity of the present moment — but opening to a direct experience of it requires a process of “self-erasure” that can be difficult to allow. Relaxing into the transparency of one's self can bring fear, and we can easily pull back behind familiar borders without knowing it, or get caught up in spiritual ambition and lose the freshness of presence that's at the heart of this. Hence the need for companions like this book, or like many other books in this vein, or better yet, for a human companion who can remind us of what we have forgotten.

I recommend reading *Free Medicine* in small doses — perhaps keep the book on your bedside table, read one or two pieces a night, or just open it at random and read what you find, and then close the book again.

These short pieces have been written over the past five years for students and others interested in what I call the Open Path, a path of nondual awakening. Inasmuch as the Open Path offers guidance, it does take the form of a spiritual path; however, since that form is fundamentally open, the path vanishes as we travel it. The Open Path belongs to all of us. It is not defined by religious beliefs or owned by any tradition. It belongs to all of us because it is present *right now*, for everyone, in the indefinable freshness of the moment.

Many diverse themes are explored here. What unifies them all is their allegiance to “the good news at the heart of reality,” and to directly experiencing that good news rather than simply philosophizing about it. The good news itself is unspeakable. Words can only orbit around it, doing what they can to point to it, but ultimately they must await the serendipitous arrival of grace — and when that might happen is anyone’s guess. The most we can do, in the words of the Sufi master Ibn ‘Arabi, is “put ourselves in the way of it.” That’s the intention of this book: to put the reader in the way of grace.

My own spiritual path has been influenced by many traditions. Although I was initiated in a Sufi order nearly fifty years ago and continue to teach in that tradition, the style of Sufism I try to express is ecumenical rather than sectarian. My conviction is that we humans share an ancient and universal mystical impulse. We’ve inherited it from countless generations of ancestors who, like us, looked out on this world, and into the mystery of their own presence, and wondered where all this came from, wondered if there is a truth hidden within the world we perceive that might reveal our true identity, and how it is that we belong here.

We live in an extraordinary and dangerous time. In the past century and a half, humanity has expanded its numbers from less

than one billion to over seven billion. We keep multiplying and demanding more sustenance and material comforts from our generous and fragile planet. We even talk now of migrating to other planets, since it's obvious we're hell-bent on trashing this one. But even if we could fly off to other planets verdant enough to support us, we wouldn't deserve them. Without knowing who we are and how it is we belong here, we will never grace any planet with our presence.

We do belong here. We belong together. We belong with the great community of life on earth. We belong in the cosmos, and in the heart of All Being. Our belonging is immanent and self-evident in this moment. Experiencing the immediacy of this revelation is the deepest desire of these writings.



Homage to the One

*To this transparent light, clearness itself, omnipresent as space,
to This, the host of all that appears,
to This, the non-locatable, spontaneous here-and-now,
to This that is identical with the openness of all those who,
whether known or unknown, have recognized its simple presence;
to This, our vibrant home, never created
so never able to cease,
to this unseen light, the most familiar presence of now,
indistinguishable from the bones in our face
and the tongue in our mouth,
indistinguishable from our most intimate thoughts and feelings,
yet beyond all limitation,
to this infinite kindness that allows everything to appear,
we bow down.*



*Caught here, believing we are something,
believing we are something that could be alone,
believing we are these frail, beautiful bodies,
we look for love from each other,
all the while we are made of love.*



*To which direction shall we bow,
to what sacred place, shrine or God,
if not to the bowing itself?*



*Bow down, we bow down,
the thunder perfect mind is our own!*



*What candle shall we light, on what altar,
to this that lights the candle,
and is the candle, and the light?*



The Desire to Be at the End of Distances

I REMEMBER MYSELF AS A CHILD waking up in the treetops. My bed was snuggled up against a window, so when I opened my eyes in the morning my entire view was of the tall crowns of beech trees, their leaves golden-green and fluttering in the early morning light. Looking at them made me feel safe. I felt as if I didn't have to go anywhere else. There was a friendliness there: me and the treetops. I was home.

