

The Guillotine of Silence

A detailed illustration of a wooden guillotine, shown from a low angle. The guillotine is made of dark brown wood with visible grain and metal bolts. It features a large rectangular opening in the center, a circular hole near the bottom, and a rope mechanism at the top. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The entire guillotine is highlighted with a glowing cyan border.

It's
Never
How
You
Think
It Is

Robert Rabbin

BOOK BUZZ

“*The Guillotine of Silence* is a joyful, luminous expression of timeless spiritual truths. There is much wisdom in these pages. Robert Rabbin is a wise guide.”
Larry Dossey, M. D., author of *Healing Words* and *Recovering the Soul*

“If you know who you are, you do not have to read *The Guillotine of Silence*. If you do not know who you are, read, learn, and create who you have always been but didn't know. It is always nice to come home and find yourself. Read and be guided.”
Bernard S. Siegel, M. D., author of *Love, Medicine & Miracles* and *Peace, Love & Healing*

“*The Guillotine of Silence* is a book that leads us out of conflict into peace. It is written with clarity and simplicity.”
Gerald G. Jampolsky, M. D., author of *Teach Only Love* and *Love Is Letting Go Of Fear*

“Insightful. In *The Guillotine of Silence*, Robert Rabbin has created a totally accessible guide to the Self. A good book for a person on life's journey.”
A. Kitman Ho, President, Miracle Pictures, Inc.; producer, *Born On The Fourth Of July* and *J.F.K.*

“*The Guillotine of Silence* is profound in its power and simplicity! It packs a wallop for such a small book. A great travel companion for occasional excursions into your Self.”
John E. Renesch, editor/publisher, *The New Leaders*

“I recommend *The Guillotine of Silence* to all who would remember their true, divine nature. Robert Rabbin's words resonate with a profound experience of Self. The enlightened moments captured in his stories lure and

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challenge us to roam in the inner sacred landscape—to begin the journey of Self-remembrance.”

James Strohecker, co-founder, Health World Online; executive editor, *Alternative Medicine: The Definitive Guide*

from the readers

“Your book, *The Guillotine of Silence*, is very beautiful. I am a student/teacher of *A Course in Miracles* and I found that your book and the Course are very similar. My prayer is that your book becomes a best seller and enriches many, many lives. God bless.”

“I loved your book! I take your book with me into the desert and read it between daybreak and sunrise each morning. It is profound! Your insight and the depths of wisdom you share blend perfectly with the splendor of the Arizona land. My mind spins and soars. I read it, not once but twice. The first time I read it through, eager to find what you were going to present next. The second time I read it more slowly. Thinking about things. Relating them to my life. Enjoying clear moments of new insight.”

“This book is a practical salvation of being and a properly ennobling description of the sacred properties of life itself. Delicious!”

“I am writing to tell you how much I am enjoying your book *The Guillotine of Silence!* It is written with extraordinary clarity and really speaks to the place in my life that I have evolved on my spiritual path.”

“*The Guillotine of Silence* doesn’t just talk about peace of mind ... it takes you there. Robert has done a

masterful job of providing easy access to esoteric teachings. I highly recommend this book for anyone eager to expand their experience of living.”

“*The Guillotine of Silence* is more than a book. It has become my guide for those soulful moments when I want to explore the outer boundaries of experience and meaning in my life.”

“*The Guillotine of Silence* stills the mind, opens the heart, stirs the soul ... as does the man who wrote it. Nourish yourself by reading it.”

“Robert Rabbin has reached the core in *The Guillotine of Silence*. I’m on my second read-through. As I read I see even more clearly my own sacred hub. I feel like I’ve come home. This will be a permanent book in my library, one which I will refer to as the years pass by.”

“*The Guillotine of Silence* is the first book I have read that demonstrates how spiritual principles can be incorporated into every moment of my life. It’s one thing to go to a meditation class or a religious service once a week. It’s quite another to observe how my mind subtly enslaves me, in my vocation, relationships and my views of the world and myself, on a daily basis. I refer to this treasure of essays often. It helps keep me clear about what is really true.”

“Welcome home! *The Guillotine of Silence* is a reminder of the Universe within, the one that so easily gets lost in today’s fast-paced world. Reading each essay I am reminded of how glad I am to know myself.”

“Your book, *The Guillotine of Silence*, is beautiful. Every sentence is potent. In most books you have to find a gem out of a mountain of words, but every passage of *The Guillotine of Silence* beautifully describes the inner life. I’ll be with this book for a long time; it’s loaded.”

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“Thank you for *The Guillotine of Silence*. I love it! So far, I’ve discovered that I feel both stimulated and serene as I read it — about 10 pages at a time so I can really let in its message. At some level I get what you are saying, and when I attempt to analyze the words or thoughts, my mind feels like a pretzel.”

“I found *The Guillotine of Silence* quite beautiful. I loved the idea of ego as cockroach! I think you did a great job expressing elusive, inescapable truths.”

“I LOVE your writing. I dive in and drown, and my essence is illuminated by your Light. Thank you! I read the section in your book on addictions to my Deepening Group last night. We were all touched deeply by your words, and it stimulated a wonderful conversation.”

“I love the book!! It is a book to be taken in very slowly. Each sentence is profound. I can relate to your sacred life journey in many ways.”

“I have finally had an opportunity to sit quietly and absorb *The Guillotine of Silence*, and I find it to be a beautiful book. It has become the gentle tool of self-care I give myself daily. I also passed it to a dear friend of mine who has had to care for her mother who recently (barely) survived a massive stroke. My friend has found the message of *The Guillotine of Silence* to be the grounding force in her time of crises. It is truly a gift.”

“I find *The Guillotine of Silence* very inspiring and beautifully written. I quoted your section on ‘Silence’ as part of an exercise that I led at a seminar on shamanism in Amsterdam last month. It was very helpful in preparing and leading everyone to that inner place which is neither thought nor feeling.”

The Guillotine of **Silence**

It's Never How You Think It Is

Robert Rabbin



**This book is dedicated to
Bhagawan Nityananda and Swami Muktananda.**

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INVOCATION

“ “ WHERE THERE IS SUFFERING AND PAIN,
MAY THERE BE HEALING AND EASE.

WHERE THERE IS ANGER AND OPPRESSION,
MAY THERE BE FORGIVENESS AND FREEDOM.

WHERE THERE IS HATRED AND VIOLENCE,
MAY THERE BE PEACE AND COMPASSION.

WHERE THERE IS POVERTY AND SORROW,
MAY THERE BE ABUNDANCE AND JOY.

WHERE THERE IS IGNORANCE,
MAY THERE BE WISDOM.

WHERE THERE IS FEAR
MAY THERE BE LOVE. ” ”

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

These writings were spontaneous compositions, written without deliberation. They were written in the crucible of silence and only after the heat and current of that silence appeared. Many times I would feel a gentle hand squeeze my heart, my eyes would fill with tears and suddenly my fingers would move across the keyboard. Whenever I attempted to edit the “ideas” during or after this way of writing, the process stopped and I could not continue.

That didn't stop me from trying to edit. I often wanted the material to be something other than what it was. I wanted what was written to be graspable; I wanted definitive explanations and certain solutions. I wanted a more singular and consistent style. But there was always a voice that said, “Do not write to please the mind. Let what is beyond the mind speak to disrupt the mind.” Some things are known only through being.

As I wrote at my pine desk, I felt surrounded by a presence which I call love. Looking out the window I would marvel at how beautiful the eucalyptus trees were or how stunning the hummingbirds that hovered at the feeder were. Sometimes I would take a break and wander through the house or walk out to the garden where I would sit silently. Sitting in this silence, I noticed that everything was translucent. A soft light emanated from everywhere. The trees towering above me, the distant hills and the bay beyond, the passing clouds, the clumps of dirt—all seemed alive and breathing and radiant. Something I have no words for was at work where the eyes could not see, tending to everything. What is this? It is love. And this love sanctifies everything. Though it cannot truly be spoken, it is real.

These writings are simply expressions from the place of silence that meditation and inquiry take me to. The content is not that important because whatever can be said is not the truth. If there is value here it is

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because you may be provoked to venture beneath the layers of the mind's false imaginings into the sacred hub within your own heart. There you will find your own truth, your own expression, your own experience of the Self. Should this happen, then we are all served.

PREFACE

In 1969, I lived in a wood shack near the village of Trinidad, about thirty miles north of Arcata, California. I was supposed to be studying Eastern philosophy at Humboldt State College but spent hardly any time in class. Instead, I sampled a variety of hallucinogens, sat zazen and practiced Aikido, followed the saga of Carlos Castaneda, and read haiku poetry — tiny bridges of words that are connected to the immense emptiness behind conventional thinking and meaning. During this time, I encountered the world of silence and in that silence I first experienced that the physical world perceived by the senses was a mere tissue hiding something vast.