Invariably, though, my reverie would come to an end and I would get up. I sometimes wondered why I got up, since nothing that followed in my day ever gave me a truer sense of home than being with the trees in my bed did. There were always distances to travel: distances to go downstairs, distances to finish my breakfast, distances to walk to school, distances to wait for summer vacation to start, distances to go until I grew up. In my bed in the treetops there were no distances.

As I got bigger I would climb those trees and sit alone in their smooth branches. Being alone up there was home. But always I would have to climb down and join the distances again.

Gradually my life became a traveling of distances. I rode my bicycle to the sea, a long distance, and when I arrived I looked out on its grey frothy surface and saw only distances. I learned to kiss my girlfriend, and the winning of that kiss revealed the breathless distances our bodies had yet to travel. I rode my little motor scooter across America to San Francisco, and finally arriving there, I saw the distances to Japan and New York.

I felt the small, daily distances layering into larger ones, and those forming part of ever-larger ones. There was no end to them: each moment was a distance to the next, the cracking of an egg a distance to its eating, the planning of a project a distance to its completion. Things never really arrived; they just led to more distances.

So I traveled to a spiritual teacher, thinking that crossing that distance would finally bring me home – but again, I only saw more distances. Years of practice and meditation followed, things to understand, spiritual levels to attain, the distance to enlightenment enormous in my imagination.

That's not to say I was never "in the moment." I was. My moments were made of the delicious, confusing signals of a sensate body and a curious mind. But where was the payoff? Where was the place where everything was resolved? Where was the end of distances? Where was home?

The young boy at home in the fluttering golden-green leaves, the young boy with nowhere else to go, is now a white-haired man. My desire for the end of distances has gradually vanished. It has vanished through the intercession of hundreds of little graces inviting me to simply accept what is, as it is. No struggle.

Though it seeks intimacy, the desire to be at the end of distances is the very thing that maintains them, and their loneliness. Wanting something that is not yet here; not wanting something that is here; wanting things to change; not wanting things to change – these wantings create the span of distances themselves.

Home is not what I had imagined. It is not a place of arrival. Seeking to arrive at the end of distances, whether to a place of security, or success, or embrace of love, or spiritual epiphany, is to remain unfulfilled. The end of distances is the end of seeking them.

Of course, distances still appear to me, but now they end where they begin, in this intimacy. For example, as I write this there is the distance between these words and what I am trying to say — but this is the distance of love-play, not waiting.

Another way to say it might be that distances open in every direction, but now they simply move through me; I am not going anywhere. I neither dwell in a “here” at the beginning of a distance nor seek a place of safety or resolution that I imagine at the end of one. There is no “here” or “there.” There is just home where I am, a home with no walls, which makes it as much yours as mine.

(“The desire to be at the end of distances” is a line from Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Rock.”)



The Everyday Practice

AS A YOUNG MAN SEARCHING FOR TRUTH I found a Sufi order and asked for instruction. My teacher gave me a series of practices, among which was a simple breathing prayer: “Open me Lord, and let me flow.” I was told to silently repeat on my in-breath, “Open me Lord,” and on my out-breath, “and let me flow.”

I took this practice to heart, repeating it whenever I remembered — sitting on my cushion, walking down a street, opening a door, preparing a meal, raising a spoonful of soup to my mouth. *Open me Lord, and let me flow.*

Unlike many in my generation, I didn’t have a problem with the word “Lord.” I wasn’t raised in a theistic tradition, so the word didn’t resonate for me with authoritarian patriarchy — it just signified everything I didn’t understand about reality, all the awesome forces at work in the universe. Since I was a typical young man tangled up in my thoughts and emotions, I had no confidence that I could open myself, but “Lord” — this incomprehensible power behind all things — to this I could appeal and submit. *Open me Lord. Let me flow.*

I repeated the prayer so often that the words became transparent to me, leaving just a visceral motion of opening whenever I breathed with this intention — like a swing swinging in the open air. It became “my familiar,” and still is.

Visiting a friend’s house recently, I saw these words from Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche written in a framed calligraphy:

The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions, and to all people, experiencing everything totally without mental reservations and blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes into oneself.