It was in search of that vastness that I traveled to India. In 1973, I set off with a friend whom I had met the year before in Israel. Eric and I had decided to go overland from Europe. We set off from Paris, hitchhiking to Brindisi, Italy, intending to take the ferry to Greece, and then trains and buses through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and into India.

During one of the station stops in eastern Turkey, Eric and I ventured out to the platform, where we met another traveler, a Frenchman. Herve was a shepherd who was returning to India to see his “guru,” Swami Muktananda. The three of us struck up a friendship and journeyed together another two months, ending up in Delhi, India. We had endured and enjoyed much and had formed a great bond of love. In India, Herve invited us to visit him at his guru's ashram near Bombay. But Eric and I were headed to Bhutan, so as we parted company to go our separate ways, I was sure I would never see Herve again.

I never made it to Bhutan. I think that the vast silence I was searching for took control of my itinerary. I was first sent to a small ashram in the foothills of the Himalayas, where the resident guru, Neem Karoli Baba,

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had passed on just days before. I stayed there for about a week. During that time I heard many stories of Muktananda, and several people suggested I visit him.

Returning to Delhi, Eric decided that he wanted to study the sitar in Benares. I bought a third class ticket and boarded a train for Madras. My next adventure, courtesy of the silence, was a two week vipassana meditation retreat with Goenka, a Burmese teacher. I subsequently visited Satya Sai Baba's ashram, and wandered around south India. Several months later, I ended up in Bombay. I thought of Herve.

I climbed into a battered red bus and spent the day crawling the 60 miles to visit him in his guru's ashram. I entered through a circular gate into the small marble courtyard that is the entrance wearing sandals, white cotton pants and shirt, and carrying a small rucksack.

Herve was in a Bombay hospital, expected back soon, and Muktananda was up north in Kashmir with a few disciples. I was invited to stay as a guest until Herve's return. I settled into a tiny room with a cot and mattress and a view of the rice paddies and plantain trees. The ashram was quite beautiful and clean, a real oasis from the pounding I had taken wandering around India for five months. Herve returned two days later, and he became my enthusiastic guide through the ashram's rigorous discipline.

One was expected to wake up at 3:00 AM and pretty much remain engaged with meditation, chanting Sanskrit hymns, or work of one sort or another until 10:00 PM. As I was still but a guest, I was allowed some leniency. I managed a few hours a day of meditating and chanting, pitched in with the dishes and the gardening. Sometimes, a few of us would escape to the dingy yellowed tea shop next store, where in deep shadows we'd drink strong tea strained through a T-shirt unwashed in over a decade.

I began to get restless. I wanted to head up to Benares to meet Eric. Herve went nuts when I told him I

wanted to leave. He insisted I wait a few more days to meet his guru. French shepherds can be very persuasive. I relented.

A few days later, a current of intense excitement went through the ashram. Muktananda was coming home. In the late morning we all gathered densely in the front of the ashram with the usual cacophony signaling auspicious events: bells, trumpets, conches, gongs, and clapping, shouting, and stomping. Suddenly, there was the guru.

I spent several more seemingly uneventful days in the ashram. In Muktananda's presence, everyone seemed more alert and alive, almost on edge. I hadn't yet felt the hammer of recognition which would come later in a series of excruciating inner experiences. Once again I felt it was time for me to head north and meet up with Eric, and I told Herve I really had to get moving. I think he felt sad for me that I hadn't connected with Muktananda in the way he had. Reconciled as he was to the mysterious ways of karma, he bowed to the inevitable. Or what we thought then was the inevitable. My wanderlust was inflamed. I was rested and ready for more adventures. Herve told me that it was customary good manners to request permission from Baba, which is what the devotees called Muktananda, to leave the ashram; it was a gesture of respect. After all, I had accepted his hospitality for over two weeks. Not wanting to offend him or Baba, I agreed, though I thought asking his permission to go was somewhat incredible. I treasured my independence.

I had my small traveling bag packed and was within minutes of the next bus departure for Bombay. Baba was sitting on his small marble perch in the main courtyard where he would often sit for hours, unperturbed by time or events. Even with my mind preoccupied with imminent departure, I was aware of a breathtaking aspect to Baba. To this day I have not encountered anyone or anything as compelling as Baba just sitting on his cushions on that marble verandah. He

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was so fabulously dangerous. Anything could happen. Anything did happen.

I went up to him and said, "Baba, I've been in your ashram for a few weeks, but I have to leave now. Thank you very much for allowing me to stay here."

He looked at me for a moment and said, "Where are you going?" It was a reasonable and friendly question. I told him I wanted to go to Benares to meet a friend. He looked at me again, differently, as though he were an x-ray machine. Something in me quivered. "Why do you want to go to Benares?" he asked. "It's cold there at this time of year. It's cold in Benares."

At his last word I went totally blank. I can recall that something in me skipped a beat: it was a sudden disruption of complacency like when you lose your balance and fall without warning. I was disoriented and confused and I couldn't regain my inner balance. Then I plunged into timelessness for an encounter with silence. I don't know how to describe those moments. I know it will sound odd, but I wasn't there: I disappeared. That's why I don't know what to say.

At some point in the aftermath of Baba's comment, I reappeared and steadied a bit but I knew something wasn't quite the same. Some strange transfusion of energy had taken place. Soon, I was all right, or so I thought. I walked back to Herve, and blurted out "I guess I won't be going to Benares." Herve cracked up.

There were many perfectly polite and rational things I could have said to Baba when he told me how cold it was in Benares, like "Yes, but I have warm clothes," or "Don't worry, I won't be there long." But something transpired in that exchange that to this day, 23 years later, I still can't quite fathom. My life took a radical turn. That moment foretold a dream I would have months later in which Baba, holding my hand as we soared through space, whispered, "If you stay with me, I'll take you flying to places you've never been before."

Baba's guru, Bhagawan Nityananda, was reported to have said, "The heart is the sacred hub of the universe. Go there and roam in that space." I believe that the experience I still can't fathom pointed me irrevocably towards that sacred hub. I remained enthralled by Muktananda and remained under his tutelage for the next ten years.

I sometimes reflect on a conversation I had with Baba in his room in India shortly before he passed away. He told me to return to America. He said I was to be his emissary. He said he would tell me where to go and what to do. At that time I thought he was referring to work he had asked me to do as an executive in his organization. Perhaps he did, perhaps he didn't. If there is one thing that is certain, it's that sages are quite inscrutable. Their words and actions have layers of significance and some of the more subtle layers are revealed over time. I don't think it is possible to understand a sage definitively. I don't think anyone can know with certainty or authority what a sage says to a particular person, including the person to whom the sage speaks. I do think that behind everything a sage says is the basic commandment, "The heart is the sacred hub of the universe. Go there and roam in that space."

Looking back, I think that's what Baba meant. I think he meant that I should continue to roam in the sacred hub of the universe. He was showing me my path in this life. To be his emissary is to stand for the light of our own true nature, our essence, the Self. I think he meant that I should serve that Self and listen to that Self and follow that Self. Rumi, a Sufi poet of the Self, said the same thing in this way, "Let the love of holy laughter guide you. Don't visit sad neighborhoods." I think this is what Baba meant.

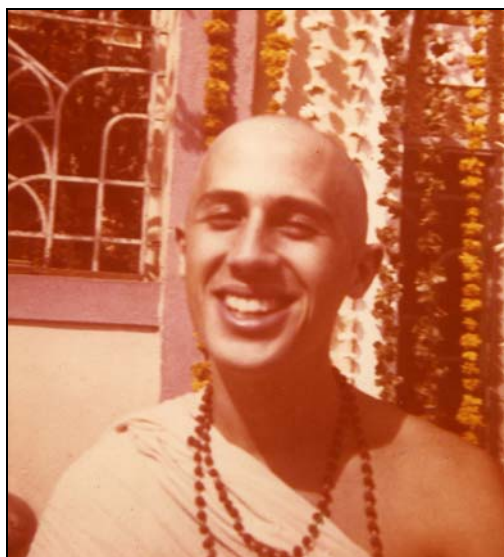
A few days after that conversation, I said goodbye to him as he sat on his chair in the courtyard. I began to slowly walk away, resigned to return to America. He called me one last time. As I turned to him,

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I saw he had leaned forward in his chair. He held a tiny candy in his right hand. With an impish and mischievous smile that contained all the love I could ever want, he said, "You should never leave the ashram without something sweet." That was the last time I saw him.

Over the years, I have tried to follow his instructions. I agree with J. K. Krishnamurti, who said that truth is a pathless land. The pathless path is not always clear, rarely certain, frequently terrifying, always challenging. Roaming in the sacred hub of the universe is simple, but it's not easy. Still, I think we should try.