There it was. The teaching of my little breathing prayer was inscribed in Trungpa’s sentence. His words don’t tell you how to respond to all situations and emotions, they don’t give you any moral guidance. They simply indicate the naked openness by which life can be lived most authentically.

The final phrase is particularly penetrating: “...so that one never withdraws or centralizes into oneself.” How familiar is this movement of withdrawing and centralizing into oneself! Don’t we do it a thousand times each day? Things get hectic, we’re late to work, someone cuts us off, someone criticizes us, our family takes us for granted, we feel inadequate, or lonely, or without a meaningful future. Centralized into our self, we join the world’s neurotic drama. But at least we think we know what’s happening; we have a point of view.

It takes profound trust to open from our solid point of view, from our withdrawal. Perhaps this is the utility of the word “Lord” — surrendering to universal forces you don’t understand, that are beyond your point of view. *Open me Lord.*

But there is something strange here. Who is the “me” that is

opened and that flows? When the *me* opens, is it any longer a *me*? When the *me* flows, what flows?

Here is the heart of this everyday practice. This is where it changes from words and good advice to in-your-face truth. Here we have to stop thinking, and look for ourselves. What “me” opens?

When we look, we don’t find anything! There is simply clear, open awareness, immediate and naturally occurring.

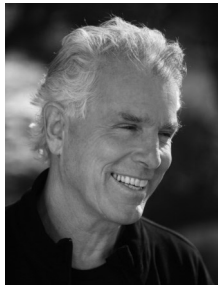
Shabkar Lama, a nineteenth-century mystic-minstrel of the Tibetan plateau, speaks to this same question: What “me” opens?

Do not look at the vision but look for the viewer. Looking for the viewer, if you fail to find him, then your vision is at the point of resolution. This vision in which there is nothing at all to see but which is not a blank nothingness, is vivid and unalloyed perception of the here and now...

No viewer, no meditator, no actor, no me, and finally, no Lord! Just this vivid openness, free of a *me*, free of withdrawal into a *myself*. This freedom is what flows, all by itself. Breathing, now: *Open me Lord, and let me flow.*



About the Author



ELIAS AMIDON IS THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR (Pir) of the Sufi Way International, a non-sectarian mystical order in the lineage of Sufi Inayat Khan. An initiate of the Sufi Way for the past forty-seven years, Pir Elias has studied with Qadiri Sufis in Morocco, Theravadan Buddhist teachers in Thailand, Native American teachers of the Assemblies of the Morning Star, Christian monks in Syria, Zen teachers of the White Plum Sangha, and contemporary teachers in the Dzogchen tradition.

Elias has lived a multifaceted, engaged life, working as a school-teacher, carpenter, architect, writer, environmental educator, peace

activist, and wilderness rites-of-passage guide. He helped develop several schools, including the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, the Institute for Deep Ecology, the graduate program in Environmental Leadership at Naropa University, and the Open Path. Co-editor of the books *Earth Prayers*, *Life Prayers*, and *Prayers for a Thousand Years*, he has worked for many years with his wife, Elizabeth Rabia Roberts, as a citizen activist for peace and interfaith understanding in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Israel/Palestine, and with indigenous tribes in Thailand and Burma on issues of cultural continuity and land rights (see: www.pathofthefriend.org). He was instrumental in founding the *Masar Ibrahim Al Khalil* (the Abraham Path), an international project dedicated to helping Middle Eastern countries open a network of cultural routes and walking trails throughout the region.

Pir Elias has been leading programs in Sufism for over three decades, and Open Path programs since 2005. He is the author of *The Open Path: Recognizing Nondual Awareness*, also published by Sentient Publications. Nine- and six-month Open Path Trainings are offered frequently in the United States, England, Holland, Germany, and Austria. These trainings give participants a chance to work directly with Elias over an extended period, learning to recognize and sustain the freshness of nondual awareness in their lives. One and two week solitary Open Path retreats are also held frequently at Nada Hermitage in Crestone, Colorado.

Information about current Open Path/Sufi Way programs can be found at www.sufiway.org.

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