What Baba said to me is an important message for everyone. I think we all know intuitively that our real home is the sacred hub of our own heart and that our real identity is that Self which is identical to the supreme consciousness that pervades the entire universe. I sincerely hope that we will all try to experience the truth of that sacred hub. If we do, our lives and this planet will become a living paradise of joy and peace.



Robert Rabbin
India, 1973

1

THE SACRED HUB

This book does not contain information or ideas the mind can readily comprehend and use. My statements are not solid answers; they are provocations for deeper questioning, deeper contemplation of how we are to live. In this contemplation of ourselves, we seek to examine thought itself, to uproot and discard all our false imaginings so that we can live with innocence and purity. The light that illuminates the questioner is the silence of the sacred hub.

One way to enter the sacred hub is through inquiry. Inquiry is simply the starting place from which to go deeper into the unplumbed depths of inner awareness. Questions that pertain to life should not be answered immediately, they should not be assaulted with what is already known. Rather, these questions should provoke careful and deep reflection about the question and about the questioner. This spiraling inquiry leads us beneath the conditioned mind to awareness itself. The Indian poet Kabir once wrote, "I reached the place inside me where the world is breathing." It is into this billowing awareness that inquiry takes us.

The mind wants to understand, to grasp some specific meaning. Inquiry, however, does not provide this. Inquiry sabotages the mind and its need for security and certainty. Inquiry confounds the mind's patterns to allow the awareness behind the mind to reveal itself.

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Through inquiry we seek to awaken a capacity of self-knowledge which is deeper than thought and prior to the impressions of acquired knowledge. What we already know is of the past, a mote against new and fresh insight. Insight in the present is not conditioned by the past. Insight in the present is being, and it is this being, free and unconditioned by acquired knowledge, that inquiry awakens and arouses. The intelligence of our being is an innate capacity. It is wisdom. In arousing our innate wisdom, we can clarify ourselves and our actions. We can illuminate the very causes of conflict, doubt, and fear within us. This path of inquiry is a direct and unmediated way to realize our essential nature. When we discover our essential nature, when we recognize who we are — through deep and persistent inquiry — we become free.

I have found, as perhaps you have, that there is a tremendous “knowing” that leaps into the mind when it is silent, when it has given up trying to understand, when all of its false imaginings and projections have been exposed. Inquiry take us into this depth of silence, and then the silence reveals itself like primordial breathing. This kind of knowing is transmitted to us as pure revelation, unformed by words and images. It is like a potent dye released in an ocean that instantly permeates every drop. When we open ourselves to this deep unconditioned knowing, we too are completely permeated.

Entering this inner silence unifies and makes whole what had seemed piecemeal and fragmented. In this wholeness, we experience a oneness of being in which the tension of feeling separate from life disappears, in which internal and external conflicts are resolved in an encompassing clarity. I call this silent intelligence, this wholeness, the Self. The Self is not a thing, like a brick, nor is it an abstraction, like patriotism. The Self is pure primordial awareness: the supremely intelligent current of life that enlivens and animates everything in existence. It is a fountain of insight and

clarity, a presence that is the fragrance of reality. The guidance of the Self is what we all turn to in times of need. The Self is the sacred hub of the universe out of which everything else appears, and around which everything revolves.

We have all experienced intimations of the Self and we have all experienced its cleansing effect on the confusion, fear, and doubt of the mind. The Self is outside of time, outside of convention, outside of expectation, outside of self-concept. It is an illumination in which everything merges into an ineffable oneness. It is a rapture of self-transcendence. This is the place in which the whole world breathes, and it is the place that is aroused and awakened through persistent inquiry into our lives and into the nature of the mind and of the separate self with which we normally identify. It is a place known to us, though we may not remember; familiar, though we may not admit it; treasured, though we may discount it; utterly real, though we cannot prove it.

Can you imagine trying to explain love to someone who has not experienced it? This is the irony of the Self. We are all searching for the love of the Self but we cannot explain this to ourselves or to others. So we look for the Self where it isn't — in objects and ideas — and remain unfulfilled.

The Self can never be known in the way we know how to repair cars. It can never be measured; it can never be proven. It simply is, without qualification or condition. The Self is beyond any measure, any knowing, any experience. The Self is always present, always moving from the hub to its spokes.

Modern science tells us that within our very own cellular structure is the imprint of energy released when the universe was first created, that we have the dust of ancient stars in our hair. We say this, but we don't actually grasp it. If we could actually grasp it, we would see in a flash that we are part of that supreme creative force that is even now creating and dissolving immense

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galaxies and dimensions whose measures cannot be taken. We would put everything else to the side and give ourselves fully and freely to this force which pulsates in each human heart as the Self.

When we enter this creative force of the sacred hub, we are able to answer the questions of living through being. The only impediment is the outward turned mind which creates, projects, and identifies with false imaginings. In this way, we look for truth where it isn't. Our only problem is that we are estranged from the Self.

There is a natural expansion of awareness that occurs in silence. This silence emerges in a deep and profound relaxation of thinking when one turns the attention within. This expansive awareness is inherent to everyone. In this awareness, we glimpse the Self. This silent awareness speaks without words and acts without thought. Whether speaking or acting, the Self is striking and sudden; its clarity is spontaneous.

We might think that only special people are endowed with this knowledge of the Self. But this knowledge of the Self is within each of us. All we have to do is see what is within us. We tend to discount our own capacity to know the Self now, as we are. We tend to distrust the spontaneous knowing that comes to us from silence, from the Self, because it often contradicts and violates the conventions of our own thinking.

Still, there is something within us which can hear reverberations from the place where the world is breathing. The mind can't fathom those things which are only known through being. When we face the vast, eternal silence of the Self, the mind stops. When the mind stops, an eruption of pure awareness pours through the gaps between our thoughts. In that timeless moment we become what we are: the Self. The Self shines when the mind falls into the silent awareness that we have all experienced.

My teacher, Swami Muktananda, said that the love of the inner Self is alive within each of us as a

divine flame. All we have to do is turn our attention inward. He said, "If you understand your own Self, you will never have to learn how to love because you will become the embodiment of love. You are the source of love. Give up all your worries and try to understand who you are."

This love is the real teacher, the real teaching, the real path. This love is what we seek and it is who we are. This love is the language of the Self. We should give ourselves freely to the Self. We should enter the sacred hub of the heart and live in our real Self. Here, with tears of rapture streaming from our grateful eyes, we will be what we are, restored through love to wholeness, peace, and joy.

2

PRESCRIPTION FOR LIVING

It is important to find out exactly what we want. I know this can be difficult, especially when so many people tell us what we should want and how we should get it. Each has their own unique prescription. We can't be persuaded by this. We must see for ourselves what is missing in our life.

The prescription that we accept should cure the condition that we have. For this, a clear diagnosis is required. We must each diagnose the truth of what we want and we must determine this honestly. What exactly do you long for?

I first experienced the nature of deep longing when I was eleven years old. I had broken my leg skiing and I had to lay in bed for a month with a cast up to my hip. I began perusing a set of encyclopedias. I didn't read them all. I just turned each page, book by book, and read what interested me. My mind opened wide. There were so many amazing things: the intricate dances of insects, the forces of nature, the distant galaxies, the gods and goddesses of strange religions. I remember being overwhelmed. I felt there was something behind all of this, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I had a faint intuition that something was moving silently behind the universes described in the encyclopedias. A wordless wonderment appeared within me and questions formed like gathering clouds. How did all of this come about? Where did I fit in?

Prescription for Living

These questions lived within me, and I listened for answers. There were none. No one else seemed concerned with the vast universe and the mystery from which it came. No one else asked questions. Everyone just went about their business. This way of living without questioning disappointed me.

I internalized that disappointment and became sad. My own questions became quiet and I tried to fit in with the life that was offered to me. I did the best I could in school. I participated in sports and student government. I worked after school in a butcher shop. I learned to play the drums. But I was always disappointed and sad. I didn't know how to articulate this then. I was just aware of a constant emptiness, an ache. My friends were designing their lives with ambitious plans and goals but I felt like an unsettled ghost. I was not interested in pursuing anything. I couldn't give my heart to what others were giving their hearts to.

One day the vague questions I had been harboring became clear. I was nineteen years old and in my second year of college. I was sitting with my girlfriend and our philosophy professor in a concealed part of the campus garden, which I had helped to plant. We had taken some mescaline.

Suddenly, from a pulsating sky, I was drenched by a monsoon of colors: crimson and wheat, sienna and rust. I trembled. The vividness of this was tremendous. Something in me shattered in that hallucinatory moment. In that shattering was an awakening. I can only say that the awakening was the question "Who am I?" This was the crystallization of the wonderment that had been born years before. This question became a glowing hot coal in my belly.

My own seeking intensified. Now I had clearly defined the condition for which I wanted a prescription. The condition was ignorance about my own self. I had to find out. How could one live without knowing this?

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I decided to self-graduate and left school. I was catapulted by that singular question of ultimate identity into years of intensity that shattered the tepid lifestyle templates I had inherited. I began to seek out one adventure after another, always searching for a satisfying answer.

I explored zazen and Aikido. I studied Eastern philosophies and read of mystics. I traveled restlessly throughout Europe, Scandinavia, and Israel. I drove trucks and worked in factories. I was a short order cook in California, a baker in Germany, and I built ammunition storage bunkers in the Sinai. I battled police in Paris and was thrown in jail in India. I wrote poetry and took up rock climbing. I became a mountain guide in the Sierras. I lived in Afghani hashish dens, and I caroused in jazz clubs, blues dives, and red light districts. If I settled too long in any one place, I felt myself slip into a stupor. I needed to stay on the very edge of the question. Along the way, I unlearned more than I learned.

In 1973, I embarked on the arduous overland route to India. I read Autobiography of a Yogi on a train in Turkey. It helped me realize there were others who had asked this question and who had something to say about it.

I wandered around India for several months. I met yogis, teachers, and gurus. I stayed in ashrams and sat in meditation retreats. I heard lectures and read scriptures. Still, my longing was unfulfilled. I didn't know who I was.

One day in the fall of 1973, I walked into the ashram of Swami Muktananda, a meditation master. He was on a pilgrimage in Kashmir when I arrived but I stayed on, nonetheless. Within a few days of his return, I had heard his basic prescription, one which he repeated constantly. Here is my summary of what I heard:

Prescription for Living

Everything is consciousness and you are that consciousness. That consciousness is God and you are that. You are more than the body and the mind. You are the one Self that shines everywhere. You are love. You are perfect. You are that consciousness which pervades the entire universe. Turn within and meditate on your own Self. When you know your own Self, you will know everything because that Self is the creative, intelligent power behind this whole universe. To know your own Self is to know everything. Your inner Self is consciousness and that consciousness is love. That love pervades everything, everywhere. Dive deep within yourself and you will know this directly. Continue to meditate on your own Self and everything else will happen at the right time.

Those words entered deeply and I was very affected. A whole new world opened up within me. In the presence of Muktananda, I experienced the answer I had been looking for.

I continue to follow his advice. I continue to meditate on that inner Self. As I do so, there is a deepening awareness of the power of which he spoke at work in all things big and small, near and far. I have not found it necessary to follow other prescriptions.

If you want to know who you are, not as an idea or belief, but deeply, truly, directly, and you want that more than anything else, then this may work for you. At any rate, it is the only prescription I have ever taken because it was the only one that entered deeply and had an effect on my condition. His prescription is the only prescription I can recommend.

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A MEDITATION ON MEDITATION

In our own way, each of us is seeking liberation. We want to experience the rapture of reality. We have been taught to pursue this through addition, not subtraction. We think we need to add happiness, prosperity, love, success. However much we add to ourselves, however much we achieve or experience or possess, still we are not whole, and we know it. We can never experience the rapture of reality through addition because what we want to enhance — our separate self — is that single condition which keeps the rapture of reality away. We only experience the heart-piercing light of reality through subtraction, when “we” disappear, when we empty ourselves of everything, including “us.” In this ending of ourself, there is silence. There is love. If “we” do the seeking, if we try to experience the rapture of reality, we will fail. We are in the way. One’s own separate self is the barrier to love. One’s own separate self is the disappointment, the sadness, that is at the end of each rainbow of false hope. We can’t do anything about it because if we do, we will only strengthen an image of “me.”

We can only see that the separate self is a facade. When we see through the facade of the separate self, it collapses; it has no support. Meditation is the eye that can see this. Meditation opens the window to the rapture of reality.

A Meditation on Meditation

At first, meditation is a practice that teaches us to focus our attention on a single point, perhaps the breath or a mantra or the space between two thoughts. As we focus, we are amazed to discover how many thoughts we have. One begins to see that the mind is nothing but thoughts about things and thoughts about thoughts, and thoughts about thoughts about thoughts. In meditation we can see directly the chaos of the mind as it races without order or purpose from one thing to the next, careening from the past to the future while barely touching the present moment. We also see that all of these thoughts are self-centered; everything we think about, our whole internal experience, is qualified by this central thought, this image of “me.”

As we continue to focus the mind on the object of meditation, we begin to observe the stream of thoughts and emotions without getting lost in them. We see that thoughts and emotions arise in numberless waves within the mind. That which observes the play of thoughts is not the mind, but the awareness from which the mind itself is born. We can see that this awareness is qualitatively different than thinking. It has a depth and silence to it. It is not tied to an image of “me.” Awareness refers to itself.

We begin to perceive the world, not through our patterns of thinking, but through this awareness whose integrity is never compromised by thinking. We begin to perceive in silence without thoughts and images and symbols. Reality is not represented, but emerges directly and immediately in its pristine state. We see thoughts and images arising and subsiding in a vastness about which nothing can be said or known. Our own self-image, our sense of “me,” becomes transparent. Suddenly there are no hands to hold anything, no firm ground to stand upon, no “me” to know and worry about.

Meditation opens the window to silence and in this silence we discover love. This love dissolves the anxiety of self-centeredness because the separate self

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has merged into silence, into love, into the sky of pure awareness. In this awareness, the true Self is liberated from conditions. Rumi tells us that “reality is a rapture that takes you out of form. You are the unconditioned spirit trapped in conditions.”

The appearance of this silence marks the end of meditation as a practice and the beginning of meditation as a state of being. It isn't practiced; it isn't attained. It doesn't belong to anyone. We all belong to it.

As this awareness grows within us, we experience peace. Our chronic restlessness subsides. A way of seeing and knowing is aroused which is not confused by thought. We might say it is the intuitive umbilical cord to the sacred, a capacity of perception that is holistic and instantaneous. It is not fragmented and chaotic. We experience directly that we are not our thoughts but that thoughts occur within us, as clouds appear in the sky.

Each of us longs to be free from all limiting conditions, from compulsive thought and worry, from the disappointment of self-centered pursuits, from the burden of striving for security and happiness. Who hasn't stared out the window and searched the sky for an answer, for a moment of peace? In that moment we are refreshed by the wholeness of the sky which embraces everything. Our breathing becomes deeper. Our thoughts become quiet. It happens to each of us, almost every day. We seem to be searching for something finer, more subtle, than the usual tension and pressure of our lives. A voice we hope to hear. A light we strain to see.

We have to become very still to be able to see and hear and sense this subtlety that we usually glimpse only in rare, unguarded moments. This subtlety is covered by the cacophony of our thoughts. We perceive this subtlety of life, not with thoughts, but with awareness. When we begin to see with subtlety, we begin to sense a pervasive presence about which nothing can be thought. When we try to know it, it

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recedes; when we simply allow it to be, it emerges. There's no longing; there's no clinging; there's no struggling; there's no persistent effort. There's simply an opening in which this subtle pervasive presence emerges. Even our thoughts appear in the midst of all of this, but they no longer obscure that presence.

This state of merging with the subtle presence is called natural meditation. Natural meditation is the atmosphere of the sacred hub. It is known in silence. It is who we are. Silence is a release within oneself of all self-centered concern. In fact, it is death, but a death of smallness, pettiness, and fear. It is the death of the repetitive cycle of desire, fulfillment, and disappointment that is the hallmark of self-centered living.

Meditation dissolves the mental images with which we have identified. Meditation is a fire that consumes the names and forms and conditions with which we have become fascinated. This fascination with the content of the mind creates the sense of being bound and alone and separate. The radiant presence which animates the whole of this universe, the Self, is suppressed by the tyranny of thought. Meditation liberates the Self from its apparent obscurity.

We don't attain anything through meditation. We don't become whole through meditation because we already are whole. Meditation does not fulfill our wishes and dreams: it ends wishing and dreaming. It is the supreme awakening. Meditation reveals the illusion of separation and all of the loneliness and sadness and fear that attend alienation from the Self. Meditation breaks our fascination with the alluring images of the mind. We come to see what those images are and how they come into being. We see this as meditation ripens. We see how all of the effort associated with self-centeredness is so unnecessary and destructive.

Meditation allows us to see that our Self is not defined or limited by our bodies, our minds, or the various patterns through which our senses perceive the external world. We are able to see that we are,

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essentially, the hub from which all these forms and ideas arise and around which they revolve. From the sacred hub, we can see a glowing presence and a shimmering light around everything. This emanation of energy, of presence, of consciousness, saturates each cell, each plant, each mountain, each person, each universe. All of these things are the spokes of the sacred hub, the Self.

This energy of consciousness is revealed in silence and it is completely beautiful and full of love. In this beauty we fall in love with all things. It is not possessive love. It is not dependent love. It's simply a quality of that consciousness that emerges from silence.

We will never be truly happy unless we return to this source. If we would just sit quietly by the open window of our heart for a few minutes each day, soon the light of that consciousness will be evident.